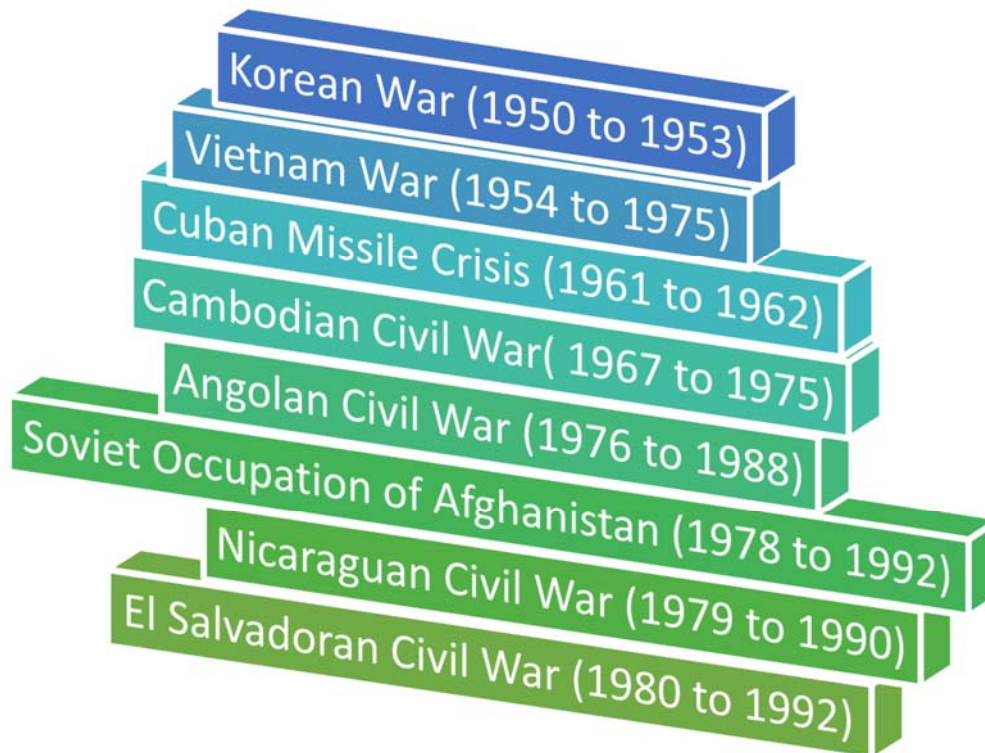




EXTENSION OF THE COLD WAR OUTSIDE EUROPE (THE KOREAN WAR)



The graphic above lists the proxy wars of the Cold War. However, Cold war intervention was not restricted to these countries; both superpowers also competed for influence on the political and economic development of smaller nations, from providing moral and financial support to the supply of arms equipment and/or military training. Such intervention led to massive disruption and considerable suffering in other countries. Often, democratically leaders were overthrown, despotic regimes used violence and repression to consolidate power and Cold War influence often led to the protraction of a conflict. On the other hand, foreign manipulation and involvement in proxy wars also helped alleviate Cold War tensions and decreased the likelihood of a full-scale nuclear war.

The Korean War (1950-1953)

- The Korean War was in origin a civil war over the unification and the future direction of Korea but it became an issue of ideological conflict within the superpower rivalry of the Cold War. Gaddis has described the Korean War as a conflict where small states along the periphery of empires, through their own self-centered behaviour, could embroil the great powers in unintended confrontations with each other. It also illustrates how events can proceed for some time along parallel but separate tracks, only to converge all at once with unpredictable results. Decisions made in Pyongyang, Moscow, Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo and Washington determined what happened; and yet no one, in any of those capitals, anticipated it.¹

1. Why was there a North and South Korea to begin with?

- Once an independent unified nation, Korea came under Japanese rule in 1910 and remained a colony till the end of World War II. On 8 August 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and marched into Manchuria and entered Korea. At the Potsdam Conference, the United States, then making plans to invade the Japanese mainland, was more than content to leave Manchuria and Korea to the Soviets. However, with

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, p. 70.



How was the global Cold War fought?

the prospect of the war actually coming to a sudden end after the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki (9 August 1945), Washington now reassessed its future interest in Asia and decided on the joint occupation of Korea with the Soviet Union. Without any natural division to the Korean peninsula, the 38th parallel, which roughly divided the country in half, was proposed to the Kremlin. The Soviet Union would occupy Korea to the north of this line, with the United States occupying the territory to the south. Stalin agreed to the division along this artificial boundary. In September 1945, American troops landed at Inchon and established their occupation of the south.²

- Indeed, by the end of 1945, the joint occupation of Korea had come to resemble the situation in Germany, with neither side prepared to withdraw for fear that the other might not. While Germany had obvious strategic importance for both superpowers, Korea did not appear to: American and Soviet troops remained there more to restrain each other than from any strong conviction, in either Washington or Moscow, that the territory itself was significant. This was to set a pattern for what became common during the Cold War – the sheer presence of one side convinced the other it had to be there too. Korea also replicated another feature of empires, which was the ease with which peripheries could manipulate the centre. Conditions on the peninsula had been anarchic after the Japanese surrender, and in the ensuing confusion, American and Soviet officials, distracted by concerns elsewhere, favoured which factions seemed likely to restore order and promote their interests.³ The occupation force was commanded by General John R. Hodge⁴, who was faced with rival groups identifying themselves as representing the new Korean government. Hodge however turned to former Japanese officials to administer the country. As the Japanese were expelled from Korea, the US military relied on a variety of collaborators to maintain law and order. Prominent nationalists and members of the anti-Japanese resistance formed a provisional government⁵, but at least half of them were Communists.
- By the end of 1945, the Americans backed Syngman Rhee, one of Korea's most famous exiles. Having studied in Harvard and Princeton, Rhee had left Korea a second time in 1910 and lobbied for Korean independence for the next 35 years. To General Hodge, Rhee was an ideal candidate since he was not tainted by collaboration with the Japanese; was staunchly anti-Communist, and spoke perfect English. Once it was evident that Rhee enjoyed the backing of the military government, the conservative leaders fell in line behind him.⁶
- To the north, under Soviet guidance and supervision, a network of People's Committees was formed. Together with these People's Committees, the Soviet Union also established a Soviet Civil Administration from October 1945. Terentii Shtykov⁷ was the main proponent of setting up a centralised structure to coordinate Korean People's Committees. In February 1946, these committees met in Pyongyang and established the People's Assembly of North Korea. Kim Il-sung, another Korean exile, was elected its chairman. Opposed to the Japanese occupation, Kim had fled to the Soviet Union during the war. After his installation in the north, Kim advocated wholesale land reform and began suppressing all opposition to Communist rule.⁸ Despite these differences, Kim and Rhee had many things in common: both were ardent Korean nationalists, both claimed the right to lead the entire country, both were determined to end the occupation with its artificially imposed dividing line at the 38th parallel, both would prove unpredictable in their actions, and each utterly despised the other.⁹

² Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, *Cold War*, pp. 93-95.

³ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 70. William Steuck, *The Korean War: An International History*, pp. 19-23.

⁴ General John Reed Hodge (1893-1963) was the military governor of South Korea under the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) between 1945 and 1948. His troops landed at Inchon under orders of General MacArthur and received the surrender of all Japanese forces in Korea south of the 38th parallel.

⁵ This provisional government was called the People's Republic of Korea. It later operated in opposition to American occupation in the south and was forcibly dissolved in early 1946.

⁶ Max Hastings, *The Korean War*, pp. 32-33.

⁷ General Terentii Fomich Shtykov (1907-1964) was the head of the Soviet Civil Administration in North Korea and later served as the first Soviet ambassador to the country (October 1948 - December 1950).

⁸ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 96.

⁹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 70.



- In November 1947, the UN General Assembly recognised Korea's independence and established the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). In January 1948, the United Nations called for free elections in both North and South Korea. The Soviet Union rejected any UN involvement, and elections eventually proceeded in the south in May. An insurgency broke out in April on Jeju Island which gave rise to a wave of anti-Communist suppression campaigns. Rhee was elected president in July and on 15 August, the Republic of Korea was established. On 9 September, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was proclaimed in Pyongyang. During 1949, the border between the two Korean regimes grew tense with incursions on both sides. In the meantime, the Red Army had withdrawn from the North late in 1948, while American troops withdrew from the South in June 1949. By now, the only thing unifying the country was a civil war, with each side claiming legitimacy and threatening to invade the other.¹⁰ Despite the country remaining divided, it appeared briefly as though Korea might become one territory that both superpowers would choose not to compete.¹¹

2. What happened in China and why did it matter?

- In the fall of 1949, the situation in Korea was transformed by developments in China. In October, Mao Zedong proclaimed the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Chiang Kai-Shek, the leader of the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan. In Washington, the Nationalist defeat was regarded as a major disaster – the 'loss' of China. This event coincided with the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb provoked a response from the United States. Mao also went to Moscow in December 1949 to participate in the seventieth birthday celebrations for Stalin. In his two months there, Mao negotiated the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in February 1950. In this agreement, Stalin gave support for the re-unification of China, thus abrogating the Yalta agreements to maintain the status quo in Asia. This alliance signalled the opening of a new front in the Cold War, in Asia.¹²
- In Korea, the superpowers imposed their rivalry on a civil war that would have existed in any event. Both Kim and Rhee were determined to unify the country on their respective terms, and despite the fact that the 38th parallel – because of the UN sanctioned elections in the south – now had a degree of international legitimacy going well beyond its original purpose of a military demarcation line. Both sides had been conducting raid across the border for some time before the outbreak of hostilities. Neither the North nor the South could seek to unify the country without superpower support.¹³ This, the Americans denied to Rhee, chiefly because the Truman administration had decided to liquidate all positions on the Asian mainland and concentrate on the defence of island strongpoints such as Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines, excluding Taiwan. Rhee repeatedly sought support for an invasion from officials in Washington as well as General MacArthur, the commander of the occupation forces in Japan, but he never got it. In fact, one of the reasons the United States withdrew its troops from the South was their fear that the unpredictable Rhee might march north and drag Washington into a war they did not want.¹⁴
- President Truman ordered the development of a hydrogen bomb in January 1950 and called for a new overview of the United States' foreign and defence policies. The result was a secret National Security Council document known as NSC-68 which was completed in April 1950. Now that American atomic monopoly had been broken, the paper argued, Soviet strength would have to be met by conventional power. The report ended by calling for a massive increase of expenditure on conventional arms, from \$13 billion to \$50 billion. In the meantime, the Truman administration completed its review of Far Eastern strategy in NSC 48-2, this called for a hands-off policy with regard to Taiwan, and concentrated on essential American interests in the Pacific, particularly with regard to Japan and Southeast Asia.¹⁵ On 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson left out any mention of Korea as part of its "defense perimeter" when outlining US interests in the

¹⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, p. 41.

¹¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 71.

¹² Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 97.

¹³ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 71.

¹⁴ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 41. Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 98.



Far East in a speech before the National Press Club, and this sent an ambiguous signal to Pyongyang and Moscow.

- Kim repeatedly sought permission from Stalin and later from Mao, to launch an attack on the south to reunite the Korean peninsula. Stalin resisted the idea, doubtful of Washington's response. He still respected agreements with the United States at the end of the war, and preoccupied with the crisis in Berlin in early 1949, concluded that the risk of American intervention was too great. As late as December 1949, Stalin urged caution, repeatedly warning the Chinese about the risks of American intervention. He disappointed Mao by defending the 1945 treaty he had signed with Chiang Kai-shek, on the grounds that "a change in even one point could give America and England the legal grounds to raise questions to modify the treaty's provisions." On 22 January 1950, Stalin's position had shifted radically; there was to be a new Sino-Soviet treaty. The most plausible explanation is that Stalin saw a tempting opportunity, whether as a result of what Acheson said publicly, or what the Truman administration had decided secretly, and he resolved to 'seize the moment'.¹⁶
- Stalin's new optimism about the prospects for international revolution provides a possible explanation. The Soviet push for influence in Western Europe had run up against its limits. Asia now looked more promising: the Chinese had shown that nationalism more easily aligned with Communism there than in Europe and he had subtly suggested to the Chinese that there might well be other opportunities beyond Chinese borders. It is now known that Stalin saw the situation in Indochina where Ho Chi Minh was fighting the French as one of them.¹⁷
- In April 1950, Kim visited Stalin in the Kremlin. By now, with the Communist victory in China and the Soviet development of an atomic bomb, Stalin felt more confident that Washington would hesitate to intervene in a distant war, even if it ended in another Communist victory. Furthermore, changes in American policy towards Japan could pose a long-term threat to the Soviet Union. American statements, such as Dean Acheson's 1950 Defense Perimeter Speech, also left Stalin in doubt as to what Washington's reaction to a quick North Korean offensive would be. He read the speech carefully and authorised Molotov to discuss with Mao. Stalin may have wanted to show other Communist parties that it was not only the Chinese who were willing to sponsor a revolutionary strategy when the time was right. The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in April 1949 may have also contributed to his militancy. The Chinese, still eager to legitimise their revolution by winning Stalin's approval, were more than willing to lend backup support, if and when needed.¹⁸
- Stalin now gave Kim permission to invade the south, informing him that the prevailing mood in the United States "is not to interfere". Kim assured Stalin that "the attack would be swift and the war will be won in three days." Even then, Stalin made it clear that the Soviet Union would not intervene directly in the conflict. Mao also extended his support to Kim and assured North Korea's ambassador that there was little to fear from the Americans, because they 'would not start a third world war over such a small territory.' A special protocol had been reached between Moscow and Pyongyang, under which the Soviet Union agreed to extend military and technical assistance. These were delivered in substantial amounts in the spring of 1950.

3. How did the invasion of the South begin?

- Stalin gave the final approval but maintained a tight rein over the North Koreans by even dictating the date of the invasion: 25 June 1950. In the early morning of 25 June, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel and within hours, the outnumbered and outmatched South Korean troops were in full retreat. When news of the invasion reached Washington, the State Department put in an urgent request which led to the United Nations Secretary-General Trygve Lie to hold a special session of the Security Council. The Soviet Union had

¹⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-70, 158-161.



boycotted the Security Council earlier in January to protest the UN decision not to admit the People's Republic of China. Under these extraordinary circumstances, the Security Council unanimously condemned North Korea's aggression and called for a withdrawal to the 38th parallel.¹⁹ The resolution was seen as a political victory for the United States, as it identified North Korea as the aggressor in the conflict. Earlier in the day, independent of the UN resolution, Truman had ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to contact General MacArthur, who was in charge of US forces in the Far East. He ordered MacArthur to prepare ships for the evacuation of US citizens from Korea, and authorised him to send ammunition and supplies to Pusan to support South Korean forces in the Seoul-Kimpo area. These would be escorted by US military units. He instructed MacArthur to send a survey team into the country to assess the situation and determine how to aid South Korea. Truman also ordered the mobilisation of the US Navy for movement into the region.

- The US delegation later contacted the Soviet delegation, requesting that the Kremlin use its influence over North Korea to compel it to comply with the resolution, but the Soviet Union refused. With the ineffectiveness of the resolution in de-escalating the conflict, the UNSC convened on 27 June to discuss further actions to take. This resulted in United Nations Security Council Resolution 83, calling on all member states to extend military aid to South Korea. With the Soviet Union out of the Security Council, which meant it could not veto UN action, the UN voted for the first time to send a military force to assist one country attacked by another.²⁰ The swift response on the part of Truman was also helped by the fact that the United States had an occupation force in nearby Japan, a fact Stalin seemed to have overlooked.²¹
- According to estimates, by mid-1950, North Korean forces numbered between 150,000 and 200,000 troops, organised into 10 infantry divisions, one tank division, and one air force division, with 210 fighter planes and 280 tanks. The invasion force included 274 T-34-85 tanks, 200 artillery pieces, 110 attack bombers, some 150 Yak fighter planes, 78 Yak trainers, and 35 reconnaissance aircraft. In addition to the invasion force, the Korean People's Army had 114 fighters, 78 bombers, 105 T-34-85 tanks, and some 30,000 soldiers stationed in reserve in North Korea.
- In contrast, the Republic of Korea Army defenders were unprepared and ill-equipped. It had 98,000 soldiers (65,000 combat, 33,000 support), no tanks, and a 22-piece air force comprising 12 liaison-type and 10 AT6 advanced-trainer airplanes. There were no large foreign military garrisons in Korea at the time of the invasion, but there were large American garrisons and air forces in Japan. Within days of the invasion, masses of ROK Army soldiers—of dubious loyalty to the Syngman Rhee regime—were retreating southwards or defecting en masse to the North.²²

4. Why did the USA intervene?

- American policy makers saw the invasion as a step in a Soviet plot to extend Communism in Asia and was a blatant instance of Soviet expansionism. They wrongly believed that Kim had been directed by Moscow to invade the South. They could not accept that Kim was acting independently. In light of fall of China to Communism and the Soviet detonation of the hydrogen bomb, the invasion appeared to have fulfilled American fears, predictions and assessment of the Soviet threat and policies.²³
- Truman saw the invasion as a direct challenge to American influence, not only in Asia but worldwide, including Europe. What mattered to Truman was not so much Korea itself – although his military advisors

¹⁹ On 25 June 1950, United Nations Security Council Resolution 82 was adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The resolution demanded North Korea immediately end its invasion of South Korea, the catalyst for the beginning of the Korean War. The measure was adopted by a vote of 9 support, none opposed, and one abstention.

²⁰ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, pp. 100-101.

²¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 43. On the same day, President Truman despatched the US Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait.

²² James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of the Korean War*, p. 23.

²³ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 101. Truman outlined his concerns in NSC-68, stating that "Communism was acting in Korea, just as Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese had ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier. I felt certain that if South Korea was allowed to fall, Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our own shores. If the Communists were permitted to force their way into the Republic of Korea without opposition from the free world, no small nation would have the courage to resist threat and aggression by stronger Communist neighbors."



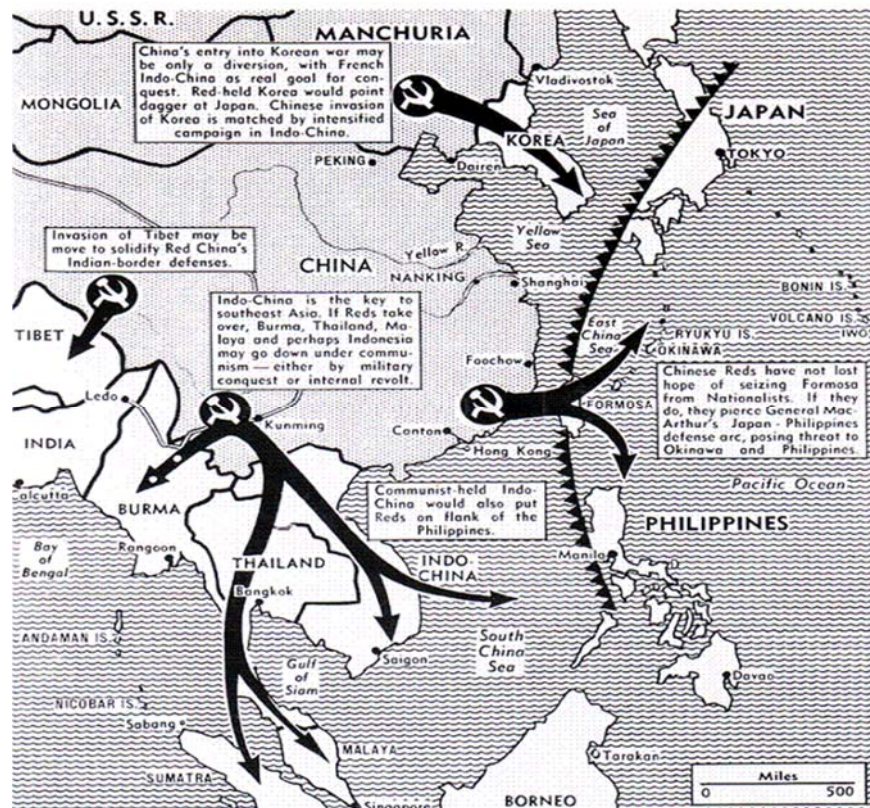
How was the global Cold War fought?

argued for the peninsula's strategic importance – but the impression the defeat of an American ally would make throughout the world. The invasion of South Korea provided a test of American credibility and ability to resist communism across the world. American inaction in Korea might engender a mood of defeatism in the peoples of Western Europe and Japan which could lead to them losing confidence in the United States and seeing the Soviet Union as a more reliable ally.

- In the 1950s, many Americans believed that they were losing the Cold War. This feeling of vulnerability had a significant impact on the attitudes to communism in both domestic and foreign policy. The Republicans had accused the Democrats for being too soft on communism and 'losing' China as a result. Subsequent McCarthy communist 'witch-hunts' within the American government placed Truman and Acheson with a rapidly narrowing choice of possible strategies and political alternatives. The hands of the Truman administration were increasingly tied by the need to show firmness and resolve in face of such accusations. Truman used a variant of the Domino Theory to justify American intervention, arguing that if the United States did nothing in Korea, then neighbouring states would fall to Communism. Kim and Stalin had miscalculated; they never imagined the United States would choose to go to war over Korea nor did they anticipate the speed of the West's response. For Syngman Rhee, the war provided the moral legitimacy of a UN resolution and backing for his beleaguered regime.

5. How did the Korean War unfold?

- Seoul fell to the advancing North Korean troops on 28 June 1950. At the end of June 1950, Truman ordered the deployment of American troops stationed in Japan into Korea. These were part of a UN force, which included South Korean troops and contingents from 15 other countries. The United States committed 260,000 troops; UN soldiers from other nations never exceeded 35,000.



This map in an American magazine published on 14 November 1950 shows how much they feared the spread of Communism in the Far East.



This cartoon by the British cartoonist David Low, from the Daily Herald (30 Jun 1950), shows Truman and the United Nations rushing to Korea's aid.²⁴



²⁴ Ibid



How was the global Cold War fought?

- On 7 July, the Security Council asked the United States to appoint a supreme commander for the UN force and General MacArthur was installed with his headquarters in Tokyo. Throughout July and August 1950, North Korean troops drove the coalition forces into the south-eastern area of the peninsula near Pusan. A defensive line was now built by the coalition forces, which became known as the Pusan Perimeter. By now, the North Koreans, who had little time to build up proper supply lines, had over-extended themselves. In the meantime, President Truman and the Secretary of State Dean Acheson obtained the consent of Congress to appropriate \$12 billion to the war in Korea. Mao also reported to the Politburo that he would intervene in Korea, justifying its response to "American aggression in the guise of the UN." MacArthur now conceived a flanking movement in the form of a daring amphibious operation behind enemy lines at Inchon. On 15 September, the large invasion fleet since D-Day made landings. On 25 September, Seoul was liberated. The North Korean assault on Pusan now crumbled as UN forces broke out of the Pusan perimeter and advanced rapidly north.²⁵
- As UN forces reached the 38th parallel, Truman made the decision to jettison the original war aim of expelling North Korean troops from the South and authorised the crossing of the 38th parallel. On 1 October, South Korean troops entered North Korea. On that day, the Soviet ambassador forwarded a telegram from Stalin to Mao and Zhou requesting that China send five to six divisions into Korea, and Kim Il-sung sent frantic appeals to Mao for Chinese military intervention. At the same time, Stalin made it clear that Soviet forces themselves would not directly intervene.
- On 7 October, the UN established a Commission for the Re-Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea. American troops advanced into communist territory the very same day. By now, Washington was no longer pursuing a policy of containment but one of rollback; the recovery of territory under Communist control. This change was prompted by expectations of a quick victory and prospects of a unified Korea within the sphere of American influence in Asia. More crucially, the decision was based on intelligence reports that neither the Soviet Union nor China would intervene in the war.²⁶
- In the meantime, Stalin grew concerned over the failings of the North Korean military, a sentiment shared by Mao. In October, Stalin decided that the Chinese must rescue the North Korean regime. Now hesitating, Mao suggested Kim accept defeat and resort to guerrilla tactics. Debate raged in Beijing between 2 and 5 October as Chinese leaders debated whether to send Chinese troops into Korea. Despite considerable resistance among many leaders, including senior military leaders, to confronting the Americans in Korea, Mao strongly supported intervention, and Zhou Enlai was one of the few Chinese leaders who firmly supported him. Peng Dehuai was appointed the commander of the Chinese forces in Korea. Peng argued that should American forces conquer Korea and reach the Yalu, they might cross it and invade China, which at this point the Politburo agreed to intervene in Korea. Later, the Chinese claimed that US bombers had violated PRC national airspace on three separate occasions and attacked Chinese targets before China intervened. On 8 October 1950, Mao Zedong re-designated the PLA North East Frontier Force as the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA).²⁷
- In order to enlist Stalin's support, Zhou and a Chinese delegation left for Moscow on 8 October, arriving there on 10 October at which point they flew to Stalin's home at the Black Sea. There they conferred with the top Soviet leadership. Stalin initially agreed to send military equipment and ammunition, but warned Zhou that the Soviet Union's air force would need two or three months to prepare any operations. In a subsequent meeting, Stalin told Zhou that he would only provide China with equipment on a credit basis, and that the Soviet air force would only operate over Chinese airspace, and only after an undisclosed period of time. Stalin did not agree to send either military equipment or air support until March 1951. Soviet

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 106-107.

²⁶ Isaacs and Downing, p. 107.

²⁷ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, pp. 355-356.



shipments, when they did arrive, were limited to small quantities of trucks, grenades, machine guns, and the like.²⁸

- On 19 October, Pyongyang fell to a combined force of UN and South Korean troops. MacArthur now divided the UN forces into two different operations as they advanced towards the Chinese border.²⁹ While the Chinese dropped hints³⁰ at intervention should the UN forces advance farther, in Washington, Dean Rusk and others in the State Department thought the Chinese were bluffing. MacArthur knew Chinese forces were massing beyond the Yalu River but he underestimated their numbers.³¹ The first confrontation between Chinese troops and UN forces took place on 25 October and after a few days of fighting, the Chinese withdrew to the hills. MacArthur refused to believe that the Chinese had entered the conflict and poured more troops north.³²
- On 26 November, the Chinese launched a full-scale assault across the Yalu River. What Washington wanted to avoid was taking place; the conflict was turning into a full-scale war with China. MacArthur informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 November that the UN forces now faced "an entirely new war." In Washington, Truman conceded during a press conference that no military option would be ruled out, presumably including the use of the atomic bomb. British Prime Minister Clement Attlee was alarmed at the prospect but was reassured by Dean Rusk that there was no desire on the part of the United States to enlarge the war by inviting confrontation with the Soviet Union. The decision was now to revert to original aim of restoring the 38th parallel as the border between the two Koreas.³³
- On 6 December 1950, Pyongyang was recaptured by Chinese troops and pursued the retreating UN troops.³⁴ Two days later, General Walker was killed in a jeep accident and replaced by General Matthew B. Ridgway. Under his leadership, the UN forces were ordered to abandon the roads and seize the high ground to deny the enemy the advantage. In early 1951, the Chinese launched a fresh offensive and captured Seoul on 4 January. However, the Chinese advance now faced a reinvigorated UN force. The tide turned once more; the Eighth Army retook Inchon on 10 February and recaptured Seoul on 14 March.³⁵ Mao cabled Stalin on 1 March, emphasising the difficulties faced by Chinese forces and the need for air cover, especially over supply lines. Apparently impressed by the Chinese war effort, Stalin agreed to supply two air force divisions, three anti-aircraft divisions, and six thousand trucks. PVA troops in Korea continued to suffer severe logistical problems throughout the war. By the end of the month, the Eighth Army was at the 38th parallel.³⁶ In the meantime, after cease-fire negotiations failed in January, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 498 on 1 February 1951, condemning the People's Republic as an aggressor, and called upon its forces to withdraw from Korea.
- During the winter of 1950 and 1951, the Truman administration had been faced with the prospect of the UN and South Korean troops being wiped out by the Chinese troops chasing them down the peninsula. At the end of 1950, the United States had 369 operational atomic bombs, all of them easily deliverable on Korean battlefields or on Chinese supply lines from bases in Japan and Okinawa. The Soviet Union probably had no more than five of such weapons and could hardly have been reliable as their American counterparts.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 359-361.

²⁹ The Eighth Army was led by General Walton Walker to advance up the western side of the peninsula while the Tenth Army under General Edward Almond would advance up the eastern side.

³⁰ Stokesbury, *A Short History of the Korean War*, p. 83. On 20 August 1950, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai informed the UN that "Korea is China's neighbour and the Chinese people cannot but be concerned about a solution of the Korean question". President Truman interpreted the communication as "a bald attempt to blackmail the UN", and dismissed it.

³¹ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 108. On 15 October 1950, President Truman and General MacArthur met at Wake Island in the mid-Pacific Ocean. This meeting was much publicized because of the General's discourteous refusal to meet the President on the continental United States. To President Truman, MacArthur speculated there was little risk of Chinese intervention in Korea, and that China's opportunity for aiding the North Koreans had lapsed. He believed China had some 300,000 soldiers in Manchuria, and some 100,000–125,000 soldiers at the Yalu River. Stokesbury, *A Short History of the Korean War*, pp. 88-89.

³² Ibid., p. 109.

³³ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁴ Stalin now allowed the Soviet Air Force to provide air cover, and supported more aid to China.

³⁵ Stokesbury, *A Short History of the Korean War*, p. 122. This was the city's fourth conquest in a year's time, leaving it a ruin; the 1.5 million pre-war population was down to 200,000, and people were suffering from severe food shortages.

³⁶ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, pp. 110-111.



The reasons for Truman's reluctance to use American nuclear supremacy to reverse the military situation in Korea could be explained by the following. First, there was the practical difficulty of using nuclear weapons in Korea which was what to target. The atomic bomb had been developed for use against cities, industrial complexes, military bases, and transportation networks. Few of these existed in Korea, where the UN forces faced an enemy that advanced mostly on foot, carried its own supplies, along primitive roads and even improvised mountain paths.³⁷

- While it was possible to bomb Chinese cities, industries and military facilities north of the Yalu, the political costs would have been severe. Washington's European allies were alarmed at the prospect of an expanded war. One reason was that if an atomic attack on China brought the Soviet Union into the war, the United States would need Western European bases to strike Soviet targets, a requirement that would leave the NATO countries vulnerable to retaliatory airstrikes or even a full-scale ground invasion. This was a bleak scenario given the alliance's minimal military capabilities at that time.³⁸

Why did MacArthur lose his job!?

- In the meantime, MacArthur had taken the position that the Nationalist government in Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek should come to the aid of the UN forces in Korea. He spoke openly of an invasion of Communist China, advocated the bombing of Chinese cities and urged Washington to supply him with massive reinforcements. Washington however considered the war in Korea as a limited operation and had no wish to extend the conflict to China or risk direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. MacArthur's views were increasingly out of line with Truman. After meeting with his principal advisors and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Truman relieved MacArthur of his command on 11 April 1951. He was replaced by General Ridgway.³⁹ General James Van Fleet assumed command of the U.S. Eighth Army.
- In late April 1951, the Chinese and North Koreans launched a new offensive but this time the UN line held firm as the war seemed to have reached a stalemate. This was also another reason for the non-use of nuclear weapons in Korea had to do with the military situation there. By now, the Chinese troops had outrun their supply lines and UN forces under the leadership of General Ridgway were taking the offensive. This paved the way for quiet diplomacy through Soviet channels which made it possible to begin armistice negotiations in July which took place at Kaesong.⁴⁰
- The United States feared that the Chinese and North Koreans might use this as an opportunity to regroup and re-equip, which was precisely what happened. After six weeks of fruitless negotiations, the Communists accused the UN of violating the neutral zone and suspended the talks. From the autumn of 1951, both sides confronted each other from trenches. In the air, the first jet-versus-jet combat was being fought.⁴¹ The US Air Force's bombing campaign devastated many North Korean cities. More than 600 000 tonnes of bombs were dropped on the North, almost as much as rained down on Germany throughout World War II.⁴² While the war dragged on, the principle had at least been established that the war would not expand and that atomic weapons would not be used.

What role did the USSR play?

- Stalin's role in all of this was ambiguous. He had, of course, started the war by authorising the invasion. However, he also justified his decision not to intervene in the Korean War on grounds that "the Second

³⁷ Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, p. 116.

³⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 59.

³⁹ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 59.

⁴¹ The Soviet MiG-15 fighters were pitted against the American F-86 Sabers. This aerial confrontation was the only time it happened during the Cold War. Both countries kept this quiet.

⁴² Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 113.



World War ended not long ago, and we are not ready for the Third World War."⁴³ He had been surprised by the decisiveness of the American responses and when it looked as if MacArthur's forces were going to reach the Yalu, he pushed hard for Chinese intervention – but he would have abandoned North Korea if that had not taken place.⁴⁴ Throughout 1951, Stalin was pressed by Mao and Kim to supply more pilots and planes to the conflict and he turned down most of these requests. In reality, the strategy of a limited war suited Stalin, who had never wanted war with the United States. As soon as the conflict started, he had withdrawn Soviet military advisors from Korea and recalled ships headed for North Korea with military supplies. Stalin carefully avoided any action that might result in war with the United States. Soviet pilots flying MiG-15s were under orders not to enter South Korean airspace while Soviet intelligence officers who interrogated UN prisoners of war wore Chinese uniforms. While the Soviets later supplied more military hardware to China, Stalin insisted that every item must be paid in cash. When Stalin approved the talks to end the war, he accepted the likelihood of a military stalemate. However, he also saw advantages in tying the United States down in East Asia. Exhausted by the war, both China and North Korea were ready to end it by the fall of 1952, but Stalin insisted that they continue fighting.⁴⁵

How did all sides finally agree on an armistice?

- In October 1951, peace talks began again at Panmunjon. These would last eighteen months. One dispute focused on whether the truce lines should be along the 38th parallel, as the Communists wanted, or along the final lines of engagement, as the UN wanted. Stalin was also influencing negotiations from afar, urging Kim and Mao to extract more concessions from the United States in return for an end to the war. Another stumbling block was the question over the repatriation of prisoners-of-war which delayed the ceasefire agreement even further. The North Koreans and Chinese rejected the principle that prisoners-of-war should not be returned to their native countries against their will.⁴⁶
- In November 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected the new US president. In March 1953, Stalin died and the Kremlin was plunged into the confusion of an uncertain succession. The new Soviet leadership concluded within two weeks that the war must be ended, a decision also reached, in the meantime by Mao. In May 1953, Eisenhower threatened Beijing with the use of nuclear weapons and at the same time, dams in North Korea were hit by US bombing, causing widespread flooding. Hostilities raged on throughout June. While the United States was set on ending the war, Rhee proved recalcitrant. In an attempt to sabotage peace talks, he allowed Communist prisoners-of-war in a POW camp in the South to defect. Eisenhower was furious and Churchill, now British prime minister, cabled the White House that Rhee should be removed from office. The armistice negotiations continued with the UN, China and North Korea present. On 27 July 1953, a ceasefire came into effect.⁴⁷ There was no clear victory for either side; the boundary between the two Koreas hardly shifted from where it was in 1950. The only decisive outcome was the precedent in set: that there could be a bloody and protracted conflict involving nations armed with atomic weapons and that they could choose not to use them.⁴⁸

What were the consequences of the Korean War ?

- The United States lost more than 54 000 men⁴⁹, with a further 100 000 wounded. The South Korean army lost 415 000 men, and estimates of North Korean casualties neared 1 million. The Chinese officially claimed 112 000 casualties, though the actual figure could be higher than that. At least 5 million refugees were homeless in the south while staggering losses in civilian lives were seen in the North as a result of US bombing. Many of the major cities on the peninsula were flattened. Under Kim Il-Sung, the North did not

⁴³ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 114.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ Official US statistics place it at 36 568.



fully recover from the war while the South would undergo a dramatic transformation, emerging as one of the dominant growth economies in the region.⁵⁰

- In the United States, with the invasion of South Korea by Soviet and Chinese-backed North Korean forces in June 1950, and continuing charges by Congressional critics that the Truman administration was soft on Communism, quickly settled matters in favour of the report's recommendations. NSC 68's recommendations thereby became policy, and Washington began a massive military build-up to achieve near parity in conventional forces with the Soviet Union and maintain nuclear superiority. While NSC-68 did not make any specific recommendations regarding the proposed increase in defence expenditures, the Truman administration almost tripled defence spending as a percentage of the gross domestic product between 1950 and 1953 (from 5 to 14.2 per cent).⁵¹ The Korean War thus marked the militarisation of the Cold War, as Washington believed that the United States could only circumscribe Soviet power from a position of military strength, which meant enlarged conventional forces and continuing superiority in strategic weapons.⁵²
- The Korean War was also a boost to the Japanese economy. The US military placed \$3 billion of war-related orders in Japan, leading to more than a doubling of its manufacturing output. Its GNP grew at a rate of ten per cent per annum between 1950 and 1954. As it was now American policy to build up a strong ally in the Asia-Pacific, Japan enjoyed a revival more dramatic than anything brought about by Marshall Plan aid in Europe. The Korean War triggered the economic growth in the region.⁵³ The political reconstruction of Japan was confirmed in the Treaty of San Francisco⁵⁴ which ended the state of war between the United States and Japan and restored sovereignty to Japan and terminated the occupation with effect from 1952. In return for independence, the United States secured Japan's signature to a Mutual Security Agreement negotiated at the same time as the peace treaty, which guaranteed the United States military bases both in Japan and on the island of Okinawa. The Japanese islands therefore formed a major bulwark against further communist expansion in the Far East. The Yoshida Letter⁵⁵ also provided evidence of Japan's central importance to the containment policy in Asia. Under this agreement, Japan agreed to a trade embargo with Communist China, which the United States hoped would weaken Mao's regime. Washington also feared that a growing trade relationship between Japan and China could lead to the detachment of Japan from the American sphere of influence. Japan also promised to trade with Taiwan.⁵⁶
- The war also changed American policy towards the Nationalist regime in Taiwan. Once the Korean War broke out in June 1950, Truman declared that the neutralisation of the Strait of Formosa was in the best interest of the United States and ordered the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to defend the island against possible Communist invasion. Consequently, Washington recognised the Republic of China as the only legitimate government of China till 1971, when recognition was extended to the People's Republic. Chiang Kai-shek now became the recipient of substantial economic and military aid, and the denial of the island of Taiwan to China was an important means of limiting the power of Chinese Communism in Asia.
- Japan's re-emergence as a sovereign state alarmed its recent wartime enemies in the Pacific. Countries like Australia and New Zealand saw the new Japan as both an economic rival and a potential aggressor. Just as American policy makers had to secure French compliance with the reconstruction of West Germany, so they had to align Australia and New Zealand behind the policy of rehabilitating Japan. Accordingly, the United States signed the ANZUS⁵⁷ Pact in September 1951. Under the terms of this security agreement, all parties agreed to help each other in the event of aggression against Australasia. The ANZUS Pact was mutually

⁵⁰ Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 117.

⁵¹ Truman asked Congress for \$10 billion to spend on the armed forces, \$260 million for the hydrogen bomb project, and \$4 billion in military aid to its allies.

⁵² Office of the Historian, NSC-68. Oliver Edwards, The USA and the Cold War, 1945-1963, p. 74.

⁵³ Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 117.

⁵⁴ This was signed between Japan and the Allied Powers on 8 September 1951.

⁵⁵ This was addressed by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru to Ambassador John Foster Dulles on 24 December 1951, and released to the press on 16 January 1952.

⁵⁶ Oliver Edwards, The USA and the Cold War, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty.



beneficial. The United States would protect Australia and New Zealand against a resurgent Japan, while Australia and New Zealand would help the United States defend the Pacific against communist incursions.⁵⁸

- American policy towards Southeast Asia also underwent change. Even before the outbreak of the Korean War, American position on Vietnam had hardened. When China and the Soviet Union recognised the Vietminh as the legitimate government of Vietnam, the United States responded by recognising the Bao Dai regime⁵⁹. In March 1950, military aid was sent to the French for the first time. It was believed that the withdrawal of the French from Vietnam could swell the rising tide of Communism in Asia. The loss of Vietnam could also turn public opinion against the French government back home, possibly to the benefit of the Communists. Military assistance to the French was partly intended to secure French support for the restoration of German economic and military power central to American strategy in Western Europe. By early 1950s, the United States was spending \$1 billion a year in military assistance to the French. To the US, the fate of Southeast Asia and the future of Japan were interdependent. China no longer existed as a marketplace for Japanese goods and a source of raw materials, so Indochina/Southeast Asia now had to become the economic hinterland for Japan. Japan and the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia must be integrated into a regional economy guaranteeing mutual prosperity as means of limiting the power of Chinese communism in Asia.⁶⁰
- The war had implications in Europe as well. Since Western Europe was the most likely area for Soviet expansion, NATO underwent strengthening; it was given an expanded secretariat and unified command structure. Four US divisions were dispatched to Europe as reinforcements. In 1951, its membership was enlarged to include Greece and Turkey. Military bases in Turkey gave the United States the capability of launching air raids against the southern regions of the Soviet Union and was a useful platform for blocking any attempted Soviet advance on the oilfields of the Middle East. The United States also encouraged its NATO partners to increase their military spending in an attempt to make NATO an effective bulwark against Soviet aggression. Between 1951 and 1955, Washington sent \$25 billion in aid to its NATO allies, but such sums were contingent on increases in their own defence budgets.⁶¹
- The strengthening of NATO was also linked to the rearming of West Germany. France was concerned over this prospect and in October 1950 proposed the Pleven Plan to create a supranational European Army. While the plan reserved the central role for France, the plan was not ratified. A draft agreement for a modified Pleven Plan was ready in May 1952 but the plan never went into effect. West Germany was eventually admitted into NATO. The rearming of West Germany was tied to the recovery of German sovereignty under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The political and economic reconstruction of West Germany was a long-term objective of the United States and a vital aspect of Containment in Europe. The Korean War and American objectives undoubtedly accelerated the end of the Allied occupation in West Germany and its attainment of full statehood.⁶²

⁵⁸ Edwards, *The USA and the Cold War*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Bao Dai was the last emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty in Vietnam and was made the figurehead of a new regime supported by the French.

⁶⁰ Oliver Edwards, *The USA and the Cold War*, p. 77.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 76.



'Rocky Road to Nowhere', by Paul Berdanier on July 17, 1952

- There is no doubt that the Korean War was a pivotal event in the Cold War. It marked an acceleration but not a reorientation of American policy. Measures such as the reinforcement of NATO, West German sovereignty and potential armament, a Japanese peace treaty, increase economic aid to anti-communist regimes in Southeast Asia and a Pacific security pact had all been under active consideration before hostilities in Korea, but all these occurred sooner than they otherwise would have as a result of the Korean War. War in Korea also accelerated the globalisation of the Cold War. After Korea, the United States had new military commitments across the world. These new commitments were reflected in permanently higher levels of defence spending. In 1950 defence spending stood at \$13.1 billion. Under the impact of Korea, it reached a high of \$50.4 billion and was never less than \$40 billion a year for the remainder of the 1950s. War in Korea also brought about a militarisation of American policy. Before Korea, the avoidance of committing US troops to a war on the Asian landmass had been an axiom of American diplomacy. After Korea, the United States was ready to deploy troops anywhere in order to defend the 'Free World'. This was to find expression again in another part of Asia – Vietnam.⁶⁴

Consequences of the Korean War on the Cold War

⁶³ <http://hti.osu.edu/opper/lesson-plans/cold-war-conflict-in-korea-the-powerful-and-powerless-united-nations/images/rocky-road-to-nowhere>

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 78.