

Korean War | A1 Sample Answer

Korean War: Notes

After the collapse of Japan in 1945 after World War Two, the USSR invaded Korea and dismantled all Japanese control rapidly, starting from the north. Frightened of losing the entire country to communism, Truman asked them to stop once they reached the 38th parallel, which Stalin agreed to. This left Korea divided.

The communist party was established in North Korea, under the power of Kim Il Sung. Truman quickly got to work in Europe with the Truman Doctrine, protecting countries against the flow of communism. Although it wasn't active in Asia, it showed the USSR that America would stop at nothing to contain communism at all financial costs.

In 1947 the UN gave Korea independence and organised a commission to oversee elections there. However Stalin refused to allow them into North Korea so the elections were only held to great a National Government for Korea in the south. In 1948, the US withdraws from Korea and the USSR also began to withdraw within that year.

The elections took place in the middle of wide corruption and violent outbreaks in Korea. Syngman Rhee gained a majority vote in the National Assembly and became the new president. The UN recognised this new Republic of Korea. However in the North, the Soviets formed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Kim Il Sung was the leader and known as the Premier. The UN refused to acknowledge this.

In 1949, China became communist which was a huge victory for the USSR. The US became increasingly worried about their domino theory and about how the rest of Asia would surely fall to communism. However, the USSR would not give Kim Il Sung the support to invade South Korea, despite the increasing violence along the north/south border: 400 soldiers had been killed in May 1949 alone.

In 1950, the US began to feel they needed to adopt a more aggressive policy than containment. They wanted to focus on rolling communism back and to reclaim areas that had fallen to the communists for democracy. However, they made the mistake of omitting Korea from their conversations in the field of strategic defence which led the Russians to believe they would not take action there.

On the 25th of June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. Propaganda from the north insisted that they only retaliated to an attack from the south but there was no proof of this. Truman was outraged and saw it as a bluff to test how the US would react and did not want to make the mistakes of appeasement in the 1930s. He got permission from the UN to intervene and this was granted on account of the USSR not being present to say otherwise because they were protesting the refusal to admit China to the UN.

The North army pushed into the south quickly and efficiently and captured the capital, Seoul, in three days. By early September, the South Koreans had been forced into the very corner of the country at Pusan and were losing before the Americans even intervened.

The Inchon Landings were led by General MacArthur who decided the best option would be to sever communications in the Northern army and cut them in two. He forced them to retreat from Pusan. This led to the reestablishment of a democratic government in South Korea and in the recapture of Seoul. The North army retreated and by the 1st of October 1950 the US and UN troops were back to the 38th parallel.

The US was left with two options: containment or rollback. They chose rollback after getting the go ahead from the UN and invaded North Korea. Truman tried to ease the risk of the war by insisting the US would not invade China or the USSR. However China still protested and dispatched troops to the North Korean border in protest of having US troops so close to them. MacArthur insisted that China would not act.

However on the 14th of October, 300,000 Communist Party Volunteers crossed over the Yalu River and began to attack the UN and US forces who were taken entirely by surprise. A state of emergency was declared in America. Truman was unwilling to engage in war with China but could not abandon Korea. He also did not want to resort to using the Atomic Bomb on Korea. That may have brought the USSR into the conflict which likely would have started World War Three. MacArthur would not stand for this reluctance however and took matters into his own hands, sending a letter to Beijing threatening China with nuclear war. Truman fired MacArthur immediately.

After the war became a stalemate, a peace talk was opened up in Kaesong in July. Violence continued while these talks took place and the talks eventually broke down. They were resumed a year later in Panmunjom but again were delayed specifically over where the demarcation line would be drawn and what would happen to prisoners of war.

The US became committed to gaining control of the skies and they had managed to gain most of the control by 1952. They began to bomb hydroelectric plants and military targets in the northern capital Pyongyang.

Despite their efforts to keep it localised on military targets, Kim Il Sung announced that 6000 civilians had been killed publically which sparked international outcry and made the Americans look bad. Truman's reputation was ruined and he decided not to run for president again, stepping back to allow Republican Eisenhower to take over. Meanwhile, Stalin died in 1953 which signalled new hope for the western powers.

On the 16th of June 1953, there were agreements for an armistice. This was not the end of the conflict however. Syngman Rhee opposed many of the compromises made but he was eventually silenced by the promise of a 1 billion dollar investment into stopping the spread of communism in Asia. On the 27th of July, the armistice was signed by China, America and North Korea. South Korea would not sign it but had to accept it anyway.