

## “Police Action”: The Korean War, 1950-1954

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity #1: The Decision to Intervene in Korea

#### Timeline of Events Related to the Origins of the Korean War

Date	Event
August 10, 1945	The United States and the Soviet Union agree to a temporary division of Korea—formerly a Japanese colony—along the 38 <sup>th</sup> Parallel. U.S. forces were to occupy and administer the southern half, while Soviet troops would occupy and administer the North.
March 1946	During World War II the two combatants in the Chinese Civil War—the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists under Mao Tse-tung—had agreed to a temporary truce while both fought the Japanese. However, less than a year after the defeat of Japan the truce fell apart, and large-scale fighting resumed between the two sides.
May 1948	The United States sponsors elections in South Korea. The Soviets protest the decision, and instruct left-wing parties there to boycott the election. The result is that Syngman Rhee, a dedicated anti-communist who was educated in the United States, becomes head of the government. Soon afterward the Soviets establish a communist regime in North Korea under the leadership of Kim Il-sung.
August 12, 1948	Eager to rid itself of commitments in East Asia, the United States formally recognizes the independence of South Korea, and arrangements begin for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region. The Soviets make a similar announcement regarding North Korea.
December 26, 1948	The last Soviet troops leave North Korea.
January 1949	Chinese communist forces under Mao Tse-tung enter city of Peiping. They change the name to Beijing and declare that it is the new capital of China.

February 3, 1949	U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, citing the unpopularity and corruption of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, recommends that the U.S. government stop sending aid. Truman and Congress reject this advice, and approve a further \$60 million in economic and military assistance.
June 1949	The last U.S. troops leave South Korea.
July 14, 1949	The Soviet Union successfully tests its first atomic bomb; however, a formal announcement of this fact is not made until September 23.
October 1, 1949	With most of the Chinese countryside, as well as its major cities, in communist hands, Mao Tse-tung declares victory in the civil war. He announces that henceforth the country will be referred to as the "People's Republic of China."
December 1, 1949	Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters abandon the mainland and flee to the island of Taiwan, where they form a government called the "Republic of China."
January 12, 1950	Secretary of State Acheson gives famous "perimeter" speech to the National Press Club in Washington. Discussing U.S. strategy in Asia, he lists Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, and the Aleutian Islands as vital interests that will be defended with force. The list includes neither Taiwan nor South Korea.
February 9, 1950	U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy (Rep.-Wisconsin) gives speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, blaming recent foreign policy failures—particularly Mao Tse-Tung's victory in China—on the presence of communists in the State Department.
February 14, 1950	After a two-month visit by Mao Tse-tung to Moscow, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China announce a 30-year alliance treaty. According to the terms of this treaty, each side promised to come to the aid of the other in the event of a war against a third party.
March 10, 1950	The Central Intelligence Agency warns of a massive buildup of North Korean troops along the South Korean border, predicts that an invasion is imminent.

April 1950	Soviet leader Josef Stalin gives Kim Il-sung permission to launch an invasion of South Korea; however, he warns Kim that "If you should get kicked in the teeth, I shall not lift a finger. You have to ask Mao [Tse-tung] for all the help."
June 25, 1950	At approximately 4:00 am, 90,000 North Korean troops, equipped with Soviet weapons, invade South Korea. South Korean forces are quickly forced to retreat. Truman orders U.S. naval and air forces—but not ground forces—to assist in the defense of South Korea.
June 27, 1950	The United Nations calls upon its members to come to the aid of South Korea. The proposal only wins the approval of the Security Council because the Soviet delegation is boycotting its proceedings to protest the U.N.'s failure to recognize Mao Tse-tung's regime as the legitimate government of China.
June 28, 1950	North Korean forces capture Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

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Telegram, dated June 24, 1950, from U.S. State Department to President Harry S. Truman informing the President about the North Korean attack on South Korea:

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/week1/kw\\_1\\_1.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/week1/kw_1_1.htm)

ACCORDING KOREAN ARMY REPORTS...NORTH KOREAN FORCES INVADED ROK [Republic of Korea—in other words, South Korea] AT SEVERAL POINTS THIS MORNING. ACTION WAS INITIATED ABOUT FOUR ONGJIN BLASTED BY NORTH KOREAN ARTILLERY FIRE. ABOUT SIX NORTH KOREAN INFANTRY COMMENCE CROSSING [38<sup>th</sup>] PARALLEL IN ONGJIN AREA, KAESONG AREA, CHUNCHON AREA AND AMPHIBIOUS LANDING WAS REPORTEDLY MADE SOUTH OF KANGNUMG ON EAST COAST. KAESONG WAS REPORTEDLY CAPTURED AT NINE...WITH SOME 10 NORTH KOREAN TANKS PARTICIPATING IN OPERATION. NORTH KOREAN FORCES, SPEARHEADED BY TANKS, REPORTEDLY CLOSING IN ON CHUNCHON. DETAILS OF FIGHTING IN KANGNUMG AREA UNCLEAR, ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS NORTH KOREAN FORCES HAVE CUT HIGHWAY.... IT WOULD APPEAR FROM NATURE OF ATTACK AND MANNER IN WHICH IT WAS LAUNCHED IT CONSTITUTES ALL OUT OFFENSIVE AGAINST ROK.

These developments are portrayed graphically on the following map:

South Korea: UN Delay, Withdrawal, and Defense:

<http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlas/korean%20war/korean%20pages/korean%20war%20map%2010.htm>

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**Directions:** Using what you’ve already learned about the origins of the war in Korea, plus the material in the following documents, write a three-paragraph letter to the editor defending President Truman’s decision to commit U.S. forces to the defense of South Korea. Each paragraph should consist of a general statement as well as at least two facts, drawn from the documents, to back up that statement.

A) Resolution dated June 27, 1950, from United Nations Security Council recommending that the members of the United Nations furnish assistance to the Republic of Korea in order to repel the attack and restore peace and security in Korea:

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/week1/ayer\\_1\\_1.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/week1/ayer_1_1.htm)

B) Statement, dated June 27, 1950, by President Harry S. Truman, announcing his order to send U.S. air and naval forces to help defend South Korea and explaining the rationale for his decision:

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/week1/kw\\_27\\_1.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/week1/kw_27_1.htm)

In Korea the Government forces, which were armed to prevent border raids and to preserve internal security, were attacked by invading forces from North Korea. The Security Council of the United Nations called upon the invading troops to cease hostilities and to withdraw to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel [that is, the border between North and South Korea]. This they have not done, but on the contrary have pressed the attack. The Security Council called upon all members of the United Nations to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution. In these circumstances I have ordered United States air and sea forces to give the Korean Government troops cover and support.

The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war. It has defied the orders of the Security Council of the United Nations to preserve international peace and security....

I know that all members of the United Nations will consider carefully the consequences of this latest aggression in Korea in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations. A return to the rule of force in international affairs would have far reaching effects. The United States will continue to uphold the rule of law....

C) Excerpts from President Truman’s Radio and Television Address to the American people on the Situation in Korea, July 19, 1950:

<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=582>

At noon today, I sent a message to the Congress about the situation in Korea. I want to talk to you tonight about that situation, and about what it means to the security of the United States, and to our hopes for world peace.

Korea is a small country, thousands of miles away, but what is happening there is important to every American.

On Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, communist forces attacked the Republic of Korea.

This attack has made it clear, beyond all doubt, that the international communist movement is willing to use armed invasion to conquer independent nations. An act of aggression such as this creates a very real danger to the security of all free nations.

The attack upon Korea was an outright breach of the peace and a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. By their actions in Korea, communist leaders have demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles on which the United Nations is founded. This is a direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build a kind of world in which men can live in freedom and peace.

This challenge has been presented squarely. We must meet it squarely....

The communist invasion was launched in great force, with planes, tanks, and artillery. The size of the attack, and the speed with which it was followed up, make it perfectly plain that it had been plotted long in advance.

As soon as word of the attack was received, Secretary of State Acheson...informed me that, with my approval, he would ask for an immediate meeting of the United Nations National Security Council. The Security Council met just twenty-four hours after the communist invasion began.

One of the main reasons the Security Council was set up was to act in cases such as this—to stop outbreaks of aggression in a hurry before they develop into general conflicts. In this case, the Council passed a resolution which called for the invaders of Korea to stop fighting, and to withdraw. The Council called on all members to help carry out this resolution. The communist invaders ignored the action of the Security Council and kept right on with their attack.

The Security Council then met again. It recommended that members of the United Nations help the Republic of Korea repel the attack, and help restore peace and security in the area....

These actions by the United Nations and its members are of great importance. The free nations have now made it clear that lawless aggression will be met with force. The free nations have learned the fateful lesson of the 1930's. That lesson is that aggression must be met firmly. Appeasement leads only to further aggression and ultimately to war.

The principal effort to help the Koreans preserve their independence, and to help the United States restore peace, has been made by the United States. We have sent land, naval, and air forces to assist in those operations. We have done this because we know that what is at stake here is nothing less than our own national security and the peace of the world....

Under the flag of the United Nations, a unified command has been established for all forces of the members of the United Nations fighting in Korea. General MacArthur is the commander of this combined force.

The prompt action of the United Nations to put down lawless aggression, and the prompt response to this action by free peoples all over the world, will stand as a landmark in mankind's long search for a rule of law among nations....

We know that it will be a hard, tough fight to halt the invasion, and to drive the communists back. The invaders have been provided with enough equipment and supplies for a long campaign. They overwhelmed the lightly armed defense forces of the Korean Republic in the first few days and drove southward.

Now, however, the Korean defenders have reorganized, and an increasing number of American troops have joined them. Our forces have fought a skillful, rear-guard delaying action, pending the arrival of reinforcements. Some of these reinforcements are now arriving; others are on the way from the United States....

We have the resources to meet our needs. Far more important, the American people are united in their belief in democratic freedom. We are united in detesting communist slavery.

We know that the cost of freedom is high. But we are determined to preserve our freedom—no matter what the cost....