

Korea Divided *(cont.)*

Historical Background Information

From 1910 until the end of World War II, Japan occupied Korea. At the end of the war, the United States divided Korea into two parts at the 38th parallel. The capital, Seoul, was in the South and was supported by the United States. Russia occupied the north. Korea was separated into the People's Republic in North Korea and the Republic of Korea in South Korea. Both the United States and Russia influenced regimes in each half of the peninsula. Democracy was supported in the south and communism was supported in the north. By 1946, both regimes were well established. In 1948, all of the United States troops left Korea.

By 1949, fighting broke out at the 38th parallel. This fighting was mostly prompted by the South Koreans. On June 25, 1950, North Korea seized an opportunity and invaded South Korea. It took only three days for North Korea to invade Seoul while the southern army fled the scene.

The United States realized that South Korea was necessary for the rebuilding of Japan's economy. So, Secretary of State Dean Acheson decided to implement the Truman Doctrine towards South Korea in hopes of containing communism. Instead of obtaining a declaration of war from Congress, President Truman sought a stamp of approval from the United Nations. Under the supervision of the United Nations, the United States rushed in to fight for the South. At the same time, China secretly stepped in to defend the North.

The northern army forced the southern forces back to Pusan, which is located on the southern tip of the peninsula. In an act of military genius, General MacArthur split his troops. He left some at Pusan to hold back the enemy, and he took the others to launch a secret invasion on the western coast of the Yellow Sea in the port of Inchon. This successful invasion cut off the communication and supplies of the northern army and they retreated back across the 38th parallel. Because the Inchon invasion was a success, Truman changed his mind about the goals of the war. Instead of just restoring South Korea up to the 38th parallel, Truman decided to try to gain control of the entire peninsula of Korea. When Truman changed his goals for the war, the premier of China warned the United Nations that he would send troops into Korea if the United Nations' forces crossed the 38th parallel.

With permission, MacArthur led the troops north across the 38th parallel. Unknown to American leaders, the Chinese had already crossed over the border to help North Korea fight against the Americans. MacArthur's forces were taken by surprise. By New Year's Eve, the Chinese and North Koreans had recaptured Seoul. The United Nations troops retreated just south of the capital.

Truman feared that the Soviets were pushing for a global war and were funding the Chinese and the North Koreans. A global war was something that Truman did not want. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed MacArthur that they would not be sending any more reinforcements to Korea. MacArthur believed that with the necessary help, the Chinese could be pushed back. So, American leaders led the troops back into Seoul again, and the American troops recaptured it by April 1951.

After the summer of 1951, the war had come to a stalemate. Periods of heavy fighting in the form of trench warfare along the 38th parallel lasted for two years. Peace talks lasted throughout these two years primarily because an agreement could not be reached on what to do with the prisoners of war. Some of the prisoners from the communist North Korea did not want to return back to their homes. Some prisoners who were held by the North Koreans had been mistreated. During this stalemate, over 50,000 American soldiers died. The United Nations, China, and North Korea signed an armistice in July of 1953, but South Korea refused to sign the document. The Korean War was the first American war in which the United States did not win an ultimate victory.

- 1. Analyze the handout (causes of the Korean War, key people, major events of the Korean War)**
- 2. What do you think the impact of this war will be globally and domestically for the United States?**