

# BBC Bitesize GCSE History – Cold War and Vietnam

## Episode 5 – The Korean War

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Katie:** I'm history podcaster Katie Charlwood.

**Datshiane:** And I'm history graduate and TV and radio presenter Datshiane Navanayagam.

**Katie:** And this is Bitesize GCSE History.

**Datshiane:** This is the fifth episode in a seven-part series on the Cold War and Vietnam War. And in this episode we're going to look at the Korean war, and how distrust and hostility between the superpowers moved to a new front in Asia.

**Katie:** We'll look at the causes, key events, the response of the United Nations, and the role of China and the impact of the Korean War.

**Datshiane:** To help you we'll be sharing revision hints and tips on how to remember key facts, and there'll be essay and exam advice.

**Katie:** And we'll check in with our Bitesize time-travelling reporter Jordan today, who'll be reporting from a key moment in this history.

**Datshiane:** Remember, if it helps to make notes you can always press stop and rewind whenever you need to.

**Datshiane:** Okay, let's get started. The Korean War, Katie give us the background to this, the who, the what, the when, and importantly the why - the causes.

**Katie:** So, we are heading back to the end of World War Two, Korea had been occupied by Japan during the second world war. The USSR liberated the north of the country at the end of the war, and the USA liberated the south. So, at this time the country was divided by a horizontal line border called the Thirty Eighth Parallel, which split the country into two zones of occupation, the Soviet-

backed communist North led by Kim Il Sung, and the US-backed capitalist South led by Syngman Rhee. This division created two rival governments, each claiming to be the legitimate ruler of Korea.

**Datshiane:** Ah, it's that old communist verse capitalist theme which runs throughout the series and strikes again.

**Katie:** Absolutely. The Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union fuelled this conflict.

**Datshiane:** The USA was committed to a policy of containment, aiming to prevent the spread of communism; whilst the USSR, and later communist China, supported the spread of communism in Asia.

**Katie:** And Truman, remember him, believed in his Truman Doctrine, which stated that any country that was threatened by communism should be helped by the USA.

**Datshiane:** So those are the causes. Now the events of the war itself; we'll help you to get familiar with the timeline.

**Katie:** On the 25th of June 1950, the North Korean forces, equipped and supported by the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea; their aim was to unify the country under communist rule. Kim Il Sung hoped that the South Koreans would welcome the North Korean forces, leading to a quick victory.

**Datshiane:** In July, the USA sent troops to support South Korea. President Truman remarked, 'If we let Korea down, the Soviets will keep right on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another.'

**Katie:** The UN passed Resolution 82 demanding North Korea's withdrawal from the South.

**Datshiane:** But hang on a minute, weren't the USSR a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council at the time?

**Katie:** Yes, go on.

**Datshiane:** And all permanent members have the right to veto decisions so, they could have just vetoed that decision.

**Katie:** Spot on, but at this point in history the USSR had been boycotting the United Nations Security Council. And so, Resolution 82 was passed, and the UN assembled a coalition of 16 countries, including Britain, to assist South Korea under the leadership of the USA. If you need a quick way to remember how the UN responded, think cafe, C-A-F-E.

**Datshiane:** Go on.

**Katie:** C is for condemnation and call for ceasefire. A is for authorisation of military action; this marked the first time the UN authorised the use of force to counter aggression. F for the formation of a unified command under American leadership, with General Douglas MacArthur at its head. And E is for effort, specifically humanitarian efforts. As with military intervention, the UN made sure there was a coordinated humanitarian aid, to address the needs of the civilian population affected by the war.

**Datshiane:** CAFE. If that works for you, use it; or if not, think of another mnemonic to help you remember.

**Katie:** So, between July and September 1950 the UN forces tried to push back North Korean forces from Pusan, a city on the south-east coast of Korea. The North Korean forces had made it all the way down here and set up the Pusan Perimeter.

**Datshiane:** In September, the UN launched a daring but successful invasion from the sea at Incheon. It turned the tide, allowing UN forces to recapture Seoul and push North Korean forces back.

**Katie:** But, in October 1950, there was a turning point when the UN forces approached the Yellow River, which was a natural border with China. This provoked China to enter in the war.

**Datshiane:** How so? Give us those key chain of events - oh, and make a note of these as they are significant in how the war continued.

**Katie:** Okay, so by pushing North Korean forces all the way to the Yellow River, the UN forces were going beyond what they originally set out to do, which was to push the North Koreans back over the border into North Korea. But, in pushing North Korean soldiers towards the Yellow River, which was a border with China, led to the Chinese launching a massive counter offensive that pushed UN forces back south. The war then became a very, very bloody stalemate around the border with thousands of casualties. And by provoking China to join the war, Truman sacked his military commander General Douglas MacArthur. Let's hear from Jordan, our time travelling reporter, who is in Seoul in 1951.

**Jordan:** Seoul has once again fallen under United Nations control after fierce fighting. UN and South Korean forces have driven Chinese and North Korean troops northward, reclaiming the capital city in a hard-won battle. This marks the fourth time Seoul has changed hands since the war began nearly nine months ago. Despite today's victory, the situation remains tense with people wondering whose ideology they'll be following next week. I've just been speaking with a journalist from the Associated Press who told me that, only weeks ago in the region around Seoul and Incheon, people were being killed, dispossessed of land and homes, left to starve, and driven away from all they held dear, because they were not communist and refused to act like communists. Today, in that same region, the same things are still happening, because some Koreans are communists and propose to remain so. And through an interpreter, a village elder told me that she was made to go to lectures about life in Russia and how good everything is. She says it was convincing, and people believed what they heard. But she is not a communist; she went because she was hungry. This is Jordan, reporting for Bitesize History. Back to the studio in the present time.

**Katie:** Thanks, Jordan. Although ceasefire negotiations began in 1951, it was not until the 27th of July 1953 that there was an armistice agreement. This was partly because Stalin died that year, and the North Koreans didn't think the new Soviet leader would keep supporting the war. This agreement established the Korean Demilitarised Zone, DMZ. It effectively ended the fighting without a formal peace treaty. This is one of the most important consequences of the Korean War, as it still exists today. Make a note of it and other consequences that follow.

**Datshiane:** If you had to imagine what DMZ looks like, then imagine a strip of land about two and a half miles wide and 160 miles long, heavily militarised.

**Katie:** An exam question might ask about the impact or significance of the Korean War. Remember to include your key knowledge of the events, and link these shorter- and long-term consequences, which you might want to write down. Let's consider some of the human impacts of the war first.

**Datshiane:** Well, it was huge; there was an enormous loss of human life with millions of Korean civilians and soldiers killed. Even many decades on, Korea remains divided into two countries: North and South.

**Katie:** This war intensified the Cold War, showing how the USA and USSR would support opposing sides in conflicts around the world, also known as a proxy war. The USA increased its military presence in Asia, and anti-communist sentiment grew.

**Datshiane:** The war caused immense suffering and loss, with millions of Koreans killed or displaced. Both North and South Korea were left devastated with infrastructure destroyed and economies shattered.

**Katie:** The Korean War did however reinforce American commitment to containing communism, leading to future conflicts such as in the Vietnam War, which we'll look at in the next episode. It showed that the USA was willing to intervene militarily to stop the spread of communism. China also emerged as a major power and gained respect amongst communist countries for its role in the war. The USSR also demonstrated its support for communist allies, though it indirectly participated by supplying arms and equipment to North Korea.

**Datshiane:** Overall, the significance of the Korean War was that it set the stage for further Cold War tensions, it divided Korea into two nations (the North and South), and it had lasting impacts on international relations and future American foreign policy.

**Katie:** Quick test time to see if those key facts have stuck: three questions, five seconds. Here goes. Along which line was North and South Korea divided?

**Datshiane:** The Thirty Eighth Parallel.

\*[correct bell sounds]\*

**Katie:** Who led the communist regime in North Korea?

**Datshiane:** Kim Il Sung.

\*[correct bell sounds]\*

**Katie:** Which country intervened in the Korean War in October 1950?

**Datshiane:** China.

\*[correct bell sounds]\*

**Katie:** Well done to everyone who got all three, which is in fact everyone! In the next episode we'll look at the Vietnam War, this again was a conflict between communism and democracy, and it had a profound impact on the United States of America.

**Datshiane:** Thanks for listening.