Which country was primarily responsible for the Korean War?

Only five short years after the close of World War II, conflict again erupted when North Korean forces attacked South Korea in June 1950. Although the resulting Korean War did not become a global conflict, it eventually expanded to include Chinese, U.S., and United Nations (UN) forces. While the North Korean invasion clearly marked the beginning of open hostilities, scholars continue to debate which nation (or nations) bears primary responsibility for the conditions that brought war to the Korean peninsula.

In her essay, Dr. Priscilla Roberts asserts that North Korea bears primary responsibility for beginning the Korean War but points out that the Soviet Union, China, and the United States each had a role to play in facilitating and broadening the conflict. She highlights the fact that North Korean leader Kim Il Sung saw a window of opportunity to reunite the peninsula that he believed would soon be closed. By contrast, Dr. James I. Matray argues that the Korean War was caused by the United States and reflected the consequences of the historic pattern in U.S. policy of subordinating Korea's interests in pursuit of American objectives elsewhere in the world. He traces the long and often contentious relationship between the United States and Korea from the 1800s through the start of the Cold War. In his essay, Dr. George Kallander contends that no single country bears the full burden of starting the Korean War; it was a complex conflict brought about by a number of causes and players. He does, however, pay particular attention to the role of imperial Japan and the emerging Cold War tensions between the United States and Soviet Union.

Maxine Taylor

Kim Il Sung and the Road to the Korean War

North Korea bore the primary responsibility for the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. The communist Kim Il Sung, president of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea), was determined to reunite his country, an ambition that impelled him to invade the southern Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea). The Soviet Union, China, and the United States each, however, played some part in facilitating and broadening the war. Without concurrence and material assistance from his patron, the Soviet premier Joseph Stalin, Kim could not have attacked South Korea.
Stalin endorsed and facilitated Kim's actions on the mistaken calculation that the United States would not intervene to ensure the survival of its own client state, South Korea. After turning the tide of war in South Korea's favor, U.S. political and military leaders in turn underestimated the readiness of China's new communist rulers to send large military forces to prevent the destruction of the North Korean state. Ironically, no power involved anticipated a lengthy, wearing, and ultimately stalemated conflict that lasted for three years and—at a cost of around 3 million Koreans dead, wounded, or missing; 150,000 Chinese and 33,000 Americans dead; and a further 220,000 Chinese and 92,000 Americans wounded—left Korea still divided at approximately the same border as in 1950. Since the contending powers never signed a formal peace treaty and the arrangements for ending the war only constituted an armistice, even today North and South Korea are still technically at a state of war.

At the end of World War II, northern Korea, which had been ruled by Japan since 1910, was liberated by Russian troops entering from Manchuria, while American forces arriving by sea took over the country's southern half. The boundary between occupation zones was set at the 38th Parallel of longitude. Initially, Allied wartime strategy envisaged a united Korean state. Growing hostility in Europe between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies meant that by the end of 1945 relations between Soviet and U.S. occupation forces in Korea had become equally strained, and prospects of Korean unification quickly became commensurately remote. The competing military occupation governments each encouraged those political forces they found the most ideologically sympathetic. In the North, this meant the Workers Party of North Korea, a communist party led by Kim Il Sung, a young guerrilla fighter who had spent several years with Chinese communist forces fighting the Japanese. In the South, the Americans somewhat reluctantly rallied behind Syngman Rhee, an elderly, decidedly authoritarian but strongly anticommunist Korean aristocrat and independence advocate who had passed decades in exile. In 1948, the United Nations (UN) approved the establishment of the Republic of Korea in the South, held elections in which Rhee won an overwhelming majority as president, and promptly recognized his government. Meanwhile, with strong Soviet encouragement, in September 1948 Kim declared the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a Soviet ally and client which the UN, whose officials were denied access to the country, declined to recognize. In late 1948, the last Soviet forces left North Korea, and a few months later the United States withdrew its remaining troops from the South. Both Korean governments shared at least one objective: the elimination of their rival and their country's eventual reunification under their own control.

Documents released by former Soviet, East European, and Chinese archives since 1990 make it clear that the initial impetus for war against South Korea came from Kim. Kim feared that the Southern government, which was promised substantial military and economic assistance by the United States and whose internal security forces had demonstrated considerable effectiveness in eradicating communist sympathizers, would soon become so well-entrenched that its overthrow would prove impossible. From March 1949 onward, he therefore sought permission from Stalin to invade the South, together with the Soviet economic and military aid that would make such an assault
possible. Stalin, fearful that the United States might come to the rescue of its South Korean client, a scenario with the potential to embroil the Soviet Union in outright hostilities with its greatest rival, initially refused. Recently released memoranda of conversations between the leaders reveal that in late January 1950 Kim assured Stalin that the United States was most unlikely to intervene in a Korean conflict. As evidence, he cited a speech Dean Acheson, the U.S. secretary of state, gave on January 12, 1950, that affirmed that neither Korea nor Taiwan fell within the "defensive perimeter" of vital strategic interests in Asia that the United States was prepared to defend. Although Acheson also stated that these countries should instead look to the UN for protection, many among his speech's wider audience, including most significantly the communist states' leaders, apparently ignored this caveat and assumed that the United States had completely abandoned Taiwan and South Korea.

Stalin and Kim seemingly interpreted Acheson's statement as indicating that the United States would not intervene to assist South Korea should the North mount an invasion, and that the still relatively defenseless state therefore represented quick and easy pickings for the communist bloc. The window of opportunity that North Korea's temporary military superiority over the South offered was likely, however, to disappear once the ROK began to receive substantial American military and economic assistance, a program for which the U.S. Congress allocated $320 million in 1950. President Rhee frequently and publicly declared his intention of reunifying all Korea under ROK leadership and repeatedly urged American officials to assist in such a campaign. Although the United States government ignored Rhee's pleas, Stalin may have been nervous that, with a US military assistance group beginning to train the South Korean armed forces, eventually Rhee would win American endorsement for an invasion of North Korea. The establishment of a communist government in China in October 1949, after a lengthy civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the American-backed Nationalist government headed by Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), may also have helped to embolden Stalin. The Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong, head of the new People's Republic of China (PRC), visited Moscow in January 1950 for talks with Stalin, at the end of which they signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. During this visit, the two men discussed the situation in Korea, and Stalin asked Mao whether he believed the Americans would intervene should the North attack the South. Although he did sound a note of caution, warning that U.S. behavior was not entirely predictable and an American military response could not be ruled out, on the whole Mao endorsed Kim's view that, faced with rapid North Korean advances and an effective fait accompli in South Korea, the United States was unlikely to intervene. In January, the CCP also boosted Kim's military resources when it authorized the repatriation to North Korea of between 50,000 and 70,000 battle-hardened ethnic Korean communist troops who had fought in support of the Chinese communists in the recent civil war, together with their equipment.

It appears that Stalin found Kim and Mao's arguments broadly convincing. In addition, within the communist camp the Soviet leader may well have wished to maintain his image as the sponsor of international revolution in Asia. In April 1950, Kim visited the
Soviet Union, and Stalin endorsed his plans, provided that Mao too approved them. Stalin also made it clear that, although Kim would receive Soviet military aid, he would not commit Russian ground forces to any Korean conflict. Moreover, should the United States intervene and the fortunes of war turn against the North, the Soviet Union would not enter the conflict, and Kim would have to rely on whatever assistance China might provide. In mid-May 1950, Kim visited Mao in Beijing and informed the Chinese leader that Stalin had finally approved his plans to invade South Korea. Although Mao warned Kim that they could not entirely rule out the possibility of American intervention and even offered to send three Chinese armies to the Chinese-Korean border, Kim declined all such assistance, rather arrogantly expressing his confidence that the war would be over in two or three weeks. Kim did not, it seems, inform Mao of the precise date of the projected invasion and the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel, therefore took Mao by surprise. Although sporadic border clashes between Northern and Southern troops were virtually routine in the months before the outbreak of war, and the South frequently declared its intention of unifying all Korea under ROK rule, the North's full-scale invasion of the South marked the inauguration of all-out civil war, as opposed to minor military skirmishes and fervent propaganda battles—a difference in kind as well as in scale of hostilities.

Defying the communist leaders' predictions as DPRK military forces advanced rapidly into South Korean territory, within a week the U.S. government had decided to commit major ground forces to Korea. The Americans acted under the auspices of the UN, which quickly passed a resolution condemning the North Korean invasion and demanding the withdrawal of DPRK forces back above the 38th Parallel. Why did the Democratic administration of President Harry S. Truman respond so forcefully to North Korea's action? In the past, radical American historians went so far as to suggest that either South Korea or the United States deliberately provoked hostilities in Korea. The thrust of this interpretation was that, in order to win congressional and public support for the tripling or quadrupling of American defense spending envisaged by the recent U.S. Policy Planning Staff paper NSC-68, U.S. officials lured North Korea and the Soviet Union into starting a war by making public declarations that they considered South Korea extraneous to U.S. security interests in Asia. Even so, the fact that communist leaders seriously miscalculated the likely American response to the invasion does not mean that the United States deliberately entrapped them into opening hostilities. Most historians now agree that, although U.S. intervention in the Korean War did indeed bring massive long-term increases in American defense spending and greatly expanded U.S. military alliance commitments around the world, U.S. officials failed to anticipate the outbreak of war and cannot be held guilty of manipulating their opponents into launching hostilities. Had American and South Korean leaders pursued such a strategy, it is highly implausible that their armed forces would have been so inadequately prepared for war. It seems clear that the outbreak of war took both the United States and the ROK almost completely by surprise.

The question remains: Why, given American officials' pronounced lack of enthusiasm for the South Korean government and their previous dismissal of its strategic
significance, did they almost immediately decide to intervene to restore the status quo and move swiftly to persuade the UN to endorse this stance? Broader Cold War preoccupations intersected with a changing and dynamic Asian situation to persuade American officials that they could not simply acquiesce to a North Korean takeover of the South. Ignoring any evidence that the Korean conflict was in large part a civil war, American officials firmly believed that North Korean troops were acting primarily as surrogates for the Soviet Union, which was masterminding a long-term global crusade to extend international communist control worldwide. Having recently successfully faced down the Soviet Union during the lengthy Berlin Blockade, they were determined to prevent a Western client state from succumbing to communist takeover. They feared that, if they did so, other U.S. allies, particularly those West European nations that in 1949 had joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), would doubt American resolve to fulfill commitments to them, and that the communist states would likewise conclude that when faced with a hostile army the United States was unwilling to back its pledges with military force. U.S. leaders therefore perceived the Korean conflict as a matter of American credibility, a test of U.S. commitment to the strategy of "containing" communism that by 1950 had become an entrenched dogma of American foreign relations. Virtually all American policymakers of this period, moreover, were strongly influenced by what historian Ernest R. May termed the "lessons of the past," specifically those of the 1930s, that "appeasement" of dictators simply encouraged them to make greater and ever more outrageous demands until their opponents had no choice but to fight them. By contrast, these policymakers believed a firm policy of standing up to dictators' aggression from the first would lead them to yield and withdraw. Perceiving Stalin as a second Adolf Hitler and Kim merely as his puppet, American officials felt they had no alternative but to try to rescue Rhee and restore his control of the South.

Within months, success in reversing the North Korean assault caused the Americans to expand their ambitions in Korea from mere restoration of the status quo to launching a drive across the 38th Parallel intended to conquer the North, overthrow Kim's government, and result in Korea's reunification under a Southern-dominated and presumably Western-oriented regime. The momentum of victory was difficult to resist, generating a sense of hubris that would shortly bring its own nemesis. In September and October 1950, American leaders ignored successive Chinese warnings, conveyed through Indian diplomats, that should UN forces cross the 38th Parallel, Chinese forces would enter the war. From early July 1950, Mao had contemplated the possibility of Chinese intervention and begun making military preparations for this eventuality, mobilizing units in northeast China. By the end of the month, over 250,000 PRC troops were already massed on the Chinese-Korean border, and the buildup of the Northeast Border Defense Army continued steadily over subsequent months. Strongly ideological in his outlook, and convinced that the Chinese communist revolution was only part of a broader Asian revolutionary movement, of which new China should be the leader, Mao perceived the North Korean invasion of June 1950 as part of the same pan-Asian struggle between socialism and capitalism. Overriding opposition from doubters and naysayers within the CCP's Central Committee, Mao seemed almost enthusiastic to take on the United States. While admitting that intervention might well carry a high
price, particularly in terms of deferring the economic rehabilitation China so badly needed after decades of war and turmoil, Mao also, according to newly declassified Chinese documentary sources, felt that entering the conflict would bring positive benefits. Apart from removing the potential for destabilization and the strategic threat that an American client state on China's Korean border might pose, this would promote national unity, allowing the CCP to consolidate its position by eliminating all potential domestic sources of opposition or dissent. Intervention would also enhance China's international stature and demonstrate that new China was finally standing up for itself in the world.

In their January 1950 talks, Stalin and Mao had agreed that leadership of the Asian communist movement should rest primarily upon the Chinese. When a shocked Kim appealed to him in September 1950 for Soviet intervention on behalf of the retreating and increasingly desperate North Korean forces, Stalin rejected his plea, recommending instead that Kim seek aid from the Chinese. Stalin was normally cautious, unwilling to risk direct confrontation with the United States, and he did not believe that assuring the survival of North Korea justified the risk of an outright Soviet-American war. On October 1, Stalin suggested to Mao that China's leaders should dispatch "volunteers," since "the situation of our Korean friends is getting desperate." If China declined to do so, Stalin intended to abandon North Korea and evacuate Kim and his followers to Soviet territory. Mao initially appeared reluctant to intervene, a stance that may have been a tactical move to persuade Stalin to provide more military equipment and air support for Chinese forces or may have reflected continuing dissent within the Chinese leadership. Eventually, however, after forceful lobbying from Mao, the Chinese Politburo endorsed intervention. On October 19, 1950, under cover of darkness, massed units of the Northeast Border Defense Army began to cross China's Yalu River border into North Korea, where they quickly turned the tide of battle and drove UN forces back beyond the 38th Parallel. To Mao's delight, the PRC gained substantial international prestige in December 1950 when its forces repulsed the far better equipped and technologically advanced U.S. troops who constituted the bulk of the UN forces. China's continuing ability to hold the United States to a draw would further enhance China's image as a great power. After initial sweeping Chinese gains, UN forces recovered lost ground, and from late spring 1951 the war settled into a stalemate, with each side holding approximately the territory under its control in early June 1950. Negotiations for an armistice opened in July 1951 and dragged on inconclusively for two years before a settlement was reached in July 1953.

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The Origins of the Korean War: A Conflict of U.S. Creation

Korea emerged as the strategic focal point of northeast Asia early in its history. In 668, China's Tang Dynasty sent an army to help the state of Silla unify the nation. In 1259, the Mongols invaded and occupied the peninsula. Twice in the last decade of the 16th century Japanese invaders devastated the nation. Thereafter, Korea became China's tributary state, until 1895 when Japan's military defeat ended Chinese privilege. Ten years later, a successful war against Russia led to Japan's annexation of Korea. During World War II, the Allies agreed on the need to liberate Korea but had different visions of its future. After 1945, the United States, continuing a tradition of mistreating the nation, forced the creation of the two Koreas that went to war in June 1950.

Korean-American relations commenced in conflict. In August 1866, the General Sherman sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang in an attempt to open trade. After the ship's captain ignored warnings from local officials not to continue, the Koreans bombarded the General Sherman with cannon fire from the riverbanks and sent fire rafts toward the schooner. When the Koreans assaulted the U.S. ship with their own vessels, the General Sherman's superior weapons easily repelled them. Tables turned when the American schooner ran aground on a sandbar. Koreans quickly attacked the immobile target. Furious at what they perceived as the arrogant and barbaric actions of the Americans, when survivors reached shore an angry mob beat most of them to death and the rest were executed.

In April 1870, U.S. secretary of state Hamilton Fish instructed Minister to China Frederick F. Low to negotiate a treaty with Korea for the protection of shipwrecked seamen. Rear Admiral John Rodgers, commander of the Asiatic Squadron, escorted
Low with an armada of five warships and more than 1,200 sailors and marines. In late May 1871, the Low-Rodgers Expedition arrived at Kanghwa Island. A surveying party came under attack from shore fortifications and returned fire. The Americans suffered no serious casualties, but inflicted extensive damage to the Korean fort. Rodgers then chose to demonstrate U.S. strength and capability. On June 10, after a massive naval bombardment of Korean shore fortifications, an amphibious assault resulted in the capture of several Korean forts. But the Koreans still refused to sign a treaty.

Rodgers was following the example of European imperialists in resorting to "gunboat diplomacy" to compel Asians to open their nations to economic and political exploitation. Nor was the United States alone in seeking relations with Korea. In 1876, Japan sent a fleet of warships to force the Koreans to approve a trade treaty. Chinese officials, fearing the growth of Japanese military power, encouraged the United States to sign a treaty with Korea in hopes of preventing Japan from dominating its neighbor. Washington agreed, sending Commodore Robert W. Schufeldt to negotiate an accord. In May 1882, King Kojong signed the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation with the United States.

For Koreans, Article 1 was the key part of its first treaty with a Western nation: "If other Powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings." Soon it became clear that the U.S. government had made this pledge to gain favor with Koreans for economic penetration of their nation. Lieutenant George C. Foulk, naval attaché and second U.S. minister to Korea, secured a foreign settlement at the port of Inchon. Already at work in expanding U.S. economic interests in Korea was Dr. Horace N. Allen, who became King Kojong's personal physician. He secured a lease on the Unsan gold mine, as well as contracts for U.S. firms to provide electricity, a streetcar, and a railroad. Americans soon served as Korea's customs commissioner and adviser on foreign affairs.

U.S. policy toward Korea at the start of the last decade of the 19th century encouraged American citizens to seek economic rewards in Korea, but without government commitments. The State Department regularly warned its diplomats in Seoul to stay neutral in domestic politics and to "hold aloof" from "hostile intrigues involving the interests of China, Japan, Russia, and England." Americans in Seoul continued, however, to give the impression that the United States would act to protect Korea's independence. A self-serving and disingenuous inconsistency thus came to characterize U.S. policy toward Korea at an early date. After the Sino-Japanese War left Korea vulnerable, Allen, now U.S. minister, allowed King Kojong to believe that Washington would intervene to prevent either Japan or Russia from ending Korea's independence.

President Theodore Roosevelt welcomed Japan's opposition to Russian hegemony in Korea, viewing their competition as a cheap way to maintain the open door in Northeast Asia. An avowed racist, he also perceived Koreans to be backward and incapable of defending their nation. When Japan easily defeated Russia in the war that began in 1904 over Korea, Roosevelt mediated the treaty that gave Tokyo control over
the peninsula. Rather than coming to Korea's aid, in July 1905, he endorsed the Taft-Katsura Memorandum, in which the United States sanctioned the Japanese domination of Korea in return for a pledge from Tokyo not to contest U.S. control in the Philippines. That October, King Kojong asked Roosevelt to use his "good offices" as stated in the 1882 treaty to prevent imposition of Japanese control over Korea. Ignoring the request, Washington withdrew its legation from Seoul. Korea then became Japan's protectorate.

In 1907, King Kojong again appealed for support from the United States when he sent an emissary to the Second International Peace Conference at the Hague to secure a ruling that the protectorate convention with Japan was null and void, having been signed under coercion. Japan argued successfully that the delegation was illegitimate because Korea had forfeited its diplomatic rights under the protectorate convention. Roosevelt did not object. Rather, in 1908, he affirmed the Taft-Katsura betrayal when he approved the same terms in the more formal Root-Takahira Agreement. After forcing King Kojong to abdicate, Japan formally annexed Korea in August 1910. Admittedly, the United States could not have saved Korea, but because it had promoted Japan's aggression, rather than even remaining silent, it was complicit in the tragedy.

Roosevelt abetted Japan's incorporation of Korea into its empire because he believed that it would help to fashion a balance of power in Asia, enhancing the ability of the United States to pursue its strategic and economic interests in the region. Koreans should have recognized that the importance of their nation to the United States would increase only if changes in world affairs made Korea a valuable asset. But U.S. officials continued to give Koreans reasons to think that Washington intended to fulfill previous perceived pledges of patronage and protection. In January 1918, President Woodrow Wilson, during World War I, advocated national self-determination in his Fourteen Points. A year later, with smaller nations in Europe about to gain their independence, Koreans expected Wilson to insist that Japan end its rule over them. Instead, the U.S. president, while ignoring Korea, accepted Japanese occupation of Shantung in China.

Wilson's Fourteen Points inspired and motivated many Korean advocates for independence. Among them was Syngman Rhee, an anti-Japanese activist who in 1948 would become South Korea's first president. In 1919, while living in exile in the United States, he attempted to attend the Peace Conference at Versailles to draw attention to Korea's plight and gain Wilson's support for its liberation. Betraying its "good offices" pledge yet again, the State Department refused to issue passports to Rhee and his associates, informing them that as subjects of Japan, they needed to obtain their passports in Tokyo. Meanwhile, in Korea, thousands participated in the March First Movement, a nationwide demonstration protesting Japan's rule. Japanese troops violently suppressed the uprising, killing nearly 2,000 Koreans and jailing countless others. That spring, Korean patriots met in Shanghai and formed the Korean Provisional Government (KPG), lobbying thereafter for U.S. recognition.

In 1921, the KPG sought to publicize Korea's struggle for independence at the
Washington Conference on naval disarmament. In an appeal submitted to the U.S. delegation on October 1, the Koreans declared that several Western powers had negotiated a treaty with Korea before the Japanese annexation and therefore "must still regard Korea as a separate entity and the treaties in force." In his reply, U.S. secretary of state Charles E. Hughes promised to warn Japan regarding its treatment of the Korean people, but made no reference to Korea's right to independence. For the next quarter century, the U.S. government was silent, as Koreans endured ruthless political repression, economic exploitation, and cultural suppression. Korean nationalists fought Japanese colonialism as exiles in the United States, China, and Soviet Siberia, but disagreement on strategy and purpose prevented unity in the liberation movement.

Korea regained importance for the U.S. government on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave the nation value in advancing American strategic interests. Upon entry into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt acknowledged at once the importance of the peninsula for postwar peace in Asia. He soon adopted trusteeship as the best way to achieve eventual independence for Korea, publicly committing the United States to this wartime policy at the Cairo Conference in 1943. There, he joined British prime minister Winston Churchill and Chinese president Jiang Jieshi in signing a declaration stating that the Allies, "mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."

Given past Sino-Russian competition to dominate Korea, Roosevelt knew that it was imperative to obtain Soviet endorsement for the Cairo Declaration or Korea again would become the victim of a great power rivalry. Early in 1945 at the Yalta Conference, he gained approval from Soviet premier Joseph Stalin for a four-power trusteeship plan that would provide protection for Korea while it developed the political experience necessary to maintain its own independence. Roosevelt's death in April 1945 set in motion a series of events that would climax in the outbreak of the Korean War. Harry S. Truman became president when Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe had begun to alarm U.S. leaders. Certain that Stalin held aggressive intentions, Truman's fears soon installed anticommunism as the driving force behind postwar U.S. foreign policy.

Almost immediately, Truman expected Soviet actions in Korea to parallel Stalin's policies in Poland. Within a week after taking office, Truman began to search for an alternative to trusteeship in Korea that would remove any chance for repetition of successful Soviet expansion. Trusteeship might have brought Korean unity and independence but the atomic bomb appeared to offer Truman a better answer. Japan's swift surrender after an atomic attack would preempt Soviet participation in the Pacific War, thereby permitting the United States to occupy Korea alone and remove any possibility for "sovietization." The failure of Truman's gamble would lead to a civil conflict, rather than liberation. When Stalin declared war on Japan and sent the Red Army into Korea on August 12, Washington proposed dividing the peninsula into Soviet and American zones of military occupation at the 38th Parallel. Stalin's acceptance of this last-minute plan prevented early restoration of independence to a
united Korea.

U.S. military occupation of southern Korea began on September 8, 1945. With very little preparation, Washington redeployed the XXIV Corps under the command of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge from Okinawa to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea. The American occupiers knew nothing about Korea's history or culture. They were unable to maintain order because the Korean people expected immediate independence. Absence of a firm plan for reunification and civil administration only invited political chaos. Following the Japanese colonial model, Hodge fashioned an authoritarian government in southern Korea. U.S. occupation officials also relied on wealthy landlords and businessmen who could speak English for advice. Not only had many of these individuals collaborated with the Japanese, they had scant interest in acting positively on the demands of Korean peasants and workers for reform.

Early in the occupation, U.S. military advisers concentrated on training and equipping a constabulary force of 25,000 men that would be the nucleus of an anticommunist national army. They recruited an officer corps of rightwing extremists who had served in the Japanese Army. Moreover, the U.S. military government tolerated the actions of rightist paramilitary units that terrorized and murdered leftist politicians and suspected sympathizers. To further boost conservative power in southern Korea, Hodge pressed Washington to assist in returning KPG leaders from exile in China. State Department officials allowed these critics of the Soviet Union to come back, but only as private citizens. It was important to avoid offending Moscow, given that Soviet military forces in northern Korea were refusing to establish cooperation and coordination.

Deterioration of Soviet-American relations in Europe meant that neither side was willing to acquiesce in any agreement in Korea that would strengthen its adversary. This became clear when the United States and the Soviet Union tried to implement a revived trusteeship plan after the Moscow Conference late in 1945. Eighteen months of negotiations failed to produce an agreement on a representative group of Koreans to form a provisional government. Meanwhile, worsening political and economic conditions in southern Korea caused Hodge to urge prompt military withdrawal. Postwar U.S. demobilization was reducing defense spending, intensifying pressure to disengage. In September 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) submitted an appraisal dismissing Korea's strategic value, reinforcing the argument for withdrawal. With communist power growing in China, Truman had political reasons for refusing to abandon southern Korea, fearing criticism from Republicans and damage to the U.S. image abroad.

Seeking an answer to its dilemma, the United States ignored the impact that its next step would have in setting the stage for war. Washington referred the Korean dispute to the United Nations (UN), which passed a resolution calling for internationally supervised elections for a government to rule a reunited Korea. U.S. leaders knew that the Soviet Union would refuse to cooperate. Discarding any hope for early reunification, Truman's policy had shifted to the creation of a separate government
south of the 38th Parallel ultimately capable of defending itself. While the United States provided military and economic aid to South Korea, a stamp of legitimacy from the UN would enhance its chances of survival. The UN, bowing to U.S. pressure, supervised and certified as valid the elections in the south alone in May 1948, resulting three months later in formation of the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea). The Soviet Union responded in kind, sponsoring creation in September of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea).

Cold War calculations had caused the United States to conclude that it was necessary to create two Koreas. While President Syngman Rhee installed a repressive, dictatorial, and anticommunist government in the south, wartime guerrilla leader Kim Il Sung replicated the Soviet model for political, economic, and social development in the north. Stalin, acting on a North Korean request, then magnified the need for the United States to withdraw when he announced that Soviet troops would leave North Korea by the end of 1948. Truman again delayed, deciding that if the ROK was doomed, he wanted to achieve a decent interval before it collapsed. South Korea's new government in fact faced violent opposition from the outset, climaxing in October 1948 with the Yosu-Sunchon Rebellion. Truman postponed military withdrawal until June 29, 1949, having by then adopted a policy to increase economic aid to the ROK and train, equip, and supply a security force capable of maintaining internal order and deterring a DPRK attack.

During the spring of 1949, U.S. military advisers supervised a dramatic improvement in the fighting abilities of the ROK army. After U.S. withdrawal, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) was so successful that in the summer militant South Korean officers started to initiate assaults northward across the 38th Parallel. These attacks ignited major border clashes with North Korean forces that often involved battalion-sized units. U.S. advisers had helped ignite a kind of war that was underway when the conventional phase of the conflict began on June 25, 1950. Contradictorily, the Truman administration then left South Korea exposed. Fearing that Rhee might initiate an offensive to achieve reunification, it limited the ROK's military capabilities, denying its requests for tanks, heavy artillery, and warplanes. Washington's failure to build a stronger South Korean military invited an attack.

Early in 1950, Truman submitted to Congress a three-year program of economic aid for recovery and self-sufficient growth in South Korea. To build political support for the Korean assistance package, Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson delivered a speech before the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, giving an optimistic appraisal of the ROK's future. But he also excluded South Korea from the American "defensive perimeter" in Asia. If attacked, he stated, the ROK would have to rely on the UN. One week later, the House of Representatives defeated the bill by one vote. Although Congress passed a revised measure in February, Democratic Senator Tom Connally stated publicly in May that the ROK's demise was certain. These events certainly emboldened the North Koreans. Soviet documents have revealed that Stalin and Chinese leader Mao Zedong resisted pressure from Kim to approve an attack because they feared U.S. intervention. Nevertheless, they approved the DPRK invasion of
South Korea on June 25, 1950, that started the Korean War.

Korea's war was a conflict of U.S. creation reflecting the consequences of the historic pattern in U.S. policy of subordinating Korea's interests in pursuit of American objectives elsewhere in the world. As historian Lloyd Gardner has remarked: "Korea was always about someplace else." Truman's initial reaction to North Korea's attack exemplified this attitude. Despite later praise for acting quickly and courageously to defeat the communist invasion, he delayed for one week before committing U.S. ground forces. More importantly, the United States ultimately intervened in the Korean War not to protect South Korea's people or its alleged democracy but to signal to the Soviet Union that it would not allow the communists to conquer more territory anywhere in the world. "Mr. Truman's War," as critics correctly labeled it at the time, was a brutal conflict that killed more than 33,000 Americans, 152,000 Chinese, and 3 million Koreans.

About the Author

Dr. James I. Matray earned his doctorate at the University of Virginia. He taught for 22 years at New Mexico State University before he became Department of History chair at California State University, Chico, in 2002, where he now teaches as a faculty member. Matray received the Best Book Prize from Phi Alpha Theta in 1986, a Donald C. Roush Excellence in Teaching Award in 1988, and a Nicola D. Bautzer Advancement Award in 2003. He is currently a member of the American Military History Advisory Board at ABC-CLIO.

See more about James I. Matray

Imperialism, Nationalism and the Cold War: Roots of the Korean War

During the Cold War, the communist and anticommunist camps held opposing views over responsibility for the outbreak of the Korean War. From the beginning, North Koreans blamed the war on the United States. Known as the "Fatherland Liberation War" in the North, it was viewed as a counteroffensive launched against an "unprovoked" invasion by South Korea, the "puppets" of Washington. The People's Republic of China (PRC) supported this interpretation as they rallied to fight the "War to Resist America and Support Korea," a struggle against American imperialism in East Asia. Soviet propaganda characterized the outbreak of the war as a U.S. plot by "the beasts of Wall Street" to attack members of the socialist world. On the other side of the
ideological divide, South Koreans blamed North Korea. They called the war "June 25" to commemorate the day the North launched an "unprovoked" invasion of the South. Much along the same lines, the United States and the West referred to it as the Korean War, a world struggle against communism in which the United Nations (UN) intervened against a Soviet-backed North Korea that attempted to topple a "peaceful and democratic" South Korea. Today, research unambiguously points to a North Korean invasion as the immediate trigger for the war. However, as Dr. Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago writes: "Civil wars do not start: they come. They originate in multiple causes, with blame enough to go around for everyone." In other words, many countries, including Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union, were responsible for creating conditions on the peninsula that ultimately led to the civil conflict between North and South Korea.

Japanese Colonialism and Anti-Japanese Nationalism, 1910–1945

Hoping to defend itself from the West by becoming more like Western countries, Japan began building an empire through war and occupation following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Early lands that Japan colonized included Taiwan after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Korea following the Russo-Japanese War (1905–1906). When Japan annexed the country in 1910, the average Korean could not resist. Some Koreans pushed back with armed confrontation that the Japanese quickly suppressed. Others tried nonviolent means, such as the March First Movement of 1919, a nationwide peaceful demonstration against colonial occupation during which many Koreans united to demonstrate to the outside world, especially to Western powers, Japan's brutal colonial control.

In Korea—Japan's most important colony because of its close geographical proximity to the home islands—the Japanese set out on a path of modernization to transform Korean society and the way Koreans lived. Most fundamentally, they created a strong central government that reached deeply and thoroughly into society to mobilize people and access the resources of the country. At first a producer of rice that was shipped to Japan to feed its growing cities, later the peninsula industrialized to help Japan's war efforts. To do so, the Japanese restructured the economy by creating a modern banking system; built roads, railroads, and port systems; adopted a Western-style education system and provided more educational opportunities; and moved Koreans away from their hometowns to work around the peninsula and throughout the Japanese Empire.

Despite these apparent benefits, however, Japanese colonial rule was harsh and bloody, as they suppressed dissent through an expanded military and police force. While it is true that the Japanese developed Korean society, developments maximized Japan's position on the peninsula to integrate the country into the Japanese Empire for economic gains. Any benefit to Koreans was either a byproduct of colonial rule or crafty policy intended to suppress dissent and tighten control over the peninsula. Under Japanese authority, Koreans were second-class citizens and, by the 1940s, Japan forced Koreans to adopt Japanese names, speak only Japanese, and participate in wars against the Chinese and Americans. This included forcing some women into sexual servitude for the Japanese Army. Further, land issues helped fuel inequalities. Rather than
distribute land to farmers, the colonial government allowed Japanese companies to buy and sell land. Some wealthy Koreans became bigger landholders, but most Koreans remained poor tenant farmers abused by the system.

One of the major consequences of Japan's actions in Korea was growing anti-Japanese sentiment. Nationalism—actions individuals and groups take to shape a country socially and politically—appeared in Asia in the 19th century as a reaction to outside influence and the inability of governments to prevent foreign interference. Nationalism was a movement that hoped to resist foreign intervention by building a country's government and society based on certain political views. For East Asia and Korea, it generally meant reforming the country in terms of "modern" or "Western" concepts of the nation, citizenship, and governance. Some nationalists looked to democracy as a model of reform, some to anarchy, while others turned to communism and socialism as models for the state.

On the peninsula, communism did not become a force until the 1920s. Following the March First Movement of 1919, the Japanese changed the way they ruled the peninsula. Rather than only heavy-handed suppression, they softened their policies to make it appear as though Koreans had more personal freedoms. In reality, the Japanese adopted covert tactics that included an expanded network of informants and spies to investigate potential opposition to their rule.

It was in this period of the 1920s that two groups of nationalists emerged that would have an impact on the post-1945 period. One group, the "cultural nationalists," believed that the Korean nation should be free from Japan but that the nation was unprepared for independence. As such, these nationalists, most of whom were older and well-respected in business and the arts, believed that Koreans should prepare themselves gradually for independence in years to come by becoming more modern through education. "Radical nationalists," however, opposed this view. Younger and more left-leaning in their political views and including socialists and communists, these nationalists agreed that Korea should be free, but rather than at some unspecified point in the future, independence should be immediate and, if necessary, attained through violence.

The Japanese permitted these groups to discuss their views openly during the 1920s. But ultimately, the colonial regime supported the cultural nationalists because the government could back the vague idea of independence without committing to a specific timeframe while at the same time suppressing the communist groups. As Japan mobilized its empire, including Korea, for war in the 1930s and 1940s, the colonial government permitted fewer opportunities for political debate and dissent. By the 1940s, as Japan expanded its suppression of the colony and launched wars against the West, many cultural nationalists were actively supporting the Japanese war effort, while other political activists, including communists and socialists, were in Japanese prisons or remained quiet.

Nationalism Unleashed, 1945–1950
The collapse of imperial Japan released the force of nationalism among Koreans. Some nationalists sought retribution against the Japanese and pro-Japanese collaborators. Other nationalists strove to build a new nation-state. Before the arrival of outside forces, these Koreans were solving their own political problems. On August 15, 1945, Liberation Day, all Koreans were elated. Decades of colonial rule ended, suddenly unleashing a deeply-held desire to determine their own future. Days before the Japanese surrender, Governor-General of Korea Nobuyuki Abe negotiated a transfer of power to elder Korean leaders who both left- and right-leaning activists respected. Fearful of disorder, Abe wanted to ensure a stable environment that would minimize violence against Japanese nationals living in Korea when the empire surrendered, hoping they could be repatriated quickly. Acting to fill the power vacuum, statesmen such as Yo Unhyong and others established the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence that a month later they renamed the Korea People's Republic, a national-level government that involved groups from across the political spectrum.

In addition to national politics, local government structures began emerging. Following the surrender, the police force dissolved, leaving behind a dangerous security vacuum, as most of the police officers in 1945 were Koreans working for the Japanese authorities. Fearing retribution, many of them fled. To minimize chaos in towns and villages, local individuals, generally people of esteem, began organizing "People's Committees" throughout the countryside. These spontaneous grassroots organizations stepped forward to provide security but also to carry out what many Koreans were demanding—trials against Koreans who had collaborated with the Japanese and fair distribution of land to farmers, among other activities. These groups were founded throughout the peninsula and had great success in the early days. Along with the Korea People's Republic, People's Committees were examples of Korean initiative in creating a government before the intervention of Cold War politics.

Emerging rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union touched Korea from afar. Two junior U.S. military officers in Washington, D.C., were ordered to find a line to divide the Korean peninsula. Late at night and without any discussion with Koreans, colonels Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel selected the 38th Parallel. Ostensibly to disarm Japanese troops, this arbitrary line seemed like a good decision, as it gave more territory to the Soviet Union but left the capital, Seoul, in U.S. hands. The United States feared that the Soviet Army, already advancing into Manchuria and parts of northern Korea, would overrun the peninsula before the United States could act, preventing the United States from holding territory on the Asian mainland. Without any negotiation, the Soviets agreed to the division and within a few months, both Cold War enemies had stepped into the peninsula with occupational advisers and troops to develop political systems friendly to their ideological sides: communism and anticommunism.

Almost immediately, the temporary division hardened, despite an initial agreement to resolve the "Korea problem." The Soviets had no clear plan for Korea at the end of World War II. It only unfolded in the months after liberation to take advantage of left-leaning political sentiments in Korea and the increasing Cold War rivalry with the
United States. They reorganized People's Committees throughout the northern countryside and then established a civil organization government in P'yongyang in place of the local People's Committee. Full of Soviet advisers working in the background, this organization served as a nascent central government shaping social and political policies. As historian Charles Armstrong of Columbia University writes, rather than from the Soviets, radical reform "came from Korean communists themselves—young enthusiasts... who pushed the Soviet authorities toward more thorough change, and ultimately to a military takeover of the South." The North developed under Kim Il Sung, a marginal communist guerrilla leader who had fought against the Japanese in Manchuria and whom the Soviets had selected to become the leader only after liberation. With Soviet assistance and the Red Army to back him, Kim began carrying out a North Korean revolution where pro-Japanese collaborators, landlords and anyone else who opposed the emerging communist regime were purged.

As part of the U.S. policy to protect Japan, a country that was vital to U.S. national defense interests in 1945, from a perceived communist threat, the United States began turning the southern part of Korea into an anticommunist state. Ostensibly spreading democracy, but really creating a strong anticommunist regime, U.S. troops arrived in Korea in September 1945 and set up a military occupational government under General John Reed Hodge, a war hero in the Pacific. One of the first orders was the disbanding of the Korea People's Republic. To the Americans, this government, along with the local People's Committees, appeared too communist in its activities, so they took steps to shut it down. Further, the United States took a very visible role in the political affairs of South Korea. Through the lens of Cold War rivalry, any resistance to U.S. efforts in Korea was seen as "pro-Soviet" and suppressed violently. The occupational government reconstituted the former colonial-era police force, including rehabilitated former pro-Japanese Korean collaborators; prevented any further attacks on Korean landlords; and, as Cumings writes, resisted "thorough reform of colonial legacies." Instead, the United States introduced conservative forces into politics and selected the anticommunist Syngman Rhee to lead the newly emerging southern regime. Rhee and his new government violently suppressed any resistance to the imposition of central control.

In addition to the two regimes, the division of Korea disrupted the economic and agricultural system developed in colonial days. The Japanese had invested in industry in the North, while fostering agriculture in the South. United, the peninsula was an equilibrium, but divided both halves were incomplete. Worst of all, as a country that had been unified since the seventh century and with a strong sense of cultural and linguistic homogeneity, most, if not all, Koreans did not welcome the division. U.S.-Soviet intervention amplified nationalism on both sides of the parallel. Leadership of both regimes were hardcore nationalists who strove to legitimize their claims to power by denouncing the "puppets" of the other side and espousing unification through military action. Rhee advocated striking north, for instance, but the United States did not support him with the weapons he needed. Kim felt the same about the South and pursued the matter through negotiations with the Soviets and the Chinese, seeking from
them permission to launch an invasion.

With the establishment of both Koreas in 1948, the United States and Soviet Union withdrew their forces, leaving behind two hyper-nationalist regimes determined to unify the peninsula under their systems while denying the legitimacy of the opposing regime. The North Korean consolidation of power largely took place in a political climate where the population welcomed their moves to uproot colonial legacies, punish landowners, and implement various other socialist policies to correct the injustices of the colonial era. By contrast, the South witnessed large-scale government resistance to the imposition of pro-Japanese sympathizers and the return of colonial-era landlords and the colonial police system, among others. Within such a tumultuous context, both Koreas faced off across the 38th Parallel. At times the North prodded the South, while at other times the South launched raids along the border against the North, but major combat did not break out prior to June 1950. Both leaders wanted war to unify the country under their brands of nationalism—one communist, the other anticommunist—but only the North was preparing for an invasion to overcome Japanese colonial legacies and bring about a resolution to the U.S. and Soviet division of the country and people.

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North Korea attacked South Korea on June 25, 1950, igniting the Korean War. Cold War assumptions governed the immediate reaction of US leaders, who instantly concluded that Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin had ordered the invasion as the first step in his plan for world conquest. "Communism," President Harry S. Truman argued later in his memoirs, "was acting in Korea just as [Adolf] Hitler, [Benito] Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier." If North Korea’s aggression went “unchallenged, the world was certain to be plunged into another world war.” This 1930s history lesson prevented Truman from recognizing that the origins of this conflict dated to at least the start of World War II, when Korea was a colony of Japan. Liberation in August 1945 led to division and a predictable war because the US and the Soviet Union would not allow the Korean people to decide their own future.

Before 1941, the US had no vital interests in Korea and was largely indifferent to its fate. But after Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his advisors acknowledged at once the importance of this strategic peninsula for peace in Asia, advocating a postwar trusteeship to achieve Korea’s independence. Late in 1943, Roosevelt joined British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in signing the Cairo Declaration, stating that the Allies "are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.” At the Yalta Conference in early 1945, Stalin endorsed a four-power trusteeship in Korea. When Harry S. Truman became president after Roosevelt’s death in April 1945, however, Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe had begun to alarm US leaders. An atomic attack on Japan, Truman thought, would preempt Soviet entry into the Pacific War and allow unilateral American occupation of Korea. His gamble failed. On August 8, Stalin declared war on Japan and sent the Red Army into Korea. Only Stalin’s acceptance of Truman’s eleventh-hour proposal to divide the peninsula into Soviet and American zones of military occupation at the thirty-eighth parallel saved Korea from unification under Communist rule.

US military occupation of southern Korea began on September 8, 1945. With very little preparation, Washington redeployed the XXIV Corps under the command of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge from Okinawa to Korea. US occupation officials, ignorant of Korea’s history and culture, quickly had trouble maintaining order because almost all Koreans wanted immediate independence. It did not help that they followed the Japanese model in establishing an authoritarian US military
Deterioration of Soviet-American relations in Europe meant that neither side was willing to acquiesce in any agreement in Korea that might strengthen its adversary. Deterioration of Soviet-American relations in Europe meant that neither side was willing to acquiesce in any agreement in Korea that might strengthen its adversary. This became clear when the US and the Soviet Union tried to implement a revived trusteeship plan after the Moscow Conference in December 1945. Eighteen months of intermittent bilateral negotiations in Korea failed to reach agreement on a representative group of Koreans to form a provisional government, primarily because Moscow refused to consult with anti-Communist politicians opposed to trusteeship. Meanwhile, political instability and economic deterioration in southern Korea persisted, causing Hodge to urge withdrawal. Postwar US demobilization that brought steady reductions in defense spending fueled pressure for disengagement. In September 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) added weight to the withdrawal argument when they advised that Korea held no strategic significance. With Communist power growing in China, however, the Truman administration was unwilling to abandon southern Korea precipitously, fearing domestic criticism from Republicans and damage to US credibility abroad.

Seeking an answer to its dilemma, the US referred the Korean dispute to the United Nations, which passed a resolution late in 1947 calling for internationally supervised elections for a government to rule a united Korea. Truman and his advisors knew the Soviets would refuse to cooperate. Discarding all hope for early reunification, US policy by then had shifted to creating a separate South Korea, able to defend itself. Bowing to US pressure, the United Nations supervised and certified as valid obviously undemocratic elections in the south alone in May 1948, which resulted in formation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in August. The Soviet Union responded in kind, sponsoring the creation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in September. There now were two Koreas, with President Syngman Rhee installing a repressive, dictatorial, and anti-Communist regime in the south, while wartime guerrilla leader Kim Il Sung imposed the totalitarian Stalinist model for political, economic, and social development on the north. A UN resolution then called for Soviet-American withdrawal. In December 1948, the Soviet Union, in response to the DPRK’s request, removed its forces from North Korea.

South Korea’s new government immediately faced violent opposition, climaxing in October 1948 with the Yosu-Sunchon Rebellion. Despite plans to leave the south by the end of 1948, Truman delayed military withdrawal until June 29, 1949. By then, he had approved National Security Council (NSC) Paper 8/2, undertaking a commitment to train, equip, and supply an ROK security force capable of maintaining internal order and deterring a DPRK attack. In spring 1949, US military advisors supervised a dramatic improvement in ROK army fighting abilities. They were so successful that militant South Korean officers began to initiate assaults northward across the thirty-eighth parallel that summer. These attacks ignited major border clashes with North Korean forces. A kind of war was already underway on the peninsula when the conventional phase of Korea’s conflict began on June 25, 1950. Fears that Rhee might initiate an offensive to achieve reunification explain why the Truman administration limited ROK military capabilities, withholding tanks, heavy artillery, and warplanes.
Pursuing qualified containment in Korea, Truman asked Congress for three-year funding of economic aid to the ROK in June 1949. To build support for its approval, on January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson's speech to the National Press Club depicted an optimistic future for South Korea. Six months later, critics charged that his exclusion of the ROK from the US “defensive perimeter” gave the Communists a “green light” to launch an invasion. However, Soviet documents have established that Acheson's words had almost no impact on Communist invasion planning. Moreover, by June 1950, the US policy of containment in Korea through economic means appeared to be experiencing marked success. The ROK had acted vigorously to control spiraling inflation, and Rhee's opponents won legislative control in May elections. As important, the ROK army virtually eliminated guerrilla activities, threatening internal order in South Korea, causing the Truman administration to propose a sizeable military aid increase. Now optimistic about the ROK's prospects for survival, Washington wanted to deter a conventional attack from the north.

Stalin worried about South Korea's threat to North Korea's survival. Throughout 1949, he consistently refused to approve Kim Il Sung's persistent requests to authorize an attack on the ROK. Communist victory in China in fall 1949 pressured Stalin to show his support for a similar Korean outcome. In January 1950, he and Kim discussed plans for an invasion in Moscow, but the Soviet dictator was not ready to give final consent. However, he did authorize a major expansion of the DPRK's military capabilities. At an April meeting, Kim Il Sung persuaded Stalin that a military victory would be quick and easy because of southern guerilla support and an anticipated popular uprising against Rhee's regime. Still fearing US military intervention, Stalin informed Kim that he could invade only if Mao Zedong approved. During May, Kim Il Sung went to Beijing to gain the consent of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Significantly, Mao also voiced concern that the Americans would defend the ROK but gave his reluctant approval as well. Kim Il Sung's patrons had joined in approving his reckless decision for war.

On the morning of June 25, 1950, the Korean People's Army (KPA) launched its military offensive to conquer South Korea. Rather than immediately committing ground troops, Truman's first action was to approve referral of the matter to the UN Security Council because he hoped the ROK military could defend itself with primarily indirect US assistance. The UN Security Council's first resolution called on North Korea to accept a ceasefire and withdraw, but the KPA continued its advance. On June 27, a second resolution requested that member nations provide support for the ROK's defense. Two days later, Truman, still optimistic that a total commitment was avoidable, agreed in a press conference with a newsman's description of the conflict as a “police action.” His actions reflected an existing policy that sought to block Communist expansion in Asia without using US military power, thereby avoiding increases in defense spending. But early on June 30, he reluctantly sent US ground troops to Korea after General Douglas MacArthur, US Occupation commander in Japan, advised that failure to do so meant certain Communist destruction of the ROK.

On July 7, 1950, the UN Security Council created the United Nations Command (UNC) and called on Truman to appoint a UNC commander. The president immediately named MacArthur, who was required to submit periodic reports to the United Nations on war developments. The administration blocked formation of a UN committee that would have direct access to the UNC commander, instead adopting a procedure whereby MacArthur received instructions from and reported to the JCS. Fifteen members joined the US in defending the ROK, but 90 percent of forces were South Korean and American with the US providing weapons, equipment, and logistical support. Despite these American commitments, UNC forces initially suffered a string of defeats. By July 20, the KPA shattered five US battalions as it advanced one hundred miles south of Seoul, the

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On September 11, 1950, Truman had approved NSC-81, a plan to cross the thirty-eighth parallel and forcibly reunify Korea.

ROK capital. Soon, UNC forces finally stopped the KPA at the Pusan Perimeter, a rectangular area in the southeast corner of the peninsula.

Despite the UNC’s desperate situation during July, MacArthur developed plans for a counteroffensive in coordination with an amphibious landing behind enemy lines allowing him to “compose and unite” Korea. State Department officials began to lobby for forcible reunification once the UNC assumed the offensive, arguing that the US should destroy the KPA and hold free elections for a government to rule a united Korea. The JCS had grave doubts about the wisdom of landing at the port of Inchon, twenty miles west of Seoul, because of narrow access, high tides, and sea-walls, but the September 15 operation was a spectacular success. It allowed the US Eighth Army to break out of the Pusan Perimeter and advance north to unite with the X Corps, liberating Seoul two weeks later and sending the KPA scurrying back into North Korea. A month earlier, the administration had abandoned its initial war aim of merely restoring the status quo. On September 11, 1950, Truman had approved NSC-81, a plan to cross the thirty-eighth parallel and forcibly reunify Korea.

Invading the DPRK was an incredible blunder that transformed a three-month war into one lasting three years. US leaders had realized that extension of hostilities risked Soviet or Chinese entry, and therefore, NSC-81 included the precaution that only Korean units would move into the most northern provinces. On October 2, PRC Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai warned the Indian ambassador that China would intervene in Korea if US forces crossed the parallel, but US officials thought he was bluffing. The UNC offensive began on October 7, after UN passage of a resolution authorizing MacArthur to “ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea.” At a meeting at Wake Island on October 15, MacArthur assured Truman that China would not enter the war, but Mao already had decided to intervene after concluding that Beijing could not tolerate US challenges to its regional credibility. He also wanted to repay the DPRK for sending thousands of soldiers to fight in the Chinese civil war. On August 5, Mao instructed his northeastern military district commander to prepare for operations in Korea in the first ten days of September. China’s dictator then muted those associates opposing intervention.

On October 19, units of the Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) under the command of General Peng Dehuai crossed the Yalu River. Five days later, MacArthur ordered an offensive to China’s border with US forces in the vanguard. When the JCS questioned this violation of NSC-81, MacArthur replied that he had discussed this action with Truman on Wake Island. Having been wrong in doubting Inchon, the JCS remained silent this time. Nor did MacArthur’s superiors object when he chose to retain a divided command. Even after the first clash between UNC and CPV troops on October 26, the general remained supremely confident. One week later, the Chinese sharply attacked advancing UNC and ROK forces. In response, MacArthur ordered air strikes on Yalu bridges without seeking Washington’s approval. Upon learning this, the JCS prohibited the assaults, pending Truman’s approval. MacArthur then asked that US pilots receive permission for “hot pursuit” of enemy aircraft fleeing into Manchuria. He was infuriated upon learning that the British were advancing a UN proposal to halt the UNC offensive well short of the Yalu to avert war with China, viewing the measure as appeasement.

On November 24, MacArthur launched his “Home-by-Christmas Offensive.” The next day, the CPV counterattacked en masse, sending UNC forces into a chaotic retreat southward and causing the Truman administration immediately to consider pursuing a Korean cease-fire. In several public pronouncements, MacArthur blamed setbacks not on himself but on unwise command limitations. In response, Truman approved a directive to US officials that State Department approval was required for any comments about the war. Later that month, MacArthur submitted a four-step “Plan for Victory” to defeat the Communists—a naval blockade of
China’s coast, authorization to bombard military installations in Manchuria, deployment of Chiang Kai-shek Nationalist forces in Korea, and launching of an attack on mainland China from Taiwan. The JCS, despite later denials, considered implementing these actions before receiving favorable battlefield reports.

Early in 1951, Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, new commander of the US Eighth Army, halted the Communist southern advance. Soon, UNC counterattacks restored battle lines north of the thirty-eighth parallel. In March, MacArthur, frustrated by Washington’s refusal to escalate the war, issued a demand for immediate surrender to the Communists that sabotaged a planned cease-fire initiative. Truman reprimanded but did not recall the general. On April 5, House Republican Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin Jr. read MacArthur’s letter in Congress, once again criticizing the administration’s efforts to limit the war. Truman later argued that this was the “last straw.” On April 11, with the unanimous support of top advisors, the president fired MacArthur, justifying his action as a defense of the constitutional principle of civilian control over the military, but another consideration may have exerted even greater influence on Truman. The JCS had been monitoring a Communist military buildup in East Asia and thought a trusted UNC commander should have standing authority to retaliate against Soviet or Chinese escalation, including the use of nuclear weapons that they had deployed to forward Pacific bases. Truman and his advisors, as well as US allies, distrusted MacArthur, fearing that he might provoke an incident to widen the war.

MacArthur’s recall ignited a firestorm of public criticism against both Truman and the war. The general returned to tickertape parades and, on April 19, 1951, he delivered a televised address before a joint session of Congress, defending his actions and making this now-famous assertion: “In war there is no substitute for victory.” During Senate joint committee hearings on his firing in May, MacArthur denied that he was guilty of insubordination. General Omar N. Bradley, the JCS chair, made the administration’s case, arguing that enacting MacArthur’s proposals would lead to “the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.” Meanwhile, in April, the Communists launched the first of two major offensives in a final effort to force the UNC off the peninsula. When May ended, the CPV and KPA had suffered huge losses, and a UNC counteroffensive then restored the front north of the parallel, persuading Beijing and Pyongyang, as was already the case in Washington, that pursuit of a cease-fire was necessary. The belligerents agreed to open truce negotiations on July 10 at Kaesong, a neutral site that the Communists deceitfully occupied on the eve of the first session.

North Korea and China created an acrimonious atmosphere with attempts at the outset to score propaganda points, but the UNC raised the first major roadblock with its proposal for a demilitarized zone extending deep into North Korea. More important, after the talks moved to Panmunjom in October, there was rapid progress in resolving almost all issues, including establishment of a demilitarized zone along the battle lines, truce enforcement inspection procedures, and a postwar political conference to discuss withdrawal of foreign troops and reunification. An armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began had the armistice could have been concluded ten months after talks began.

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An armistice ended fighting in Korea on July 27, 1953.


Premier Kim Il Sung endorses the July 27, 1953, Korean Armistice Agreement (Courtesy, eastphoto.)

assault on the mainland. What influenced China more was the devastating impact of the war. By summer 1952, the PRC faced huge domestic economic problems and likely decided to make peace once Truman left office. Major food shortages and physical devastation persuaded Pyongyang to favor an armistice even earlier.

Early in 1953, China and North Korea were prepared to resume the truce negotiations, but the Communists preferred that the Americans make the first move. That came on February 22 when the UNC, repeating a Red Cross proposal, suggested exchanging sick and wounded prisoners. At this key moment, Stalin died on March 5. Rather than dissuading the PRC and the DPRK as Stalin had done, his successors encouraged them to act on their desire for peace. On March 28, the Communist side accepted the UNC proposal. Two days later, Zhou Enlai publicly proposed transfer of prisoners rejecting repatriation to a neutral state. On April 20, Operation Little Switch, the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners, began, and six days later, negotiations resumed at Panmunjom. Sharp disagreement followed over the final details of the truce agreement. Eisenhower insisted later that the PRC accepted US terms after Secretary of State John Foster Dulles informed India’s prime minister in May that without progress toward a truce, the US would terminate the existing limitations on its conduct of the war. No documentary evidence has of yet surfaced to support his assertion.

Also, by early 1953, both Washington and Beijing clearly wanted an armistice, having tired of the economic burdens, military losses, political and military constraints, worries about an expanded war, and pressure from allies and the world community to end the stalemate conflict. A steady stream of wartime issues threatened to inflict irrevocable damage on US relations with its allies in Western Europe and nonaligned members of the United Nations. Indeed, in May 1953, US bombing of North Korea’s dams and irrigation system ignited an outburst of world criticism. Later that month and early in June, the CPV staged powerful attacks against ROK defensive positions. Far from being intimidated, Beijing thus displayed its continuing resolve, using military means to persuade its adversary to make concessions on the final terms. Before the belligerents could sign the agreement, Rhee tried to torpedo the impending truce when he released 27,000 North Korean POWs. Eisenhower bought Rhee’s acceptance of a cease-fire with pledges of financial aid and a mutual security pact.

An armistice ended fighting in Korea on July 27, 1953. Since then, Koreans instead had to endure the living tragedy of yearning for reunification, as diplomatic tension and military clashes along the demilitarized zone continued into the twenty-first century.

Korea’s war also dramatically reshaped world affairs. In response, US leaders vastly increased defense spending, strengthened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization militarily, and pressed for rearming West Germany. In Asia, the conflict saved Chiang’s regime on Taiwan, while making South Korea a long-term client of the US. US relations with China were poisoned for twenty years, especially after Washington persuaded the United Nations to condemn the PRC for aggression in Korea. Ironically, the war helped Mao’s regime consolidate its control in China, while elevating its regional prestige. In response, US leaders, acting on what they saw as Korea’s primary lesson, relied on military means to meet the challenge, with disastrous results in Việt Nam.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

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Korea's war at 60: A survey of the literature

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This article provides a summary of current literature addressing the Korean conflict, from World War II until July 1953. It describes not only the content of major books and articles, but also key areas of interpretive disagreement. Topics cover both political and military affairs.

Korea’s war began 60 years ago, inflicting over three years of massive destruction on the nation and tremendous physical and emotional damage on its people. Since then, historians and political scientists have spilled gallons of ink presenting conflicting answers to numerous questions about the causes, course and consequences of this conflict. Serious debate did not begin, however, until scholars had rejected the credibility of an orthodox judgement about the Korean conflict that dominated the literature for two decades. Until then, few histories challenged Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson’s definition in June 1951 of the war’s meaning that the Soviet ‘dagger thrust pinned a warning notice to the wall which said: “Give up or be conquered!”’

To date, sharp differences persist on almost every critical issue, but with two notable exceptions. First, Korean War scholars have reached agreement that this conflict marked a watershed in post-war international affairs, militarising the Soviet–American competition and extending the Cold War contest for dominance to the...
entire world. Second, a firm consensus now prevails that the origins of the Korean conflict date from at least the beginning of World War II. By contrast, the most important question that has constituted for some time the great divide in the literature on the Korean War is whether it was more an international conflict or a civil war.

For more than two decades, President Harry S. Truman’s description of the Korean War at the time as an act of Soviet-inspired communist aggression went unchallenged as conventional wisdom. This combined with the absence of public interest resulted in Clay Blair in 1987 naming his detailed account of the conflict *The Forgotten War*. Since then, a steady stream of books and articles examining – and re-examining – all aspects of the conflict has produced a robust literature. Several historiographical books and articles now exist that summarise and assess these writings. Editor Lester H. Brune and 10 other scholars have written 23 historiographical essays contained in an excellent volume covering all aspects of the war. Authors of the best articles are Allan R. Millett, Rosemary Foot, Hakjoon Kim, and James I. Matray, who describe works covering military, diplomatic, and political issues. Keith D. McFarland published last year an updated version of his annotated bibliography summarising all studies related to the war. Paul M. Edwards provided the same service in volumes on the Pusan Perimeter, the Inchon Landing and the Korean War. Inevitably, all of these publications fall out of date, with the exception of the chapter of annotations on Korean War writings in Thomas Zeiler’s *American Foreign Relations since 1600*, an annually updated internet-based summary of sources.

Future historiographies of the Korean War will assign prominence to the recent work of two scholars. First, renowned military historian Allan R. Millett now has completed two-thirds of his unprecedented three-volume account of the entire conflict. Michael D. Pearlman has written that this trilogy ‘will almost certainly be the most authoritative history of the Korean War to appear in our lifetime’. In *The War for Korea, 1945–1950: A House Burning*, Millett argued that Korea was a civil war, dating its beginning specifically to 3 April 1948 when communist-led partisans staged an uprising on Cheju island. He relies on South Korean military records and recollections to support a provocative thesis that both North and South Korea waged a people’s war to realise contrasting visions of the nation’s future. *The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North* examines the first year after North Korea’s attack. Second, Steven Casey has made a stellar contribution with his assessment of the war’s impact on US domestic affairs. Consistently escaping scholarly attention, only Paul G. Pierpaoli and John E. Wiltz have previously addressed this topic exclusively and in detail. Casey explains how Korea was difficult for two administrations to sell to the public because Americans resist fighting for anything less than complete victory. Finding the task of building and maintaining popular support too complex, US leaders achieved mixed success because they advanced a hesitant propaganda message.

Cold War assumptions influenced the authors of a long list of overviews that presented an orthodox interpretation of the Korean War before the release of archival documents. Rutherford B. Poats published a general history the year after the fighting ended. Robert Leckie, an experienced military historian, then contributed a
straightforward narrative account of the conflict eight years later, concluding that the military stalemate was a victory because UN forces repelled the invasion and inflicted a major defeat on the communists. Establishing an early interpretive baseline in 1963, T.R. Fehrenbach in his full-length study explained that the United States was not prepared militarily or mentally to fight a limited war in Korea. Military intervention, however, was critical for the preservation of American credibility and prestige. British historian David Rees relied on sounder scholarship and research in documents available at the time to publish in 1964 what stood for two decades as the standard history of the conflict. His richly detailed account praised the United States for having waged a limited war that defeated aggression. Historians apparently thought that they had received the last word on the conflict, as Korea earned its status as the forgotten war during the next decade. Harry J. Middleton, Edgar O’Ballance, and James McGovern made unimpressive contributions to the list of surveys during these years.

Most of these writers had access to Roy E. Appleman’s US Army history describing the first five months of the Korean conflict, but not all of the official studies that followed. Addressing many of the same events as Appleman but from a different perspective, James F. Schnabel focused more on explaining the development and direction of US military strategy during the first year of the war. Global responsibilities and fear of escalation in a nuclear age, he argued, justified the US decision to fight a limited war. Walter G. Hermes, Jr. covered the conflict’s last two years, discussing the truce talks and continued intense fighting at the front. Military officers sought victory, he explained, not on the battlefield but at the conference table, where politics determined exchanges and diplomacy decided the outcome. In his official history of naval operations, James A. Field Jr. documented the US Navy’s importance in supply, amphibious operations, land bombardment, and air support. Robert F. Futrell wrote – and later twice revised – an official US Air Force study providing a factual account of how air power played a vital role in US military successes in Korea, also describing the transition to use of jet fighters and internal disputes over close air support and strategic bombing. Completed over a period of nearly 20 years, Lynn Montross supervised the writing of the detailed and comprehensive official history of US Marine operations in the Korean War.

Two other official histories would exceed the US Army studies in value, referencing a fuller array of primary source documents. In the third volume of *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Schnabel and Robert G. Watson provided detailed coverage of the role the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) played in managing the Korean War, integrating discussion of wartime military matters into the larger context of US national security policy. Similarly, Doris M. Condit presented a different perspective on mainly the first year of the Korean War in the volume she contributed to the history of the Office of Secretary of Defense. Like Schnabel and Watson, she examined planning and decision making at the Pentagon, arguing that a lack of clarity about the relationship between the JCS and Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall in providing direction to General Douglas MacArthur, the head of the United Nations Command (UNC) in Korea, contributed to the mistakes that escalated the war. More
important, in 1976 the State Department had begun publishing volumes reprinting US government documents pertaining to the war years in *Foreign Relations of the United States*. Moreover, during the 1980s, access to primary documents in private manuscript collections at presidential libraries and other government archives allowed and encouraged historians to re-examine the origins and impact of the Korean War.

Historical analysis of the Korean War experienced a fundamental shift in the 1970s, as scholars had access to previously classified US documents for the pre-war years through to 1950. Rejecting the orthodox characterisation of the conflict as the consequence of external aggression, historians acknowledged the centrality of domestic factors. Some scholars insisted that the Korean conflict was a civil war, rather than an example of Soviet-inspired expansionism, even denying the Kremlin’s involvement. Bruce Cumings, the leading proponent of this interpretation, emphasised in the first volume of *The Origins of the Korean War* that a conventional war started in Korea in June 1950 because the United States blocked the triumph of a leftist revolution on the peninsula in 1945 and thereafter imposed a reactionary regime on southern Korea.\(^{14}\) While Cumings discussed internal developments in Korea before and after World War II, others were reassessing US foreign policy toward that nation during the same period. Referencing US documents at the National Archives and presidential libraries, historians wrote detailed studies of US involvement in Korea from the start of World War II to the outbreak of hostilities a decade later. William W. Stueck, Jr., Charles M. Dobbs, and James I. Matray all challenged the traditional assignment of blame to the Soviet Union for igniting the Korean War on 25 June 1950.\(^{15}\)

Contrasting sharply with previous works, histories of the war thereafter rarely excluded description of US policy toward Korea during and after World War II. Before December 1941, John Wilz traced how the United States had no vital interests in this remote East Asian nation and was largely indifferent to its fate, although it had been the first western nation to sign a treaty with Korea in 1882.\(^{16}\) But after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his advisors recognised at once the importance of this strategic peninsula for the maintenance of post-war peace in East Asia. Park Hong-kyu and Liu Xiaoyuan have criticised Washington for not supporting the claims to political legitimacy of Korean exiles in China, but Matray argued that the United States was realistic in advocating a multinational trusteeship to manage Korea’s transition to independence.\(^{17}\) At the Cairo Conference in late 1943, Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and China’s Jiang Jieshi announced that the Allies, ‘mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent’.\(^{18}\) Given the history of Sino-Russian competition for control over Korea, Roosevelt knew that it was imperative to obtain Soviet support for the Cairo Declaration and, at Yalta, he gained Joseph Stalin’s endorsement for his four-power trusteeship plan.

During the McCarthy era, Robert T. Oliver argued that just as communists in the State Department had helped Mao Zedong seize power in China, so too had they conspired to ensure Soviet control in North Korea. Korea’s partition at the 38th
parallel, according to George M. McCune and Arthur Grey, Jr., and E. Grant Meade, was part of the price that Roosevelt paid at Yalta for Soviet entry in the Pacific War.\textsuperscript{19} Mark Paul and Michael C. Sandusky set the record straight. When Harry S. Truman became president after Roosevelt’s death in April 1945, he expected Soviet actions in Korea to parallel Stalin’s expansionist policies in Eastern Europe. Within a week after taking office, Truman began to search for an alternative to trusteeship that would remove any chance for a repetition of ‘sovietisation’. The atomic bomb seemed to provide a way to avoid replication of this unhappy outcome. Japan’s prompt surrender following an atomic attack would pre-empt Soviet entry into the Pacific war and allow the United States to occupy Korea unilaterally. But Truman’s gamble failed. When the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and sent the Red Army into Korea prematurely on 12 August 1945, Truman proposed and Stalin accepted Korea’s division into Soviet and American zones of military occupation at the 38th parallel.\textsuperscript{20}

Korea soon became a captive of the Cold War. Attempts at reunification began when the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to implement a new trusteeship plan after the Moscow Conference in late 1945. Eighteen months of intermittent negotiations at a Joint Soviet–American Commission would fail to produce agreement on a representative group of Koreans to form a provisional government. Meanwhile, political and economic conditions in southern Korea deteriorated, prompting US occupation officials to urge military withdrawal as soon as possible. As the United States demobilised, reduced defence spending intensified pressure for disengagement and ultimately forced the administration to develop a new policy. In September 1947, the JCS submitted an assessment concluding that Korea was without strategic significance, adding weight to the argument for early withdrawal. But with communist power growing in China, the Truman administration was unwilling to abandon southern Korea, fearing political criticism at home and damage to US credibility abroad.\textsuperscript{21} According to Erik Van Ree, the Soviet Union was far more purposeful, dominating northern Korea from the outset and establishing there a Stalinist satellite state. Cumings offered a very different assessment, applauding the Soviet occupation for sponsoring self-government and sweeping social and economic reforms.\textsuperscript{22}

Scholarly interest in the Soviet–American confrontation in Korea prior to June 1950 also initiated a deeper examination of the US military occupation of southern Korea from September 1945 to June 1949. A spirited debate persists among writers either directly or indirectly assigning or denying responsibility to the US Army for the civil strife raging on the peninsula for five years after the end of World War II. With little preparation, Washington redeployed the XXIV Corps under the command of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge from Okinawa to Korea to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea. John C. Caldwell and Fred Ottoboni wrote firsthand accounts of how this force of approximately 45,000 men, who knew nothing about this country’s history or culture, was not able to maintain order because Koreans wanted immediate independence, rather than occupation.\textsuperscript{23} Certainly, the greatest challenge that the US military faced in post-war Korea was establishment of cooperation and
coordination with Soviet military forces north of the 38th parallel. Donald W. Boose, Jr. has argued that the hasty US occupation was a tactical military success, but absence of a firm plan for reunification and civil administration created conditions that led to the Korean War. Historians do agree that the onset of the Cold War increased the odds against realising the US goal of creating the foundation for post-war economic development and democracy in a united Korea.

Accounts of the US occupation of southern Korea differ sharply in their assessment of the performance of the American military. Defenders attribute failures to US officials in Washington, pointing out that Hodge did not receive any detailed instructions to govern his operations until nine months after arrival. Donald S. Macdonald, who was an officer in the XXIV Corps, acknowledged the mistakes of the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), but insisted that, despite very limited resources, it succeeded in mitigating human suffering, reviving the economy, and establishing an administrative infrastructure. Millett agreed, emphasising as well the USAMGIK’s role in promoting land reform. Both Millett and Gregg Brazinsky also lauded the work of American military advisors in building a constabulary army after 1946 that became the nucleus for the army of the Republic of Korea (ROK). By contrast, Cho Soon-sung argued that the USAMGIK should have been just as proactive in returning the Korean Provisional Government from exile in China and placing it in power in the south alone. This would have avoided the unwise US decision to advocate a Korean trusteeship that Choi Sang-Yong blames for creating an internal cold war in southern Korea. Using Korean sources, Jeon Sang-sook documents how US occupation officials betrayed Korean moderates who were working for factional reconciliation.

Other writers contend that the US military followed the Japanese colonial model in establishing an authoritarian government in southern Korea. McCune and Grey criticised Hodge and his associates for relying on wealthy landlords and businessmen who could speak English for advice, culminating in their appointment to top positions in a subsequent interim government. Not only had many of these individuals collaborated with the Japanese, but, as Carl Berger stressed, they had little interest in acting positively on the demands of Korean peasants and workers for reform. Matray targets Hodge as primarily responsible for the failures of the occupation, pointing to his administrative inexperience, visceral anti-communism, and obsession with maintaining security. All these writers join Cumings in emphasising how the US military recruited right-wing extremists who had served in the Japanese Army as officers in the Korean constabulary army. Moreover, the USAMGIK tolerated rightist paramilitary units that terrorised and murdered leftist politicians and their suspected sympathisers. Park Chan-Pyo agreed that US military officials wanted to build an anti-communist bulwark in South Korea, but assigned credit to them for imposing democratic procedures and institutions that made possible later triumph of a democratic polity.

Cold War demands on US resources ultimately forced President Truman to approve planning for withdrawal of American forces from Korea. Washington also referred the
Korean issue to the United Nations in September 1947, which resulted in passage of a resolution in November calling for reunification after internationally supervised nationwide elections. The Truman administration, knowing that the Soviet Union would refuse to cooperate with this plan, had shifted its policy to pursuing the creation of a separate government in southern Korea ultimately capable of defending itself. While the United States provided military and economic aid, a stamp of legitimacy from the United Nations would further enhance South Korea’s chances of survival. Leland M. Goodrich and Leon Gordenker have provided coverage of how the United Nations, bowing to American pressure, supervised and certified as valid elections in the south alone during May 1948, resulting in the formation of the ROK the following summer. The Soviet Union responded in kind, sponsoring the formation in September of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). And so the post-war great powers created two Koreas. While President Syngman Rhee built a repressive, dictatorial, and anti-communist regime in the south, Kim Il Sung followed the Soviet model for political, economic, and social development in the north.

These events magnified the need for prompt US withdrawal, since Stalin, acting on a North Korean request, announced that Soviet troops would pull out of the north by the end of 1948. The Truman administration had already taken steps to provide South Korea with the ability to defend itself against anything less than a full-scale invasion. By then, Peter Clemens and Millett document how a dedicated and skilled US Army advisory team under direction of the talented and tireless Captain James Hausman had trained and equipped an army cadre of 25,000 men in the south. US military advisors had also supervised formation and training of a National Police Force. Despite these internal security forces and the continuing presence of US troops, the new government faced violent opposition from the start, climaxing in October 1948 with the Yosu-Sunchon rebellion. US military advisors played a central role in helping purge leftists and then supervised a dramatic improvement in the ROK Army prior to and after American military withdrawal. Robert K. Sawyer and Walter G. Hermes, Jr. have written the official history of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) that describes the activities and impact of these US officers and enlisted men before and during the Korean War. Despite plans to leave the south by the end of 1948, Truman delayed military withdrawal until 29 June 1949.

KMAG training of the ROK Army was so successful that confident South Korean officers began to initiate provocative attacks northward across the 38th parallel beginning in the summer of 1949. John Merrill has described the series of major border clashes that these assaults ignited with North Korean forces, often involving battalion-sized units. A kind of war, he argues, was already underway on the peninsula when the conventional phase of the conflict began on 25 June 1950. Fears that Rhee might initiate an offensive to achieve forcible reunification caused the Truman administration to maintain limits on the ROK’s military capabilities, for example denying its requests for tanks, heavy artillery, and warplanes. Berger, Cho, and Dobbs, among other writers, sharply criticised the United States for not building a stronger South Korean military force and inviting an attack from North Korea.
D. Buhite, Matray, and Ronald L. McClothlen countered that Washington, reflecting its strained resources, was in fact implementing a policy of qualified containment in Korea. Before withdrawal, the Truman administration had undertaken a commitment to train, equip, and supply a security force in the south that was able to maintain internal order and deter an attack from North Korea. It also submitted to Congress a three-year programme of economic aid for recovery and self-sufficient growth.\footnote{35}

To build political support for the Korean aid package, Acheson delivered an address before the National Press Club on 12 January 1950 that presented an optimistic assessment of the ROK’s future. Six months later and thereafter, critics charged that his exclusion of South Korea from the American ‘defensive perimeter’ gave the communists a ‘green light’ to launch an invasion. Matray has provided evidence, however, that Acheson’s words had almost no effect on communist planning for the invasion.\footnote{36} Moreover, by June 1950, the US policy of containment in Korea through economic means appeared to be experiencing marked success. The ROK had acted vigorously to control spiralling inflation and elections during May had given Rhee’s opponents control in the legislature. As important, the ROK Army had virtually eliminated guerrilla activities threatening internal order, causing the Truman administration to consider a sizeable increase in military aid. While Washington was willing to wait for Moscow’s artificial client state in the north to collapse, Rhee was vocal in calling for military reunification. The ROK’s rising strength had a significant impact on Stalin, who was concerned about the military threat that South Korea posed to North Korea’s survival.\footnote{37}

Before Soviet documents became available, the issue Korean War scholars debated most fiercely was how the conflict began. US officials never doubted for a moment that Stalin ordered the invasion. On 27 June 1950, just two days after the North Korean attack, President Truman put in place the foundation for initial historical analysis of the conflict when he declared that ‘communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war.’\footnote{38} The accounts of Generals Mark W. Clark, J. Lawton Collins, and Matthew B. Ridgway proceeded on this assumption. George F. Kennan, the father of the containment strategy, disagreed, asserting instead that the Soviets saw conquest of Korea as a way to weaken the US position in Japan.\footnote{39} Surprisingly, some writers challenged the Truman administration’s stated position during the war. For example, Wilbur W. Hitchcock claimed that Kim Il Sung ‘jumped the gun’ and attacked South Korea before the Soviet Union was ready for the invasion. For proof, he pointed to the Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council that prevented Moscow from vetoing the resolutions justifying UN military action to defend the ROK. According to I.F. Stone, Rhee had purposely initiated the border clashes to provoke North Korea’s retaliatory attack. He then portrayed the orderly retreat of South Korean forces as a military debacle to persuade Truman to commit US troops and save his corrupt regime.\footnote{40}

Neither the Hitchcock nor Stone interpretation had won many adherents as the fighting in Korea ended. Thereafter, Truman’s description of the war as the result of Soviet-inspired external aggression held for two decades, largely because Soviet—
American relations remained acrimonious. Consensus on the reasons for the Korean War brought a predictable shift toward investigation of other issues. For example, if the United States had decided before June 1950 to abandon South Korea, it begged the question of why Truman would reverse the policy and order military intervention. Glenn D. Paige examined this decision-making process in detail, praising Truman for being calm and rational in selecting the right choices. Ernest R. May then elaborated on Paige’s claim that avoiding appeasement was Truman’s primary motive. Robert E. Osgood and Morton H. Halperin just added details to orthodoxy when, in referring to Truman’s action in Korea, they extolled the virtues of resisting pressure for military escalation and fighting limited war in a nuclear age. Bernard Brodie explored the relationship between war and politics in his examination of twentieth century conflicts, focusing analysis in the second half of his study on Korea. More recently, Jennifer Millikin examined the behaviour of the major players in the first year of the war to develop a theoretical model to explain interaction among nations in international affairs, speculating on the impact if the Soviets had vetoed the UN resolutions.

Meanwhile, a left-revisionist interpretation had emerged to challenge the traditional view that assigned responsibility to the Soviet Union for starting the Cold War. These writers contended that the United States had used superior economic power and an atomic monopoly in an effort to establish global political dominance in the post-war era. Denna Frank Fleming advanced a left-revisionist assessment of Korea in his two-volume study of the Cold War. Ironically, Korea otherwise escaped reinterpretation at first. American involvement in Vietnam, however, transformed left-revisionism into a plausible and legitimate explanation for the Korean conflict. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko and Karunakar Gupta boldly charged that South Korea’s attack was an act of self-defence. The most important impact of these revisionist accounts was to spark interest in the civil origins of the Korean War. Former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev added impetus to this trend when he reported that Stalin approved North Korea’s attack with great reluctance because he feared US intervention. Robert R. Simmons claimed Moscow and Pyongyang had decided on 15 August 1950 as an invasion date, but the attack came two months earlier because of the political rivalry between Kim Il Sung and Foreign Minister Pak Hon-yong.

During the 1980s, left-revisionism peaked in popularity, as most scholars accepted the accuracy of the Cumings interpretation that the Korean conflict was in fact a civil war. Peter Lowe, Burton I. Kaufman, and Callum MacDonald all presented North Korea’s attack as entirely Kim Il Sung’s decision, minimising or even excluding Soviet involvement. Jon Halliday and Cumings wrote that Rhee had sent his forces across the parallel before dawn on 25 June 1950 to provoke a communist invasion and prompt US military intervention, thereby setting the stage for the ROK’s conquest of North Korea. In 1990, Cumings would describe this ‘trap theory’ in more detail in the second volume of his *The Origins of the Korean War*. But the rising consensus that Korea was a classic civil war ended abruptly the next year with Russia’s release of Soviet documents following the fall of the Soviet Union. Sergei Goncharov, John W. Lewis,
and Xue Litai were among the first scholars to use these sources to eliminate any remaining doubts about Stalin’s direct role in the planning and preparations for the North Korean invasion. Just as important, they demonstrated that throughout 1949, Stalin consistently refused to approve Kim Il Sung’s persistent requests to authorise an attack on South Korea. The Soviet leader believed that the DPRK still lacked military superiority over the ROK, but that autumn the Communist victory in China placed pressure on Stalin to show support for the same outcome in Korea. 48

Access to Soviet documents renewed emphasis on international factors as decisive in explaining the origins of the Korean War. Almost immediately, a right-revisionist perspective on the conflict revived key orthodox arguments. Kathryn Weathersby advanced this interpretive approach in a string of important articles that emphasised the DPRK’s total dependence on the Soviet Union. She assigned responsibility for the North Korean invasion to Stalin’s obsession with aggressive expansion. 49 Stueck, however, would provide the fullest elaboration of right-revisionism in his The Korean War: An International History, where he argued that US military intervention in Korea promoted world stability because it deterred future Soviet adventurism. His first of six main conclusions asserted that multinational involvement dictated the origins and nature of the Korean War. Second, the UN role was more critical role in restraining the superpowers than in practising collective security. Third, internal factors determined the calculations of the main actors often more than battle imperatives. Fourth, Korea expanded US military commitments globally. Fifth, the conflict militarised the Cold War and undermined bipolarity. Finally, fear of showing weakness caused the major players not to inhibit the war’s larger negative impact. Stueck later published a synthetic account of the war to popularise right-revisionism. Posing questions throughout, he delivered answers closer to orthodoxy than left-revisionism. 50

Reading the same sources as Weathersby and Stueck, Evgeni Bajanov, Alexandre Y. Mansourov, and Shen Zhihua, among other scholars, disagreed with the right-revisionists. They insisted that Kim Il Sung made the decision for war and Stalin agreed with reluctance because he feared US military intervention. Indeed, in January 1950, Stalin discussed Kim Il Sung’s plans with him personally in Moscow, but, despite Acheson’s Press Club speech, he was not ready to give final consent for an invasion. At that time, he did authorise a major expansion of North Korea’s military capabilities, but this may have had as much to do with fortifying the DPRK’s defences as preparing for an offensive southward. When they met during April, Kim Il Sung persuaded Stalin that a military victory would be quick and easy, largely because of support from southern guerrillas and an expected popular uprising against Rhee’s regime. Stalin still feared US military intervention, advising Kim Il Sung that he could stage his invasion only if China’s Mao Zedong approved. During May, Kim went to Beijing to gain Chinese consent for the invasion. Significantly, Mao also voiced concern that the United States would act to defend South Korea, but gave his reluctant consent as well. 51 In a failed attempt to reconcile these conflicting views, Kim Chull Baum and Matray suggested that Korea might be defined best as an ‘international civil war’. 52
Neither Truman nor Acheson gave any thought in their memoirs to the domestic origins of the Korean War. The president equated Stalin’s behaviour in Korea with Adolf Hitler’s aggression during the 1930s, arguing that if the North Korean aggression went ‘unchallenged, the world was certain to be plunged into another world war.’ Orthodox writers would heap praise on Truman for acting with swiftness and courage to halt the communist invasion, but he in fact would delay for a week before committing US ground forces. After meeting with his top advisors at Blair House on 25 June 1950 to consider the Korean crisis, the president referred the matter instead to the UN Security Council and banked on South Korea’s ability with largely indirect US help to defend itself. At a 29 June press conference, Truman was still optimistic that a total commitment was avoidable, agreeing with a newsman’s description of the war as a ‘police action’ rather than coining the phrase himself. The following day, Truman deployed US ground troops in Korea after General MacArthur advised that without them, communist conquest of South Korea was certain. Fifteen nations would join the United States in responding to a UN Security Council resolution calling for defence of the ROK and a sizeable literature addresses their contributions but space limitations prevent discussion of these works in this essay.

An extensive literature covers with varying degrees of detail the political and military developments that followed during the Korean War. Beginning in 1982, Joseph C. Goulden wrote an entertaining narrative targeted at a popular audience. Bevin Alexander, an army historian during the war, provided sweeping coverage of events both in Washington and on the battlefield. While the United States won the first war against aggression, it lost the second because it failed to reunite Korea or weaken China. Clay Blair’s detailed account of the ground war benefited from his military experience. British historian Max Hastings linked Korea with the Vietnam War, attributing military failures to the inability of US infantrymen to execute a strategy based on sophisticated military technology against a lightly equipped force in a divided country with a primitive economy. Two more recent popular histories covered familiar ground but offered contrasting judgements on the wisdom of US military involvement. Richard Whelan faulted US leaders for risking another world war to save a corrupt and authoritarian regime. Replicating his typically sweeping style and vivid prose, John Toland praised the heroism of US soldiers in taking the first step toward winning the Cold War. Flaws of fact and interpretation appear throughout the works of Stanley Sandler and Dennis D. Wainstock. James Stokesbury, Michael Hickey, Brian Catchpole, and David Halberstam also have written full studies of the Korean War.

On 7 July 1950, the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorising creation of the UNC and calling on Truman to appoint the UNC commander, who immediately named MacArthur for the job. At first, US forces suffered a string of defeats. By 20 July, the Korean People’s Army (KPA) had shattered five US battalions and moved 100 miles south of Seoul, the ROK’s capitol. Six days later, MacArthur travelled to Korea and told Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, commander of the US Eighth Army, that he would not tolerate further retreat. Walker then issued his ‘stand or die’ order, but
the KPA continued to advance. As the United States sent to Korea more troops, equipment, arms and supplies, US forces withdrew to the Pusan Perimeter, a rectangular area in the south-east corner of the peninsula. Then and later, Walker was the target of blame for battlefield defeats. But Robert A. Cole instead faulted MacArthur for sending into battle poorly trained and armed soldiers with no sense of purpose and low morale. Geoffrey Perret and Stanley Weintraub concurred, but criticised MacArthur as well for running the war by ‘remote control’ from Tokyo and not relieving ineffectice officers. Uzal W. Ent, a retired US Army brigadier general, defended Walker, praising him as a strong, determined, and successful leader.59

South Korean troops were targets during and after the war of criticism for displaying neither will nor skill in weakly resisting the communist advance. US soldiers and war correspondents regularly reported examples of the corruption, incompetence, and brutality of ROK officers. Experiences with the Korean Army Training with the US Army (KATUSA) programme added further disillusionment, Richard Weinart and David C. Skaggs explained, as these recruits showed little capacity to learn how to wage war from their American counterparts.60 Recent writers have labelled this criticism as unfair, insisting that ROK Army units often fought effectively under South Korean officers who were highly professional. Millett presents support for this judgement in relating ‘war stories’ from South Korean, American, and European participants in the conflict. John Kieh-chiang Oh denied that the ROK Army collapsed when North Korea invaded, emphasising how it delayed the advance toward Pusan and was responsible for the critical defence of Taegu. In his memoirs, General Paik Sun-yup, an ROK corps and division commander, blamed South Korea’s military failures on US Army policies that provided inferior equipment and limited its firepower. Kim Chum-gon, a wartime division commander, also defended the performance of the ROK Army in South Korea’s first comprehensive and detailed study of the war.61

Complete access to primary documents in South Korea would add much to existing understanding of the Korean War. Instead, the ROK government has sponsored official histories that make limited use of these materials. In 1970, the War History Compilation Committee completed nine volumes covering the war written in the Korean language. Five years later, it published a six-volume history that chronicles the military operations of United Nations forces. More accessible is the Korean Institute of Military History’s three-volume account that the University Nebraska Press has published in the English language. The first volume provides a comprehensive account of the ROK Army’s performance from the period before North Korea’s invasion to Chinese intervention. Relying on Soviet and Chinese documents and firsthand experiences, it stresses the valour and sacrifice of the ROK soldiers in the operations along the Naktong and the counteroffensive northward. Volume two then examines the actions of the ROK Army to the start of the armistice negotiations in July 1951. It provides a detailed description of China’s decision to intervene and success in driving UN forces out of North Korea, then covering the UNC counterattack in early 1951, the Chinese Spring Offensives, and the arrival at military stalemate that June. The last
volume describes the final two years of the war, discussing the truce talks and ending with a summary of the Geneva Conference in April 1954. Despite the UNC’s seemingly desperate situation in July 1950, MacArthur devised plans for a counteroffensive in coordination with an amphibious landing behind enemy lines that would permit him to ‘compose and unite’ Korea. But the JCS had serious reservations about MacArthur’s intention to land at the port of Inchon, 20 miles west of Seoul, because of its narrow access, high tides, and seawalls. MacArthur justified his optimism and persistence when the Inchon Landing on 15 September was a stunning success that reversed the course of the Korean War. It allowed Walker’s forces to break out of the Pusan Perimeter and move north to join with the X Corps, liberating Seoul two weeks later and sending a routed KPA back north of the parallel. Robert D. Heinl, a participant as US Marine colonel, has written in his authoritative study that his comrades overcame government indecision and inter-service bickering to achieve victory. Both Walt Sheldon and British historian Michael Langley, however, assign near exclusive credit for the success at Inchon to MacArthur. Since the landing – labelled ‘Operation Common Knowledge’ in press reports at the time – was no secret, they insist that this military triumph was the direct result of the superior planning, leadership, courage, determination, and luck of MacArthur.

During the last week of September 1950, UNC forces were poised for an advance across the 38th parallel. US leaders realised that extending hostilities northward risked Soviet or Chinese entry and possibly a global war. Therefore, President Truman’s plan for the conquest of North Korea, which he approved on 1 September, included important precautions. First, only Korean forces would advance into the most northern provinces. Second, Washington would obtain explicit UN support for reunification. After the DPRK refused to surrender, the United Nations passed a resolution of 7 October providing specific authorisation for MacArthur to ‘ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea’. Historians agree that the UNC military offensive into North Korea was an incredible blunder because it provoked Chinese intervention. Administration officials later tried to deflect blame to MacArthur for the disastrous consequences of invading North Korea. Early writers endorsed this official interpretation. For example, Martin Lichterman, Rees, and Ridgway attributed the US decision to cross the parallel as a product of inadvertence, rather than design, characterising it as the product of ‘military momentum’ and ‘a surge of optimism’ after the exhilarating Inchon Landing.

Other writers rightly assigned blame for the ill-considered US decision for pursuit of forcible reunification to Truman. Trumbull Higgins and Ronald J. Caridi identify political motivation, arguing that the president was hoping to boost the Democratic Party’s prospects in the November elections. For Walter LaFeber and Barton J. Bernstein, however, a more purposeful goal was scoring a political victory in the Cold War. Stueck and Kaufman have stressed that maintaining US credibility required pursuing Korea’s reunification. But Matray has viewed the decision to cross the parallel as a product of Truman’s belief that conquest of North Korea would allow a united Korea to choose freely to follow the US model of economic, social, and political
development. Many of his advisors had begun to lobby during July for forcible reunification once the UNC had thrown communist forces out of the south. State Department official John M. Allison successfully overcame Acheson’s initial opposition, arguing that the United States should destroy North Korea’s army and then sponsor free elections for a government to rule a united Korea. US military leaders were reluctant to back this drastic change in war aims. But on 31 July, after defensive lines stabilised, the JCS advised Truman that occupying North Korea would be desirable if the Soviets did not intervene. During early August, Truman made his choice and authorised the development of plans to achieve forcible reunification.  

Xia Yafeng recently published a superb survey of the writings of Chinese scholars on the Korean War. Allen S. Whiting, Russell Spurr, and Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai are among those writers who have argued that China intervened in the Korean War because the UNC advance to the Yalu constituted a grave threat to its national security. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) was furious when Truman ordered the deployment of the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait on 27 June because this prevented Beijing from removing the nationalist redoubt on Taiwan. In late July, MacArthur visited the island and stated plans to strengthen the military capabilities of Jiang Jieshi’s regime. Much to Truman’s chagrin, the militantly anti-communist general then dispatched a massive to the Veterans of Foreign Wars which appeared to threaten the PRC. Nevertheless, China tried to avoid war. On 2 October, Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai warned the Indian ambassador that China would intervene in Korea if US forces crossed the parallel. US officials thought the Chinese were bluffing. At a meeting on Wake Island on 15 October, MacArthur told Truman that China would not intervene. Even after the first clash between UN troops and Chinese ‘volunteers’ later that month, the general was supremely confident. On 24 November, he launched his ‘Home by Christmas Offensive’, with US troops in the vanguard. China then counterattacked in force, sending UN troops into a rapid mass retreat.  

China’s decision to intervene in the Korean War has received a thorough re-examination in recent years as a result of access to new information from the communist side. Chen Jian, Zhang Shu Guang, and Michael M. Sheng contend that safeguarding the Chinese–Korean border was not the primary reason for the Chinese entry into the Korean War. Mao Zedong, Chen Jian writes, sought ‘to win a glorious victory’ that would restore China’s world status as the ‘Central Kingdom’. He also wanted to repay a debt to North Korea, which had sent thousands of soldiers to fight in the Chinese Civil War. Furthermore, after the Inchon Landing, Stalin had been pressing Beijing to intervene and pledged Soviet air support. Some top PRC leaders opposed military intervention, but Mao used his authority and persuasive skill to convince his comrades that US conquest of North Korea would shatter China’s credibility and prestige in Asia. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue and Mansurov claimed that China balked in early October when Stalin reneged on his promise of air support, but then intervened to avert Kim Il Sung’s creation of an exile government in Manchuria. According to Chen, Zhang, and Sheng, however, Chinese entry was
inevitable because the triumph of Mao’s revolutionary nationalist programme was so vital to the PRC’s future success.72

During December 1950, MacArthur publicly defended his advance to the Yalu as a ‘reconnaissance in force’ that had exposed a communist trap and averted disaster. He had already ridiculed Britain’s ‘buffer zone’ proposal and criticised US allies for blocking approval of ‘hot pursuit’ and bombing the Yalu bridges. MacArthur pressed for adoption of his ‘Plan for Victory’ that proposed blockading China’s coast, bombing of military installations in Manchuria, using Chinese nationalist forces in Korea, and staging an assault from Taiwan against the mainland. Rosemary Foot documented how the JCS, despite later denials, seriously considered implementing these actions prior to receiving favourable reports from the battlefront late in December. Roger Dingman has shown that the president was prepared to use atomic weapons, an option that he had under consideration since the outset of the war.73 After Chinese intervention, Truman wanted to fight a ‘limited war’ in Korea to accomplish the original objective of restoring the pre-war status quo. MacArthur opposed this strategy, arguing that escalation or evacuation was the only option. By March 1951, however, General Matthew B. Ridgway, having replaced Walker who had died in a jeep accident in December 1950, had proven that the administration’s limited war strategy was feasible, driving Chinese communist forces back into North Korea.74

Few American military leaders have attracted the attention of biographers more than General Douglas MacArthur. In this essay, there is neither reason nor space to consider accounts that cover his entire career. But a handful of works concentrate on the general’s performance and eventual recall in the Korean War. In the third volume of his authoritative biography, D. Clayton James provided a sympathetic treatment of MacArthur’s conduct of the war, although he records how the general regularly ignored, exceeded, or violated instructions from the JCS. By contrast, Weintraub has portrayed MacArthur as a duplicitous, lying self-promoter, who as commander of the UNC was uninformed, indecisive, and incompetent. Michael Schaller and Russell D. Buhite concurred, arguing that the general’s reputation exceeded achievements, as well as criticising his mixing of partisan politics and military affairs. Higgins interpreted the clash between the Truman administration and MacArthur over conduct of the conflict as the result of waging a limited war that created strains in the relationship between military and civilian command. Truman’s decision to recall MacArthur in April 1951 was, Higgins explained, a result of a fundamental disagreement over military strategy. Weintraub was far less generous to MacArthur, but insisted that he engineered his dismissal to create public outrage and gain election as president.75

In March 1951, Truman’s plans to propose a ceasefire set the stage for the recall MacArthur. Richard Rovere and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and John W. Spanier established the consensus that still commends Truman for preserving the constitutional principle of civilian control over the military.76 Most recently, Burton I. Kaufman and Michael D. Pearlman affirmed this conclusion. Pearlman, however, places the Truman–MacArthur relationship in the even broader context of
administration politics, US relations with European allies, and a longstanding clash between the two on policy toward nationalist China. In the first of two acts of insubordination, MacArthur scuttled Truman’s planned peace initiative, issuing to China a humiliating public ultimatum demanding immediate surrender. Then, just weeks later, Republican Congressman Joseph W. Martin read a letter from MacArthur on the floor of the US House of Representatives charging the Truman administration with appeasement in Korea. This directly violated a JCS directive of 6 December 1950 that required all government officials to obtain clearance for public comments on the war. Truman relieved MacArthur on 11 April, but his reasons related to military strategy and alliance politics. Michael Schaller has shown how preparations to make atomic weapons available for the UNC commander to use in response to a major communist escalation in Korea caused fears that MacArthur might provoke an incident to widen the war.77

Neither Truman nor his advisors ever completely embraced limited war as the US strategy in Korea. Chinese intervention had created an atmosphere of supreme crisis in Washington as Truman declared a state of national emergency. His comment at a press conference early in December about MacArthur possibly having power to use atomic weapons to halt the Chinese offensive caused US allies to fear another world war was near. Barton J. Bernstein argues that the Truman administration at that moment was giving serious thought to using the atomic bomb in Manchuria. Ridgway’s success in halting the UNC’s retreat and then restoring the front near the 38th parallel removed the immediate necessity to consider this option. But by spring 1951, Truman had approved a blockade of the China coast and bombing of Manchuria if UNC forces faced annihilation or China expanded the war beyond Korea. Conrad Crane documents how the US military’s plans at this time included the possible use of nuclear weapons. Roger M. Anders confirms that the JCS persuaded Truman in April 1951 to secure the transfer nine atomic bombs from the custody of the Atomic Energy Commission to the US Air Force. Sean L. Malloy shows how pressure to break the military stalemate caused Truman to consider nuclear options seriously, but he never could find a way to transform this power into effective diplomatic leverage.78

Meanwhile, MacArthur’s recall had ignited a firestorm of public criticism against Truman and the war. The general returned home to tickertape parades and delivered a televised address defending his actions before a joint session of Congress, declaring that there was ‘no substitute for victory’. During Senate hearings on his firing in May and later in his memoirs, MacArthur denied he was guilty of insubordination.79 General Omar N. Bradley, the JCS chair, made the administration’s case, arguing persuasively that enacting MacArthur’s proposals would lead to ‘the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy’. Meanwhile, during April and May, the UNC had repulsed two huge Chinese communist offensives, establishing a defensive position just north of the parallel. Stalemate on the battlefield persuaded the belligerents to seek an armistice. After Soviet UN Ambassador Jacob A. Malik publicly advocated a ceasefire late in June, armistice negotiations opened on 10 July at Kaesong. Washington was determined to limit the discussions to military matters, thus
preventing the PRC from exploiting the talks to gain admission to the United Nations or control over Taiwan. As a consequence, both belligerents appointed military officers, rather than diplomats, as the main negotiators, reducing, as Foot has emphasised, the prospects for flexibility and compromise.80

Boose has provided a succinct and balanced description of the armistice talks, attributing the inability to achieve a quick armistice to the lack of direct diplomatic contact between the main belligerents, preconceptions derived from cultural differences, domestic politics on both sides, the isolation and bleak austerity of the conference site, but most important the intensity of clashing national interests. Xia relies on Chinese sources in supporting many of the same judgements. North Korea and China created an acrimonious atmosphere at the outset with efforts to humiliate its adversary, but the United States raised the first major roadblock when it proposed a demilitarised zone that extended deep into North Korea. Both shared responsibility for communist suspension of the talks in August after an alleged UNC violation of the neutral zone. Two months later, talks would resume after Ridgway forced movement of the negotiating site to Panmunjom, six miles east of Kaesong. Swift agreement followed that the demilitarised zone would correspond to the line of battle. Negotiators then approved inspection procedures to enforce the armistice, as well as a post-war political conference to discuss withdrawal of foreign troops and reunification. In a trade-off, the UNC accepted airfield rehabilitation and the communists dropped their demand for Soviet membership on a neutral supervisory commission. Ten months after talks began, there would have been an armistice had negotiators not deadlocked over exchange of prisoners of war (POWs).81

Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, chief UNC negotiator until May 1952, wrote his own account of the talks in which he condemns his Communist counterparts for stalling and stubbornness in preventing a settlement. He also criticised the Truman administration for allowing the enemy to gain concessions at the truce table that it could not win on the battlefield. Allen E. Goodman carefully edited a printed version of the diary Joy kept during the negotiations that records his unpleasant experiences in intricate detail. William H. Vatcher, Jr., the UNC psychological warfare advisor in Korea, seconded Joy’s assessment, as well as blaming Washington for imposing limitations both on the negotiators and on the battlefield that prevented an early settlement and unnecessarily prolonged the war.82 By contrast, Foot has emphasised concessions the communists made, characterising the United States as truculent because, accustomed to total victory, it did not want to negotiate with an enemy it could not defeat militarily. Sydney D. Bailey, in his coverage of the truce talks, blamed slow progress on the fact that United States did not have direct diplomatic access to the Chinese or North Koreans, forcing Washington to rely on intermediaries that US leaders considered untrustworthy or inept. He was sharply critical of the United States, however, for ignoring the United Nations both in determining the conduct of military operations and the course of peace negotiations in Korea.83

Events at the armistice negotiations influenced how US civilian and military leaders made decisions about conducting the war. For example, after the communist side
adjourned the talks in August 1951, US B-29 bombers carried out mock atomic bombing test runs over North Korea in September and October to intimidate and punish the communist negotiators. Following suit, the Chinese government early in 1952 began publicising charges that the United States was waging bacteriological warfare in Korea. Secretary of State Acheson vehemently denied these claims and demanded an international investigation, but North Korea and China stymied International Red Cross efforts to do so. After examining the issue, both John Gittings and Crane endorse as accurate US denial of communist charges about the UNC’s alleged use of both biological and chemical warfare. Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagerman, by contrast, point to evidence of American guilt. But Weathersby has relied on Soviet and Chinese documents to show that these Chinese charges were false, as well as communist efforts to hide their prevarication. Milton Leitenberg referenced Soviet documents to reveal that in 1953, Moscow told its Korean and Chinese allies to cease making unsubstantiated accusations about germ warfare.

Orthodox works on the Korean War stressed the humanitarian motivation behind the inflexible refusal of the United States to return communist POWs to China and North Korea against their will, endorsing Truman’s explanation at the time for his decision. Foot and Bernstein insisted, however, that the president’s main goal was to win a propaganda victory in the Cold War, which necessitated a misrepresentation of the facts. The US stand on the principle of non-forcible repatriation directly contradicted the Geneva Convention, which required, as the communist side demanded, the return of all POWs. Far worse was the Truman administration’s purposeful decision to allow the perception that those POWs refusing repatriation were communists defecting to the ‘Free World’. Gavan McCormack and Kaufman have noted that the vast majority of North Korean POWs were actually South Koreans who either had joined voluntarily or had been impressed into the KPA. Thousands of Chinese POWs were Nationalist soldiers trapped in China when the civil war ended who now had the chance to escape to Taiwan. Moreover, Chinese Nationalist guards at UN POW camps used terrorist ‘re-education’ tactics to force prisoners to refuse repatriation. Foot, Goodman, and MacDonald documented how those who resisted risked beatings or death.

In May 1952, the UNC’s brutal suppression of a communist POW uprising at the Koje-do POW compound provided substantiation for the enemy’s charges of inhumane treatment. That summer, massive UNC bombing raids devastated the north, but failed to force communist concessions at Panmunjom. Despite intense efforts at the United Nations, the armistice talks adjourned in October 1952. The next month, angry American voters elected Dwight D. Eisenhower president largely because they expected him to end what had become a very unpopular war in Korea. Fulfilling a campaign pledge, the general visited the Korean battlefront during December, concluding that further ground assaults would be futile. But Edward C. Keefer and Stueck have shown that the new president thought seriously about using expanded conventional bombing and threats of a nuclear attack on China. Eisenhower insisted that the PRC agreed to a ceasefire after Secretary of State John
Foster Dulles informed India’s prime minister in May 1953 that without progress toward a truce, the United States would end the existing limitations on its conduct of the war.\textsuperscript{90} Robert A. Divine, Stephen E. Ambrose, and Daniel Calingaert have argued that Beijing agreed to a truce because of US nuclear threats. Most scholars, however, share Malloy’s doubts that China was reacting to Eisenhower’s atomic diplomacy because as yet no documentary evidence has surfaced to support his assertion.\textsuperscript{91}

How Eisenhower achieved an armistice agreement on 27 July 1953 thus remains contested terrain. Edward Friedman and Foot have argued that China, facing immense domestic economic problems and wanting peaceful coexistence with the West, had already decided to make peace once Truman left office. In March, Stalin’s death only added to the Chinese sense of political vulnerability, persuading Beijing later that month to accept the UNC’s proposal for exchange of sick and wounded POWs and then recommend turning non-repatriates over to a neutral state.\textsuperscript{92} Elizabeth A. Stanley reiterates these points in a recent study, positing a ‘domestic coalition shift theory’ to explain why Moscow, Beijing, and Washington agreed to an armistice. Eisenhower’s nuclear threats, she contends, helped encourage the PRC to relent, while Keefer and Dingman have emphasised that delivery was neither clear nor forceful.\textsuperscript{93} China’s leaders, Mark A. Ryan has added, did not judge any nuclear threats as credible. Moreover, in late May and early June 1953, Chinese forces staged powerful attacks against positions that ROK units were defending along the battlefront. Far from being intimidated, Beijing thus showed its continuing resolve, using military means to persuade its adversary to compromise on the final terms of the armistice. For Thomas Allen, domestic and international pressures on the belligerents dictated the timing of the armistice agreement, specifically the lobbying of US allies on Washington and Moscow’s new leaders on Beijing to end the war quickly.\textsuperscript{94}

By January 1953, Washington and Beijing in truth welcomed an armistice. Both nations had grown tired of the economic burdens, military losses, political and military constraints, worries about an expanded war, and the pressure from allies and the world community to end the stalemated war. Food shortages in North Korea, combined with an understanding that forcible reunification was no longer possible, had persuaded Pyongyang to advocate an armistice even earlier. Moscow’s new leaders thought that a more conciliatory approach not only would reduce the risk of general war, but also might generate tensions in the Western alliance if Washington refused to reciprocate. Bailey and Stueck in fact describe how a constant succession of issues during the Korean War threatened to inflict irrevocable damage on US relations both with its allies in Western Europe and non-aligned members of the United Nations. Indeed, in May 1953, US bombing of North Korea’s dams and irrigation system ignited a new outburst of world criticism. Then, in June, Rhee, who opposed any deal that left Korea divided, almost torpedoed the pending ceasefire when he released 27,000 North Korean POWs. Eisenhower would buy Rhee’s acceptance of a ceasefire with pledges of financial aid and a mutual security pact. Fortunately, the incident only delayed until 27 July 1953 the signing of an agreement to end this brutal conflict.\textsuperscript{95}
In its April 2010 issue, the *Journal of Strategic Studies* commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the start of the conventional phase of Korea’s War, publishing six diverse articles on the topic. Stueck and Boram Yi explained how the US occupation strained bilateral relations, but fighting together created a firm alliance. Shen Zhihua traced how Stalin delayed approving Beijing’s offer to intervene after US entry because he feared a rise of Chinese influence in Korea. Robert Barnes described how the Commonwealth, when acting in unison, limited US escalation in Korea. Colin Jackson speculated that a coastal landing behind enemy lines to move the battlefront to the Pyongyang–Wonsan line in May 1951 would have resulted in an earlier and better armistice agreement. Casey showed that in Korea, casualty reports had an adverse impact on public support because scoop-seeking journalists and ambitious politicians made it so. Charles S. Young contended that US leaders found a substitute for victory in forcing the enemy to accept forcible repatriation, but could not publicise this for fear of amplifying public demands for peace. While welcome additions to the literature on the Korean War, all these essays presented the conflict as international in character. In two recent histories, Cumings and Matray have reminded readers that the war was both in name and nature Korean. Division in the scholarly perspective on the Korean War persists in an ironic replication of Korea’s fate as a nation.

**Notes**


[31] Clemens, ‘Captain James Hausman’; Millett, ‘Captain James H. Hausman’.


[33] Merrill, *Korea*.


[70] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*; Spurr, *Enter the Dragon*; Hua and Zhai, ‘China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War’. See also Hunt, ‘Beijing and the Korean Crisis’.


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120 J.I. Matray
Ruetten, ‘General Douglas MacArthur’s “Reconnaissance in Force”’; Foot, The Wrong War; Dingman, Atomic Diplomacy during the Korean War.

Roy E. Appleman has covered these military events and operations in great detail in a succession of books. Appleman, East of Chosin; idem, Escaping the Trap; idem, Ridgway Duels for Korea.

James, The Years of MacArthur, Vol. 3; Weintraub, MacArthur’s War; Schaller, Douglas MacArthur; Buhite, Douglas MacArthur; Higgins, Truman and the Fall of MacArthur.


Kaufman, ‘Harry S. Truman as War Leader’; Pearlman, Truman and MacArthur; Schaller, Douglas MacArthur.


MacArthur, Reminiscences.

Foot, A Substitute for Victory.


Joy, How Communists Negotiate; Goodman, Negotiating While Fighting; Vatcher, Panmunjom.

Foot, A Substitute for Victory; Bailey, The Korean Armistice.

Gittings, ‘Talks, Bombs and Germs’; Crane, “‘No Practical Capabilities’”; Endicott and Hagerman, The United States and Biological Warfare.


Foot, A Substitute for Victory; Bernstein, ‘The Struggle over the Korean Armistice’.

McCormack, Cold War/Hot War; Kaufman, The Korean War.

Foot, A Substitute for Victory; Goodman, Negotiating While Fighting; MacDonald, Korea.


Friedman, ‘Nuclear Blackmail and the End of the Korean War’; Foot, ‘Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict’.

Stanley, Paths to Peace. See also Keefe, ‘President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the End of the Korean War’; Dingman, Atomic Diplomacy during the Korean War.

Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons; Allen, ‘No Winners, Many Losers’.


Cumings, The Korean War; Matray, Korea Divided. See also Lee, The Korean War.

References


“Korea: Lessons and Legacies of a Memorable War”

James I. Matray, California State University, Chico

Historians acknowledge that the Korean War was long the object of unwarranted neglect, in spite of the catastrophic impact it had on the lives of the Korean people. Indeed, for more than two decades after a truce ended the fighting on 27 July 1953, scholars devoted only modest attention to examining its causes and consequences. This, combined with the lack of American public interest in the conflict, resulted in Clay Blair naming his detailed study of it *The Forgotten War* (1986). Callum A. MacDonald (1986) labeled Korea “The War Before Vietnam” and John Halliday and Bruce Cumings titled their account of the conflict *The Unknown War* (1988). Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr. (2001), who has written about the domestic impact of the war on the United States, notes that Korea was a very politicized and inconclusive limited war that Americans preferred to forget. Further, its placement between the “good war” of World War II and “bad war” in Vietnam obscured Korea. However, publication of new studies of the war in the 1980s and access to Communist sources in the 1990s revitalized the historiography of the Korean War, elevating public knowledge about the conflict. More important, some scholars concluded that the Korean conflict was the most important event of the early Cold War.

On 27 July 1995, U.S. President Bill Clinton and South Korean President Kim Yong-sam commemorated the Korean War Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., marking the 42nd anniversary of the end of the military combat phase of the war when Communist and United Nations Command (UNC) military commanders signed an armistice agreement. Some might argue that the Korean War deserves scholarly
inattention because of its lack of relevance in explaining world affairs a generation after the Soviet-American contest for global hegemony ceased to define international politics. At the start of the 21st Century, the U.S. challenge was to find a strategy to eliminate the use of terror as a political weapon and then unite the world behind its implementation. However, understanding the origins, course, and effects of the Korean War can be useful in at least two important ways. First, the conflict demonstrated the relevance of nationalism and local circumstances as important factors that affect events in human history. Second, it demonstrated how leaders may act on erroneous assumptions and dubious expectations to make decisions resulting in unintended and sometimes disastrous outcomes. Both U.S. President Harry S. Truman and his counterparts in Moscow, Beijing, P’yŏngyang, and Seoul made decisions that left Korea after three years of war still divided and in ruins.

Lessons learned in the 1930s dominated the thinking of Truman and his advisors, causing them to conclude that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had ordered North Korea to attack as part of a global plan for expansionist aggression. They viewed Korea as a regional conflict, but in the context of a global U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Thus, the vast increase in U.S. defense spending that followed was not entirely for Korea, but a large portion financed a larger deployment of U.S. forces in Western Europe and expanded military assistance to the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The United States also started to lobby for rearmament of West Germany, finally realizing this goal in 1955. Similarly, the Truman administration sharply increased military aid to Indochina, the Philippines, and the exiled Nationalist regime on Taiwan. Revolutionary unrest persisted, however, persuading U.S. leaders that the
direct application of military power could counter what they now perceived as a dire Soviet threat menacing the entire world. The United States thereafter practiced a policy of global intervention, frequently using military means to maintain the status quo, most consequently in Vietnam.

Korea reinforced the perception of American leaders that communism was a monolithic global movement under the direct control of the Kremlin, a belief that influenced U.S. foreign policy for years. But Communist sources now depict a relationship between the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) that was complex, fractious, and suspicious. A long-hidden legacy of Korea was the divisive, rather than unifying, impact of the war on this Communist alliance. Stalin, who had opposed an invasion until early 1950, was annoyed that Kim Il Sung had misled him into thinking that his forces would triumph before Washington had time to intervene. Kim, for his part, never forgot how Stalin stalled on giving approval for Chinese intervention and even was prepared to allow U.S. forces to conquer North Korea, before Mao Zedong acted to save his regime. Wartime friction grew steadily in Sino-Soviet relations as Stalin limited support for the Chinese war effort and delayed an armistice. Underestimating these divisions, Truman solidified the confrontation with Beijing when he sent the U.S. Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait at the start of the war, forestalling Communist reunification of China, and then gained passage in February 1951 of a UN resolution condemning China as an aggressor in Korea. Meanwhile, the PRC’s ability to prevent U.S. conquest of North Korea boosted its prestige in Asia.
Creation of an alliance system to block further Communist expansion in East Asia became a major strategic goal of U.S. policy after the start of the Korean War. North Korea’s attack ended division in Washington about Japan’s future, as the Pentagon agreed to an early restoration of sovereignty, and the State Department reciprocated with agreement to rearm Japan. In September 1951, the Japanese Peace Treaty resulted in independence the following spring. Simultaneously, Japan signed a separate bilateral security treaty with the United States that allowed U.S. troops to stay in Japan indefinitely. Reacting to regional fears of a revived Japan, the United States sought the parallel goal of Communist containment when it negotiated security agreements with a series of nations in East Asia. In August 1951, it signed a mutual defense pact with the Philippines. The next month, the United States signed a similar agreement with Australia and New Zealand. In 1954, the U.S.-South Korea Mutual Security Treaty and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which brought Thailand into the alliance system, came into effect, while the U.S.-Republic of China (Taiwan) Mutual Defense Pact would follow in 1955. It is difficult to imagine this immense network of security relationships and concomitant projection of U.S. political and military power into the Pacific in the absence of the Korean War.

Many early writers defined the legacy of the Korean War as a victory for collective security, but U.S. control over decision-making also severely strained its relations with its allies. Nor was it necessarily an ideal example of effectively waging limited war in a nuclear age. The United States considered the use of atomic weapons from the outset without coming close to using them, while laying waste to North Korea through aerial bombardment. Many would argue that the most important lesson of
Korea is that military power is a blunt and usually ineffective instrument for resolving a political dispute. Similarly, references to the “Forgotten War” obscure what is the most significant legacy of the conflict. For Koreans, the war was the second great tragedy in their recent history after Japanese colonial rule. Not only had it caused devastation and perhaps three million deaths, it confirmed the division of a homogeneous society after centuries of unity, while permanently separating millions of families. Koreans in the north continue to live under a brutal dictatorship. In the south, the leadership pursued economic development while harshly suppressing dissent for over three decades after the war ended. Meanwhile, U.S. wartime spending jump-started Japan’s economy, which led to Korea’s former oppressor emerging as a global power. Koreans instead had to endure the living tragedy of yearning for reunification as diplomatic tension and military clashes along the demilitarized zone continued into the 21st Century. Wiser leaders—American, Korean, Russian, and Chinese—conscious of the power of nationalism and their own imperfections, would have placed a higher priority on helping meet the needs and desires of Koreans after World War II.
REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN WAR

The Korean War in American History
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Center for the Study of the Korean War
Independence, Missouri

and

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GUIDE TO THE VIDEOTAPE TEACHING UNIT BY:

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Center for the Study of the Korean War

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National Archives-Central Plains Region

1999
This video is designed to supplement readings and instruction by high school social studies teachers. It is our hope the video will spur classroom discussions and activities that will, in turn, help students to understand and appreciate the lessons, as well as the costs, of the Korean War. The video hopes to portray the military participation of American and United Nations forces, and to take a look at what was going on at home during that time.

It is anticipated that the viewing of this video, and the discussions which follow it, will follow a previous study of World War I and World War II, as well as the period between when the Second World War ended and 1950, when the Korean War began. This was a period of growth and regrouping after a major national effort, but it was also a period of considerable unrest.

The Korean War came unexpectedly and fell upon a people who felt they had already paid a great price for peace. Many were bitter about their experience, many had lost loved ones, some felt the war was wrong. Even today, discussion of the Korean War triggers an emotional response. But it is a significant part of American history, and as a key to understanding the Cold War, it needs to be understood.

Before viewing the video there would be great value in some general preparation by students and the teacher. The following are some recommendations.

* Look at a map of the Pacific and locate Korea, Japan, China, Formosa.
* Identify primary materials that might be of help in learning more about the Korean War. These ideas will be of use when it comes to addressing the class projects suggested in this guide.
* Try and identify with the characters who appear in the video. While they are obviously actors, they nevertheless represent real persons and reflect much of what is currently known about the war.
* Talk about war. War is harsh, violent, cruel, and often very costly to the people involved. Hollywood tends to romanticize it. Take some time to discuss war in class.

Goals: After the viewing and discussions it is hoped that students would be able to do the following:

* Discuss the causes for the Korean War, including the domestic problems and the international conditions.
* Discuss American culture during the period 1948 and 1954 and to see how it was related to the war in Korea.
* Be familiar with the location and use of at least a few primary research tools, as well as some secondary sources that deal with the Korean War.
* Be able to compare their contemporary American life with the life of someone who was 15 years old in 1950.
In order to encourage discussion, a brief commentary is provided about each segment, followed by a series of questions concerning the segment. The film is a conversation between the student whom we call Nick, his mother, the teacher Mrs. Atkins, the voice of a young Marine, and Mr. Empey, a veteran of the Korean War. The student discovers some unusual items in the family attic, which cause him to ask questions about the Korean War. His mother and his teacher try and help provide the answers. Eventually, Mr. Empey is invited into the discussion to share his wartime experience. On several occasions, you heard the voice of a young man who, aged 22, was a lieutenant in the Marines. The words come from the actual letters and diary of such a person.

While the questions are designed to spark discussion, the best conversations will emerge if the students, after watching the film, come up with questions of their own. They should be encouraged to do so.

I. Notes on Segment One:

Having discovered some Korean War memorabilia while helping his mother clean the attic, Nick asks his teacher questions about the 1940s and 1950s, and the outbreak of the Korean War.

Questions:

The items that Nick found in the attic are called artifacts. That is, they are items and documents that portray a historical period. Have you saved such items from important events in your life? Consider why you save them, and what these items would tell some future grandchild about you and the way you lived.

If, during this time, the United States did not trust the Soviet Union, why did we agree to divide Korea with them?
What did people mean by the term Cold War? Compare the relations between the United States and Russia in 1950 and 1998.

Why would the Berlin Blockade have anything to do with a war in Korea? Relate the events in the other parts of the world with what was happening in Korea during the 1940s and 1950s.

Senator Joseph McCarthy led the fight against communists in American government. Were there communists in the American government at this time? If America is free, and people are allowed to think what they want, why were the people so willing to support McCarthy in his anti-communist attacks?

II. Segment Two

In a continuing conversation with his teacher, Nick discovers that the events behind the outbreak of war were not simple, but involved relations between North Korea and China, China and the Soviet Union, and such other pressures as the Chinese Civil War and America's support of Nationalist China.

Nick and Mrs. Atkins discuss America's reaction, the discussions and involvement of the member nations of the United Nations, and the fact that President Truman made the decision to become involved, but did so without a formal declaration of war by the Congress.

Questions:

Mrs. Atkins tells Nick that Joseph Stalin considered a war in Korea as a means of testing the United States willingness to "fight" communism. What had happened to make Stalin question American resolve?

During this period, the Cincinnati Reds changed its name (temporarily) to the Redlegs. They would later change it back. Discuss why this change might have happened.

If fifty-one of the fifty-nine member nations approved the UN resolution to intervene in Korea, who were the nations who voted against it, and why did they vote that way?

The first Americans to face the North Koreans were not able to stop the advance. There are many reasons for this fact. Identify them and discuss why those conditions existed.

Investigate and explain how the president can involve America in a war without the permission of Congress. How was this procedure used later in American history?

One of the more important events to occur in 1948 was the order to desegregate the military. How was the military segregated before?

III. Segment Three

Following a successful landing at Inchon, and the breakout at Pusan, the United Nations forces moved across the 38th Parallel and headed for the Yalu River. The plan was to have the United Nations troops home by Christmas. China was alarmed. After issuing several warnings, the Red Chinese attacked across the Yalu and caught X Corps at Chosin and the Eighth Army in the west.
The unexpected attack and the awesome weather forced the evacuation of United Nation's troops from along both coasts.

Questions:

If Inchon was such a risk, why would the Joint Chiefs of Staff allow General MacArthur to attempt a landing there? What were the reasons why a victory there would be so important?

During the post-Inchon fighting, Communist China tried to warn the United States that if American troops crossed the 38th Parallel, China would enter the war. Why was Red China so concerned? Why did the United Nations ignore the warning? What were other options available to the United Nations at that time?

General Smith, who was involved with the Marines at Chosin, described the evacuation from the area as "Attacking in another direction." Look at the retreat and describe what other troops were there, how they got out, and how more than 100,000 people were evacuated at Hungnam.

IV. Segment Four

In order to get better first hand answers, Mrs. Atkins invites her neighbor, a Korean veteran, to talk with the student. Mr. Empey talks to Nick about the military situation and the change in the fighting from an all-out push for victory to a limited war. Truman was behind an effort at peace, but he and MacArthur disagreed and eventually the president had to relieve the general. His replacement, General Ridgway, managed to re-invigorate the United Nations forces and fought back to about the 38th Parallel. There the war settled down to a form of trench warfare much like World War I. When an armistice was finally signed, there was very little celebration or reaction. The troops went home.

Questions:

President Truman was the last American president who had the choice of a third term as president. Why did President Truman pull out of the race for the presidency?

The same National Security document that sent troops into Korea also sent advisors into Vietnam. What are the connections between these two Asian wars? Explain the differences on the home front.

Psychological warfare became very important during the Korean War. In some ways it is no different from commercials on television that are designed to make you want to buy something. Consider how many different forms of psychological warfare there are in your life. Why do you think it works so well?

After General MacArthur was fired and returned to the Unites States, why did he receive such a resounding welcome? What happened to him after he left the service?

Final Exercise.

Locate a picture of the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Look at the way the Korean War is symbolized for Americans. Consider the monument and what it means to you, and to the million or more veterans.
THE KOREAN WAR

___________. Korea and the Cold War: Division, Destruction, and Disarmament. (1993).
___________. The War in Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From the North. (2010).
Whiting, Allen S. China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War. (1960).
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## Evaluation
President Truman meets with his advisors on foreign and military affairs.

1950

Bradley
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Harriman
Special Assistant

Johnson
Secretary of Defense

Jessup
Special Ambassador to the United Nations

Truman
President of the United States

Barkley
Vice President of the United States

Ross
Press Secretary

Acheson
Secretary of State

Is the senior uniformed military advisor to the President and the secretary of defense.

Advises the President on national security policy and directs the U.S. armed forces.

Commander in chief, chief diplomat, and chief executive and administrator.

Advises and assists the president in presenting himself and his policies to the press and the public.

Like all vice-presidents his role is defined by the President.


Assists and advises the President on affairs of national security.
Advisory Evaluation Form—Module 2

As an advisor to President Truman, you are expected to have a high working knowledge of issues and events affecting the nation and the world. Briefings are being circulated on seven issues and events to a limited number of advisors including you. For quick reference in the days ahead please fill out an evaluation on the Briefings below. Use the form also to assess the importance of this briefing to your advisory role.

Briefing Title: ____________________________

Relevant Information:

• __________________________________________

• __________________________________________

Based on our assessment, we believe our advice would have been needed (check one):

A great deal □  Possibly □  Not at all □  Not sure □

Why?

__________________________________________________________

Briefing Title: ____________________________

Relevant Information:

• __________________________________________

• __________________________________________

Based on our assessment, we believe our advice would have been needed (check one):

A great deal □  Possibly □  Not at all □  Not sure □

Why?

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Briefing Title: ________________________________

Relevant Information:

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Based on our assessment, we believe our advice would have been needed (check one):

A great deal □  Possibly □  Not at all □  Not sure □

Why?

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Relevant Information:

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Why?

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Briefing Title: ________________________________

Relevant Information:

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A great deal □  Possibly □  Not at all □  Not sure □

Why?

- ________________________________

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CIA Situation Report is designed for use as a reference, analysis and interpretation of the strategic or national policy aspects of foreign situations, which affect the national security of the United States, furnished to authorized recipients.

It is suggested that the recipients retain this report, since it will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised.

WARNING

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS INFORMATION AFFECTING THE NATIONAL DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE ESPIONAGE ACT, 50 U.S.C., 31 AND 32, AS AMENDED. ITS TRANSMISSION OR THE RELEVATION OF ITS CONTENTS IN ANY MANNER TO AN UNAUTHORIZED PERSON IS PROHIBITED BY LAW.

(1948 DOCUMENT ABRIDGED AND EDITED BY THE WHITE HOUSE DECISION CENTER)
Korea is significant to the security of the US because it is the critical point of contact between the US and the USSR in the Far East. Korea is of little military value to the US, but the failure to meet our commitments regarding Korean independence would result in serious loss of prestige. From a long-range view, Korea is important to US security because Soviet control of this area would jeopardize our political aims in China and Japan, and would threaten all US security plans throughout the Pacific.

HISTORY
Koreans have maintained their isolation for centuries. Nationalism is a strong characteristic of the Korean people. Japan dominated Korea for forty years, intensifying their desire to eliminate foreign influence. Koreans fought for freedom from Japanese interference from 1919 until their independence in August 1945.

Korea is known as the Hermit Kingdom. Korea’s geographic location kept it in virtual isolation from more powerful neighbors. Korea adopted Chinese civilization from its early history until the end of the 19th century. This allegiance of Korea to China resembled the relationship of younger brother to elder brother. In this relationship with China, Korea had sufficient freedom to develop a national culture without ever achieving true autonomy.

Korea could not stay isolated forever. Once the geographic barrier was overcome, Korea became the crossroads of international conflict in Asia. Japan and China undertook the first joint occupation of Korea in 1885. China and Japan struggled with each other for domination of the peninsula. Chinese influence tended to be stronger until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1893. Japan demanded the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Korea. The expulsion of China from Korea was a victory for Japan, and a benefit for the Russians, who controlled the Maritime Province of Siberia.

For a time Russian influence replaced the Chinese. Japan contested control of Korea until the defeat of Russia in 1905. Korea kept a form of self-government under the Japan control until 1910, when the Korean king finally abdicated in favor of the Emperor of Japan. From then until its liberation by the Allies in August 1945, Korea was governed as a Japanese colony.

Koreans were generally in opposition to Japan until just before the outbreak of war in the Pacific. As war tension mounted the idea of Korean independence from Japan became more of a possibility. Factions emerged in preparation for the coming struggle for power. The Korean Provisional Government was suddenly challenged by rival organizations.

Two of the rival organizations in China, the Korean Independence League (KIL) and the one in the US, the United Korean Committee (UKC) maintained contact on an informal basis. These two groups began the Leftist opposition to Rhee Syngman the President of South Korea. They ranged from extreme pro-communism in the China group to the “liberalism” of the US group.

Following the war, the USSR took advantage and imposed full-fledged totalitarianism. on the Koreans north of the 38th parallel. Soviet strategy for achieving control is to place responsibility for

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the political and economic welfare on Soviet-recognized representatives of the Korean people. The USSR promptly packed the People’s Committee in North Korea then with native communists and organized a police state.

In South Korea, on the other hand, the US Military Government had established policies to relieve the wants of the people while educating them for eventual independence and self-government. The Military Government tried to maintain a balance among the Korean parties and guaranteed fundamental liberties.

Since the USSR began immediate implementation of Soviet policy in its zone, North Korea appeared to have moved faster toward self-government and reform than the US zone. However, US policy prepared southern Korea for a democratic form of government and self-rule, a condition not even considered in the North.

ECONOMICS
Korea has historically possessed an agricultural economy. While it was dominated by Japan it served as the “granary” to the Japanese Empire. During the 1930’s, with the Asiatic expansion, Japanese money and technology were used in Korea to build a wartime industrial superstructure. The proximity to the bituminous coal resources of North China and Manchuria along with the peninsula’s abundant supply of waterpower, iron ore, and anthracite coal created the basis for Korean industrial development.

Japan’s exploitation of the Korean economy has a direct bearing on Korea’s present economic plight. The peninsula was developed not as a self-sustaining economic unit, but as an integral part of the Japanese Empire. Development. The expansion of industry was carried out in terms of its wartime potential, and the Japanese heavily subsidized many Korean factories and mines. These enterprises would not be expected to operate as peacetime ventures.

Agriculturally and industrially, Korea was operated as a business for Japan’s financial and material gain. Little regard was ever given for the welfare of the Korean people. Native Koreans were not trained in technology to any significant extent. Korean industry was almost completely dependent upon Japan for managerial talent, capital equipment, and technical experience. Moreover, in the later stages of World War II Korea’s agricultural and industrial assets were laid to wholesale waste and despoliation\(^1\) by the Japanese.

Korea thus emerged from the War with a nearly flat economy. Its soil and forests were seriously impoverished. Its industry, transportation and communications was in a desperate state of deterioration and obsolescence. The financial structure had been nearly destroyed by the flood of currency issued by the Japanese prior to the surrender. The bulk of Korea’s foreign trade, which had been with Japan, disappeared almost overnight.

The arbitrary division of the peninsula into Soviet and US Zones has compounded post-war problems in Korea. Immediate problems of preventing disease and unrest, as well as the longer-range problem of economic rehabilitation are in need of attention. Hydroelectric power facilities, chemical (particularly fertilizer) metal and mining industries of the North form a much-needed

\(^1\) de-spoil v. to deprive of possession by force, plunder
complement to the agriculture and textile industry that dominate in southern Korea.

Conditions needed to revive agricultural production would include an adequate supply of fertilizers to southern Korea (supplies must be imported as long as the Soviets continue to withhold fertilizer surpluses manufactured in the North). Rehabilitation of Korea's badly run-down transportation system is also an immediate need.

Long-range measures are also needed, including reforestation, flood control, extension of acreage under cultivation, and completion of irrigation projects that were started by the Japanese. Any agricultural revival must reform the feudalistic land-holding system. Soviet land reform efforts in the North have been largely ineffective due to their excessive farm taxes. Land reform in the South is still in the planning stage.

Serious wartime neglect, shortages of replacement rails, construction materials, and coal have severely impaired Korea's 4000-mile rail system. By early 1947, rail transportation was in a state of near paralysis in North Korea. The lack of locomotives and rolling stock has multiplied the effects of other shortages. Rail conditions in South Korea, though far from adequate, are believed to be better than in the North.

The country's 14,000 miles of highways, serving as essential feeders to the cities and railroads, must also be rehabilitated. In South Korea, such essential construction items as asphalt and cement must be imported in quantity, since the concentration of Korea's asphalt and cement plants are north of the 38th parallel. In the Soviet zone, according to reports dated May 1947, highways are being well maintained and an extensive road repair program using compulsory labor has been instituted.

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

With the exception of waterpower—the country's most important natural asset—Korea, is not richly endowed with natural resources. Most of its mineral wealth and waterpower is located in the northern zone. Between 80% and 90% of Korea's hydroelectric power is generated by plants in North Korea. The whole electric power complex in Korea suffers from a lack of maintenance, replacement parts and technicians. In their present condition, the power plants are incapable of supporting an increase in consumer demand. The situation in the South is more uncertain since there is no guarantee that the Soviet-controlled North zone will continue supplying the South with power.

Korea possesses coal reserves estimated at nearly two billion tons, largely from the northern zone. Three-quarters of the reserves consist of low-quality anthracite. Good quality bituminous coal had to be brought in from Japan, North China, and Manchuria. The supplies from these areas are now largely cut off. Likewise coal for the production of iron and steel and coal for gas manufacture must be imported. Even if Korea returned to its wartime coal production level, and received large imports of coal from Japan, a serious coal supply problem would still exist.

Iron ore resources are also largely concentrated in North Korea. The wartime production rate of 3,400,000 tons (1944) substantially exceeded iron ore requirements of Korea's own iron and steel industry.

Both North and South Korea formerly had extensive forestlands. While North Korea is still...
substantially stocked with timber, much of South Korea’s forestland has been laid waste, largely due to heavy overcutting to provide fuel. Rapid deforestation resulted in serious soil erosion and contributed to the worst flooding in twenty years in South Korea during 1946. There is no replenishment from the Soviet Zone, greatly retarding the restoration of South Korean transportation and construction.

The bulk of Korea’s heavy manufacturing is concentrated in North Korea, where the sources of iron ore, hydro-electric power, and bituminous coal are found. Most of the chemical manufacturing, Korea’s largest pre-war industry, is north of the 38th parallel. Since the end of the war, almost no commercial fertilizers have been made available to South Korea from the northern zone, partly due to the poor condition of the fertilizer industry, and partly due to Soviet unwillingness to make fertilizer accessible.

**GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Korea has well defined natural frontiers. In the northwest the Yalu, Korea’s largest river, forms part of Chinese boundary. Three railroads cross the river, linking Korea’s major highway, with China. This north-south orientation of major transportation arteries would favor penetration from the China.

In the northeast, Korea borders the Maritime Province of the USSR for ten miles to the Tumen River. Since the Russian occupation of North Korea, an excellent overland road from Chongjin to Vladivostok has been developed. This new road provides a good link between the USSR and the rail and highway network of Korea, which connects the major northeastern ports of Pusan on the south coast, Seoul in the southwest, and Sinuiju in the northwest.

Two rail lines and two first class roads cross the backbone of the peninsula, connecting Wonsan and the northeast directly with P’yong-yang and Seoul, the country’s major commercial centers. The transportation facilities in the northeast were developed primarily to funnel Japanese supplies during the war.

The east coast of Korea, which borders the Sea of Japan, is fairly regular with small beach-bordered valleys separated from the interior by steep mountains and swift streams. Six of the ten principal ports of Korea are located along this coast — Unggi, Najin, Ch’ongjin, Hungriam, Wonsan, and Songjin — all of them north of the 38th parallel. They also have numerous secondary ports and landings on this coast, with clear approaches and fairly moderate tides.

In contrast, the south coast, which borders the Korea Strait, is highly irregular with alternate beach-fringed lowlands, rocky headlands, and numerous islands, rocks, reefs, and shoals. Broad drying mud flats and sandbars and very high tides make approach difficult. However, Korea’s most vital port and third largest city, Pusan, is located at the eastern corner of this coast.

At Pusan the freight and passenger ferry from Shimonoseki, 120 miles across the Korea Strait, meet the main Korean railroad which runs north through Pyongyang to Sinuiju. A first-class highway parallels the railroad from Pusan to Sinuiju. Other ports, developed by the Japanese as military and naval bases, are located along the southern coast and are connected with the Pusan-Seoul route.

The west coast, which borders the Yellow Sea, is similar to the south coast in its irregularity and
perils to navigation. There are, however, numerous good harbors and landing places. Seoul, by far the largest and most important city in Korea, lies at the eastern edge of a lowland, which extends for about twenty miles from the coast. Seoul is connected by rail and highway with Inch'on serving as its port. Seoul is the principal railway and road hub of the peninsula and the key to control of the peninsula.

P'yong-yang, the second largest city of Korea, now being used by the Soviets as their headquarters, is another lowland city about 120 miles northwest of Seoul. It is connected by rail and highway with the port of Changhang-ni. The third important west coast harbor is the estuary Kum-gang River which serves the ports of Kunsan and Changhang-ni. These cities, like the other principal ports, are tied in with the peninsular transportation system.

Korea's only other boundary, the 38th parallel, is a purely arbitrary dividing line with no physical geographic delineation. It crosses the peninsula at about its broadest point, a distance of approximately 9190 miles. It isolates a sub-peninsula to the west, which according to present arrangements, can be reached only by weekly American convoys passing through the Soviet Zone.

The 38th parallel cuts across Haeju Hay on the west coast, separating the city of Heaju in the Soviet Zone from some of its port facilities at Yongdangp'o on the US side. The topography along the parallel varies from tidal flats, low hills, and intensively cultivated valleys in the west to higher hills and ridges descending to a narrow coastal strip in the east. It is crossed by 181 small cart roads, 104 country roads, 15 all-weather provincial roads, and 8 better class roads. There are two good highways running northeast and northwest from Seoul to Wonsan and P'yong-yang. Six railroad lines furnish modern transport across the boundary. It is in no sense a natural barrier.
1948 CIA Summary Report: Korea

1. Beside each box, list an important fact concerning Korea found in the CIA report.
2. Check the information that would be relevant in your advisory role.

**Natural Resources and Geographical Characteristics:**
- [ ]
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**Economic Characteristics:**
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**General History:**
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**Map Assignment:** Label the map of Korea (use textbook, atlas, etc. as reference source).
Source Evaluation Form—Module 3

It is early 1950. President Truman asked you to assess whether his policy of containment is providing protection from Soviet aggression. Your secretary pulled these documents for your review. Which ones should you, in your role as a key advisor, analyze to provide information useful to Truman in the weeks to come?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Title/Author or Origin:</th>
<th>Would this document have been relevant to understanding the likelihood of the Soviet Union’s influence spreading beyond its borders?</th>
<th>Relevant to our advisory role? Explain.</th>
<th>This information will be relevant to these advisors:</th>
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Sample Internet Search Report Form

Write a list of findings from your search that relate to the topic. (Optional): Print and attach the pages.

Topic: **Pork Chop Hill**
Time on computer: from 7 am/pm to 8 am/pm
Search words used: "Pork Chop Hill" Korea
Search engine(s) used: Yahoo snap.com

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<th>Site Name/URL address</th>
<th>Relevant to your advisory role?</th>
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<td>Pork Chop Hill</td>
<td>Movie Review</td>
<td>entertainment.com</td>
<td>Yes □ Not sure □ No □ Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching About Korea</td>
<td>Handout 9.3</td>
<td>Ease.indiana.edu</td>
<td>Yes □ Not sure □ No □ Why?</td>
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page 25
# Internet Search Report Form

Write a list of findings from your search that relate to the topic. (Optional): Print and attach the pages.

**Topic:** _______________________  **Time on computer:** from _______ am/pm to _______ am/pm

**Search words used:** ____________________________

**Search engine(s) used:** ____________________________

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page 26
Welcome to

The White House Decision Center

At the Truman Presidential Museum & Library

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page 35
What must you consider? -- 1950

W. Averell Harriman
Special Assistant
You must consider the effect of the Korean crisis on U.S. foreign policy, particularly with regard to U.S. allies in Europe.

Harry S. Truman
President of the United States
You must consider your responsibilities as Commander in Chief of the armed forces, as well as the effect of the Korean crisis on U.S. foreign policy, which in recent years has been based on containing the expansion of Soviet Communist power while avoiding a world war.

Charlie Ross
Press Secretary
You must consider how the Korean crisis, and the President's reaction to it, will be perceived by the press and the public.

Louis Johnson
Secretary of Defense
You must consider the national security implications of the crisis, in the context of recent reductions in military spending, which you supported against the wishes of the armed services.

Alben Barkley
Vice President
You must consider the reaction to the Korean crisis in Congress, where you served for many decades.

Dean Acheson
Secretary of State
You must consider the effect of the crisis on U.S. foreign policy, with particular attention to the views of foreign policy experts in the State Department.

Omar Bradley
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
You must consider the potential role of the U.S. armed forces in responding to the crisis, in the context of recent reductions in military spending.

Philip Jessup
Ambassador at Large
You must consider the potential role of the United Nations in the crisis, and how the U.S. can marshal support for its position in the U.N.
What personal factors are important to you? -- 1950

Harry S. Truman
President of the United States
You are not afraid to make difficult decisions. You often draw upon your knowledge of history, which has convinced you that aggression by totalitarian nations must be checked if peace and democracy are to be preserved. You have been criticized for not doing enough to prevent the "fall" of China to Communist forces in 1949.

Charlie Ross
Press Secretary
You are the President's longtime friend, and he often calls upon you for "common sense" advice.

W. Averell Harriman
Special Assistant
Your experiences as a diplomat lead you to be particularly interested in the reactions of U.S. allies in Europe, where there is widespread concern that the Korean crisis will lead to a third world war or divert American attention from the defense of Europe.

Louis Johnson
Secretary of Defense
You are unpopular with the armed services because of your role in cutting defense appropriations in recent years. You have very poor relations with Acheson and have largely lost the confidence of the President. You are politically ambitious and would like to be President someday.

Alben Barkley
Vice President
Despite your high office, you have little independent authority and are not usually consulted on major issues. However, the President likes you and would respect what you have to say, particularly with regard to Congress, an institution in which you have vast experience.

Dean Acheson
Secretary of State
You are close friend of the President, who reposes great confidence in your judgment. You share his belief that Communist aggression must be met with a vigorous response. However, you have been accused of being "soft on Communism" by the President's political opponents.

Omar Bradley
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
As the President's principal military adviser, you enjoy his respect and confidence. You must also be concerned about the limited U.S. combat capability in Asia at this time.

Philip Jessup
Ambassador at Large
By virtue of your position as liaison between the administration and the United Nations, you are inclined to favor a U.S. response to the Korean crisis that involves the closest cooperation with the U.N.
Press Briefing on the Korean Crisis
by Charlie Ross, Press Secretary
Press Brief by Charlie Ross, Press Secretary

The primary purpose of this morning's press briefing is to inform the American people on the background of the events in Korea, the latest developments and initial US actions. You are not to try to resolve this issue at this time. The outline below will serve as a guide for what you, as President, want Charlie Ross to state in the press briefing to be given June 27, 1950.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of President Truman, I am authorized to release the following information on the unfolding events in Korea. The President wants Americans to know the following background information concerning the invasion of North Korea into South Korea....

[Background: What led to this aggression? Why is South Korea important to US interests?]

Include:
Greetings and purpose of the Press Briefing

Use the information from the video and background information on the North Korean invasion. WARNING: DO NOT INVENT FACTS!!!!

"At this early hour of this conflict the following actions have been taken....

[Current Situation: What is the US doing in response and why?]

Consider all documents provided to date.
"In conclusion...

[Concluding Remarks]

Remain standing and call for questions from the audience.

1. Correspondents must raise their hand to be recognized.
2. When recognized by you, they must stand and state their name and the media they represent, and then ask the question. The questions must begin with, "Mr. Ross ..."
3. You may allow one follow-up question.
4. The correspondents may not argue with you or other correspondents.

When you choose to end the briefing, thank the audience and walk off.
Presidential Plan for Action:

Working with his advisors, each president decides what US policy will be on the Korean conflict. The President’s decision will be announced at the Press Conference.

Some possibilities (could be used in combination):
1. Commit US and UN forces to:
   a) push back and hold North Korea at 38th parallel
   b) hold North Korea to current position
   c) push north of 38th parallel into North Korea to reunite North and South Korea
2. Rely entirely on air and navy support and commit no ground troops
3. Use atomic weapons
4. Pull out all military support (do not support UN resolution)
5. Confront Russia and China militarily, economically, or diplomatically
6. Other

Your position statement must consider possible US consequences of your chosen option. Some possible consequences are:
1. Civilians called up for service (the draft, National Guard mobilization)
2. Rationing of goods (gas, food, iron, clothing, etc.) in the United States
3. Return factories (auto and air) to war time production
4. Direct confrontation with Communist leaders Stalin and Mao Tze-Tung
5. Increase military budget which may result in increased taxes for the US
6. US military fatalities and casualties
7. Cold War victory or loss for Communists
8. Gain or loss of US and UN credibility with other nations
9. Communist expansion beyond Korea
10. Public perception of strength against communism
11. World War III
12. Other
**Response Summary to North Korea’s Invasion of South Korea**

Situation: North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. Limited air and navy support has been provided for the US. UN resolutions have called for North Korea to end its aggression on South Korea. They have not done so.

How should the United States respond to North Korea’s invasion of South Korea?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarify</th>
<th>That a problem exists and identify what the problem is</th>
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<tr>
<th>Confirm</th>
<th>That your group has the authority to make recommendations for a decision</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Plan</th>
<th>How you would gather and analyze information about this problem?</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Analyze</th>
<th>The problem</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the best outcome?</td>
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<td>2. What will not be compromised?</td>
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<td>3. What is an alternate outcome that would still be acceptable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What is not an acceptable outcome?</td>
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<td>5. How will we know when we have reached our desired outcome?</td>
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<td>6. Who needs to be involved to meet the goal?</td>
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<td>Determine and assess</td>
<td>three possible recommendations with risks, consequences, and benefits</td>
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<td>1. Recommendation:</td>
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<td>Risk:</td>
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<td>Consequences:</td>
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<td>Benefits:</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choose, commit and prepare to announce</th>
<th>The President’s plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Buck Stops Here</td>
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I, Harry Truman, will announce the following course of action:
White House Decision Center  
The President’s Action on the Crisis in South Korea  
Press Conference  
President Harry S. Truman  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Opening Remarks and Background]</th>
<th>June 30, 1950</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Ladies and gentlemen of the press, I conferred with the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other senior advisors about the situation in the Far East created by the unprovoked aggression against the Republic of Korea. To date, North Korea has failed to comply with UN resolutions calling for cessation of hostilities and immediate withdrawal to the 38th parallel...&quot;</td>
<td>Greetings</td>
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</table>
|  | Use the information from the video, the first press conference, decision making matrix, and reference materials  
**WARNING: DO NOT INVENT FACTS!!!!** |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Decision(s) made by President with reasons for decision]</th>
<th>Consider all the advice given by the advisors—weigh decision and consequences carefully—use supporting facts as needed.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Accordingly, I have ordered the following...&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;My reasons for this course of action is...........&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Possible consequences of the decision(s)

"I know my actions may have some important consequences for my fellow Americans including..."

Use position paper instructions. Remember to include domestic, diplomatic, and military consequences.

Closing remarks

Think of a presidential closing and include an invitation for the press to ask questions.

Remain standing and call for questions from the audience.

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