

“Police Action: The Korean War, 1950-1954

Student Name _____ Date _____

Activity #4: Public Opinion and the Korean War

Directions: Using the following documents, in addition to what they have already learned about the Korean War, write a brief essay in response to the following question: “What did the American public think about the war by late 1952 – early 1953? What factors do you think influenced their opinions?”

Your essay should consist of at least three paragraphs, each of which should include a general statement and at least two sentences citing facts from the documents to back up their generalizations.

A) Campaign speech by Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower, October 24, 1952:
<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/ishallgotokorea1.html>

[T]he biggest fact about the Korean War is this: it was never inevitable, it was never inescapable....There is a Korean War—and we are fighting it—for the simplest of reasons: because free leadership failed to check and to turn back Communist ambition before it savagely attacked us. The Korean War—more perhaps than any other war in history—simply and swiftly followed the collapse of our political defenses. There is no other reason than this—we failed to read and outwit the totalitarian mind [that is, the minds of the Communist leaders].

World War II should have taught us all one lesson. The lesson is this: to vacillate, to hesitate—to appease even by merely betraying unsteady purpose—is to feed a dictator’s appetite for conquest and to invite war itself.

That lesson—which should have firmly guided every great decision of our leadership through these later years—was ignored in the development of the administration’s policies for Asia since the end of World War II. Because it was ignored, the record of those policies is a record of appalling failure.

That record of failure dates back—with red-letter folly—at least to September of 1947. It was then that General Albert Wedemeyer—returned from a Presidential mission to the Far East—submitted to the President this warning: “The withdrawal of American military forces from Korea would...result in the occupation of South Korea by either Soviet troops or, as seems more likely, by the Korean military units trained under Soviet auspices in North Korea.”

That warning and his entire report were disregarded and suppressed by the administration....

[F]ive Republican members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on July 26, 1949 submitted this solemn warning....

“It is reliably supposed that Soviet troops, attached to the North Korean puppet armies, are in position to command as well as acting as advisors.... This development may well presage the launching of a full-scale military drive across the 38th Parallel. Our forces...have been withdrawn from South Korea at the very instant when logic and common sense both demanded no retreat from the realities of the situation.”

Then, [in January 1950] the Secretary of State [Dean Acheson] announced his famous “defense perimeter”—publicly advising our enemies that, so far as nations outside this perimeter were concerned, “no person can guarantee these areas against military attack.” Under these circumstances, it was cold comfort to the nations outside this perimeter to be reminded that they could appeal to the United Nations.

These nations, of course, included Korea. The armies of Communism, thus informed, began their big build-up. Six months later they were ready to strike across the 38th parallel. They struck on June 25, 1950. On that day, the record of political and diplomatic failure of this administration was completed and sealed....

...The first task of a new administration will be to review and re-examine every course of action open to us with one goal in view: to bring the Korean war to an early and honorable end. This is my pledge to the American people...

B) Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Expectations on Truce:

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/publidcopiniononthekoreanwar.html>

Do you think we will be able to reach a satisfactory agreement with the Communists in the next month or so, to stop the fighting in Korea?

	<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>
Yes, satisfactory agreement soon	34%	17%
No	54%	74%
No opinion	<u>12%</u>	<u>9%</u>
	100%	100%

C) Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Korea Worthwhile? (October '52-April '53)

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/publidcopiniononthekoreanwar.html>

As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea has been worth fighting, or not?

	<u>Oct.</u> <u>1952</u>	<u>Nov.</u> <u>1952</u>	<u>Jan.</u> <u>1953</u>	<u>Apr.</u> <u>1953</u>
Worth Fighting	32%	34%	39%	36%
Not Worth Fighting	56%	58%	52%	55%
No opinion	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>9%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%

D) Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Confidence in the President

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/publidcopiniononthekoreanwar.html>

All polls have testified to the great majority (70% to 80%) which places great confidence in President Eisenhower's handling of foreign affairs.

This has been particularly true of his handling of the Korean problem.

E) Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Truce along present lines:

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/publidcopiniononthekoreanwar.html>

US Success or Failure (mid-May 1953)

If we do get a truce in Korea along the present battle line, would it seem to you that we had generally succeeded or generally failed in our main purpose in going into Korea?

Generally succeeded	45%
Generally failed	38%
No opinion	<u>17%</u>
	100%

Approve Signing? (early April 1953)

Would you approve or disapprove of our government signing an armistice to end the fighting in Korea along the present battle line?

Approve	69%
Disapprove	20%
No Opinion	<u>11%</u>
	100%

F) Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Should US Take Strong Steps? (Feb. 1953)

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/Korea/documents/publidcopiniononthekoreanwar.html>

Do you think the United States should take strong steps to try to end the war in Korea, even though our allies in the United Nations refuse to go along with us?

Yes, strong steps	62%
No	31%
No opinion	<u>7%</u>
	100%

For more than two years, popular majorities—but not the press—have supported such steps as:

Bombing across the Yalu [the river that forms the boundary between North Korea and China]

Using Chinese Nationalist troops [from Taiwan] in Korea

Giving Chiang [Kai-shek, leader of the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan] “all the help he needs” to invade the Chinese mainland

G) Map Showing Stalemate in Korea, November 1951 – July 1953:

<http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlases/korean%20war/korean%20pages/korean%20war%20map%2022.htm>