

Should the US have intervened in the Korean War?

Directions: Read through the primary and secondary sources to analyze whether or not the US should have intervened in the Korean War.

Document 1

Source: excerpts from, *President Truman's Radio and Television Address to the American people on the Situation in Korea*, July 19, 1950.
<http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/KoreanWar.pdf>

At noon today, I sent a message to the Congress about the situation in Korea. I want to talk to you tonight about that situation, and about what it means to the security of the United States, and to our hopes for world peace.

Korea is a small country, thousands of miles away, but what is happening there is important to every American.

This attack has made it clear, beyond all doubt, that the international communist movement is willing to use armed invasion to conquer independent nations. An act of aggression such as this creates a very real danger to the security of all free nations.

The attack upon Korea was an outright breach of the peace and a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. By their actions in Korea, communist leaders have demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles on which the United Nations is founded. This is a direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build a kind of world in which men can live in freedom and peace.

This challenge has been presented squarely. We must meet it squarely....

The principal effort to help the Koreans preserve their independence, and to help the United States restore peace, has been made by the United States. We have sent land, naval, and air forces to assist in those operations. We have done this because we know that what is at stake here is nothing less than our own national security and the peace of the world....

Under the flag of the United Nations, a unified command has been established for all forces of the members of the United Nations fighting in Korea. General MacArthur is the commander of this combined force.

We have the resources to meet our needs. Far more important, the American people are united in their belief in democratic freedom. We are united in detesting communist slavery.

We know that the cost of freedom is high. But we are determined to preserve our freedom—no matter what the cost....

Document 2

Source: Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Truce along present lines.
<http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/KoreanWar.pdf>

US Success or Failure (mid-May 1953)

If we do get a truce in Korea along the present battle line, would it seem to you that we had generally succeeded or generally failed in our main purpose in going into Korea?

Generally succeeded	45%
Generally failed	38%
No opinion	<u>17%</u>
	100%

Approve Signing? (early April 1953)

Would you approve or disapprove of our government signing an armistice to end the fighting in Korea along the present battle line?

Approve	69%
Disapprove	20%
No Opinion	<u>11%</u>
	100%

Document 3

Source: Public opinion on the Korean War, 1953: Korea Worthwhile? (October '52-April '53)
<http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/KoreanWar.pdf>

As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea has been worth fighting, or not?

	<u>Oct.</u> <u>1952</u>	<u>Nov.</u> <u>1952</u>	<u>Jan.</u> <u>1953</u>	<u>Apr.</u> <u>1953</u>
Worth Fighting	32%	34%	39%	36%
Not Worth Fighting	56%	58%	52%	55%
No opinion	<u>12%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>9%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Document 4

Source: excerpts from "What We Learned From the Korean War", *The Atlantic*, July 23, 2013, by James [president-emeritus and professor of history at Dartmouth College. He is a former Marine and the author of *Those Who Have Borne the Battle: A History of America's Wars and Those Who Fought Them*]. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/07/what-we-learned-from-the-korean-war/278016/>

... Ignoring his own intelligence reports of Chinese troop movements and consumed with his own confidence, [General Douglas] MacArthur assured Washington that China would not enter the war -- and if they did he was certain they did not have the means to mount a significant threat. One of his top generals dismissed them as Chinese "laundrymen." MacArthur boasted that he would bring "the boys home by Christmas."

The only American boys who got home for Christmas in 1950 came on hospital ships or in coffins. The Chinese entered the war as they had promised they would, and they did it in far greater numbers and with greater military capacity than MacArthur had predicted. By late November the First Marine Division faced annihilation at the Chosin Reservoir and fought their way out in what some have described as one of the great military actions of American history.

The Army's 31st Regimental Combat Team was nearly annihilated northeast of the reservoir. And units of the 8th Army that had advanced far to the north on the western side of the peninsula retreated under heavy Chinese assault. South Korean general Sun Yup Paik said the "God of Death himself hovered" over them. Correspondent Homer Bigart reported that it was "the worst licking Americans had suffered since Bataan [battle against the Japanese in WWII]." The largely American UN force was pushed back south of the 38th parallel and 5,964 Americans died in November and December 1950.

The war would continue for 30 more months, pushing and pulling a little north and a little south of the 38th parallel. And nearly 22,000 more Americans would die from 1951 to 1953.

In the last months before the 1953 truce, the U.S. Army fought the Chinese for Pork Chop Hill in a brutal battle. Everyone knew the treaty was coming but the fight continued over a piece of real estate whose ownership would finally be resolved at the Panmunjom talks rather than on the battlefield. In July 1953, as all recognized the agreement was near conclusion, 1160 more Americans died. As some of the troops in Korea described it, they "died for a tie [stalemate]."

**American deaths in the Korean War totaled 36,574.*

Document 5

Source: excerpts from, "The Role and Responsibilities of the United States in the Korean War: Critical Foreign Policy Decisions by the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations", *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, by Doug Bandow (Cato Institute) <http://www.icks.org/publication/pdf/2010-FALL-WINTER/5.pdf>

... The Korean War was small compared to the global conflagration [WWII] which preceded it by barely five years. But the former's consequences still were enormous. The human costs were high. The division between the two Koreas deepened. The war drew the United States into a permanent role as the guarantor of East Asian security. The conflict created enduring hostility between Washington and the newly-created PRC [People's Republic of China]. And the war militarized U.S. foreign policy.

None of these consequences was inevitable. Rather, they were the result of a series of decisions taken by policymakers looking through a glass darkly. Had Washington made different decisions at a number of key points, the futures of both the American and Korean peoples would have varied dramatically...

Few wars easily survive the harsh glare of history. President Truman and his aides had to make many difficult decisions under difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, administration mistakes did much to trigger the Korea War, expand the conflict to China, and militarize the Cold War around the world. The conflict's malign [harmful] impact is still being felt on the Korean peninsula and beyond.