

The Cold War Heats Up

MAIN IDEA

After World War II, China became a communist nation and Korea was split into a communist north and a democratic south.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Ongoing tensions with China and North Korea continue to involve the United States.

Terms & Names

- Chiang Kai-shek
- Mao Zedong
- Taiwan
- 38th parallel
- Korean War

One American's Story

First Lieutenant Philip Day, Jr., vividly remembers his first taste of battle in Korea. On the morning of July 5, 1950, Philip Day spotted a column of eight enemy tanks moving toward his company.

A PERSONAL VOICE PHILIP DAY, JR.

“I was with a 75-mm recoilless-rifle team. ‘Let’s see,’ I shouted, ‘if we can get one of those tanks.’ We picked up the gun and moved it to where we could get a clean shot. I don’t know if we were poorly trained, . . . but we set the gun on the forward slope of the hill. When we fired, the recoilless blast blew a hole in the hill which instantly covered us in mud and dirt. . . . When we were ready again, we moved the gun to a better position and began banging away. I swear we had some hits, but the tanks never slowed down. . . . In a little less than two hours, 30 North Korean tanks rolled through the position we were supposed to block as if we hadn’t been there.”

—quoted in *The Korean War: Pusan to Chosin*



▲ American soldiers in Korea, November 1950.

Only five years after World War II ended, the United States became embroiled in a war in Korea. The policy of containment had led the United States into battle to halt communist expansion. In this conflict, however, the enemy was not the Soviet Union, but North Korea and China.

China Becomes a Communist Country

For two decades, Chinese Communists had struggled against the nationalist government of **Chiang Kai-shek** (chǎng' kī'shěk'). The United States supported Chiang. Between 1945 and 1949, the American government sent the Nationalists approximately \$3 billion in aid.

Nationalists Versus Communists, 1945

Nationalists Leader: Chiang Kai-shek



- Ruled in southern and eastern China
- Relied heavily on aid from United States
- Struggled with inflation and a failing economy
- Suffered from weak leadership and poor morale

Communists Leader: Mao Zedong



- Ruled in northern China
- Relied heavily on financial aid from Soviet Union
- Attracted peasants with promises of land reform
- Benefited from experienced guerrilla army and a highly motivated leadership

Many Americans were impressed by Chiang Kai-shek and admired the courage and determination that the Chinese Nationalists showed in resisting the Japanese during the war. However, U.S. officials who dealt with Chiang held a different view. They found his government inefficient and hopelessly corrupt.

Furthermore, the policies of Chiang's government undermined Nationalist support. For example, the Nationalists collected a grain tax from farmers even during the famine of 1944. When city dwellers demonstrated against a 10,000 percent increase in the price of rice, Chiang's secret police opened fire on them.

In contrast, the Communists, led by **Mao Zedong** (mou'dzǔ'dǒng'), gained strength throughout the country. In the areas they controlled, Communists worked to win peasant support. They encouraged peasants to learn to read, and they helped to improve food production. As a result, more and more recruits flocked to the Communists' Red Army. By 1945, much of northern China was under communist control.

RENEWED CIVIL WAR As soon as the defeated Japanese left China at the end of World War II, cooperation between the Nationalists and the Communists ceased. Civil war erupted again between the two groups. In spite of the problems in the Nationalist regime, American policy favored the Nationalists because they opposed communism.

From 1944 to 1947, the United States played peacemaker between the two groups while still supporting the Nationalists. However, U.S. officials repeatedly failed to negotiate peace. Truman refused to commit American soldiers to back up the Nationalists, although the United States did send \$2 billion worth of military equipment and supplies.

The aid wasn't enough to save the Nationalists, whose weak military leadership and corrupt, abusive practices drove the peasants to the Communist side. In May 1949, Chiang and the remnants of his demoralized government fled to the island of **Taiwan**, which Westerners called Formosa. After more than 20 years of struggle, the Communists ruled all of mainland China. They established a new government, the People's Republic of China, which the United States refused to accept as China's true government. **A**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A What factors led to the Communist takeover in China?

AMERICA REACTS TO COMMUNIST TAKEOVER The American public was stunned that China had become Communist. Containment had failed! In Congress, conservative Republicans and Democrats attacked the Truman administration for supplying only limited aid to Chiang. If containing communism was important in Europe, they asked, why was it not equally important in Asia?

The State Department replied by saying that what had happened in China was a result of internal forces. The United States had failed in its attempts to influence these forces, such as Chiang's inability to retain the support of his people. Trying to do more would only have started a war in Asia—a war that the United States wasn't prepared to fight.

Some conservatives in Congress rejected this argument as a lame excuse. They claimed that the American government was riddled with Communist agents. Like wildfire, American fear of communism began to burn out of control, and the flames were fanned even further by events in Korea the following year.

The Korean War

Japan had annexed Korea in 1910 and ruled it until August 1945. As World War II ended, Japanese troops north of the **38th parallel** (38° North latitude) surrendered to the Soviets. Japanese troops south of the parallel surrendered to the Americans. As in Germany, two nations developed, one communist and one democratic.

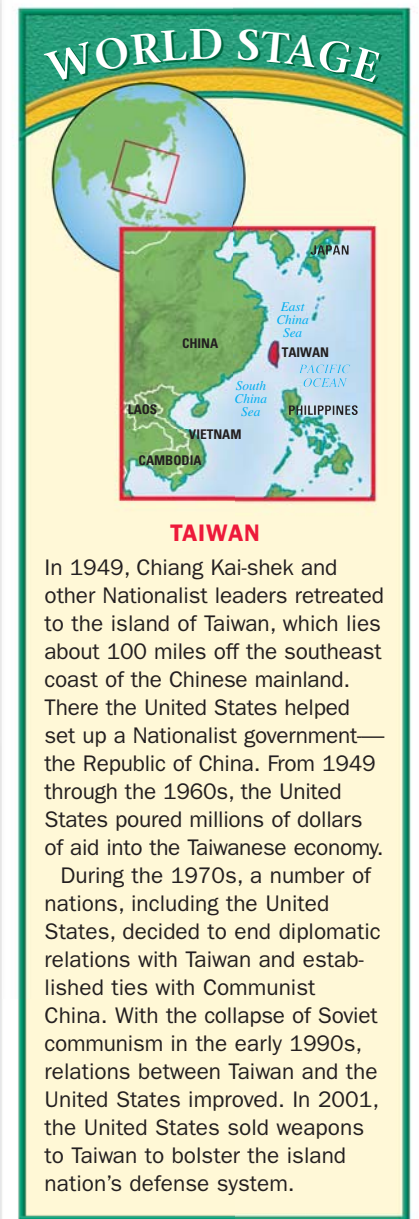
In 1948, the Republic of Korea, usually called South Korea, was established in the zone that had been occupied by the United States. Its government, headed by Syngman Rhee, was based in Seoul, Korea's traditional capital. Simultaneously, the Communists formed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north. Kim Il Sung led its government, which was based in Pyongyang. (See map, page 613.)

Soon after World War II, the United States had cut back its armed forces in South Korea. As a result, by June of 1949 there were only 500 American troops there. The Soviets concluded that the United States would not fight to defend South Korea. They prepared to back North Korea with tanks, airplanes, and money in an attempt to take over the entire peninsula.

NORTH KOREA ATTACKS SOUTH KOREA On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces swept across the 38th parallel in a surprise attack on South Korea. The conflict that followed became known as the **Korean War**.

Within a few days, North Korean troops had penetrated deep into South Korea. South Korea called on the United Nations to stop the North Korean invasion. When the matter came to a vote in the UN Security Council, the Soviet Union was not there. The Soviets were boycotting the council in protest over the presence of Nationalist China (Taiwan). Thus, the Soviets could not veto the UN's plan of military action. The vote passed.

On June 27, in a show of military strength, President Truman ordered troops stationed in Japan to support the South Koreans. He also sent an American fleet into the waters between Taiwan and China.



MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Events

B How did Korea become a divided nation after World War II?

In all, 16 nations sent some 520,000 troops to aid South Korea. Over 90 percent of these troops were American. South Korean troops numbered an additional 590,000. The combined forces were placed under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, former World War II hero in the Pacific.

The United States Fights in Korea

At first, North Korea seemed unstoppable. Driving steadily south, its troops captured Seoul. After a month of bitter combat, the North Koreans had forced UN and South Korean troops into a small defensive zone around Pusan in the southeastern corner of the peninsula.

MACARTHUR'S COUNTERATTACK MacArthur launched a counterattack with tanks, heavy artillery, and fresh troops from the United States. On September 15, 1950, his troops made a surprise amphibious landing behind enemy lines at Inchon, on Korea's west coast. Other troops moved north from Pusan. Trapped between the two attacking forces, about half of the North Korean troops surrendered; the rest fled back across the 38th parallel. MacArthur's plan had saved his army from almost certain defeat.

The UN army chased the retreating North Korean troops across the 38th parallel into North Korea. In late November, UN troops approached the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and China. It seemed as if Korea was about to become a single country again.

THE CHINESE FIGHT BACK The Chinese, however, had other ideas. Communist China's foreign minister, Zhou En-lai, warned that his country would not stand idly by and "let the Americans come to the border"—meaning the Yalu River. In late November 1950, 300,000 Chinese troops joined the war on the side of North Korea. The Chinese wanted North Korea as a Communist buffer state to protect their northeastern provinces that made up Manchuria. They also felt threatened by the American fleet that lay off their coast. The fight between North Korea and South Korea had escalated into a war in which the main opponents were the Chinese communists and the Americans.

By sheer force of numbers, the Chinese drove the UN troops southward. At some points along the battlefield, the Chinese outnumbered UN forces ten to one. By early January 1951, all UN and South Korean troops had been pushed out of North Korea. The Chinese advanced to the south, capturing the South Korean capital, Seoul. "We face an entirely new war," declared MacArthur. **C**

For two years, the two sides fought bitterly to obtain strategic positions in the Korean hills, but neither side was able to make important advances. One officer remembered the standoff.



Beverly Scott

A PERSONAL VOICE BEVERLY SCOTT

"Our trenches . . . were only about 20 meters in front of theirs. We were eyeball to eyeball. . . . We couldn't move at all in the daytime without getting shot at. Machine-gun fire would come in, grenades, small-arms fire, all from within spitting distance. It was like World War I. We lived in a maze of bunkers and deep trenches. . . . There were bodies strewn all over the place. Hundreds of bodies frozen in the snow."

—quoted in *No Bugles, No Drums: An Oral History of the Korean War*

Vocabulary

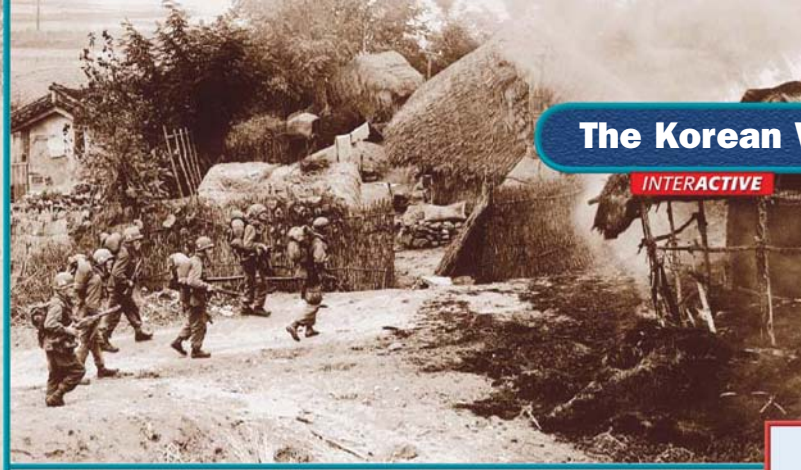
amphibious: capable of traveling both on land and on water

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

C How did the involvement of communist China affect the Korean War?

The Korean War, 1950–1953



INTERACTIVE

American paratroopers comb through a village in North Korea on October 20, 1950, during the Korean War.

SOVIET UNION



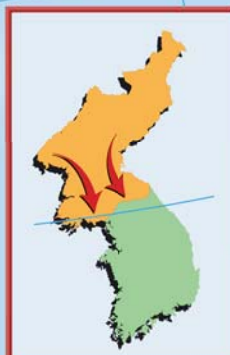
June 1950
North Korean troops invade South Korea and capture the capital, Seoul.



September 1950
North Koreans push South Koreans and UN troops south to the perimeter of Pusan.



September to October 1950
UN troops under MacArthur land at Inchon and move north from Pusan. This two-pronged attack drives the North Koreans out of South Korea. UN troops then continue into North Korea, take Pyongyang, and advance to the Yalu River.

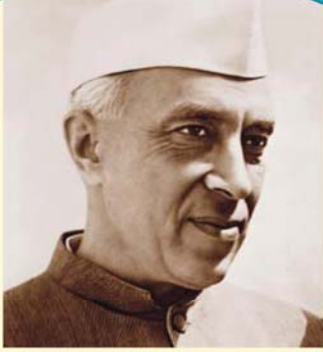


November 1950 to January 1951
The Chinese intervene and force UN troops to retreat across the 38th parallel.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Movement** How far south did North Korean troops push the UN forces?
- 2. Place** Why do you think MacArthur chose Inchon as his landing place?

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE



INDIA'S VIEWPOINT

Nonaligned nations such as India were on neither side of the Cold War and had their own perspectives. In 1951, the prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru (shown above), had this to say about the Korean War:

“This great struggle between the United States and Soviet Russia is hardly the proper role in this world for those great powers. . . . Their role should be to function in their own territories and not be a threat to others.”

General Douglas MacArthur (left) and President Truman (right) strongly disagreed about how best to proceed in the Korean War.



MACARTHUR RECOMMENDS ATTACKING CHINA To halt the bloody stalemate, in early 1951, MacArthur called for an extension of the war into China. Convinced that Korea was the place “where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest,” MacArthur called for the use of nuclear weapons against Chinese cities.

Truman rejected MacArthur’s request. The Soviet Union had a mutual-assistance pact with China. Attacking China could set off World War III. As General Omar N. Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, an all-out conflict with China would be “the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.”

Instead of attacking China, the UN and South Korean forces began to advance once more, using the U.S. Eighth Army, led by Matthew B. Ridgway, as a spearhead. By April 1951, Ridgway had retaken Seoul and had moved back up to the 38th parallel. The situation was just what it had been before the fighting began.

MACARTHUR VERSUS TRUMAN Not satisfied with the recapture of South Korea, MacArthur continued to urge the waging of a full-scale war against China. Certain that his views were correct, MacArthur tried to go over the president’s head. He spoke and wrote privately to newspaper and magazine publishers and, especially, to Republican leaders.

MacArthur’s superiors informed him that he had no authority to make decisions of policy. Despite repeated warnings to follow orders, MacArthur continued to criticize the president. President Truman, who as president was commander-in-chief of the armed forces and thus MacArthur’s boss, was just as stubborn as MacArthur. Truman refused to stand for this kind of behavior. He wanted to put together a settlement of the war and could no longer tolerate a military commander who was trying to sabotage his policy. On April 11, 1951, Truman made the shocking announcement that he had fired MacArthur. **D**

Many Americans were outraged over their hero’s downfall. A public opinion poll showed that 69 percent of the American public backed General MacArthur. When MacArthur returned to the United States, he gave an address to Congress, an honor usually awarded only to heads of government. New York City honored him with a ticker-tape parade. In his closing remarks to Congress, MacArthur said, “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.”

Throughout the fuss, Truman stayed in the background. After MacArthur’s moment of public glory passed, the Truman administration began to make its case. Before a congressional committee investigating MacArthur’s dismissal, a parade of witnesses argued the case for limiting the war. The committee agreed with them. As a result, public opinion swung around to the view that Truman had done the right thing. As a political figure, MacArthur did indeed fade away.

Vocabulary
conspirator: a person who takes part in secretly planning something unlawful

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

D How did Truman and MacArthur differ over strategy in the Korean War?

Vocabulary

demilitarize: to ban military forces in an area or region

SETTLING FOR STALEMATE As the MacArthur controversy died down, the Soviet Union unexpectedly suggested a cease-fire on June 23, 1951. Truce talks began in July 1951. The opposing sides reached agreement on two points: the location of the cease-fire line at the existing battle line and the establishment of a demilitarized zone between the opposing sides. Negotiators spent another year wrangling over the exchange of prisoners. Finally, in July 1953, the two sides signed an armistice ending the war.

At best, the agreement was a stalemate. On the one hand, the North Korean invaders had been pushed back, and communism had been contained without the use of atomic weapons. On the other hand, Korea was still two nations rather than one.

On the home front, the war had affected the lives of ordinary Americans in many ways. It had cost 54,000 American lives and \$67 billion in expenditures. The high cost of this unsuccessful war was one of many factors leading Americans to reject the Democratic Party in 1952 and to elect a Republican administration under World War II hero Dwight D. Eisenhower. In addition, the Korean War increased fear of communist aggression and prompted a hunt for Americans who might be blamed for the communist gains.



NOW & THEN

THE TWO KOREAS

Korea is still split into North Korea and South Korea, even after 50 years. South Korea is booming economically, while North Korea, still communist, struggles with severe shortages of food and energy.

Periodically, discussions about reuniting the two countries resume. In 2000, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to improve ties with North Korea. The two nations met in North Korea for the first time since the nations were established in 1948. Although economic and political differences continue to keep the two countries apart, there is renewed hope that one day Korea will become a united nation.

◀ South Korean President Kim Dae-jung waves to cheering North Koreans on June 13, 2000.

SECTION 2

ASSESSMENT

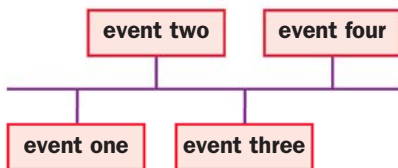
1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Chiang Kai-shek
- Taiwan
- Korean War
- Mao Zedong
- 38th parallel

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

On a time line such as the one shown below, list the major events of the Korean War.



Choose two events and explain how one event led to the other.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. HYPOTHESIZING

What might have happened if MacArthur had convinced Truman to expand the fighting into China? How might today's world be different?

4. ANALYZING EVENTS

Many Americans have questioned whether fighting the Korean War was worthwhile. What is your opinion? Why? **Think About:**

- the loss of American lives
- the fear of communism that enveloped the country at the time
- the stalemate that ended the war

5. EVALUATING DECISIONS

At the end of China's civil war, the United States refused to accept the communist People's Republic of China as China's true government. What were the advantages of such a policy? What were the disadvantages? Do you agree with this decision? Why or why not?