War in Korea and a New Red Scare

If YOU were there...
A radio broadcast on June 26, 1950, delivers a shocking announcement. Communist forces from North Korea have just invaded South Korea. President Truman has demanded that the North Koreans halt their invasion, but they seem to be ignoring this demand. Now Truman has to decide whether to use American military force to stop the North Koreans.

Do you think the United States should send troops to Korea? Why or why not?

The Korean War

The Cold War began in Europe but quickly spread to the Asian nations of China and Korea. In China, the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party had been struggling for control of the country since the early 1900s. The two rivals joined forces against Japan during World War II but then resumed their civil war after Japan’s defeat. The United States, as part of its commitment to stop the spread of communism, backed the Nationalists. The Nationalists were defeated, however, and were forced to flee to the island of Taiwan. Led by Mao Zedong, the Communists officially established the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Many Americans saw this as a disastrous failure of U.S. foreign policy. They feared that all of Asia might soon fall to communism.

These fears were heightened by a crisis in Korea. Japan had controlled Korea from 1910 to the end of World War II. After the war, the Allies divided Korea at the 38th parallel. The Soviet Union
controlled the northern part of Korea, and the United States occupied the south. Both sides set up governments, neither of which recognized the other as legitimate.

**Fighting in Korea**

On June 25, 1950, North Korea’s Soviet-trained and equipped army stormed across the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. The United Nations called for a cease-fire. But the North Koreans continued their attack.

President Truman had to make an immediate decision: Should the United States use force to try to stop the North Korean invasion? On June 27 Truman announced: “I have ordered United States air and sea forces to give the [South] Korean government troops cover and support.” That same day, the UN decided to help South Korea “to repel the armed attack.” American general Douglas MacArthur was put in command of the UN forces, which included troops from the United States and 15 other countries. The majority of the troops were from the United States and South Korea.

In the early battles, MacArthur’s forces were driven back to the southeastern tip of the Korean Peninsula, near the city of Pusan. Fierce fighting raged for six weeks before the UN troops turned the tide of the war with a surprise attack. Landing at the port city of Inchon on September 15, UN forces attacked the North Koreans from behind. About a month later, MacArthur’s troops captured Pyongyang, North Korea’s capital. They then advanced north to the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and China. MacArthur told Truman he would “have the boys home by Christmas.”

Then China suddenly sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers across the border to join the North Koreans. They drove UN forces south again, back below the 38th parallel. MacArthur suggested air strikes on Chinese cities and an attack on mainland China. Truman refused permission. He was determined to contain the war in Korea.

When MacArthur publicly criticized the president’s strategy, Truman relieved the general of command. “I fired General MacArthur because he wouldn’t respect the authority of the president,” Truman said. This was a very unpopular decision with the American public. MacArthur came home to a hero’s welcome.
The War Ends
By the spring of 1951 the fighting in Korea settled into a violent stalemate. The UN forces had driven the North Koreans and Chinese back across the 38th parallel. But neither side seemed able to win the war.

Americans’ frustration with the war dominated the 1952 presidential election. The Republicans nominated war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower. He promised to end the increasingly unpopular conflict, saying, “The first task of a new administration will be to . . . bring the Korean War to an early and honorable end.”

This promise helped Eisenhower win the election. Eisenhower visited Korea, but the conflict dragged on. A cease-fire finally ended the fighting on July 27, 1953. After three years of fighting, North and South Korea were again divided near the 38th parallel. More than 130,000 Americans had been killed or wounded. Korean and Chinese casualties topped 2 million.

A New Red Scare
The first Red Scare swept America after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Cold War fears led to another Red Scare in the late 1940s and 1950s. Attorney General J. Howard McGrath summed up these fears when he said, “There are today many Communists in America. They are everywhere—in factories, offices, butcher shops, on street corners.”

Fear of Communists
A congressional committee called the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated Communist influence in America. In 1947 HUAC launched a series of hearings to expose what it believed was Communist influence in the Hollywood movie industry. The committee branded as “red,” or Communist, actors and writers who would not answer questions or who refused to reveal the names of suspected Communists. People suspected of Communist sympathies were often blacklisted, or denied work. Some of these people never worked in movies again.
Explosive spy cases also fed the fears that Communists were at work in the United States. In 1950 a German-born physicist was convicted of providing the Soviets information about the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos, New Mexico, that allowed them to develop an atomic bomb at least one year earlier than they would have. In 1951 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg also were tried for providing Soviet spies with secret details about atomic bomb design. The Rosenbergs denied the charges but were found guilty and executed in 1953.

The Rise of McCarthy

Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy contributed to fears in the early 1950s by charging that Communists were working inside the State Department. He claimed to have the names of 57 people who were “either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party.”

McCarthy produced no concrete proof of crimes. When challenged, he made up new charges, labeling those who questioned him as “soft on communism.” This method of making aggressive accusations without proof became known as McCarthyism.

McCarthy finally went too far in 1954. In televised Senate hearings, he charged that there were Communists in the U.S. Army. For five weeks, Americans watched McCarthy’s bullying tactics. At one point, McCarthy tried to discredit Joseph Welch, the army’s attorney, by attacking a young assistant in Welch’s law firm. This shocked Welch—and the nation. “Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator,” Welsh said. “Have you left no sense of decency?” A later Senate vote condemned McCarthy’s actions, but it came too late for those whose careers had been ruined by his attacks.

Comparing How were HUAC’s and McCarthy’s actions similar?
Eisenhower and the Cold War
Cold War tensions increased around the world during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. In this hostile atmosphere, Americans adjusted to the reality of living with the constant threat of nuclear war.

The Arms Race
In 1950 President Truman approved work on the hydrogen bomb, a weapon far more powerful than the atomic bombs used in World War II. American scientists tested the first hydrogen bomb in the South Pacific in 1952. “The fireball expanded to three miles in diameter,” said a test observer. He soon saw that the entire island on which the bomb exploded “had vanished, vaporized.”

The Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb in 1949 and its first hydrogen bomb in 1953. In what became a nuclear arms race, both the United States and the Soviet Union rushed to build more and more weapons. American school children practiced “duck-and-cover” drills, in which they were taught to crouch under their desks in case of nuclear attack. Some families built underground bomb shelters in their backyards.

In October 1957 the Soviets launched Sputnik, the world’s first artificial satellite. Americans feared that if the Soviet Union could launch a satellite, it could launch missiles to attack the United States. In January 1958 the United States responded by launching its own satellite. Later that year, the U.S. government established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to conduct space research.

Cold War Crises
President Eisenhower modified Truman’s policy of containment. He and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles supported brinkmanship—a willingness to go to the brink of war to oppose communism. “The ability to get to the verge [edge] without getting into war is the necessary art,” Dulles explained. The president and Dulles also

History Close-up
Inside a Bomb Shelter
Many families built personal bomb shelters for use in a nuclear emergency. The shelters were stocked with essentials like food and water and were often located in the family’s backyard.
threatened the Soviet Union with “massive retaliation” against Soviet advances.

As part of his effort, Eisenhower used covert, or secret, operations around the world. In 1953, for example, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped overthrow the premier of Iran. American officials had feared he was a Communist. In 1954 the CIA helped organize the removal of the Guatemalan president for similar reasons.

In 1956 a crisis in Egypt seemed to push the world to the brink of a third world war. Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a vital waterway connecting the Mediterranean and Red seas, in an attempt to collect tolls from the canal to finance a major dam project. Britain and France, which relied on the canal for trade, allied with Israel, a longtime enemy of Egypt, and invaded the area around the canal. The Soviet Union, an ally of Egypt, threatened to crush the invaders. This would force the United States to defend its allies. Finally, the Americans and the Soviet Union agreed to condemn the invasion, and the Suez crisis ended. After the brief moment of cooperation, the Cold War continued.

**READING CHECK**

**ANALYZING** How was the arms race a display of brinkmanship?

**Families practiced getting into their shelters as quickly as possible. Some families spent free time in the shelters to adjust to spending weeks or months there.**

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**ANALYSIS SKILL**

**ANALYZING INFORMATION**

Which essentials did families keep in their bomb shelters?