

Background to the Korean War

- Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)
 - Japanese wanted control of Korea: defend Japanese isles, gain source of minerals and wheat, land for growing
 - Russians wanted control of Korea: protect interests in Manchuria
 - Japanese won → Korea became Japanese protectorate
 - In 1910: annexed by Japan until WW2 defeat
 - Any opposition from Koreans = oppression
 - Any industrial development was primarily for Japanese benefit
 - Korean resentment against Japanese, looked forward to Korea's independence in light of imminent Japanese defeat in WW2
- Post-war occupation of Korea & partition of Korea
 - Potsdam Conference: Korea divided into 2 occupation zones along the 38th parallel
 - North: Soviet Union
 - South: USA (aim: counter Soviet influence in Korea)
 - USA and USSR agreed Korea should be unified under a provisional government, but no agreement reached on how to unite Korea and administer it
 - Americans reluctant to allow Soviets to have total dominance over Korea, fearing the expansion of communist influence
 - Initially, the superpowers didn't intend to be heavily involved in Korean affairs
 - 1947: UN called for free elections to be held in Korea

North Korea

- USSR did not allow elections: wanted to establish dominance and influence over political and economic developments in their occupation zone
- DPRK established with Kim Il Sung as leader, recognised by USSR as the only legitimate government in Korea
- Kim Il Sung convinced the whole of Korea should be united under one rule, sought to achieve sole control through the use of violence if necessary (both North and South's hostility reduced possibility of peaceful reunifications, while heightening the possibility of armed conflict)
 - Used extensive propaganda, promoted cult of personality
 - North Koreans greatly respected him: he had fought a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese → popular
 - Promoted self-sufficiency
 - Isolated North Korea from the rest of the world to limit Western influence & opposition
- Kim cultivated ties with USSR and Communist China, vilified South Korea and the USA
 - Stalin agreed to provide military supplies and economic support
 - In contrast to the poorly-trained and ill-equipped South Korean Army, North Korean People's Army (NKPA) heavily armed with Soviet tanks and artillery
 - Stalin unwilling to be entangled in a war with the USA → warned that USSR would not have any direct involvement in Korea (did not want to risk military confrontation)
 - USSR's only close ally in Asia-Pacific was China, but Korea was significant as it was close to USSR, China, and other countries in Asia-Pacific
 - Incorporation of North Korea into communist bloc: platform for spread of communist influence, counterbalance American influence in Japan

South Korea

- 80% of eligible population in South took part in elections, boycotted by communists
- Syngman Rhee supported by USA and UN
 - Seen as patriot who devoted his life to securing Korean independence from the Japanese
 - Anti-communist
 - Backed by USA as preventing communist influence from spreading to the south was more important than people's interests
 - Became President in August 1948
- Rhee was increasingly authoritarian and intolerant of political opponents
 - Dictator → unpopular
 - Jeju Massacre: up to 60,000 opponents and civilians killed by the army
 - Labour party leaders e.g. Communist Workers' Party of South Korea planned rallies to denounce massacres
 - He later attempted to sabotage the 1953 peace talks and was opposed to any ceasefire that failed to remove Kim Il Sung from power and unify Korea under his own rule
- Rhee appealed to the USA and the UN
 - USA thought Rhee was rash and USA was unwilling to risk war: did not provide significant military aids and weapons, initiated process to withdraw American troops from South Korea, South Korean Army equipped with light weapons
 - USA saw Korea as a buffer state
 - Proximity to strategic resources in Manchuria and Northeast China
 - Proximity to Japan: USA wanted to rebuild Japan as a bulwark against communism and wanted to use South Korea as a buffer
- Before June 1950, the USA focused its attention on rebuilding Japan
 - Saw Korea situation as more political than military
 - Believed American economic aid would be more effective than military aid in preventing communism from gaining traction in South Korea
 - Cautious not to equip South Korea with extensive military capabilities to prevent Rhee from launching a military offensive against the North, that might drag the USSR and China into a major conflict with USA that USA did not want
- Rhee's aggressive actions in initiating border clashes: USA reluctant to send heavy weapons that Rhee demanded (didn't want to be embroiled in another war)

Entry of USA into the Korean War

- USA convinced the North Koreans had been influenced by the USSR to launch the 25 June 1950 attack on South Korea
- Truman believed this was a step in Stalin's master plan to spread communism throughout Asia, and ultimately the world
- Truman worried (domino theory)
 - Believed American involvement in Korean War as essential for the success of global containment, as outlined in NSC-68 → justified militarisation of American policy in East Asia
- Believed if UN didn't take a firm stand on Korea → lose all credibility as an organisation that protected international security, and in future there would be no way to check further communist aggression
- June 1950: USA rapidly mobilised the UN to condemn North Korean aggression & pass resolutions to take action to support South Korea

- April 1951: stalemate
 - Truman wished to limit the Korean War even if it meant achieving only initial objective of saving South Korea from communism and accepting a return to the 38th parallel
 - USA's allies in the UN aware if they attacked China, USSR might enter the war and nuclear weapons might be deployed, involving USA in a war they didn't want

Entry of China on North Korea's side

- As UN forces moved further into North Korean territory: moving closer to North Korea's border with China
- Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai warned if American forces crossed the 38th parallel, China would intervene in the war and would not hesitate to defend its border with Korea and risk full-scale war if Americans advanced towards Yalu River
 - At this point, Stalin still didn't want direct conflict (Soviet air cover didn't cover Chinese soldiers) but pressured Mao to take action
 - Proximity of American military to Chinese territory: security threat
 - Americans supported Chiang Kai-Shek and KMT during Chinese Civil War
- October 1950: Zhou En-lai sent cable to UN that any continuation of the Korean War would lead inevitably to a widening of the conflict
 - mid-October: Chinese started to cross secretly into North Korea
 - MacArthur defied directives of Truman and the UN and continued pushing towards the Yalu River → enlarged the scale of the Korean War (Chinese forces responded and took UN by surprise → UN retreat)
- 'Human wave' attacks caused 4 million deaths (huge involvement)
- Chinese People's Volunteer (CPV) troops led by General Peng Dehuai

Armistice Talks (July 1951 to July 1953)

- USA, USSR, UN, China keen to end the Korean War
 - Suffered heavy casualties, wanted a resolution
 - China militarily exhausted: war was taking a toll on its military, economic, human resources
 - USSR achieved aim of maintaining communist influence in Korea
 - USA achieved aim of South Korean independence
- Although North Korea and South Korea wanted to continue fighting until they had achieved the unification of Korea under their own rule, the superpowers controlled the outcome of the war
 - Rhee: South Korean forces to push on to the Yalu River and unify Korea (not supported by the UN, unable to achieve his aims)
 - Kim: complete unification of Korea (pressured by USSR and China to participate in the peace talks)
 - NKPA depended on USSR and China to contribute the bulk of the weapons and armed forces: unable to sustain the fighting
- Not easy (differing interests and expectations)
 - North Korean POWs: communists wanted them all to be returned to North Korea, UN and South Korea wanted them to have a choice to return or stay in the South
 - Division line: communists wanted it to be at the 38th parallel, UN and South Korea wanted to be along the battle line established between the 2 sides

How the Cold War tensions influenced and shaped the Korean War

1. US fear of communism
 - Took stronger and more concrete actions in Korea
2. Division of Korea mirrored Cold War divides
 - USA and USSR safeguarded each part of Korea: communist and non-communist camps
3. Attempts to prevent the communist bloc from prevailing
 - Containment → roll-back → containment
4. Outcome of the Korean War
 - War started on the premise that Korea was a third party substitute used by superpowers to compete without direct confrontation
 - When Korea became a burden, pulled out against the wishes of the locals

Impact of the Korean War

Set the precedence for proxy wars

- Korean War: first time the Cold War was fought outside Europe using third party substitutes for direct confrontation between USA and USSR
- Globalisation of the Cold War (peace wasn't really achieved after Korean War as USA and USSR continued to use third party substitutes e.g. Vietnam for competition)
 - Superpowers frequently became entangled in local conflicts where they took sides and supported individual factions in proxy conflicts in order to expand their influence
 - Avoided direct military confrontation

Intensified American involvement in Asia-Pacific / Changes in American Policy in Asia

- USA felt that USSR was planning to take control of Asia-Pacific, like how it had established satellite states in Eastern Europe
- NSC-68: US perception of USSR's determination to bring Asia-Pacific under communist influence
- USA saw the communist bloc as a united entity
- Domino theory: USA feared if they lost one country to communism, others would inevitably be lost too
- Increased in American defence expenditure
 - 33% of budget (1950) to 60% (1953)
- Economic reconstruction of Japan
 - USA and allies occupied Japan and helped to rebuild it: feared a weak Japanese economy would allow the Japanese communist movement to spread and gain more popularity amongst Japanese
 - USA felt it was important to establish a base in Japan to strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific and prevent the spread of communism
 - After Korean War: accelerated American attempts to support economic reconstruction of Japan
 - Close proximity of Japan and Korea: Japan important and convenient source of military supplies for American forces in Korea
 - Japan remained an integral part of American containment policy in Asia-Pacific and enjoyed strong military and economic ties with the USA

Escalation of military tensions between Western and communist blocs in Europe

- Militarisation of NATO
 - Saw North Korean attack on South Korea as Soviet-led communist aggression
 - Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers of Europe (NATO command structure)

- Long-term defence plan to expand NATO's forces (wanted to contain the spread of communism)
- Military exercises to strengthen NATO's capabilities
- Rearmament of NATO members
- Inclusion of Turkey and Greece (1951) and West Germany (1955)
- Strong indicators of the perceived need to strengthen European military defences due to the Korean War
- Formation of the Warsaw Pact (1955) to counter NATO

Timeline

Date	Event
1910	Korea annexed by Japan
1945	Potsdam Conference: Korea divided at the 38th parallel
1947	UN called for free elections to be held in Korea
May 1948	Elections in the South
August 1948	Syngman Rhee elected President of the newly-founded Republic of Korea
9 Sep 1948	Establishment of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with Kim Il Sung as leader, with Soviet support
12 Sep 1948	USSR recognised DPRK as the only legitimate government in Korea
End 1948	Soviet forces withdrew from North Korea
March 1949	Mutual defence treaty between Chinese Communist Party and South Korea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Korean soldiers who had fought in People's Liberation Army of China during Chinese Civil War returned to North Korea to bolster North Korean forces
June 1949	American forces withdrew from South Korea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Left token force of a few hundred men - Before key international developments (Soviet detonation of the atomic bomb and communist victory) caused Americans to reassess strategic importance of Korea
July 1949	Border clashes: South Korean warships attacked North Korean military installations at the mouth of the Taedong River <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiated by the South to capture more territory - Sank most of North Korean west coast fleet - Provoked retaliation of NKPA → fierce fighting, heavy casualties - Showed inability of South Korean forces to launch successful offensive attacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many military desertions from South to North (showed how unpopular Rhee was)

August 1949	<p>USSR exploded first atomic bomb → atomic parity (USA could no longer use atomic diplomacy to threaten USSR, caught USA off-guard)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unleashed nuclear arms race → heightened fear of possible nuclear war - By early 1950: USSR more inclined to provide support to a possible North Korean invasion without such a threat
1 Oct 1949	<p>Mao Zedong (leader of Chinese Communist Party) proclaimed People's Republic of China</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More favourable international climate for USSR, gained a strong ally → Stalin more confident to take aggressive actions - 'Lost China' accusation: pressure on Truman to take decisive action against communists especially due to Sino-Soviet alliance (increased threat against US interests in Asia) - Seemed to signal a tip in balance of power in Cold War in favour of the communists - McCarthyism: accused Americans of being communists or communist sympathisers without firm evidence → heightened tensions and suspicion → more determined and involved in ensuring no further spread of communism
Early 1950	<p>Soviet advisers sent to train the NKPA, military equipment such as tanks, guns, artillery, fighter planes provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stalin changed his mind (encouraged by exclusion of Korea by American Defense Perimeter & Sino-Soviet Treaty) - North Koreans had advantage over South Koreans: training from USSR, experience from fighting in the Chinese Civil War
Jan 1950	<p>Dean Acheson's speech on the American Defense Perimeter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exclusion of Korea: led Stalin to conclude that USA was not likely to get involved in Korea → more willing to support North Korea's invasion of the South
Feb 1950	<p>Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promised to come to each other's aid - Mao could commit attention to the assistance of North Korea if the invasion of the south did not go smoothly - USSR: direct involvement and intervention could be avoided - USSR more willing to support Kim's ambitions to invade South Korea by early 1950 - Communist bloc thus becoming a more prominent threat to the USA and South Korea
April 1950	<p>National Security Council Paper NSC-68</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - USSR was set against USA - Advocated for drastic increase in American military capability to apply containment on a global basis

	<p>Kim visited USSR, persuaded Stalin that he could easily and swiftly conquer Korea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offered Stalin a chance to strengthen Soviet presence in the Asia-Pacific - Stalin concerned about alliance of USA with Japan: saw this as an opportunity to counter American influence - Encouraged by attainment of atomic parity and alliance with China, Stalin granted Kim permission to carry out the invasion
25 June 1950	<p>North Korea invaded South Korea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than 90,000 North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel in coordinated attacks in South Korea - Perceived as part of a communist bid for global domination, seemed to confirm the analysis of Soviet intention as set out in NSC-68 - Caught USA and South Korea by surprise - By end July 1950: North Koreans quickly gained control of South Korea until Pusan - No quick victory as expected by the North Koreans <p>UNSC unanimously condemned the North Korean the DPRK invasion of the ROK, passed resolution calling upon North Korea to end hostilities and withdraw north of the 38th parallel</p>
27 June 1950	<p>Truman called on UN to employ the use of force as North Korea had not responded</p>
29 June 1950	<p>UN-sanctioned 'police action'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sent USA and 16 UN member states forces to resist the invasion of South Korea - Objective: containment (protect South Korea) - Actually military aggression without declaration of war - USSR boycotted UNSC as the UN gave Taiwan a seat instead of People's Republic of China → unable to veto - At this stage, China was starting to build up military in Manchuria and started an anti-US propaganda campaign
15 Sep 1950	<p>Inchon landing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership of MacArthur and involvement of UN helped South Korea defend its territory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South Korean forces were extremely dependent on the American and UN forces for the provision of strong leadership in war strategies, manpower, equipment - Daring amphibious landing at port of Inchon - 261 ships landed with little opposition - Under heavy air bombardment and communications cut, North Koreans fled north across the 38th parallel - MacArthur achieved UN's original objective to free South Korea from occupation by North Korea
27 Sep 1950	<p>USA consulted with UN regarding war aims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objective changed to roll-back (limit how much communist influence spreads) - MacArthur now had permission to push further into North Korea

	<p>across the 38th parallel as long as Soviet or Chinese forces did not enter North Korea</p> <p>From now on: Kim under pressure → sought help from Mao</p>
18 Oct 1950	Chinese forces began to cross secretly into North Korea
Late Nov 1950	Chinese forces responded to UN advancement towards the Yalu River and caught the UN forces by surprise → forces unable to defend themselves → UN forces forced to retreat
Dec 1950	UN forces forced to retreat
April 1951	<p>Stalemate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Koreans still fighting but sidelined by UN and US who dictated the course of the war
11 April 1951	MacArthur wanted to use nuclear weapons on Korea, publicly criticised Truman's stance, threatened to destroy the Chinese → dismissed for insubordination
July 1951	Start of armistice talks
January 1953	<p>Eisenhower became President</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Campaign promise: end the Korean War - Tried to persuade Rhee to accept the armistice and end the war to unite Korea (Rhee refused) - Notified Chinese and North Koreans USA wouldn't hesitate to use nuclear weapons if communist forces didn't sign the armistice - Eisenhower Doctrine: the right of the USA to aid any country threatened by communist aggression
March 1953	<p>Stalin died</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New leaders keen to reach an armistice agreement with the West to relieve the strain the Korean War was placing on its economy
27 July 1953	<p>Armistice (temporary peace agreement)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signed by China, North Korea, USA, USSR - New boundary near the 38th parallel - Demilitarised zone - Joint security area at Panmunjom with security stations and conference rooms - Area heavily guarded by North Korean, South Korean, American forces
Sep 1954	<p>Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - USA, UK, France, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan - Prevent spread of communism in Asia-Pacific