

India's Role in Korean War (1950-53)

What is the issue?

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- The relationship between “North and South Korea” has evolved drastically past months from “complete hostility to strong cooperation”.

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- At this juncture, it is important to note that India did play a vital role in effectuating the “Armistice Agreement, 1953”, that ended the Korean War.

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What is the historic context?

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- The beginning of the cold war saw the Soviet dispensation backing a communist regime in Korean peninsula's Northern region.

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- But the US faction was backing a liberal government that eventually took control of the southern part of the peninsula.

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- The inter-Korean war lasted for three years between 1950 and 1953, which was a proxy war between USSR and the US.

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- Although a truce was reached in 1953 through the “Armistice Agreement”, both Korean regimes never officially ended the war till recently.

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- The agreement divided the Korean peninsula into two along the 38th Parallel (latitude) and also provided for neutral international peace patrol.

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What was India's Role?

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- India under Nehru was actively involved in negotiating peace in the Korean peninsula by engaging all the major stakeholders - US, USSR and China.
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- **Diplomacy** - In late 1952, the Indian resolution on Korea was adopted at the UN with unanimous non-Soviet support.
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- But India rightly recognized any deal without the Soviets will fail and immediately flung into action to get them on board, which happened in 1953.
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- Ultimately, despite the rough international political climate, India succeeded in building consensus - which precipitated in the “Armistice Agreement”.
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- **Effectuation** - One of the follow-up actions to the Armistice Agreement was the establishment of a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC).
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- NNRC was to decide on the fate of over 20,000 prisoners of war from both sides and India was chosen as the Chair of the NNRC.
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- NNRC also had “Poland and Czechoslovakia” representing the Communist bloc, and “Sweden and Switzerland” represented the Western world.
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- A UN Command led by an Englishman and a Custodian Force from India (headed by Lt.Gen Thimayya) was also deployed in the inter-Korean border.
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- NNRC’s tenure ended in early 1954, and the Indian forces were praised internationally for executing the tough stabilising operations successfully.
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- **Indian Abode** - At the end of its work, the NNRC was left with over 80 prisoners of war who didn’t want to go to either of the Koreas.
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- As an interim arrangement, Nehru decided to grant them abode in India until the UN directive on their request is pronounced.
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- Although most settled in foreign destination like Latin America, some did stay back in India and lived their entire lives here.
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Source: The Hindu

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