THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KOREAN WAR IN COLD WAR HISTORY

Student’s Name
Course
Date
The cold war which took place between 1947 and 1991 was a state of sustained military and political tension between nations of the western bloc and those of the Eastern bloc, with the Western bloc led by United States and NATO while the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw. The name Cold War came to being because the two main warring powers that owned nuclear weapons threatened to destroy each other but never engaged in military combat.1 The Korean War was a war between the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and North Korea also known as Democratic People Republic of Korea. The US military troops were camping in the Southern Korea from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to 1949 when they left. Korea as a unified country had been divided by the Soviet Union and American occupations and in the year 1950, the Northern part decided to invade the southern part in a bid to re-unite the country.

During the Korean War, the United States armies engaged in military combat against the communist forces of China and USSR. Initially, the troops from Northern Korea took over most of the Peninsula but were quickly driven back by the American troops from Japan. The Chinese troops helped push the American troops back to the 38th parallel which had been used to divide Korea. The armies from both sides remained in the same place for more than two years when an armistice agreement was signed and Korea was officially divided into two nations.2 The Korean War had massive positive and negative effects on the political, economical and social cultural statuses of both the Northern and Southern Korea. However, from the time of the war up to date, one cannot fail to notice the vast differences between the Northern and Southern Korea in especially in terms of economic revolution. This paper aims at discussing the effects of the Korean


War to the political and economical nature of Korea and the contribution of America. The Korean War led to political stability and economic development in Southern Korea due to assistance from America and without the Korean War, United States policy would have been different.

The cold war was a duel of threats between the two superpowers but the Korean War was the first armed confrontation of the war. The War was a good example of a proxy war where the fighting superpowers fight in another country and the locals bear the majority of losses and destruction. Unlike during the Second World War, the fighting superpowers restrained themselves from the use of nuclear weapons. The United States had a containment policy of fighting against communism by containing it and not letting it spread to other parts of the world. The Soviet Union and China on the other hand fought against the American capitalism.\(^3\) The conflict lasted from June 1950 to July 1953 when the armistice was signed and the boundaries between Southern and Northern Korea were restored at the 38th parallel. Since the war was within a single state, many authors have often referred it to a civil war. However, the warring sides received support from external powers. Although the Soviet Union did not involve itself with the fighting directly, it supplied North Korea with weapons and armory. The United States on the other hand committed its soldiers as United Nations peace keepers but in reality, the Southern Korea soldiers were entirely United States troops.\(^4\)

Indeed, the Korean War influenced international history and most of the characteristics associated with the Cold war are according to the Korean War. The Korean War is also seen as a war of ideologies, because the struggle between America and USSR was a war of capitalism versus communism ideologies. The United States wanted to

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appear strong against communism since it was a democratic state that believed in capitalism.\(^5\) Immediately after the war, the South Korean state became strong in terms of monitoring the society and utilizing resources. The United States troops remained stationed in Korea after the war and their presence was very important for development.\(^6\) South Korea was assisted by the United States to develop its geo-political function. Good security state and the creation of welfare led to quick development in South Korea.

The Korean War experiences made the state of South Korea a specialist in using violence. Within no time, the army of South Korea grew from 100,000 soldiers to a formidable force of 600,000 soldiers. The massive assistance that was offered by America to South Korea during the war contributed greatly to the establishment of the anti-communist state and its armed forces. The South Korean military grew very strong and was able to maintain military regimes for over twenty years.\(^7\) The first groups to be exposed to modernization in Southern Korea were the military and the civilian bureaucratic civilians. The military overthrew the rural elite and brought an end to the traditional system. If the Korean War had not occurred, the involvement of the United States would have been totally different since the US had no much interest in South Korea.\(^8\) The alliance between the United States and South Korea has been very advantageous to Korea because they have continued to enjoy peace and stability for more than fifty years. Because of the Korean War, the United States had to globalize its policy regarding communism and capitalism. This served as a threat to the Eastern Bloc of the Cold War. America had to globalize its commitments like the one of supporting its allies.

\(^8\) Ibid, 2
In the year 1949, the US had withdrawn their army from Korea and the secretary of state at the time Dean Acheson had excluded Korea from its defense perimeter. This was a show that America did not want to interfere with the political scene of Korea. The United States only emerged as if to assist South Korea defeat North Korea but immediately after the war, the United States pressured the Korean government to make domestic policy reforms. The US through its aid program pressured Korea to achieve a state of self sufficiency so that it would cut on its aid to Korea. America used the Korean War to pass messages to the Eastern bloc in case they doubted the seriousness of the United States. The Korean War therefore acted as an avenue for both the Western and the Eastern side to pass messages that they both had the capacity to strike. America continually provided South Korea with defense and economic assistance so that it would not fall to the pressure of the Soviet communism.

The ruling elites of Korea took advantage of the presence of the United States military to consolidate their power. The consolidation of power greatly helped them in achieving state control since they were able to control the society and the economic activities. During the decade from 1950 to 1960, the United States controlled the economy and politics of South Korea. During that period, aid from America to South Korea amounted to over two billion dollars and the entire budget of South Korea was dependent on the aid from America. Substantial amounts of the monies were set aside to help the government of Korea build its defense. South Korean military forces received huge amounts of money to recruit and train new soldiers and within the ten years, they

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10 Kang, 45.

had trained an army of more than 600,000 soldiers.\textsuperscript{12} The military also purchased a lot of armory to use in protecting itself from adversaries. The Korean War led to militarization of the NATO which was an important faction in the Cold War.

America helped the State of South Korea after the war to establish itself economically under the reign of President Park. The United States at large opened up its market to South Korean producers during and after the cold war. Evidently, they helped Korea to achieve export oriented industrialization and subsequently increase its levels of production\textsuperscript{13}. During the Korean War, the military aid from the United States to Korea was higher compared to the United States aid to all of Europe and Latin America. It contributed to more than 80% of all the military purchase and technical training of the soldiers and advanced weapons. Economic development can be easily achieved by a country that can secure its military security cheaply. The American aid was the only source of finance for the South Korean government budget\textsuperscript{14}. The United States lost more than 30,000 soldiers and had more than 170,000 casualties during the war. Despite the huge loses, the United States increased their commitment to ensure that South Korea is well protected. To control and sustain the thousands of United States troops in South Korea, they signed a formal defense commitment and formed a close bilateral alliance to ensure continued protection of Korea during and after the war\textsuperscript{15}. Jervis states that American interests in Korea were not only because of containing and ending communism but also because they had to prove their power to their cold war opponents of the East\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{13} Song, Byung, 145-6.
\textsuperscript{14} Jervis, 568.
\textsuperscript{15} Kang, 67.
\textsuperscript{16} Jervis, 567.
Initially, the Cold war was more associated European nations but due to the Korean War, other nations joined and expanded the Cold War\(^\text{17}\). The alliance between South Korea and the United States in terms of security was another important factor that helped South Korea to develop economically. The State of South Korea was assured of external protection and this enabled them to fully concentrate on economic development activities especially production and exporting. The United States provided Korea with a lot of aid when it was needed most. According to Dong-choon, if America had withdrawn its support from South Korea immediately after the war, the state would have returned to destructive politics and probably would have ended up in ruins.\(^\text{18}\) By the year 1970, the effects of capitalism had spread all over the world and trade expanded rapidly leading to economic development of capitalist economies.\(^\text{19}\) During the three years of the war, the State of South Korea was fully dependent on the United States for security due to the inadequacy of its geopolitical military function. For instance, when the North Korea invaded the South, they had captured most of the peninsula until the arrival of American troops to assist in pushing back the North Korean troops. It is important to note that, it was impossible for the United States to demand allegiance from South Korea before the war.\(^\text{20}\) The war had put South Korea in a state of vulnerability and they had no choice but to accept the help from America and its allies.

The Cold War and the Korean War influenced the citizens by awakening their rights and especially their democratic right to vote. During the Cold War, they started by voting out the Rhee regime which had failed its nationalists and could not even provide the basic needs. In a military coup, General Park took over power. The government of General Park concentrated more on the development of the economy and was more

\(^{17}\) Karsten, 20.
\(^{18}\) Dong-choon, 1.
\(^{19}\) Karsten, 112.
\(^{20}\) Jervis, 564.
responsive to the wide range of needs of the citizens. The Korean War brought about the need to build the military and the government of General Park ensured a quick buildup of the army. In the early 1960’s, Park’s government continued with the Rapid industrialization and initiated the export led industrialization strategies. The Park regime was perceived as ambitious due to its direct intervention in the business processes by training and guiding business owners on the production and export of goods and merchandise. The State of South Korea established non tolerant policies against the labor unions since it was more interested in lowering costs of labor to reduce the cost of production so that its businesses could be more competitive in the world market. The old landlords were wiped out during the war and this was a great breakthrough for industrialization of South Korea during the Cold War.

The government of General Park formed alliances with the business elite on the extraction of economic resources. These businesses later on were very beneficial to the government because they provided taxes and economic resources needed in maintaining the state bureaucracy. The State encouraged people to engage in massive business activities so that they could gain enough resources as a country. These resources were very helpful in enabling the cold war between them and the North Korea. Park’s government prioritized economic activities because it believed that it would create a good foundation for the provision of security. The State builders depended on the army which provided them with surety of security in case of another invasion from the Northerners. Economic success in South Korea took place because of the good relationship between the State of South Korea and the business class.

21 Kang,10.
22 Bruce, 67-8.
23 Dong-choon, 78.
24 Snyder, and Lee, 1.
Korea had been a Japanese colony for a period of thirty eight years. The Post colonial State was still on its knees even after the liberation from the Japanese, until the war started. The Korean government is the best example in the world of a government that began from the scratch. Before the Korean War, South Korea was not even a national state but immediately after the war, the State was developed rapidly. According to Reed, the mechanism that led to the rapid development of South Korea state lies in the process of state formation during and after the Korean War.²⁶ The challenge of engaging in war against the North Korea military forces strengthened and fortified the South Korean state. The making of a state and the making of a war goes hand in hand. The rapid growth of the South Korea military came with rapid growth of the economy. Due to the Korean War, there was a deficit in authoritative and legitimate leadership which led to a vacuum which was filled by the armed forces.²⁷ The South Korean armed forces today are much larger than the armed forces in other developing economies. The South Korean state emerged out of the war stronger and remarkable in many aspects. In 1948, President Rhee established the National security Law to public order and this allowed the government to crush internal dissent.²⁸

At the peak of the Cold War, the Soviet Union majorly supported the North Korean Regime and the Republic of China came in during the Korean War to rescue North Korea. According to Bruce, the South Korean State was formed through coercion.²⁹ In coercion formed States, there is sharing of limited capital but with presence of abundant weaponry. In coercive states, rulers extract the means of war from own population and from other conquered domains. After the liberation of Korea from the Japanese, the Japanese left behind very little in terms of capital but with massive military

²⁶ Millett, 692.
²⁷ Boose, 134.
²⁹ Cumings, 2010.
forces drawn from the colonial administration. At some point, the military elites attempted to use the scarce domestic resources in building new bureaucracies. However, coercive state formation has to give way to capital state formation. This is because, capital grows with time and they both must be incorporated in the economy. During the entire period, the police and the army remained the most organized groups in South Korea. In addition, the same police and military were filled with people who previously occupied positions in the colonial armies.

At the peak of the Cold War is when the conflict between South and North Korea intensified. Another major contribution to South Korea was brought about by the Korean War was the Land reforms. The countryside was the home of the landlords’ class and they would have dominated the country politically and socially because a few owners of land were very powerful and ruled over huge masses of peasants. The United States recommended land reforms in South Korea in the year 1946 but none of it materialized because the land owners were the ones being given the mandate of redistributing the land. However, the redistribution of land took place during the Korean War after the United States government forced the government of President Rhee to implement the land reforms. Capitalism undermines the power of the class of landlords and uplifts the power of the working middle class.

The economic strides in South Korea can be attributed partly to capitalism. During the Cold War, America globalized its anti communism policy and all its allies had to embrace capitalism. Although capitalism may bring out the notion that no one is concerned about the other, it has its own benefits that lead to economic growth.

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30 Millet, 693.
31 Dong-choon, 56.
32 Jervis, 574.
Capitalism gives everyone the opportunity to excel. With capitalism, the harder one works, the greater the reward. Capitalist economy encourages citizens to work hard because it is their hard work that determines their livelihoods. It is argued capitalism works consistently with human nature and specifically, the greedy nature of humanity. Greed leads to competition for resources which is important in fuelling an economy. Capitalism ensures freedom of career choice. In capitalist economies, students decide the subjects they want to pursue and they can also work where they want to work. Capitalism works very well with democracy. Everybody gets same chance to one vote and thus equal political right to choose the leaders and the government at large.

Capitalism leads to sustainable and exponential economic growth. The more money an economy invests in production, the more money it makes and the more money it makes, the more it can in turn invest in production. This means that unless any unfortunate events befall the economy, it will continue to grow indefinitely. However, there is fear that the constant increase in production will run into a halt one day, since the resources are limited. In this modern age, there is no alternative politico-economic system that can work better than capitalism. It is evident that all attempts to embrace communism have failed. For instance, China abandoned communism decades ago and embraced capitalism.

It is also important to note what would not have happened had the Korean War occurred. First, the land reforms may not have taken place and maybe the landlords may have remained powerful controllers of industrialization. Secondly, without the war, the Military state of South Korea may never have developed. Before the war, South Korea

33 Kang, 121.
35 Kang, 81.
36 Karsten, 78-9.
had only 100,000 soldiers but the number changed rapidly after the war. Americas help to South Korea was also meant to show the Cold War opponents of their strength. Thirdly was the aid from America and its allies to South Korea. During the cold war period, the year 1949, America had withdrawn its troops from South Korea.\textsuperscript{37} When the Korean War began in 1950, the United States brought back its troops and aided Korea with a lot of military support.

The war lasted only three years but South Korea continued to receive aid for many later years.\textsuperscript{38} In the decade 1950 to 1960, South Korea budget entirely depended on the support of America. On average, yearly aid in terms of money from the United States was 200 million dollars. Had there been no Korean War, it is hard to determine how the relationship between Korea and the United States would be. South Korea developed good relations with the United States during the war and they became allies. Due to the influence and pressure from the United States, South Korea was converted fully into a capitalist economy.\textsuperscript{39} On the other hand, the relationship between the United States and North Korea only deteriorated. The United States perceived every communist nation as an enemy and had even put anti-communism policies in place. The Korean War was a war between America and Communism of the Soviet Union.

During the Cold War, The Korean War led to political stability and economic development in Southern Korea due to assistance from America and without the Korean War, the United States policy would have been different. Conclusively, the Korean War had advantages and disadvantages to both North and South Korea. In South Korea, the war had more advantages than disadvantages while in North Korea, the war seems to have had more disadvantages than advantages. Most of the positive effects of the War to

\textsuperscript{37} Miongsei, 156.
\textsuperscript{38} Boose, 76.
\textsuperscript{39} Byung, 90.
South Korea can be attributed to the role played by the Americans. The Korean War was used by the Western and Eastern warring factions to pass messages of their capacity to strike. The Korean War acted as a way of passing threats to enemies. It is worth noting that, during the war, both America and South Korea suffered great losses in terms of lives lost and destruction of resources. For instance, over 30,000 American soldiers perished and over 170,000 soldiers were injured. This however did not deter America from fighting for what it believed in; capitalism. In the same manner, the losses incurred by South Korea during the war are very little as compared to the benefits. First was the issue of the implementation of land reforms which was made possible during the war. Secondly, the military of South Korea underwent rapid development in terms of numbers of the army and armory itself. Third was the rapid economic development which took place after the Korean War. This rapid economic development was brought about by the military and financial assistance from America. The state of South Korea formed business strategies that are in effect up to date. During the war, America and its allies opened up their markets to South Korea and this has continually secured market for commodities from South Korea.

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40 Hanley and Kim, 2010.
41 Bruce, 78.
Bibliography


