

[Read free] Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953

## Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953

*Richard Whelan*

*\*Download PDF / ePub / DOC / audiobook / ebooks*

 Download

 Read Online

#1326397 in Books 1991-11Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 #File Name: 0316934038352 pages | File size: 34.Mb

**Richard Whelan : Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good retrospective of the conflictBy ClemReading a multitude of presidential histories that took place during the twentieth century aroused my interest in several worldwide events of the particular times and events, one of them being the Korean War (or Korean "Conflict" as it was known). Wanting to read a general overview compendium of the event posed a bit of a problem since, doing a search on didn't reveal that much of a selection. There were plenty of volumes about specific events during the war, but I couldn't find a book that represented a nice, broad summary of the entire event.I then remembered that I bought this book about 22 years ago, and never got around to reading it. I found it on one of those "bargain book tables" when I worked for Hastings for about \$3.99 (my employee discount probably knocked another dollar off). At the time, the book was only a year or two old, so it was a bit of a puzzle that it was already a cut-out piece of product ("cut-out" is industry jargon for "it didn't sell well, we produced too many copies, so we're trying to get rid of it by selling it dirt cheap"). I probably figured, at that time, that maybe one day I would get around to reading it. Well, I was right, but I never would have guessed that "one day" would be 22 years in the future. Even now, I was curious as to the overall quality and readability of the material. Well, all this to say, that I'm happy to report that this was a very enjoyable read overall.The author, Richard Whelan is (or was) a university professor, and sometimes his writing style reflects this. That's not to say the narrative is dry by any means, but perhaps not as engulfing as some of the more popular, well known authors.

He sets out to do exactly what I was wanting - a broad overview of The Korean War. So much of the history of this particular war is "behind the scenes". There really weren't that many well known battles nor places that this particular war is known for, so the vast majority of the narrative talks about background, histories of the relative nations, and negotiations. Since many people don't know (nor did they back then) the important history of the country of Korea, Whelan does a good job giving us a thorough overview starting around the turn of the twentieth century, about 50 years before the conflict began. Apparently, Korea has always been a bit of a goldmine, and was a much desired territory back in the Russian-Japanese war that occurred around this time (Korea is, in a sense, geographically in the "middle" of the two). Without regurgitating much of the details here, the country remained a much sought after prize at the conclusion of World War II with, again, the Soviets and Japanese wanting a big piece. Well, for those of you that remember history during World War II, the Japanese were the "bad" guys, and the Russians were the "good" guys. That immediately flip-flopped after the war, so when Russia decided they should be entitled to this piece of property, Harry Truman and the U.S. felt they had to get involved. We couldn't let Joseph Stalin do in 1946 what Hitler started doing in 1938. So essentially, the U.S. steps in to try to help Korea in the late 1940s. We leave after a couple of years, thinking we've done a pretty good job, but after we're gone, North Korea (essentially controlled by Russia) invades the South. So America (and the United Nations) had to step in, and push the commies back. It's here where the one major battle of the Korean War, the Battle of Inchon, is highlighted. Essentially, General Douglas MacArthur launches a very respectable D-Day-ish invasion to push North Korea back, and it works triumphantly with very little casualties for the Americans. General MacArthur then pushes the enemy all the way back, back to the border of China. Well, then China (also a "bad" guy) enters the war, and pushes the good guys back to the 38th parallel. And here's where the war comes to a geographical stalemate. All of this happens within the few months of the war, and not surprisingly, about 70% of the book. So by early 1951, the peace negotiations begin. And go on and on and on. One of the areas where this book succeeds is that it describes quite well the tumultuous relationship between Truman and MacArthur. Apparently, MacArthur had quite the ego (especially after the highly successful Inchon battle), and was a bit of a loose canon, wanting to do things his way, and not listening to his boss. Truman actually wanted to get rid of him much earlier, but really couldn't due to politics. Even after MacArthur is relieved, he comes back home to a hero's welcome. There are public appearances, ticker tape parades, and women are even fainting as he rides by. I'm sure this didn't set well with Truman's ego. Fortunately, a Senate Committee was appointed after MacArthur's dismissal to review the allegations, and it essentially proved that Truman was right all along with his decision. Sadly, this event isn't told in much detail here - only a couple of paragraphs, so a reader may not grasp the entire picture of the particular event. Perhaps the author thought it would be too big of a distraction from his main topic. So the war drags on. American's back home are frustrated (when aren't they during a war?), and when popular Eisenhower is elected president in 1952, he manages to bring the conflict to an end shortly after in 1953. That's not to say he should get most of the credit. He essentially had the same plans as Truman, but Ike being a "war hero", people were more comfortable going along with his proposals. Another part of the book that I really enjoyed was the introduction to the persona and makeup of the Asian enemy. The Chinese and North Koreans were unlike any enemy the United States had ever encountered, and their fierce jungle tactics, willingness to fight to the death, and the ability to survive for months only on rice after their supply lines and villages were bombed beyond recognition made them a very formidable enemy. It's a fascinating read since America essentially faced the same type of foe in Vietnam a decade later, yet we didn't seem to "learn our lesson". Perhaps the only drawback about this book was the continuity factor. Many times the author would stray a bit, and talk in detail about events that had happened in the past or would happen in the future, and I would get a bit lost in trying to maintain my focus on what was actually happening "now". Example: The Battle of Inchon is told in its entirety, beginning with the planning of the battle shortly after the war started. So at the conclusion of this particular narrative, the author then goes on to describe events that happened before the battle, and you become baffled as you're reading about events that you thought had concluded, yet hadn't actually begun. To be fair, the Battle of Inchon was only a few months into the war, but as I mentioned, about 70% of this book is focused on these particular few months, so I became a bit lost at times. Even the inserts of the pictures in the middle sections of the book seem to be thrown in haphazardly, with no focus on presenting the events in a linear fashion. All of this is a minor digression. Overall, I felt the book was an excellent retrospective about the "forgotten" war, I learned a lot, and would recommend to anyone wanting an overview of why we were there and what our goals were during this horrible conflict.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. To the brink of war...but not over  
By Jason N. Palmer  
Richard Whelan's 1990 diplomatic history, *Drawing the Line*, seeks to explain why the United States was not only willing to go to the brink of World War III in order to rescue the "repressive and only nominally democratic" regime of South Korean President Syngman Rhee, but also why the Truman administration deliberately limited its strategy such that the total, resounding victory that American had come to expect with World War II was impossible to achieve. Whelan's 379-page study examines the Korean War in its global Cold War context. The focus is particularly political, although it includes enough detail on the military aspects of the conflict to explain political concerns and how enemy action supported numerous Washington assumptions-whether or not the assumption proved sound. Whelan's thesis is that the Korean War was "a turning point in postwar history, with momentous repercussions worldwide." (xv) Whelan credits the Korean Conflict.

with: the transformation of NATO from a paper alliance to a powerful military force and the resultant intensification of the Cold War, the ascendancy of the United States within the United Nations and the weakening of the UN as a US tool, the justification for quadrupling the American military budget and the impetus this gave to the arms race, the creation of an adversarial relationship with Communist China and the recognition of Nationalist Formosa, the end of two decades of Democratic monopoly of the American executive branch and the integration of the Army. Whelan believes "the Korean War had far less to do with Korea than with Japan and Germany." (xv) It was a World War that pitted seventeen anti-Communist nations against North Korea and Communist China. Whelan counters the popular view that the war was a failure; by his measures it succeeded in resolutely "drawing the line" against communism without starting World War III. Whelan takes his title from President Truman's 25 June 1950 meeting with his top military and foreign policy advisors at the Blair House. General Omar Bradley said that "we must draw the line [against Communist expansion] somewhere...[and because] Russia is not yet ready for War...the Korean situation offered as good an occasion for action in drawing the line as anywhere else." From this conspicuous beginning Whelan demonstrates throughout the text how strategic policy was contingent upon Russian reaction in the Cold War context. The Chinese were seen as Russian pawns. Actions taken, at times unilaterally, by MacArthur resulted in intense scrutiny of Russian reaction in Washington. Truman, Bradley and the other Joint Chiefs remained fully cognizant of the potential for escalation that the theatre commander (MacArthur) frequently downplayed, or emphasized if it suited his purpose. NSC-68 and NSC 88/1, with their often erroneous assumptions of Russian or Chinese intent and capability provide crucial support to Whelan's argument. Although Whelan does an excellent job of framing administration motivation and hesitation in terms of global context, we are given a narrow view of that context-particularly those parts of the Cold War that related directly on Asia. The Berlin airlift, the Marshall Plan, actions taken by France, and West German initiatives receive short shrift or are disregarded. In short, Whelan takes little or no time to discuss alternatives to his thesis-that the Korean War was only one of a number of factors in empowering NATO, that the rapid expansion of American military capability would have occurred without and may have even been slowed down by Korea, and that the Republican resurgence was based as much upon popular perceptions of Democratic corruption, budgetary issues, and the aura of stability that Ike and Mamie projected as antiwar sentiment. Whelan's diplomatic methodology gives no voice to American society. We are given little information on how societal pressures molded the Truman administration's actions, or how America reacted to the war. The average American is given no voice. Even his chapter, "Referendum on Korea," on the 1952 election, is presented from Eisenhower's standpoint. Rarely does Whelan extend his interest beyond the most senior commander and certainly goes nowhere near the front-line troops point-of-view. Whelan is at his best depicting the outbreak of the conflict and the reasoning that lead figures in American foreign policy took at the time. However, Whelan hearkens back to a Cold War interpretation when he defends the U.S. intervention, arguing that the invasion by North Korea was "a Soviet test of American willingness and ability to oppose further Communist expansion." (119) An engaging narrative does not save Whelan's argument from a rigidity that smacks strikingly of the extremist positions that drove each side into the Korean Conflict.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. Just the right amount of depth and breadth...By walters@imagin.netMr. Whelan succeeds in describing the important aspects of the Korean War without succumbing to the usual bug-a-boo of war books - losing the non-military reader in an avalanche of military unit designations and troop movements. What he does do is provide an excellent recounting of how we as a nation stumbled into something we were not prepared for by exploring the reasons behind the "a loss to communism anywhere is a loss to communism everywhere" sentiment so pervasive after Stalin showed his true colors at the end of WWII. Two sections stand out clearly in my mind, and it's been years since I've read it (it's one of the few books I might just read again). During a succinct discussion of what lessons were not learned in Korea to be applied later in Vietnam, he summarized our failure in Southeast Asia as no other has when he wrote that we did not recognize the impossibility of fighting a moral war, that it is extremely difficult to fight a technological war against an enemy largely independent of mechanized transport, and that we failed to grasp the difference between communism and Asian nationalism. Wow! The other memorable phrase, appearing in a discussion on extremism, was that the best defense against extremism is self-protective firmness and a willingness to compromise. If you want the nitty gritty details of who-shot -who this book might just leave you with a Purple Heart; however,if you desire to gain thoughtful insight into the underlying reasoning and motivation of our political and military leaders during a crucial period of our national history, this book could be a valuable addition to your library.

The author describes the causes, events, and consequences of the Korean War. In his analysis, the war had momentous repercussions for NATO, the UN, Russia, China, and the arms race. And it provided the prologue to America's next war in Asia - Vietnam.

From Publishers WeeklyWhelan ( Robert Capa ) argues that the Korean War was a turning point in current history with momentous repercussions worldwide: the conflict consolidated the international anti-Communist coalition and led to a quadrupling of the U.S. military budget, thus setting off the arms race. Whelan counters the popular view that

the war was a failed American effort by demonstrating that the U.S. accomplished what it set out to do, i.e., prevent a Communist conquest of South Korea. The author presents a well-researched, gracefully written history of the conflict with emphasis on the political rather than the military aspect, and offers fresh insight into President Truman's decision to intervene. In an epilogue, he analyzes developments relating to the Korean peninsula since the 1953 truce. He concludes that the two Koreas "must eventually sign a peace treaty, establish full diplomatic and economic relations, and join the U.N." Photos. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Whelan is doubtless correct in asserting that the vast majority of Americans know little more about the Korean War than what they have gleaned from M\*A\*S\*H. And he is certainly correct in emphasizing the importance of this war, which President Truman initially called a "police action." There is no shortage of books on the war--Whelan's bibliography runs to nearly 200 items. Among recent studies of great merit are Max Hastings's *The Korean War* (LJ 12/87) and Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings *Korea: The Unknown War* (Pantheon, 1988). Hastings has no peer as a writer of battlefield history, and the Halliday and Cumings volume is both challenging and controversial. *Drawing the Line* does not measure up to either of these, but it is nonetheless a well-informed, well-balanced work written in a lucid if bland style. Recommended to general readers and informed laypersons.- John H. Boyle, California State Univ., Chico Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.