

A. What created such great tension between North and South Korea?

Toward the end of World War II, the Soviet Union (USSR) declared war on Japan and by August 10, 1945, it occupied the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. At the end of the war, Korea was then divided into northern and southern portions at the 38th parallel by the Allies at the Potsdam Conference. The United States was to administer the southern part, while the USSR administered the northern area.

This division started the conflicts between the two areas of Korea because the northern region followed the USSR and became communist, while the south opposed this form of government and formed a strong anti-communist, capitalist government. As a result, in July of 1948, the anti-communist southern region drafted a constitution and began to hold national elections which were subjected to terrorism. However, on August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was officially founded and Syngman Rhee was elected as president. Shortly thereafter the USSR established a Communist North Korean Government called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) with Kim Il-Sung as its leader.

Once the two Koreas were formally established, Syngman Rhee and Kim Il-Sung worked to reunify Korea. This caused conflicts though because each wanted to unify the area under their own political system and rival governments were established.

"Tensions and Conflict on the Korean Peninsula" Amanda Briney

B. Why was North Korea able to attack South Korea?

Both Korean governments were determined to reunite their country on their own terms. Shortly after partition, North Korea supported large-scale guerrilla attacks on the south, and retaliatory raids by South Korean forces kept the divided country in a state of crisis. Despite this situation, American troops were withdrawn in June 1949, leaving behind only a small group of technical advisers. South Korea, whose army was small, poorly trained, and poorly equipped, faced an adversary (enemy) with an army of 135,000 men, equipped with modern Russian weapons, and between 150 and 200 combat airplanes. Although South Korean leaders and some Americans feared that North Korea might attack across the 38th parallel at any time, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, declared that Korea was not within the "defensive perimeter" of America's vital interests in the Far East.

"Korean War" John Whiteclay Chambers II

C. Why did the Soviet Union support Kim Il-sung's attacks on South Korea?

Kim Il-sung repeatedly sought support in Moscow for a military campaign to unify Korea, and had been repeatedly turned down—until January, 1950, when yet another request got a more encouraging response. What made the difference, it appears, was Stalin's conviction (belief) that a "second front" was now feasible (workable) in East Asia, that it could be created by proxies (substitutes), thus minimizing the risk to the U.S.S.R., and that the Americans would not respond. They had done nothing, after all, to save tired Chinese nationalists, and had even announced publicly that the American "defensive perimeter" did not extend to South Korea. Stalin read the speech carefully and authorized his foreign minister, Molotov, to discuss it with Mao Zedong (Chinese Communist leader). The Soviet leader then informed Kim Il-sung that the U.S. would likely not get involved. Kim in turn assured Stalin that "[t]he attack will be swift and the war will be won in three days."

"Origin of the Korean War" John Lewis Gaddis

D.

Why did North Korea feel like it could defeat South Korea?

Post World War 2 the Americans quickly reduced their number of soldiers based in South Korea; this left South Korea in charge of its own defense under the guidance of The Korean army, known as ROK. The Korean army was armed with light weaponry. The North on the other hand was given heavy weapons and military vehicles by the USSR making them a formidable opponent in military circles.

In 1950, the United States spoke openly of the countries they would willing support militarily. South Korea was not mentioned and this supported North Korea's view that America would not step in if they attacked the South. Overall this meant that North Korea were a much stronger military force and had strong backing by Stalin and the USSR while South Korea was left with light weaponry and a lack of support from the United States.

"Causes of the Korean War" Peter Fitzgerald

E. Why did the U.S. send troops to defend South Korea?

What Stalin had not anticipated was the effect an attack would have on the Americans: this unexpected attack was almost as great a shock as the one on Pearl Harbor nine years earlier, and its consequences for Washington's strategy were at least as profound (important). South Korea was of little importance to the global balance of power, but the fact that it had been invaded so blatantly—across the 38th parallel, a boundary sanctioned (approved) by the United Nations—appeared to challenge the entire structure of post-World War II collective security. It had been just this sort of thing that had led to the collapse of international order during the 1930s, and to the resulting outbreak of World War II. Truman hardly needed to think about what to do: "We can't let the U.N. down," he repeatedly told his advisers. It took his administration only hours to decide that the United States would come to the defense of South Korea, and that it would do so not just on its own authority, but under that of the United Nations as well.

"Origin of the Korean War" John Lewis Gaddis

F. Why did the United States enter the Korean War?

Events in Asia also contributed to an increased sense of insecurity. In 1949 China underwent a revolution that brought Mao Zedong and his Communist party into power. The nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-Shek, had retreated to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) while they continued their war with mainland China. Mao quickly moved to ally himself with the Soviet Union, and signed a treaty with the Soviets in 1950. The Truman administration faced criticism from Republicans who claimed he had "lost" China. They criticized him for not providing enough aid to the Chinese nationalists.

The Truman administration also faced criticism regarding its commitment to anticommunism at home. Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin had recently begun his infamous hunt for communists within the U. S. Government. Although McCarthy was just warming up, the recent trials of Alger Hiss and others for espionage left the Truman administration apprehensive (uneasy) about its anticommunist credentials. Truman and his advisors found themselves under increased domestic pressure not to appear "soft" on communism abroad.

Thus, when North Korean troops invaded the South, the Truman administration seized upon the opportunity to defend a noncommunist government from invasion by communist troops. Determined not to "lose" another country to communism, and interested in shoring up its anticommunist credentials, the Truman administration found itself defending a nation a world away from U.S. soil. Yet Truman's response was not merely a response to internal pressure. The invasion of South Korea made Truman genuinely fearful that the Soviet Union and China intended to expand the sphere of communism throughout Asia.

"The United States Enters the Korean Conflict"