The Cold War in Asia Notes


Naming himself head of state, communist revolutionary Mao Zedong officially proclaims the existence of the People’s Republic of China. The proclamation was the climax of years of battle between Mao’s communist forces and the Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek, who had been supported with money and arms from the American government. The loss of China, the largest nation in Asia, to communism was a severe blow to the United States.

Harry S. Truman’s administration tried to prepare the American public for the worst when they released a “white paper” report in August 1949. The report argued that Chiang’s regime was so corrupt, inefficient, and unpopular that no amount of U.S. aid could save it. Despite massive U.S. support for the Nationalist regime, Mao’s forces were victorious in 1949 and drove the Nationalist government onto the island of Taiwan. In September Mao announced the victory of communism in China and vowed to establish the constitutional and governmental framework to protect the “people’s revolution.”

Mao denounced those who opposed the communist government as “imperialistic and domestic reactionaries.” In the future, China would seek the friendship of “the Soviet Union and the new democratic countries.” Mao also claimed that communism would help end China’s reputation as a lesser-developed country. “The era in which the Chinese were regarded as uncivilized is now over. We will emerge in the world as a highly civilized nation.” On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China was formally announced, with Mao Zedong as its leader. He would remain in charge of the nation until his death in 1976.

1. Describe Mao Zedong’s rise to power in China and his initial plan for the new People’s Republic of China.

Document 2: Brave the Wind and the Waves, Everything has Remarkable Abilities. 1958.

2. Based on this propaganda poster, what is Mao Zedong’s vision for China’s Great Leap Forward?
Mao toured China and concluded that the Chinese people were capable of anything and the two primary tasks that he felt they should target were industry and agriculture. Mao announced a second Five Year Plan to last from 1958 to 1963. This plan was called the Great Leap Forward. By 1959, it was obvious that the Great Leap Forward had been a failure. Quickly produced farm machinery produced in factories fell to pieces when used. Many thousands of workers were injured after working long hours and falling asleep at their jobs. Steel produced by the backyard furnaces was frequently too weak to be of any use and could not be used in construction — its original purpose. Buildings constructed by this substandard steel did not last long. Also, the backyard production method had taken many workers away from their fields — so desperately needed food was not being harvested. Party leaders claimed that the harvest for 1958 was a record 260 million tons — which was not true. Some parts of China were hit by floods. In other growing areas, drought was a major problem. The harvest for 1959 was 170 million tons of grain — well below what China needed at the most basic level. In parts of China, starvation occurred. The government had to introduce rationing. It is thought that 20 million people died of starvation or diseases related to starvation. The backyard furnaces also used too much coal and China’s rail system, which depended on coal driven trains, suffered accordingly.

3. Which two industries did Mao Zedong target in the Great Leap Forward?
4. List three problems with the Great Leap Forward that ultimately led to it’s failure.

In 1966, China’s Communist leader Mao Zedong launched what became known as the Cultural Revolution in order to reassert his authority over the Chinese government. Mao called on the nation’s youth to purge the “impure” elements of Chinese society and revive the revolutionary spirit that had led to victory in the civil war 20 decades earlier and the formation of the People’s Republic of China.

Mao launched the so-called Cultural Revolution (known in full as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution). He shut down the nation’s schools, calling for all youth to kill some government officials for a lack of revolutionary spirit. In the months that followed, the movement escalated quickly as the students formed paramilitary groups called the Red Guards and attacked and harassed members of China’s elderly and intellectual population.

5. Based on what you know about The Great Leap Forward, why would Mao Zedong need to “reassert his authority over the Chinese government”?
6. Predict why would Mao Zedong close schools during the Cultural Revolution? Why would he target “China’s elderly and intellectual population?”
Korea was occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. The United States proposed temporarily dividing the country along the 38th Parallel as a way to maintain its influence on the peninsula, which bordered Russia. But the divide lasted in part because of competing visions among Koreans for the country’s future.

The Korean War began when North Korean troops pushed into South Korea on June 25, 1950, and it lasted until 1953.

In 1948, the American-backed, anti-communist southern administration declared itself the Republic of Korea. Soon after, the Soviet-backed, communist north, based in Pyongyang, declared itself the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Its leader was Kim Il-sung, who was the grandfather of North Korea’s current dictator, Kim Jong-un.

The war pitted South Korea and the United States against North Korea and China. The Soviet Union supported North Korea by giving it arms, tanks and strategic advice.

The war devastated Korea. Historians said that between three million and four million people were killed. As many as 70 percent of the dead may have been civilians. Destruction was particularly acute in the North, which was subjected to years of American bombing. Roughly 25 percent of its prewar population was killed. The North Koreans see the American bombing as a Holocaust, and every child is taught about it.

So, how did it end? Technically, the Korean War did not end. The fighting stopped when North Korea, China and the United States reached an armistice in 1953. But South Korea did not agree to the armistice, and no formal peace treaty was ever signed. Since 1953 there has been an uneasy coexistence between North and South Korea, which hosts over 20,000 American troops. In the decades after the war, South Korea transformed into an economic powerhouse. Meanwhile, North Korea became a communist dictatorship under Kim Jong-un.

7. Predict why would the United States be concerned about Korea’s border with Russia after WWII? How did the United States recommend dealing with their concern?

8. The Korean War was technically a war between North Korea and South Korea. Despite this, how did the United States and Russia show support for their sides?

9. Describe how the Korean War ended.

**THE KOREAN WAR IN FOUR MAPS**

June 25, 1950

Sept. 14, 1950

Nov. 25, 1950

July 27, 1953
10. Describe the events of the Korean War according to the images in Document 6. Be sure to include all four images in your description.


[Image of the Koreas at Night]

11. Based on this image of North Korea from space at night, how are the effects of the Korean War still felt today?


After World War II had ended, Japan was devastated. All the large cities, the industries, and the transportation networks were severely damaged. A severe shortage of food continued for several years. Japan basically lost all the territory acquired after 1894. The remains of Japan's war machine were destroyed, and war crime trials were held. Over 500 military officers committed suicide right after Japan surrendered, and many hundreds more were executed for committing war crimes. A new constitution went into effect in 1947: The emperor lost all political and military power, and was solely made the symbol of the state. Universal suffrage was introduced and human rights were guaranteed. Japan was also forbidden to ever maintain an army. Furthermore, Japan's media was subject to a rigid censorship of any anti-American statements and controversial topics such as the race issue.

12. How did the United States and its Allies deal with Japan after World War II? Include at least 3 sanctions in your response.
13. Explain the Japanese economic situation compared to the United States and Great Britain from 1870 to 2000. How does the end of World War II impact Japan economically?