

Introduction about the
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Introduction

One of the major results of the Second World War was the emergence of two world super powers; the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

These two powers appeared to be pitted against each other from an ideological point of view resulting in high polarization. The United States favored communism while the Soviet Union was pro communism and aimed to spread this ideology to its spheres of influence. The Soviet Union was keen on spreading communism while the United States was equally keen on advancing capitalism or at least curbing the spread of communism. One of the fronts on which this ideological war was fought was along the North and South Korea since North Korea was a communism sphere of influence while the south was a capitalism sphere. However, this ideological war escalated into a fully fledged military operation making it the first major war after the Second World War. Historians agree that the Korean War had a strong influence on US policy and the international history.

Bearing the huge significance of the Korean War, this paper shall conduct a concise yet informative research on the impacts of the Korean War on the US.

Events Leading up to the Korean War

The Korean peninsula prior to the end of the Second World War was under the control of the Japanese. Following the defeat of the Japanese and the subsequent end of World War II in 1945, the Korean Peninsula had an opportunity to regain its full sovereignty. However, this was not to be the case. Henneka documents that this “ liberation” of the Korean Peninsula was

started by the Soviet troops from the north which the American troops advanced from the South[1].

The two liberators, The US and the Soviets agreed to demarcate the Korean Peninsula at the thirty-eighth parallel line. This demarcation was meant to be a temporal one but over time, the Korean Peninsula became a front for the rivalry between the two world powers with the North being a Soviet sphere of influence and the South being an American sphere of influence. The political influence of the two rivals (Soviets and the US) on the Korean society was monumental and Henneka states that “ the two Koreas started their new life in dependence of their military and political protectors; the US and the Soviet Union”[2]. The war was sparked by the North Korea who invaded the South in 1950 with the sole goal of reunifying the two Koreas by force. Following the defeat of the Japanese, the US had taken up control of the political and administrative structures of South Korea therefore assuming the role of the hated Japanese Imperialists. The North therefore viewed the US as an imperialist taking over from Japan and the invasion was meant to liberate the South. The Korean War was devastating to both the North and the South and it is deemed to be one of the world’s most destructive wars in terms of the proportion of the population that was affected. Hang Shin documents that the war resulted in the decline of the South Korean population by approximately 2million and the creation of over half a million refugees[3].

The War ended in a stalemate with the North being a communist state and the South being a capital state under the protection of the US. However, the war which lasted from 1950 to 1953 had huge significances to the United States.

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Impacts of the War

A major impact of the war was the radical change of the United States' perception of the communist threat. Before the war, officials in the US held mixed feelings about the Soviet Union and while some perceived them as a real danger, the Soviets were seen as weak and incapable of carrying out war. Following the Korean War, Jervis records that the US now viewed communism as a force that was not only willing but also intent on attacking free nations so as to expand their influence[4]. The Korean War was seen as direct evidence that communism was willing to resort to armed aggression whenever it perceived that it could win the war.

The Korean War resulted in a monumental increase of the US defense budget. These increases could not have been possible without the new policies that came about as a result of the Korean conflict. Before the Korean war, the US government faced budgetary restrictions that prevented it from enhancing its defense or even offering foreign assistance on the high levels that it wanted to. As a result of the Korean War, there was large public support for a stronger military since the communist threat was more real to the Americans and they were therefore willing to be taxed more to fund the military[5]. Daggett when talking about the costs of the Korean War for the United States notes that the US engaged in a large buildup of forces not just for the Korean war but in readiness for deployment elsewhere in the world should the need arise[6].

Before the Korean War, the US was involved in helping the war-torn

European nations rebuild themselves through the European Recovery

Program (commonly known as the Marshall plan) which began in 1948-1951.
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This plan which is still hailed as the most successful aid plan ever implemented by the US was mostly aimed at economic recovery of the European nations. However, this plan also touched on security issues by establishing a military alliance in the form of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Trachtenberg notes that NATO was not militarized and it was hugely a symbol of the long-term American commitment to Europe and it aimed towards a greater degree of military integration[7]. The Korean War resulted in the militarization of NATO since the US saw the need to have a strong conventional defense force capable of countering the communist threat in Europe. Following the Korean War, the US was also keen to develop a large NATO army whose troops would come from the US and great contributions from Britain, France and German. The rearmament of Germany (which had been disarmed following the end of the Second World War) was also precipitated by the Korean War. Before the Korean War, there was fear that any war between the West and the Communism forces would result in a Third World War.

This was a scenario that was viewed as hugely undesirable and for this reason, the US went into great troubles to ensure that diplomatic means were used to quell disputes between capitalism and communism before they erupted into full scale wars. Prior to the Korean War, the US had held the assumption that war in any part of the world against communism would be unrestrained. The Korean War showed that it was possible to take part in limited wars where the dispute was limited to conventional forces at a particular geographical position[8]. The Korean War proved that the idea of <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-about-the-soviet-union-and-while-some/>

limited war could be realized without posing a threat to the world. The US was from then on more willing to engage in limited wars as is demonstrated from the Vietnam Wars.

The Korean War also resulted in deterioration in Chinese-American relationships. While the relationship between the US and China were bad even before the war, China's entry into the Korean War in support of North Korea and her Russian allies reinforced the notion to the US that China was a hostile nation. Jervis notes that while China joined the war as a result of its own personal interests in protecting itself from the perceived aggression by the United Nations forces, the US saw China as acting under the instructions of the Soviet Union[9]. The war therefore resulted in the change of China policy since now China was seen to be on the same side as the Soviet Union. The Chinese entry in the war therefore resulted in a solidification of the perception of a Sino-Soviet bloc. The US henceforth sought to strengthen her allies in the region (South Korea and Japan) by stationing military bases in the region as well as funding military spending for the countries so as to counter the perceived threat. In addition to this, the US became visibly anti-Chinese following the Korean War since China had in the eyes of the US proven herself to be an enemy. Another impact of the Korean War is that it resulted in the profound change of US policy by globalizing the U.

S. commitment. The war led to the adoption of a belief by the US that any communist victory would greatly threaten vital American interests. The US role in Indochina where the US offered economic and military aid was as a direct result of the policy changes that resulted from the Korean War. Jervis states that following the Korean War, the US worked under the assumption <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-about-the-soviet-union-and-while-some/>

that “ the whole of Southeast Asia is in danger of falling under Communist domination”[10]. While prior to the Korean War the US would have been reluctant to commit her troops and resources to reverse such a situation, the Korean War led to the preference of military intervention by the US to prevent a communist victory.

Another impact of the Korean War is that it placed North Korea as a major security risk to the United States. The direct attack initiated on South Korea by the North against supposed American imperialism demonstrated that North Korea was willing to undertake provocative actions against the US. This is a stance that is still held to the present day where the acquisition of nuclear warheads by the North is a major concern for the US which views Pyongyang as being willing to perpetrate acts of war from a historical view[11]. The Korean War enhanced the commitment of the US to the containment policy. The containment policy was proposed by United States diplomat George Kennan and it was primarily a policy designed to curb Soviet expansionism that seemed eminent following the end of the Second World War[12].

The containment policy was deemed necessary in light of the increasing influence of communism ideology in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia. In the cause of the Korean War, the US was tempted to endorse the rollback policy which would in essence have seen the destruction of North Korea's government and a take over by the US led UN forces. The failure of this policy during the Korean War resulted in the US reverting back to the containment policy which was summed up by the Truman Doctrine in which

the US pledged to “ support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures”[13].

This containment policy was hugely successful in that it kept Soviet aggression at Bay. Kang authoritatively states that the relative peace and stability on the Korean peninsula even in the face of predictions of war by many scholars has been proof that deterrence works[14].

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine one of the major wars in which the US was involved in; the Korean War or 1950. The paper has proceeded to highlight the events that led to the way and gone on to examine the various impacts that the Korean War had on the United States.

The consequences that the war had on US policy as well as her relationship with other countries have been articulated. From this paper, it is clear that the Korean War had immense impacts on the United States. It is this war more than any other single factor that resulted in the significant increase in the United State’s military spending. In addition to this, the war led to the globalization of the United States commitments as it viewed any local conflict as a test of strength between itself and the Soviet Union.

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