

The Cold War Gets Hot: The Korean War, 1950-53

Should the USA pursue a "Limited War" in Korea only, or be prepared to risk a "General War" with China / the USSR?

1950	October: MacArthur, with Truman's permission, strikes deep into North Korea in the hope of driving the communists out altogether. China protests that this is illegal aggression and demands that the troops pull back.
1950	November: MacArthur's troops reach the Yalu river – the border between North Korea and China. He assures Truman that the Chinese will be crushed easily if they attempt to intervene in Korea.
1950	December: The Chinese launched a massive attack on MacArthur, pushing him back into South Korea. MacArthur asks Truman to authorise a blockade and military attacks on China, but Truman refuses, fearing that this could lead to a Third World War.
1951	April: Truman continues to insist the conflict remains a "limited war" and dismisses MacArthur for his outspoken criticism of this position. A stalemate develops with the two sides facing each other off at the 38 th Parallel.

Sourcework – Was Truman right to dismiss MacArthur?

Source A: December 1950 – Truman writes to MacArthur

"No speech, press release, or other public statement concerning foreign policy should be released until it has received clearance from the Department of State... The purpose of this memorandum is not to curtail the flow of information to the American people, but rather to ensure that the information made public is accurate and fully in accord with the policies of the United States Government"

Source B: March 1961 – "General War" - MacArthur to a Congressman

"My views and recommendations with respect to the situation created by Red China's entry into the war against us in Korea... follow the conventional pattern of meeting force with maximum counter-force as we have never failed to do in the past... if we lose the war to communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable... we must win. There is no substitute for victory"

Source C: April 1951 – "Limited War" - Truman says that MacArthur is fired

"So far, by fighting a "limited war" in Korea, we have prevented aggression from succeeding. We have taught the enemy a lesson. He has found out that aggression is not cheap or easy.

I believe that we must try to limit the war in Korea for these vital reasons: to make sure that the precious lives of our fighting men are not wasted; to see that the security of our country and the free world is not jeopardized; and to prevent a third world war.

A number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy. I have therefore considered it essential to relieve General MacArthur so that there would be no doubt or confusion as to the real purpose and aim of our policy. General MacArthur is one of our greatest military commanders. But the cause of world peace is more important than any individual. We are ready, at any time, to negotiate for a restoration of peace in the area. But we will not engage in appeasement. We are only interested in real peace...

Source D: April 1951 – MacArthur speaks before Congress

"The President's decision to intervene in support of the Republic of Korea... proved a sound one... but then Red China intervened with numerically superior ground forces. This created a new war and an entirely new situation... I called for reinforcements, but was informed that reinforcements were not available.

It has been said that I am a warmonger. Nothing could be further from the truth. I know war as few other men now living know it, and nothing to me is more revolting. But once

war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end...In war there is no substitute for victory.

There are some who would appease Red China. They are blind to history's clear lesson, for history teaches that appeasement, like blackmail, lays the basis for new and successively greater demands until violence becomes the only alternative. Some may say appeasement will avoid an all-out war with China – but China is already engaging with the maximum power it can commit...

Task 3: Complete these questions after reading through the sources.

a. Study Source A.

Why did Truman feel it necessary to issue this directive in December 1950?

b. Study Sources B&C.

Give three ways in which MacArthur (Source B) justifies his strategy of "General War"

1.

2.

3.

Give three ways in which Truman (Source C) justifies his strategy of "Limited War"

1.

2.

3.