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Introduction: **The Cold War in Asia (Korea)**

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| **Read and annotate (underline key terms and phrases. Summarize key ideas) the article titled Police Action v. Declared War:** |

**Police Action v. Declared War**

Truman did not seek a formal declaration of war from Congress; officially, America's presence in Korea amounted to no more than a "police action."

However, the entry of the United States into the conflict signaled a reversal of policy toward Korea. Although it backed the government of Syngman Rhee, the United States had begun withdrawing its troops from South Korea in 1948. As late as January of 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had implied that the Korea Peninsula lay outside the all-important "defense perimeter" of the United States, a statement that some took to mean that the United States would not defend the ROK from communist attack.

So why did the United States become involved in the Korean conflict?

The decision to intervene in Korea grew out of the tense atmosphere that characterized Cold War politics. On the eve of the North Korean invasion, a number of events had made Truman anxious. The Soviet Union exploded an atomic bomb in 1949, ending the United States' monopoly on the weapon. In Europe, Soviet intervention in Greece and Turkey had given rise to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which funneled aid to war-torn Europe in the hopes of warding off communist political victories. In early 1950, President Truman directed the National Security Council (NSC) to conduct an analysis of Soviet and American military capabilities. In its report, known as "NSC 68," the Council recommended heavy increases in military funding to help contain the Soviets.

Events in Asia also contributed to an increased sense of insecurity. In 1949 China underwent a revolution that brought Mao Zedong and his Communist party into power. The nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-Shek, had retreated to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) while they continued their war with mainland China. Mao quickly moved to ally himself with the Soviet Union, and signed a treaty with the Soviets in 1950. The Truman administration faced criticism from Republicans who claimed he had "lost" China. They criticized him for not providing enough aid to the Chinese nationalists. The suggestion by Secretary of State Dean Acheson that the administration recognize the communist government of China only gave them more ammunition for their attacks.

The Truman administration also faced internal criticism regarding its commitment to anti-communism at home. Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin had recently begun his infamous hunt for communists within the U. S. Government. Although McCarthy was just warming up, the recent trials of Alger Hiss and others for espionage left the Truman administration apprehensive about its anti-communist credentials. Truman and his advisors found themselves under increased domestic pressure not to appear "soft" on communism abroad.

Thus, when North Korean troops invaded the South, the Truman administration seized upon the opportunity to defend a noncommunist government from invasion by communist troops. Determined not to "lose" another country to communism, and interested in shoring up its anticommunist credentials, the Truman administration found itself defending a nation a world away from U.S. soil. Yet Truman's response was not merely a response to internal pressure. The invasion of South Korea made Truman genuinely fearful that the Soviet Union and China intended to expand the sphere of communism throughout Asia.

Truman's statement of June 27 illustrates his concern with communist aggression and expansion. In it, Truman argues that "communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war." Truman's statement suggests that he believed the attack by North Korea had been part of a larger plan by communist China and, by extension, the Soviet Union. The President believed that the Korean situation was similar to that of Greece in 1947. He informed his advisors that he believed the invasion was "very obviously inspired by the Soviet Union." This gave America a moral imperative to act. "If we don't put up a fight now," Truman observed to his staff, there was "no telling what they'll do." His concern over the future of anti-communist governments in Asia showed in his public statement. Truman pledged to defend Formosa (Taiwan) from attack and to support French forces in Indochina, a conflict that would eventually escalate into the Vietnam War. Yet Truman had no wish to provoke a full-scale war with the Soviets. By blaming "communism" in the statement, as opposed to the Soviet Union, Dean Acheson later explained, the administration sought to give the Soviets a "graceful exit" and not provoke open confrontation with Russia.

Truman's statement also reflected a new military order. Although the United States took the lead in the Korean action, it did so under the rubric of the United Nations. Truman made it clear that his actions fell within the measures recommended by the United Nations, and reminded "all members of the United Nations" to "consider carefully the consequences of this latest aggression in Korea" and that America "will continue to uphold the rule of law."

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**Notes:**

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| Causes: |

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| 38th Parallel: |

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| American Conflict (Truman vs. MacArthur): |

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| --- |
| Results: |

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| --- |
| Why did the U.S. invade Korea? |

***At what point is it appropriate to intervene in the affairs of other nations?:***

Korean War

Why did America get involved in the Korean War?

**Directions:** Study the quotes and write the main idea within the appropriate boxes below as well as the first row of the chart on the next page. Some things to consider while trying discovering the main point: What was America’s mission in Korean? How far should the United States go in accomplishing that mission? Did President Truman improperly interfere in military operations in Korea?

**QUOTE 2: (General Douglas MacArthur)**

**QUOTE 1: (President Harry Truman)**

**QUOTE 3: (General Douglas MacArthur)**

**QUOTE 5: (George Marshall)**

**QUOTE 4: (President Harry Truman)**

**Was Truman correct in intervening in Korea? Was firing MacArthur the correct decision?**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Words that show author’s emotions** | **Words that describe how he/she sees the war and Korea** | **What is said about US Government and UN Policies** |
| **Soldier’s Perspective** |  |  |  |
| **Korean Perspective** |  |  |  |

“In Korea the Government forces, which were armed to prevent border raids and to preserve internal security, were attacked by invading forces from North Korea....The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war.”

**Quote 1**

*- President Harry Truman*

**Quote 2**

“Once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory--not prolonged indecision. In war, indeed, there can be no substitute for victory.”

*- General Douglas MacArthur*

**Quote 3**

“It seems strangely difficult for some to realize that here in Asia is where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest, and that we have joined the issue thus raised on the battlefield; that here we fight Europe's war with arms while the diplomats there still fight it with words; that if we lose the war to communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable, win it and Europe most probably would avoid war and yet preserve freedom.”

**Quote 4**

“We do not want to see the conflict in Korea extended. We are trying to prevent a world war--not to start one....But you may ask why can't we take other steps to punish the aggressor. Why don't we bomb Manchuria and China itself? Why don't we assist Chinese Nationalist troops to land on the mainland of China? If we were to do these things we would be running a very grave risk of starting a general war....If we were to do these things, we would become entangled in a vast conflict on the continent of Asia and our task would become immeasurably more difficult all over the world.

I believe that we must try to limit the war to Korea for these vital reasons: To make sure that the precious lives of our fighting men are not wasted, to see that the security of our country and the free world is not needlessly jeopardized and to prevent a third world war. A number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy. I have, therefore, considered it essential to relieve General MacArthur so that there would be no doubt or confusion as to the real purpose and aim of our policy.”

*- President Harry Truman, - General Douglas MacArthur*

**Quote 5**

“General MacArthur...would have us, on our own initiative, carry the conflict beyond Korea against the mainland of Communist China, both from the sea and from the air. He would have us accept the risk of involvement not only in an extension of the war with Red China, but in an all-out war with the Soviet Union. He would have us do this even at the expense of losing our allies and wrecking the coalition of free peoples throughout the world. He would do this even though the effect of such action might expose Western Europe to attack by the millions of Soviet troops poised in Middle and Eastern Europe.”

*- George Marshall*

**Soldier’s Perspective**

**Korea, The Chosen Place, a poem**

Korea, the chosen place
Ravished by war, laid to waste
All United Nations there engaged
In another history Page.

Korea, tis not a beauty site
To see by day or by night.
The eye beholds only the gloom
Of a country buried in war's tomb.

Korea, it's been torn up
and torn down;
Marched up
and marched down.

Korea, blood shed, land and mountains
Have been bathed by youthful fountains.
Brave men here have gone to their reward
Perishing 'neath the sword.

Korea, twas not a war they say;
Only a police action day by day,
A testing place
For the human race.

Korea, two ideals clashing
Communism and democracy smashing;
The U.N.'s firm stand
Against the hammer red hand.

Korea, a question of peace there,
A question of peace everywhere
Soon it may be inflamed
Again in blood and war's shame.

Korea, a prayer of the free
That in peace here we may see
The sword no more to rise
On any land or any skies.
---S/Sgt. Irvin V. Worden

The poem is by S/SGT Irvin V. Worden, on 14 December 1953, while stationed in Korea. This poem is included in the book "Korea, The Chosen Place, a view from Old Smokey", the story of my father’s experiences in Korea. --Stephen H. Worden

**Soldier’s Perspective**

## A Letter Home From Korea" Between the Lines "

David J. Lutze DJL457@aol.com
Date: Fri, 5 Sep 1997

...The following article appeared in the Racine Journal Times (Racine Wisconsin).

*The column was called "Between the Lines " by Tex Reynolds. The letter was written by my father when he was 19yrs old. I thought you may find it interesting. My father was in the 5th cav HQ company I&R platoon.*

Tex:
If one may judge by a letter received from a Racine lad, the U.S. Army has done a miserable job of " selling " its soldiers on the reason for the war in Korea. Certainly there is a lack of fervor over the " Crusade for Democracy " as compared to the fanaticism of the enemy that is fighting for Communism.

The name of the 19 year old first class Private is James J. Lutze. He is in the 5th Cav. Regiment. His letter to this department comes via his mother, Mrs. Iva Lutze. Here are some excerpts.

" The question on the lips of the G.I. over here is, " What are we fighting for? "

This is no 'police job' as Mr. Truman says. It is a real war, but not the kind most people at home can realize. We are fighting men who can live for a week in the mountains with just a little bag of rice. Where we have to travel by road they travel over the mountains and beat us to where we are going. We attacked and took a small town the other day with no opposition at all.

Then, just before daylight, a couple days later, they hit us with everything they had, and we were forced to withdraw for about eight miles with heavy casualties. About half the members of our battalion have been killed or wounded. Among the latter is our battalion commander and six other officers including my section leader.......

" Well, we withdrew again last night for about 10 miles and again the enemy knew we were moving, because they shelled the road. It's an old saying here on the lines that if you kill one Korean, there are 10 more to takes his place.......In closing all I can say is this: give us reinforcements, or pull out what is left of us---which isn't many. "

At the end of the column Tex wrote:

" No it isn't surprising if GI's at the front ask themselves, " what are we fighting for? " They haven't been told, in clear, honest language. And the home front certainly isn't doing much to inspire them, with its " business and pleasure as usual "

***Opening remarks from a workshop for the Boston Public Library***

**Korean Perspective**

**by Sook Nyul Choi**

When I was a young child growing up in Northern Korea, the Japanese military was occupying my country. We were forbidden to speak or write our own language, and we were forbidden to own even a single book.

Every day we were all forced to work in the Japanese labor camps.

At night, exhausted as she was, my mother would cover the windows with blankets and light a small candle and she would whisper to us about Korean history, and recite poems and stories to us in Korean. But too soon, her words would trail off as she succumbed to the sleep she needed so desperately.

As I watched the candle light flicker on her emaciated face and sunken eyes, I longed for the day when I would be free to talk, write, and to hold a book in my own hands and to read to my heart’s content.

In 1945, World War II ended and the Japanese, who had brutally occupied Korea for 36 years, were finally forced to leave the country. How elated and excited we were anticipating our life of freedom.

But all too quickly, our hopes were dashed as we learned that the Korean peninsula had been divided into two. The Soviets came marching in with their guns and tanks to the north of the 38th parallel, where I lived. Now we had to study the *Red Books* the soldiers gave us, and we were forced to sing about and praise their leaders and our life as “Little Proletariat.”

In 1947, after two years living under Communist rule, my mother, little brother, and I risked our lives to escape across the 38th parallel to freedom in South Korea where the U.N. forces were. It was a treacherous journey, but we were lucky to make it across the border.

Life was hard in Seoul as we tried to start our lives, but we were thankful that we lived in freedom and looked to the future with great hope. I treasured a few books I was able to buy and I reveled in the freedom to learn and to think and to dream.

But, in June 1950, bombs fell on the city of Seoul, and tanks rolled into the city: the Korean War had begun. Our house was bombed, my books burned, and we were forced to flee further south. For three years, my family lived in a makeshift home in the mountains of Pusan.

In 1953, the Armistice was signed, ending the fighting, and finally we were able to return to Seoul. My friends, teachers, and I all worked to rebuild our school. I was excited being back in Seoul for high school and we began to read and write poetry and published our own school newspaper.

We were so hungry to learn and express our thoughts. What a luxury it was to be free to study!