

# **HOW WAS THE KOREAN WAR A “FLASHPOINT” OF THE COLD WAR?**

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** Global History IV, US History II

**TIME REQUIRED:** One to two class periods

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will be able to:

1. Identify the Korean War as a Cold War event.
2. Explain the causes of the Korean War and how the U.S. became a major party to the Korean War.
3. Use primary and secondary sources to discuss and analyze how the Korean War was a flashpoint of the Cold War.

**MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Handout 1: DBQ: How was the Korean War a flashpoint of the Cold War? (attached)
- Documents 1-9 (attached)
- Handout 2: Essay
- Map outline of the Korean War (attached)
- paper, pens, pencils and coloring pencils

**BACKGROUND:**

While the Cold War was largely characterized by rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States that largely resulted in statements and threats, the Korean War involved both superpowers, plus the newly Communist China, in the war between North and South Korea. While there is little discussion of the Korean war in many Global History courses, the tensions between North and South Korea linger to this day.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Do Now – write this question on the chalkboard. “What comes to mind when you think of the term ‘flashpoint’? How can we apply these ideas to historical events?” Answers will vary. Follow-up questions may be: Does a flashpoint denote a violent situation? Does a flashpoint mean that it occurs very quickly, then dies out just as quickly?
2. Explain that we are taking on the Korean War as an example of a flashpoint, and that it occurred during the early period of the Cold War. Ask some basic questions to get students warmed up on the Cold War first: What was the Cold War? Who ‘fought’ in the Cold War? Why was it called a ‘Cold War’ in the first place? What were differences between both groups in the Cold War?
3. Show a map of North and South Korea in Asia. Questions to ask may include: What countries are close to North and South Korea? Why are these other countries important to the world today? How are North and South Korea presented in the media?

4. Explain that in 1950, these differences, plus the tensions of the Cold War, led to the North Korean invasion of South Korea. This invasion was addressed by the United Nations, which also called for a security force to push back the North Korean army. The UN, in addition, placed command and control of this force in the hands of the United States. With this, the Korean War commenced.
5. DBQ Focus: How was the Korean War a flashpoint of the Cold War? Divide students into three groups, providing each group with three of the nine documents and questions. Have the students work together to accomplish two objectives: first, to answer the questions to all documents, and second, to show how the documents support the context and the task of the DBQ.

**EVALUATION:**

Go over the answers to the DBQ and have students explain how their answers support the task of the DBQ. Further homework or a test grade can be shown in their essays to the DBQ.

## **HANDOUT 1: DBQ: HOW WAS THE KOREAN WAR A FLASHPOINT OF THE COLD WAR?**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historical Context:** While the Cold War was largely characterized by rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States that largely resulted in statements and threats, the Korean War involved both superpowers, plus the newly Communist China, in the war between North and South Korea..

**Task:** Using information from the documents and your understanding of global history, answer the documents that follow each document. Your answers will help you answer the Aim, in which you are asked to:

1. Identify the Korean War as a Cold War event.
2. Discuss the causes of the Korean War.
3. Analyze the roles of the United States, the United Nations, the Soviet Union, and China during the Cold War.

### Vocabulary from the DBQ

DPRK – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea – North Korea

ROK – Republic of Korea – South Korea

Syngman Rhee – ROK leader

Kim Il-Sung – DPRK leader

Pyongyang – capital city of DPRK

Seoul – capital city of ROK

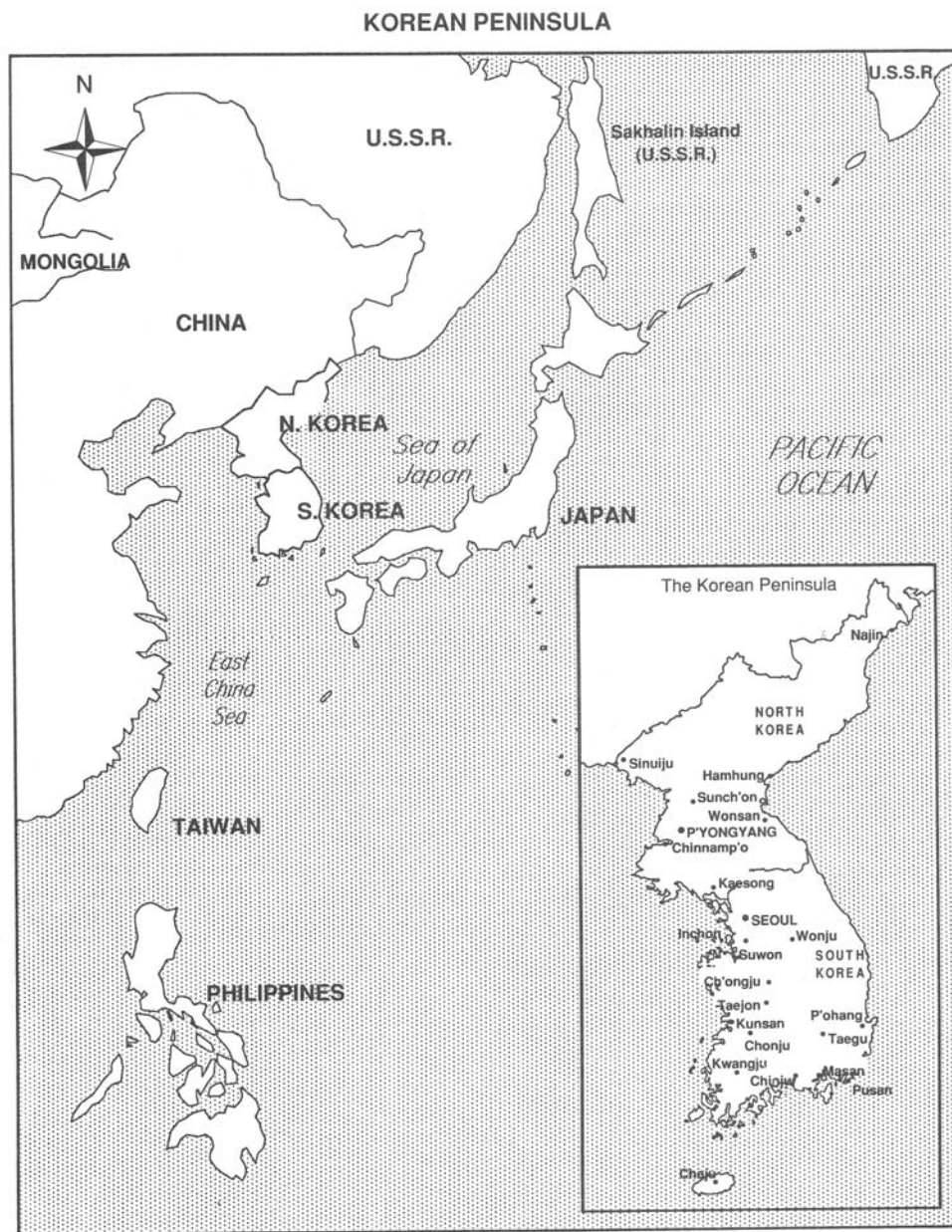
Cessation – an end to

Correlation – mutual relation of two or more things

To repel – to push back

## DOCUMENT 1

Name \_\_\_\_\_



What are three countries that are near the Korean peninsula? What are two ways they may be affected by the outbreak of war?

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**DOCUMENT 2** is part of a 1947 memorandum by Francis Stevens, assistant chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

“Korea...is a symbol to the watching world both of the East-West struggle for influence and power and of American sincerity in sponsoring the nationalistic aims of Asiatic peoples. If we allow Korea to go by default and to fall within the Soviet orbit, the world will feel that we have lost another round in our match with the Soviet Union, and our prestige and the hopes of those who place their faith in us will suffer accordingly...”

According to Stevens, how is Korea a symbol of the Cold War?

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**DOCUMENT 3** is from a 1950 article from the Soviet Monitor regarding the influence of the United States in southern Korea.

“Their (the United States) policy is aimed at making the southern part of the country a colony without rights and a military strategic springboard for the United States...under cover of the so-called United Nations Commission for Korea, American ruling circles set up a puppet ‘government’ under the traitor Syngman Rhee, who traded away the independence and material wealth. The collapse of national industry, increasing unemployment, a continuous worsening of the economic position of the working people and bloodthirsty terror – these are the results of American rule in southern Korea.”

What are the criticisms against U.S. policy in Korea?

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**DOCUMENT 4** is from a 1966 Soviet study of the Korean War, as noted in *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished* by Stanley Sandler (1999).

“The correlation of forces between North and South Korean forces (on the eve of battle) was as follows: in number of troops, 1:2, number of guns, 1:2, machine guns, 1:7, submachine guns, 1:13, tanks, 1: 6.5 (actually the South Koreans had no tanks, just armored cars), planes, 1:6. The operational plan of the KPA (Korean Peoples’ Army) envisioned that North Korean troops would advance 15 – 20 kilometers per day and would in the main, complete military activity within 22 - 27 days...specific towns and cities are cited, with the days for their anticipated capture: Taejon, Seoul, Osan, Kwangju, and with Pusan, the end of the war...”

According to the statistics and plans, which country holds a military advantage? Explain.

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Look at the map on Document 1. What directions would the North Korean forces take in an invasion of South Korea?

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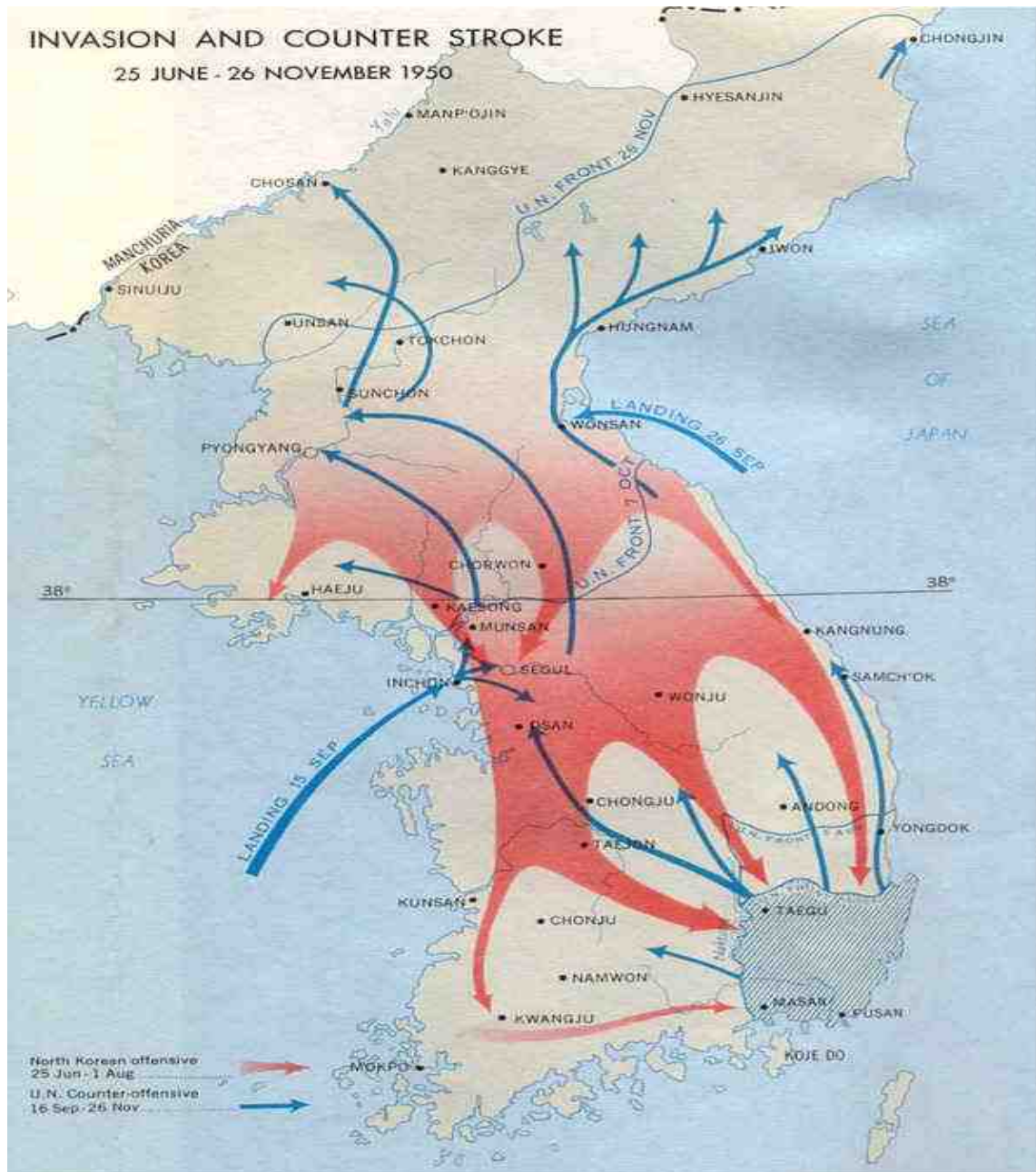
Consider the source of the document. What is the importance of the connection between the source and North Korea?

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**DOCUMENT 5** is an announcement from Kim Il-Sung, the Leader of North Korea and Syngman Rhee, the President of South Korea, and a map of the invasion and counter-strike that led to the Korean War, courtesy of the Department of National Defense, Government of Canada.



“The South Korean puppet clique has rejected all methods for peaceful reunification proposed by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and dared to commit armed aggression... north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The DPRK ordered a counterattack to repel the invading troops. The South Korea puppet clique will be held responsible for whatever results may be brought about by this development.”

Kim Il-Sung, June 25, 1950

“The Communists have invaded...our soldiers are fighting courageously, but they lack weapons. Please ask the U.S. to hasten the delivery of arms (weapons) to us.”

Syngman Rhee, June 24, 1950

According to this document, what is the main difference between the text of Kim Il-Sung and Syngman Rhee?

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Using the map, and the information from Document 4, what started the Korean War?

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**DOCUMENT 6** is from United Nations Security Council resolutions 82, 83, 84, and 85, dated between June and July, 1950.

(82 – June 25, 1950) The Security Council...noting with grave concern, the attack on the Republic of Korea by forces from North Korea...determines that this act constitutes a breach of peace...calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities...calls upon the authorities in North Korea to withdraw their armed forces to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

(83 – June 27, 1950) The Security Council...recommends that members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area.

(84 – July 7, 1950) The Security Council...recommends that all members providing military forces and other assistance pursuant to the aforesaid Security Council resolutions make such forces and other assistance available to a unified command under the United States of America.

(85 – July 31, 1950) The Security Council...requests the unified command to exercise responsibility for determining the requirements for the relief and support of the civilian population of (the Republic of) Korea and for establishing in the field the procedures for providing such relief and support.

According to these resolutions, what were three actions the UN Security Council took either against North Korea or for the benefit of the Republic of Korea?

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**DOCUMENT 7** is a list of countries supplying military and humanitarian aid to South Korea and from a speech by Harry Hopkins, member of the British Parliament.

<u>United Nations Forces during the Korean War</u>			<u>Medical Support</u>
United States	New Zealand	Belgium	Denmark
United Kingdom	South Africa	Ethiopia	Italy
Canada	Greece	Luxembourg	India
Turkey	France		Norway
Australia	Thailand		Sweden
Colombia			

“I should like to remark...that we are, in fact, witnessing something quite unique in the enforcement by arms of collective security by a world organization...that is something that has never before occurred in the history of the world and it is, at least, a consolation that we are moving along the lines toward an international police force.”

According to this document, what made the Korean War unique?

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**DOCUMENT 8** is an excerpt from the testimony of Captain Zhou Baoshan of the Chinese People's Volunteer Force on why Chinese forces attacked UN forces in the Korean War. (Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li, *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese soldiers*, 2004)

“...I told the men some historical facts about American invasions of China in the past and its recent occupation of Taiwan. We were victims of American imperialism. I argued that if we didn't stop Americans in Korea now, we would have to fight them later in China. To assist Korea was the same as defending our homeland...even though the U.S. military had modern weapons, the American troops were fighting an unjust war and suffering from low morale. They were short of manpower, and their support had to come from a great distance. Our army was dedicated to a just cause. We had the brilliant leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao (Zedong), and the full support of our people, the Korean people, and peace-loving people from around the world. Our weapons were not as advanced as the Americans, but we enjoyed a numerical advantage.”

What reasons did Captain Zhou give for attacking Americans?

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What advantages did he feel the Chinese had over the Americans?

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**DOCUMENT 9** is a different perspective from Captain Wang Xuedong of the Chinese People's Volunteer Force. He described the issues facing the CPVF, as well as the North Korean and U.N./U.S. forces.

“...First...we were hastily thrown into combat without good preparation and had serious breakdown in our supply and transportation systems. We had to take with us whatever we needed...when we ran out of food, we had to trade our blankets, towels, and even medicines with local Koreans for their rice, corn, and vegetables. Second, the cold weather hit our troops very hard...we lacked gloves, caps, and even winter shoes. Our division lost seven hundred men during the first week due to frostbite. Third, transportation became another serious problem...the [CPVF] marched 120 miles through mountains and forests in the cold winter with heavy snow and without trucks. In these conditions, it was impossible for the army to move with any kind of speed.”

What difficulties, according to Capt. Wang, did the Chinese soldiers experience during the Korean War?

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## HANDOUT 2: ESSAY

Directions: Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs, and a conclusion. Use evidence from at least five documents to support your response.

Historical Context: While the Cold War was largely characterized by rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States that largely resulted in statements and threats, the Korean War involved both superpowers, plus the newly Communist China, in the war between North and South Korea.

Task: Using information from the documents and your understanding of global history, answer the questions that follow each document. Your answers will help you answer the Aim, in which you are asked to:

1. Identify the Korean war as a Cold War event.
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Guidelines: In your essay, be sure to:

- Develop all aspects of the task
- Incorporate information from at least **five** documents
- Incorporate relevant outside information
- Support the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Use a logical and clear plan of organization, including an introduction and conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme