

## **UNIT 12: MODULE: TASK 02: FOCUS ON ASIA?**

### **TASK 01: Read and Highlight**

On 6th August 1945, the US used the first atomic weapon on Hiroshima. This was followed with another on 9th August on Nagasaki. The Japanese then surrendered. The US led occupation of Japan then followed culminating in the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951.

The Allies in the Pacific, the US, Britain and China had met in Cairo in 1943 to discuss the post-war settlement. It was agreed that Japanese colonies would be liberated, the Japanese repatriated and democracies established. However, by 1946 war had broken out in Indo-China as Ho Chi Minh's communists fought the returning French forces.

Korea had been temporarily occupied by Soviet forces in the north and US forces south of the 38th parallel to facilitate the Japanese repatriation. Although the superpowers withdrew their forces, they left behind a pro-communist regime in the north under Kim Il Song and a pro-western regime in the south under Syngman Rhee. Both regimes aimed to unify the Korean peninsula.

By 1949, it appeared that the US had been successful in containing communism in Europe; the USSR had been stopped in Berlin so the Truman Doctrine was working and was now supported by NATO.

However two events shifted the balance in favor of the USSR by the end of 1949: the USSR got the atomic bomb and China fell to the Communist forces of Mao Zedong.

Both of these events had a profound effect on America in raising the government's fear of communism; simultaneously a Red Scare was taking place in the US which was heightened by these events and was to help shape the US response. The Red Scare heightened into a hysteria when Senator McCarthy accused members of the government as being Communist and triggered a witch hunt. (See ATL: Containment under Truman and Eisenhower)

One response of the US government was to draw up National Security Document 68 which set a new agenda for US foreign policy in the light of the new global threat.

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- 'Had it not been for the fall of China and the Korean war, the Cold War as a fifty-year phenomenon involving the expenditure of billions of dollars and the destruction of millions of lives might never have happened'

- Randall B Woods

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**TASK 02:** NSC-68 - Answer Questions

Read the conclusion of NSC 68 which can be found [here](#).

1. What does this report identify as the threats facing the US?

2. What does it see as the aims of the USSR?

3. What solutions does it put forward to deal with the threats facing the USA?

4. How is this document both similar and different to that of the Truman Doctrine?

NSC 68 was not immediately implemented. Truman was reluctant to support a programme that would involve a massive increase of spending on defense; indeed the report called for 'annual appropriations of \$50 billion, or not much below the former wartime levels'. However, the outbreak of the Korean War prompted action leading one state department official to comment 'Thank God Korea came along' - as this was the event that convinced the US public of the need for increased military spending. NSC 68 remained the basis of US foreign policy until the 1970s.

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Japan had officially annexed Korea in 1910 and was still in occupation of Korea when World War Two ended. Korean nationalists, who had led a revolution in 1945 and who included many Communists, were not allowed to decide the fate of Korea in 1945 and it was agreed by the USA and the USSR that the two superpowers would take joint responsibility for repatriating the Japanese forces there. The 38th parallel line of latitude was taken as the dividing point, with the USSR occupying Korea north of the line and the USA occupying Korea south of the line.

This was originally intended to be a temporary arrangement and at the Council of Foreign Ministers' Moscow Conference in December 1945 the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on the creation of a Korean provisional government, followed by a short period of international trusteeship or supervision, leading eventually to independence.

This was difficult to achieve, however, because:

As the Cold War developed, the USA and the USSR became less willing to co-operate.

Despite the Moscow Agreement, separate administrations emerged on either side of the 38th parallel. In the South, the U.S. military government put forward as leader the elderly Syngman Rhee, a rebel who had fought against the Japanese and spent much of his life in exile. The Soviets supported the Communists and backed a faction headed by Kim Il Sung, a young Russian-trained Korean Communist who had been a guerrilla fighter against the Japanese. Although the two men were very different, they had much in common: both were Korean nationalists, both wanted to end the division of Korea and each saw himself as the leader of a united Korea.

In the increasingly tense atmosphere of the Cold War, the division of Korea was confirmed in 1947. The Americans persuaded the UN to establish a commission to supervise Korean elections. This commission was refused entry into the North, but observed a separate election in the South in May 1948. Although most Koreans opposed partition, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was set up in the South under Syngman Rhee. It was an undemocratic and strongly anti-Communist administration, which was recognized as legitimate by the UN General Assembly. In response, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was founded in the North under Kim Il Sung in September 1948 and was immediately recognized by the Communist bloc. 'The Cold War had thus institutionalized a Korean civil war in two hostile states, each claiming to represent all Koreans'

Although the USA supported Syngman Rhee with economic and military aid, they did not intend to station troops there, and the U.S. military had left South Korea by mid-1949. Soviet troops left the North in 1948. The United States made it

clear that they still saw Europe as the most important area in the Cold War, but decided to maintain a line of offshore strong points stretching from Japan to the Philippines rather than involve themselves in expensive military commitments on the mainland. This was made clear in Dean Acheson's 'perimeter' speech of January 1950, in which both South Korea and Taiwan were publicly excluded from the American defensive perimeter in the Western Pacific.

### The actions of Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung's role is key to explaining this war. It is clear that both Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung wanted to unify the country. Thus a civil war would have existed here in any case, regardless of the involvement of the superpowers. However, neither side could unify the country on its own, and thus the involvement of the Soviets in support of Kim Il Sung or the Americans in support of Syngman Rhee was essential for success. Kim Il Sung put a huge amount of effort into persuading Stalin that he should back an attack on the South. Stalin initially had no interest in these plans and Kim Il Sung obtained Stalin's approval only after persistent appeals. Thus it is clear that the impetus for war came from Pyongyang and not from Moscow. The Truman administration's assumption in June 1950, and of many scholars writing since then, that the war was Stalin's initiative is therefore false, though his support for Kim Il Sung was key in allowing the war to go ahead.

### The role of Stalin and Mao

Stalin initially refused to help and only agreed after many appeals from Kim Il-Sung. Historians are unsure as the exact reason why Stalin changed his mind and agreed to help. Possibly it was because he was feeling more confident now that the Chinese had become Communist or he may have been worried about the US' new determination to turn Japan into a strong anti-Communist state; gaining influence over Korea would help to secure the Soviet position in northeast Asia. He may also have been working on the assumption that the US would not intervene as Acheson had not mentioned Korea in his 'perimeter speech'. Historian Gaddis sees this 'opportunism' of Stalin as an important factor. Meanwhile, Mao supported the invasion partly because Kim, on a visit to Mao, gave the impression that Stalin was more enthusiastic than he actually was, and also because he needed Stalin's support over his plans to invade Taiwan. Thus both Stalin and Mao misjudged the situation; indeed historian Warren Cohen describes Stalin's actions in agreeing to support Kim as his 'most disastrous Cold War gamble'. Truman's response to the invasion was swift and resulted in a large UN force being sent to Korea to push back the North Korean forces.

### **TASK 03:** Sourcework

## Document A

- Broadcast of Kim Il Sung to the nation, 26 June 1950

Dear brothers and sisters!

Great danger threatens our motherland and its people. What is needed to liquidate this menace? In this war which is being waged against the Syngman Rhee clique, the Korean people must defend the Korean Democratic People's Republic and its constitution, they must liquidate the unpatriotic fascist puppet regime of Syngman Rhee which has been established in the southern part of the republic; they must liberate the southern part of our motherland from the domination of the Syngman Rhee clique and they must restore the peoples' committees there – the real organs

of power. Under the banner of the Korean Democratic People's Republic we must complete the unification of the motherland and create a single, independent, democratic state. The war which we are forced to wage is a just war for the unification and independence of the motherland and for freedom and democracy.

## Source B

- Statement by U.S. President Truman, 27 June 1950

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. Accordingly I have ordered the Seventh Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa [Taiwan] ... I am calling on the Chinese Government on Formosa to cease all air and sea operations against the mainland ... 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.

What are the key points made in Document A regarding the reasons for North Korea's invasion of South Korea?

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With reference to the origin, purpose and content, assess the values OR limitations of Document A for historians studying why the Korean War started

Compare OR contrast Documents A and B regarding the explanation they give of 25 June 1950