

# The Korean War

## **Background:**

China turned Communist in 1949. This was a very big problem for the USA. China was the most powerful country in the Far East and had the largest population in the world. Now the USA had to deal with another Communist threat.

Communist China was already part of the United Nations, but its leader, Mao Tse Tung, wanted China to be part of the Security Council, the part of the UN that made the most important decisions. The Security Council was dominated by Capitalist countries. The USSR was the only Communist country that was part of the Security Council. Stalin wanted China to join the Security Council, but he was outvoted and left the UN in protest.

Communism was gaining support in other parts of Asia. Korea was divided by the Communist North and the anti-Communist South. In 1950, the North invaded the South and by September 1950 it was almost ready to proclaim itself victorious.



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## **The USA gets involved**

US President Truman was determined not to allow Communism to take over Korea. He got the UN to condemn the North for invading the South and even managed to get the UN to send forces to aid the South Koreans in driving the North Koreans out of their half of the country. The main reason that he was able to do this was because of the USSR's absence in the UN. It was still boycotting the UN because of the China issue.

By late 1950, the UN forces were approaching the border of China, having successfully pushed the North Korean forces back above the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The Chinese responded to this by adding their troops to the North Korean side. The USSR also backed them with weapons and equipment. American General MacArthur called for Chinese cities to be bombed and said that the USA should use nuclear weapons if necessary. President Truman fired MacArthur in 1951.

By 1953, the war had reached a stalemate as the two sides were too evenly matched. Both sides eventually signed a ceasefire in July 1953. North Korea stayed Communist and South Korea stayed Capitalist.

### **The physical consequences**

The total number of casualties was 1.4 million, half a million of these being South Korean citizens. The UN lost 35 000 soldiers, 30 000 of these being American.

### **The political consequences**

Most Americans were much divided in what they thought of the policy of containment that the USA had followed when entering the Korean War. They had stopped Communism, but things had nearly gone very wrong and they had lost many of their men. They would be more cautious in getting involved in big disputes in the future.

At one point of the Korean War, Truman had threatened to use nuclear weapons. This made the USSR even more determined to create powerful nuclear weapons of its own.

China became an important Communist force after the Korean War. They already that the Americans worried, but after the war the Soviets started getting concerned too. They wanted to be the largest Communist power and thought that China should just support their policies.

The USA had virtually taken over the UN during the war and at times General MacArthur had acted as if he alone as the UN. The USSR was now very wary of the UN.

The war convinced the Americans that the only way to deal with Communists was to act tough.

### **Questions:**

1. Why was it a problem for the USA that China turned Communist in 1949?
2. Why did Stalin leave the UN in 1949?
3. Why do you think President Truman could not allow Korea to become Communist?
4. Which two countries fought on the side of the Communist North Koreans in the Korean War?
5. List some of the physical consequences of the Korean War.
6. Do you think that Americans were right to become more cautious when getting involved in foreign affairs after the Korean War? Why?
7. Was it possible that the Korean War could have led to the launching of nuclear weapons?
8. Were the Soviets happy about China's rise in importance? Why or why not?
9. Why was the USSR so wary of the UN after the Korean War?

10. 'The physical consequences of the Korean War were far greater than the political consequences.' Do you agree with this statement? Be sure to support your point of view.