The **Korean War** (1950–1953) was a major conflict during the Cold War that pitted **North Korea**, backed by the Soviet Union and China, against **South Korea**, supported by the United States and the United Nations. Often referred to as the "Forgotten War," it marked the first major military clash of the Cold War era and set the stage for U.S.-Soviet tensions for decades.

**Background:**

1. **Division of Korea**:
   * After Japan's defeat in World War II (1945), Korea, a former Japanese colony, was divided at the **38th parallel**:
     + **North Korea**: Occupied by the Soviet Union, later becoming a communist state under **Kim Il-sung**.
     + **South Korea**: Occupied by the United States, becoming a capitalist democracy under **Syngman Rhee**.
   * Both governments claimed to be the legitimate authority over the entire Korean Peninsula.
2. **Cold War Context**:
   * The division of Korea reflected broader Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, with the peninsula becoming a flashpoint for ideological and geopolitical rivalry.

**Timeline of the War:**

**1. Outbreak of War (June 1950):**

* On **June 25, 1950**, **North Korean forces**, equipped with Soviet tanks and weapons, launched a surprise invasion of South Korea, quickly overrunning most of the country.
* The United Nations, led by the U.S., intervened to support South Korea. A multinational force was assembled, with the majority of troops coming from the United States.

**2. UN Counteroffensive (September 1950):**

* General **Douglas MacArthur** led a bold amphibious landing at **Inchon**, cutting off North Korean forces and recapturing Seoul.
* UN forces pushed the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel and advanced deep into North Korea, nearing the Chinese border.

**3. Chinese Intervention (October 1950):**

* Alarmed by UN forces approaching its border, **China** entered the war in late 1950, sending hundreds of thousands of troops ("Chinese People's Volunteer Army") to support North Korea.
* Chinese and North Korean forces launched a massive counteroffensive, driving UN troops back into South Korea and retaking Seoul.

**4. Stalemate and Truce Talks (1951–1953):**

* By mid-1951, the frontlines stabilized near the 38th parallel.
* The war devolved into a bloody stalemate, with intense trench warfare and artillery battles reminiscent of World War I.
* Peace talks began in **July 1951** but dragged on for two years, as both sides haggled over issues like prisoner exchanges and the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

**5. Armistice Agreement (July 27, 1953):**

* An armistice was signed, establishing the **Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)**, a heavily fortified border near the 38th parallel.
* No formal peace treaty was ever signed, meaning North and South Korea remain technically at war to this day.

**Impact of the War:**

1. **Human Cost**:
   * Approximately **2.5 million people** died, including soldiers and civilians.
   * The war caused widespread destruction in both North and South Korea.
2. **Military Consequences**:
   * The U.S. and its allies demonstrated a commitment to containing communism, following the policy of **containment**.
   * The war marked the first large-scale test of the United Nations' ability to respond to international aggression.
3. **Geopolitical Implications**:
   * Strengthened Cold War divisions between the communist and capitalist blocs.
   * Solidified U.S. military presence in Asia, including bases in South Korea and Japan.
   * Contributed to the U.S. decision to rearm West Germany and escalate defense spending.
4. **Legacy for Korea**:
   * **South Korea**: Eventually grew into a prosperous democracy, aided by U.S. support.
   * **North Korea**: Remained a totalitarian regime under the Kim dynasty, isolated and heavily militarized.

**Key Figures:**

* **Kim Il-sung**: Leader of North Korea and architect of the invasion.
* **Syngman Rhee**: Leader of South Korea during the war.
* **General Douglas MacArthur**: Commander of UN forces, later dismissed by President Truman for advocating an expansion of the war into China.
* **Harry S. Truman**: U.S. President during most of the war, emphasized limited war to avoid a broader conflict with China or the Soviet Union.

**Why It Matters Today:**

* The war set the precedent for U.S. involvement in conflicts to contain communism, influencing later interventions such as the **Vietnam War**.
* The Korean Peninsula remains divided, and tensions between North and South Korea occasionally flare up, posing a significant security challenge in the region.