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## The Korean War As One Of The Key Moments Of The United States' Fight Against Communism

Throughout the years of his command of US forces in the Korean War, from 1950 to 1951, General Douglas MacArthur allowed his success in the Philippines Campaign in the Second World War to boost his confidence beyond the levels of his true capabilities. Despite recovering the territory South Korea had prior to the war and receiving a command from President Harry S Truman to cease fire, MacArthur insisted on crossing the 38th parallel, the original border between the countries, and drove further north, threatening the Chinese border with North Korea and eventually risking war with the Chinese in late 1950. Some historians argue that MacArthur's desire to push past the border was practical and justified his strategy because it was reasonable to assume that the Chinese would not dare to risk igniting an atomic war after witnessing the horrors of the bombings in Japan. In addition, MacArthur believed that the Chinese lacked strength "in the air and on the sea," giving him another initiative to bring them into the war and win an easy fight. However, the advancement beyond the border may have also been justified objectively, since it is improbable that MacArthur's sole opinion is the only factor in the development of the war. Other historical sources have shown that MacArthur's triumph in the Philippines and experience in Japan cast him into an illusion of Asian obedience and humility, suggesting that he had not expressed caution for and may have even intentionally provoked the Chinese. MacArthur showed little, if any, interest in the impending Chinese threat, claiming that he didn't believe that the Chinese would be "foolish enough" to attack American forces. Though MacArthur's decision to cross the 38th parallel and continue up north was driven by his stereotypical misconception of Chinese submission and weakness, which caused him to seriously underestimate their power and consequently suffer detrimental blows, it is only a facet of the entire war and should not be treated as the only influence.

The Korean War (1950-53) is marked as one of the key moments of the United States' fight against Communism around the world. The conflict surfaced on June 25, 1950, when Communist North Korea crossed the 38th parallel, the border that separated the newly divided Koreas, thus invading and attempting to take over South Korea in order to reunify the countries as one communist nation. The United Nations immediately recognized this as an attack and assembled its own military, consisting of mostly US forces, to defend South Korea on the 27th. The arrival of the UN support majorly turned tables in the course of the war—South Korea was able to gain back its territory up to the 38th parallel after being forced entirely into the small city of Busan by the North Korean military. However, upon reaching the border, General Douglas MacArthur, who commanded the US troops in the war, decided to "push on north" and drive the North Korean forces to the Yalu River, the established border between North Korea and China, despite several orders from President Harry S Truman to terminate the advance. As a result of this intrusion into North Korea, the Chinese, who have been on the sidelines during the initial course of the war, entered the war as support for North Korea and pushed the US forces back towards the 38th parallel, where most of the subsequent fighting took place before reaching an ultimate stalemate in 1953 and establishing a new border currently known as the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). MacArthur's act of defiance against Truman subsequently resulted in both Truman's decision to recall him from his position of command in Korea and the ultimate intervention of the Chinese, who joined the North Koreans with a million men to push the US forces back across the 38th parallel, resulting in a prolonged fight along the border and the loss

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of several more lives with no additional gain of land.

MacArthur's motive for persistently driving the US forces past the 38th parallel against President Truman's commands puzzled many and still remains a highly debated topic among historians. Historian and journalist David Halberstam establishes his stance clearly, arguing that MacArthur's decision to push past the border is primarily based on his teeming "hubris and vanity" and underestimation of the power of the Chinese military, which posed as a possible threat upon crossing the 38th parallel. Halberstam makes references not only to works of other historians, but also recounts of those who witnessed MacArthur's behavior and mentality in the Korean War. On the other hand, historian Dennis Wainstock argues that the crossing of the border is based on a plausible war strategy, which reasoned that China would not dare ignite a war with the United States just years after the horrendous atomic demolition of two of Japan's cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that ended the Second World War. Unlike Halberstam, Wainstock focuses his sources on the conflicting relationship between Truman and MacArthur and war statistics that supported his claims. The opposing arguments of each historian, discussing the motives for General MacArthur's defiance against President Truman's orders, can be validated through multiple sources addressing both on war statistics and on MacArthur's strategies and mindset shown in the Korean War.

General MacArthur's decision to push past the 38th parallel and to advance up north appeared to be a reasonable justification, claiming both that the Chinese would not risk war with the United States due to the recent bombings in Japan that successfully ended the Second World War and that the advancement beyond the border was necessary to prevent a total annihilation of the US forces. The North Korean Army had a strength of only 266,000 men, in contrast to the South Koreans' 602,902 and the Americans' 326,863, and was "neither 'of sufficient strength' nor 'sufficiently well led' to handle the situation." However, the Chinese also played as an impending threat throughout the rising conflict between the UN and North Korean forces, prepared to attack if American troops approached the Yalu River. Despite this danger, General MacArthur insisted that advancement was mandatory, asserting that the Chinese were already planning to intervene by building up a substantial army and to "destroy [the US force] with one mighty blow." By crossing the 38th parallel and advancing towards the Yalu, MacArthur argued, the US prevented itself from being a "'sitting duck' doomed to eventual annihilation," as both the power and the size of the Chinese military would have built up over time and have ultimately demolished them if not for the premature intrusion. Additionally, MacArthur claimed that the "so-called 38th Parallel [...] is not a factor in the military employment" and not an official boundary that limited the US troops within the confines of South Korea, therefore justifying his "intrusion" into North Korea. All in all, MacArthur's decision to lead the US forces north of the 38th parallel was not only reasonable in consideration of the strength of the North Korean military and the weaknesses previously exhibited by the Chinese, but also critically essential for the prevention of the complete destruction of the US troops.

However, it is also arguable that MacArthur's successful campaign in the Philippines and occupation of Japan had led him to falsely believe that all Asians fit the humble and compliant character he had seen through his limited experience in Asia, causing him to recklessly provoke the Chinese in blind belief that his men would easily be able to overcome the capabilities of the Chinese forces. In contrast to his self-proclaimed caution of the looming threat located north of the Korean peninsula, MacArthur had in fact been excessively condescending towards the Chinese, claiming belligerency in their communist values and labeling their intervention as a "destruction of those forces now arrayed against [the US military] in North Korea." Moreover, his experience

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in the US occupation of Japan, which constituted a significant amount of his inadequate outlook of Asia, suggested that all Asians were “obedient, dutiful, childlike, and quick to follow resolute leadership,” which steered him into the direction of a delusional superiority complex, which ultimately resulted in the advancement of the UN forces beyond the 38th parallel. Contrary to his justification of putting a halt to a possible assault by the Chinese as self-defense, MacArthur’s strategy to confront the Chinese included “[punishing] the aggressor” by thoughtlessly attacking China, which could have possibly started a Third World War the United States had desperately tried to prevent. President Truman also repeatedly stressed on the strength of the Chinese military, implying MacArthur’s ignorant views on their warfare potential.

In addition, MacArthur’s limited knowledge of the East Asia and his refusal to understand current Chinese customs have added to his lack of contemplation of possible consequences that may come with breaching the 38th parallel. Despite this informational weakness, he remained overconfident in his inadequate knowledge of Chinese conventions and rejected any external ideas presented to him by more experienced officers. MacArthur’s image of China, formed prior to the Chinese Civil War, differed vastly from the Communist China that rose under the newly-established People’s Republic of China in 1949. The first and only time MacArthur had visited China was in 1905, years before the Qing Dynasty was overthrown. As a result, MacArthur’s image of China, formed prior to the Chinese Civil War, differed vastly from the Communist China that emerged, explaining his lack of knowledge but not rationalizing his rejection of ideas from those who are better informed. “What had happened in the Chinese civil war,” Halberstam argued, “reflected those [cultural and tactical] changes, something MacArthur never chose to understand.” Halberstam focuses on this fact passionately, pointing to the example of Major General Dave Barr, “the head of the last American military advisory mission in China” and “a witness to the rise of Mao.” While MacArthur overlooked the “battle hardened North Koreans, or the dedicated Chinese who had whipped Chiang”, Barr was “very knowledgeable about the tactics of the Chinese Communists” and “a division commander in Korea when the Chinese entered the war. He knew more than most American officers about why the Communists had won in China, but MacArthur was not about to let him brief other regimental and division commanders, [...] [showing] astonishingly little curiosity about who his enemy was and why they had been so successful in the past” . Additionally, the Chinese attack served more as a shock than as an anticipation MacArthur had been waiting to jump on, accentuating the depths of his obliviousness to Chinese intervention. First-hand accounts of the retreat affirmed that US forces “had the stuffings knocked out of them” on the morning of the assault, while the withdrawal back south was filled with orders “to turn [...] [turrets] to the rear and shoot the hell out of anything that looked suspicious,” extending the degree of chaos that ensued following the unexpected attack . The attack eventually resulted in the longest retreat in US history, which in turn led to a prolonged fighting period between American and Chinese forces. Ultimately, MacArthur’s blatant disinterest in the “tactics” of the Chinese ultimately cost him many preventable defeats and even possibly the war itself, and he is proven to have failed to “apply the most basic tenet for military commanders: know your enemy.”

In conclusion, MacArthur’s decision to cross the 38th parallel was primarily based on his heavy underestimation of the power of the Chinese forces and his refusal to welcome new ideas or suggestions that may help with American military strategies against the Chinese, both of which are products of his overbearing arrogance and superior perceptions. Though the weaknesses of both the North Korean and Chinese forces and the possibilities of preplanned Chinese intervention could partially justify MacArthur’s intrusion into North Korea and advance towards China, his stubborn refusal to thoroughly understand his enemy on top of his lack of knowledge

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about China's war tactics and its strengths and weaknesses is marked as the fatal flaw of the US forces in the Korean War. In conclusion, the advancement of the US forces beyond the border was prompted not by MacArthur's defensive tactics against Chinese belligerency, but rather by MacArthur's condescension towards the power of the North Koreans and the Chinese along with his refusal to thoroughly understand the tactics of his enemies, which ultimately resulted in the unanticipated counterattack of the Chinese and the bitter fight that ensued.

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