

critical of US society and culture was not subject to the same restraints as films or television, leaving avenues of dissent open, but in a time when increasing numbers of people were getting their information from television programs and sponsors' advertisements, social criticism in book form had limited audience reach.

The culture and society of the late 1940s and 1950s was greatly affected by the Cold War. Society reflected a desire for national unity and fear of communism and nuclear war. The arts, especially film and television, were constrained by the political mood and outright or manipulative governmental pressure of the period. Popular culture, with some exceptions, played to popular themes and did not challenge the prevailing conventional wisdom; challenges to the establishment were commonly viewed as un-American.

The Korean War, 1950–53

On June 25, 1950, 100,000 North Korean soldiers equipped with Soviet battle tanks, artillery and fighter planes crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea, announcing a new phase in the Cold War: one that would be repeated in Vietnam, Afghanistan and a dozen other locations. The North Korean objective was to reunite Korea under the communist government of Kim Il-Sung. They planned for a two month war. The United Nations declared the invasion illegal and authorized the United States to take command of a UN force and restore the borders. Fifteen UN nations committed their military and the Korean War became the first real test of the United Nation's concept of collective security. Intended to be a "limited war," it would drag on for three years, ravaging the Korean peninsula: the Chinese intervened, the United States contemplated using nuclear weapons and millions of Korean civilians became casualties and refugees. The war would end where it started, with no changes to the borders and the lessons learned would dictate US foreign policy and that of other nations in the Americas until the Cold War ended in 1989.

Background to the Korean War

The Korean peninsula borders China to the north and is relatively close to Japan to the south-east. The Japanese had occupied Korea since 1910. At the end of the Second World War, after Japan had surrendered in August 1945, the Soviet Union and United States divided Korea at the 38th parallel with the Soviets occupying the North and the United States the southern half of the country. The respective populations numbered nine million and 21 million. The occupation was assumed to be temporary but by 1947, with no end in sight, the United States handed the administration of South Korea over to the United Nations. The Soviets suggested that both powers should withdraw and let the Koreans sort it out but the United States rejected this solution, concerned about the build-up of Soviet forces in the North, which the South could not match. On August 14, 1947,

Activity

Limited warfare

Research further definitions of "limited warfare." Which conflicts in the Cold War period conform to this definition? What kind of precedent was set by the Korean War?

A **limited war**, as it came to be known in the second half of the 20th century, is a conflict in which the weapons used, the nations or territories involved, or the objectives pursued are restricted in some way (avoiding, in particular, the use of nuclear weapons).

the UN created the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to oversee withdrawal of occupation forces and to supervise elections that would reunify Korea. The North Koreans denied UNTCOK entry. On May 10, 1948, the UN supervised elections in the South and Syngman Rhee was elected president. In the North, the reins of power were firmly held by Soviet-backed leader Kim Il Sung, who refused to hold elections. Korea thus seemed destined to permanent division.

After the elections were held and power consolidated both the Soviet and US forces withdrew from the peninsula. While the Soviets equipped the North Korean army with heavy artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles, the US feared South Korean aggression and left them with limited military resources. Both sides claimed they were Korea's legitimate government and North Korean armed incursions into the South became common. UNTCOK warned of a possible civil war.

New archival research reveals that Kim had appealed to Mao Zedong to assist in reunifying Korea. When Stalin was approached he was initially unenthusiastic but changed his mind upon hearing of the Pacific Perimeter speech. In January 1950, the US Secretary of Defense, Dean Acheson, addressed the Washington Press Club and named a "defence perimeter" that the US was committed to protect. Korea was not mentioned as being in the US sphere of defense. Stalin, therefore, thought that the US did not see Korea as in its sphere of influence and he counseled Kim to proceed. The North Koreans crossed the border at 4 a.m. on June 25, 1950. The South Koreans fought bravely but were overwhelmed. Roads became clogged with soldiers and refugees fleeing the communist juggernaut and impeded attempts to move reinforcements north to stop the invasion.

Although he was willing to act unilaterally, President Truman asked the UN Security Council to condemn the North's invasion and give the US command of the UN military response. On June 27, the Security Council passed a resolution that the invasion constituted a "breach of the peace." A Soviet veto would have ended the resolution but the USSR was boycotting proceedings in protest over the UN's refusal to grant a seat to mainland China. On July 8, Truman appointed General Douglas MacArthur as commander of the UN forces, and 15 other UN nations pledged support.

Truman was determined to limit the war to Korea and prevent it from expanding for three reasons. First, to keep the Soviets out and avoid a direct confrontation: the Soviets had successfully tested an A-bomb in 1949 and the nuclear standoff made direct confrontation extremely risky and dangerous. Second, Truman, his advisors, cabinet and allies worried that Korea might be a diversion and the real test would come in Europe. Korea, they opined, was just another in a series of Soviet probes, starting with Greece and Turkey (1947), Czechoslovakia (1948) and the blockade of Berlin (1948–49). Third, Truman had to consider public opinion. The US had sacrificed much during the Second World War and it was unlikely they would support another major conflict on the other side of the world, yet he

had been charged with being soft on communism and was determined to change that perception.

Truman was convinced that the US and its allies had to fight to contain communism and the regional conflict to the Korean peninsula. The president was also sensitive to accusations by the Republican-controlled Congress that he was soft on communism and had lost China in 1949. This time he would take a hard line and stop the communists in their tracks to improve his image and silence his critics. The executive was convinced Stalin was probing the West's defences but this time he had gone too far. No more appeasement. It was a volatile situation trying to keep the confidence and support of the citizens of the United States, as well as the United Nations and keep the conflict localized to Korea. The next move was designed to do it all at once: he did not ask Congress to declare war but instead declared the Korean conflict a "police action." The tactic worked. The military mobilized, the UN gave the United States command and 15 UN nations offered to help.

Military developments

Stage 1: Invasion and Inchon

Four days after the invasion started, the North captured Seoul, South Korea's capital. The South's army had been routed and was in headlong retreat to Pusan in the southeast corner of the peninsula. US units arrived from Japan but were too few and too lightly armed to make much difference and were brushed aside with heavy losses. The roads were clogged with refugees making reinforcement all but impossible. US air power however, was able to slow the North Korean advance and by late August the invasion had run out steam and, as more US ground forces arrived, the front stabilized around the port of Pusan called the Pusan Perimeter.

On September 15, in a bold and decisive manoeuvre, General MacArthur landed two divisions (about 25,000 men) at Inchon on the west coast and moved inland. At the same time, the allied forces broke out of the Pusan Perimeter. Faced with being cut off and surrounded the North Korean army fled retracing their July victory march, this time in retreat. MacArthur's forces quickly recaptured Seoul and crossed the 38th parallel.

Stage 2: Chinese Intervention

The temptation to reunite Korea was balanced against the likelihood of Chinese intervention. Flushed with victory, MacArthur charged into the North and captured the capital of Pyongyang. By



Koreans flee the fighting, 1950.

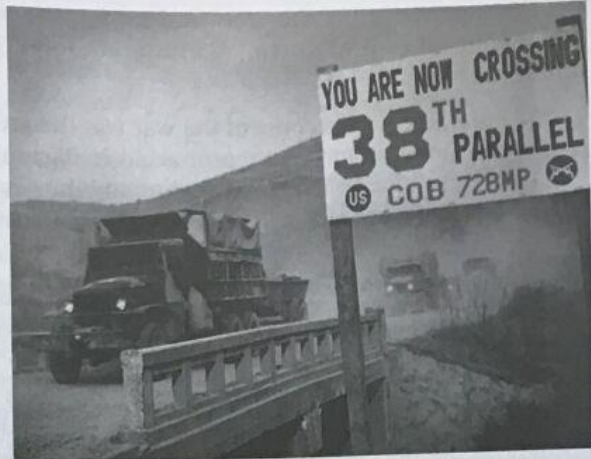
November, the North Korean army was all but finished. In late November, as US and South Korean forces neared the Yalu River (the border between China and Korea), MacArthur received warnings that the Chinese were coming. He scoffed, believing the Chinese would never dare to fight the US army, and if they did come he would use the opportunity to teach them a lesson. When he and the president had met in October he told the president that the Chinese threat was overblown and did not pose a serious threat. Truman supported his General. MacArthur downplayed a couple of brushes with Chinese units and continued to downplay the threat. On November 27, US troops awoke to the sound of bugles announcing the arrival of 300,000 Chinese soldiers. Taken by surprise, the US suffered one of the worst defeats in its military history. The 1st Marine Division was cut off and barely escaped annihilation, saved by the US and Canadian navies evacuation at Cochin. Within weeks, the Chinese had pushed the UN forces back across the border and recaptured Seoul. Meanwhile, tensions between President Truman and General MacArthur which had been simmering behind the scenes since the war began were about to become public.

Stage 3: Stalemate and Panmunjom

On March 20, 1951, Truman issued a statement that his policy was to continue to fight a limited war and seek a negotiated peace. This seemed wise considering recent indications that the Chinese wanted to start peace talks, which commenced in July. A few days after the president's announcement MacArthur publicly stated his opposition to the policy, threatened to expand the war against China and intimated he might use atomic weapons. This was clear and blatant insubordination. Truman met with his chiefs of staff and on April 11, 1951, fired MacArthur. General Matthew Ridgway took command and quickly mounted a counteroffensive that recaptured Seoul (the fourth time it changed hands during the war) and stopped the advance of the North Koreans at the border. At this point, the war became a stalemate: trench warfare like the First World War, stretched across the hills and valleys of the 38th parallel, from coast to coast. Battles became small engagements to straighten the line here and capture a hill there. The focus shifted to the negotiations. Kaesong, the ancient capital of Korea, was the first venue. Talks commenced on July 10, 1951, but broke down in late August when no progress was made. In late October 1951, following bitter fighting in September and October, talks resumed and shifted to Panmunjom, on the border in Gyeonggi Province. Negotiations dragged on for another two years, while the fighting continued. During the stalemate, both the US and the USSR had changes in leadership. In November 1952 Dwight Eisenhower was elected president; in March 1953 Stalin died and the USSR was engulfed in yet another power struggle. These new leaders seemed unwilling to continue the fight and a final cease-fire was signed on July 27, 1953. A demilitarized zone roughly along the 38th parallel divided the belligerents. Although the fighting stopped, these negotiations persisted, and in 1954 a permanent armistice was agreed upon without a treaty. Technically, North and South Korea remained at war.

The war had lasted three years and 2 days. The casualties of war included Koreans on both sides of the border, with civilian losses were estimated at 2 to 2.5 million. North and South Korea, respectively, lost 215,000 and 137,00 soldiers. Chinese casualty figures are controversial, depending on the source. Officially, the Chinese report about half a million casualties but US sources contend it was over a million. The United States came next with 36,000 battlefield deaths and the other UN forces lost 3,600 soldiers. The limited war had proved costly totalling over three million lives on all sides.

Truman was heavily criticized for his handling of the war, particularly his firing of MacArthur and inability to negotiate an end to the fighting. With his popularity at an all time low, he decided not to run for a second term. Dwight D. Eisenhower came home from his NATO command, accepted the Republican nomination and defeated Adlai Stevenson with the slogan "I will go to Korea." Ike fulfilled this objective, when in 1953 he went to Korea and shortly after signed a negotiated settlement. The war ended without a clear victory but with a sense of relief. In the eyes of the United States it was a nasty little war, in a faraway place that cost the lives of too many US soldiers.



US trucks crossing the 38th parallel: The Korean War stopped where it started.

Canada and Colombia in the Korean War

Canadian prime minister Louis St. Laurent cautiously brought Canada into the war. He and his cabinet were determined to support the UN and initially offered a token force of three light cruisers and an air-force transport squadron but no ground forces. Following the Chinese intervention, and pressured by the defense minister and Secretary of State, the prime minister authorized the recruitment of a special volunteer force comprising an infantry brigade, tanks and artillery. He decided against using existing standby forces, fearing a Soviet move into Europe. Canada eventually sent 27,000 soldiers, sailors and aircrew to Korea, the third largest UN contingent after the United States and United Kingdom. Over 500 Canadians were killed and 1,500 wounded.

Colombia also sent roughly 6,200 soldiers, many of whom notably participated in the Battle of Pork Chop Hill, the bloodiest battle of the war, from March to July 1953. A regiment of 1,000 men fought with the US forces and suffered heavy losses; almost half of the contingent were killed or wounded. Colombia also sent six warships to assist in the amphibious landings. This was the lone Latin American participant in the war; in a sign of hemispheric solidarity, this force was dispatched and the last Colombian troops did not leave the peninsula until 1955.

Political consequences of the Korean War

Canadian Historian David Bercuson contends that to view the war as futile is incorrect. Korea was the first effort by a communist state to take over a non-communist neighbor. "In a very real sense,

Activity

US public attitudes toward Korea

Research the attitudes of US citizens to the war in Korea and the outcome of the conflict.



What were the public perceptions of the war, and the region at stake?

the first real victory of the West in the Cold War was won in the bloody hills of central Korea.” US historian John Gaddis offers a different lesson.

The only decisive outcome of the war was the precedent it set: that there could be a bloody and protracted conflict involving the nations armed with nuclear weapons and they could chose not to use them. The lesson was not lost and Vietnam would be next, only this time the ending would be very different.

Source: Gaddis, John. 2005. *Cold War: A New History*. London: Penguin. p. 50.

In Canada, the government’s response to Korea was to initiate the most massive and costly peacetime rearmament in the nation’s history. By the mid 1950s, 45% of the annual budget went to defense and Canada’s NATO contribution in Europe was 10,000 soldiers, sailors and aircrew; a big commitment for a middle power. The contingent was reduced during the 1970s but Canadians stood on guard in Europe for four decades until the Cold War ended. This commitment was a direct result of the Korean War.

In the United States, the Korean War further strained relations with the Soviet bloc. After Truman, President Eisenhower continued to support containment, although he worried about the defense budget’s rising costs. He supported the French in Vietnam against Ho Chi Minh’s forces. He had little choice: after 1945, the United States became increasingly committed to regime protection against communist forces in Southeast Asia, following the defeat of the nationalist Chinese army of Chiang Kai-shek against Mao’s revolutionary army. After three bloody years in Korea, the US remained committed to protecting the fledgling Republic of South Korea, stationing thousands of troops along the 38th parallel.

The political consequence of Korea in the United States was a single-minded commitment to containment by every US president up to the 1990s. In decades to come, this allegiance restricted the freedom of presidents to consider other policy options and alternatives. This monopoly was supported by US public opinion that expected presidents to be tough on communism. Vietnam would begin to change all that. In the short term, Korea helped bring an end to 20 years of Democratic control of the White House, paving the way for Eisenhower. Kennedy, a Democrat, would take a harder line against communism than Eisenhower’s Republicans. Johnson would follow Kennedy’s lead and the result was the escalation in Vietnam.