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July 27, 2003
Los Angeles, CA

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Article Published: Saturday, July 26, 2003 - 6:31:05 PM PST

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Site of conflict now a study in stalemate

By Helen Gao
Staff Writer

On the early Sunday morning of **June 25, 1950**, when most Seoul residents were still asleep, **North Korean troops** suddenly invaded South Korea, **setting off the Korean War**.

Three days later, North Korean **communists captured** the South Korean capital of Seoul, where many residents were trapped because they had no warning the war was coming.

At the time, Korea was divided **along the 38th parallel**, with Soviet forces occupying the north and American troops the south -- an arrangement the two sides agreed to after they defeated Japan in World War II.

Within days of the invasion, then-President Harry S. Truman ordered U.S. air, sea and ground **forces to defend** South Korea against communist aggression. American forces were joined by troops from 15 **United Nations** countries.

Truman at the time saw Korea as "a testing ground in the ideological conflict between **communism and democracy**," according to historians.

At the height of war, 480,000 **American soldiers** were engaged in combat. China sent **hundreds of thousands** of troops to help North Korea, which at the time already outgunned and outnumbered the **South Korean military**.

The war lasted 37 months, until a **cease-fire agreement** was signed on July 27, 1953 -- 50 years ago today.

By the time the war ended, more **than 33,600 U.S. soldiers** had died on the battlefields along with **47,000 South Koreans**, 520,000 North Koreans and **900,000 Chinese**. The war also claimed the lives of an estimated 2 million civilians.

As part of the cease-fire agreement, a **demilitarized zone** was created north of the 38th **parallel along the final battle line**, separating North and South Korea. A permanent peace treaty was never signed.

In the last 50 years, North Korea **has remained under the control** of a communist dictatorship **while South Korea has prospered** as a democracy.

President George W. Bush **condemned North Korea as part** of an "axis of evil" during his 2002 **State of the Union** address. North Korean leaders **acknowledged they have restarted** their nuclear program.

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However, some political scientists believe the likelihood of the United States launching a war to disarm North Korea has significantly diminished in light of the difficulties the U.S. faces in rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Now we find out winning the war is one thing and actually winning peace is going to be an extremely difficult endeavor," said Professor Timothy Lim, associate of director of the Center for Korean American and Korean Studies at California State University, Los Angeles.

"That clearly puts the brakes on what the (Bush) administration understands is possible now from their perspective, but also from the perspective of what the American public will understand. Unless North Korea directly threatens the U.S., which I don't think will be the case, I imagine there is no stomach among the American people for any kind of intervention."

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