

Korea and the Cold War
 Korea is located between China and Japan and has often been fought over by these countries. In the early 1900s, Japan took control of Korea, ruling it until the end of World War II. After Japan's defeat, Soviet forces took control of the north, while US forces took the south, dividing Korea along the **38th parallel**. This split was supposed to be **temporary**, with elections planned to reunite Korea. However, in 1948 the Soviets helped **Kim Il-Sung** create a communist government in North Korea, while **Syngman Rhee**, a capitalist leader, was elected in South Korea. The two zones became separate countries: **communist North Korea** (capital: Pyongyang) and **capitalist South Korea** (capital: Seoul). Both leaders wanted to unite Korea, but under their own political systems. This division brought Cold War tensions to Asia, increasing conflict between communism and capitalism.



The Warriner School History Department

The Korean War – knowledge organiser – TERM THREE – Year 10



Cold War in Asia,
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1948-1950 <i>The move towards war</i>	From 1948, both North and South Korea claimed to be the rightful rulers of the whole country. Border clashes were common, and by 1949, North Korea's leader, Kim Il-Sung, believed South Koreans would support an invasion to unite Korea. He sought Soviet leader Stalin's approval, but Stalin initially refused, fearing conflict with US troops stationed in South Korea. Meanwhile, China was in a civil war between the nationalist government, supported by the USA, and Mao Zedong's communist forces. In October 1949, the communists won, creating the People's Republic of China. This alarmed the USA, who feared communism spreading across Asia. Under the Truman Doctrine , the USA committed to stopping communism. By 1950, Stalin changed his stance as US troops had left Korea, China had turned communist, and the Soviets had developed nuclear weapons. Confident the USA wouldn't intervene, Stalin armed and trained North Korean forces. In April 1950, he approved Kim's invasion of South Korea , but insisted Soviet troops would not be involved. If help was needed, it had to come from China. The war was about to begin.
Sept. 1950 <i>The Korean War begins</i>	Two days after North Korea's invasion, the UN Security Council condemned the attack and ordered North Korea to withdraw. With the USSR boycotting meetings, the UN approved military action. The USA, under President Truman , led the response, committing significant forces under General MacArthur . Sixteen countries contributed troops, but the USA supplied the majority (50% armed forces, 93% air force). Despite UN efforts, North Korea advanced rapidly, pushing South Korean forces back to Pusan by September 1950, prompting urgent military planning.
Sept. – Oct. 1950 <i>UN at war</i>	By September, North Korea's army had pushed South Korean forces to Pusan, risking total defeat. General MacArthur sent UN troops to defend Pusan but faced well-armed North Korean forces. In a bold move, UN troops launched a surprise attack on Inchon , capturing it and Seoul . Combined UN and South Korean forces then trapped North Korean troops, killing or capturing thousands. By October, North Korean forces were pushed back behind the 38th Parallel. The UN advanced into North Korea, despite China's warnings.
1950-1951 <i>China enter the war</i>	In October 1950, UN forces crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea, despite warnings from China's leader Mao Zedong , who feared UN troops would threaten China. Mao met Stalin, who supported a Chinese response but limited Soviet involvement, providing equipment but not direct military action. In late October, 300,000 Chinese troops secretly entered North Korea and, on 25th October, launched a strong counterattack with Soviet weapons. MacArthur refused to retreat, but by November, UN forces were pushed back, and Seoul was captured. By March 1951, the UN had regained Seoul, but both sides were back at the 38th Parallel, resulting in a stalemate . Truman saw this as a win, fearing further escalation could lead to nuclear war. MacArthur disagreed and pushed for a continued offensive into North Korea, threatening nuclear weapon use. Truman fired him in April 1951 for disobeying orders, despite public outcry, to prevent further conflict.
1951 <i>Stalemate at the 38th Parallel</i>	By the end of 1951, the front line of the Korean War remained stable along the 38th Parallel, with both sides entrenched in heavily fortified positions. The USA, aiming to break the stalemate, began using air power to target North Korean towns, cities, transport systems, factories, and military bases. US bombers dropped high explosives and napalm , which led to the deaths of as many as one million people , both soldiers and civilians. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had secretly provided support to China and North Korea by sending military equipment, ammunition, and MiG-15 fighter jets . The MiG-15 was far superior to UN planes, and the US offered large rewards for any pilot who defected with one. Air combat between the UN and the North Korean, Chinese, and Soviet forces continued for nearly two years, with both sides suffering heavy losses.
July 1951 <i>Changes</i>	In July 1951, peace talks began, but no agreement was reached. However, in November 1952 Truman was replaced by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Stalin died in 1953. The Chinese and North Koreans were not confident that a new leader would support them like Stalin had and the increased US bombing meant that North Korea was struggling to feed its people. Additionally, China was focusing on industrialisation and needed to reduce military spending to do this.
July 1953 <i>Peace at last</i>	On 27th July 1953, the UN, China and North Korea signed a peace treaty that ended the fighting. Few things actually changed as a result of the war. Both North Korea and South Korea would remain independent , separate countries and the border between the two would remain at the 38th Parallel – exactly where it would have been before the war started. However, a 3km wide demilitarised zone was placed between the two countries, to act as a buffer in the hope of preventing future wars.

Consequences

Korea		USA	United Nations	USSR	China
- 1.3 million Koreans died on both sides of the conflict. Homes, farms, factories and infrastructure were destroyed. The 2 countries were not united as some had hoped, and the USA has had a military presence guarding the border on the 38th Parallel to this day. However, better relations were created with the USSR and China who sent monetary aid.		The USA prevented communism from spreading to South Korea. Containment seemed to work! However, they lost 40,000 men and spent \$30 billion. Additionally, they failed to 'save' North Korea from Communism.	- Gained respect by taking quick and decisive action. Fulfilled aim of using combined forces to stop aggression. However, some saw the UN as a puppet of the USA.	- Gained a better relationship with China and avoided direct conflict with the USA. They were happy for the USA and China to fight instead and had silently proved their military strength.	- Gained the respect of the USSR and prevented a US invasion of North Korea. However, they lost 500,000 men and a valuable trading partner in the USA.