THE COLD WAR: STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT

CONTAINMENT IMPLEMENTED: KOREA
Our Class Session Topics

1. Prelude to Containment: A Tense Partnership
2. Containment Begins: The Truman Administration
3. Containment Implemented: Korea
5. Containment Challenged: Khrushchev and Cuba
6. Containment Punctured: Vietnam
7. Containment Revised and Victorious: Détente and Dissolution
Short Summary – the Korean War

- North Korea invades South Korea June 25, 1950 and pushes South Korean forces to south end of Korean peninsula

- US Army under Gen. Douglas MacArthur invades South Korea at Incheon, south of Seoul, South Korea in September 1950 and routes North Korean troops, pushing them back into North Korea within 30 miles of the Yalu River (border with China)

- November 1950 China sends troops into North Korea and pushes UN/US forces into South Korea.

- China, North Korea, South Korea and UN/US enter into armistice negotiations in spring 1951 ending the war in July 1953.
US LSTs at Incheon 1950
How US got to June 25, 1950

End of WW II

Korea as “protectorate” of Japan since 1905; Korean’s are collaborators or patriots

Soviets invade Korea in August 1945 near end of WW II to gain sphere of influence there and in Japan

In August 1945, US scurries to establish 38th parallel as US/Soviet demarcation line and Soviets agree

US sends troops to south Korea in September 1945 to stabilize south peninsula
1945-1950

Soviets Union and United States do not come to agreement on a unified or independent Korea

Kim Il-sung becomes Soviet approved North Korean leader

Syngman Rhee becomes US approved elected South Korean leader
Before June 1950 outside Korea

July 1945 Potsdam Conference failure regarding Eastern Europe and Germany unification

Allies announce unification of US-Britain-France west German areas (West Germany) in 1948 and Europe of prime strategic concern to US and USSR

Soviets explode its first atomic bomb August 1949

Chinese Communists defeat Chinese Nationalists in August 1949
Soviets withdraw troops from North Korea in 1948; US in 1949

January 1950 US publicly announces its periphery of concern in Western Pacific/East Asia

US and Japan begin negotiating a defense treaty (to Stalin’s severe disappointment)

US Secretary of State
Dean Acheson
Questions so far?
Stalin hesitant at first to support Kim’s invasion of South Korea
- changes mind after Chinese Communists drive Chinese Nationalists onto Taiwan
- assurances by Kim of quick victory before US could mobilize

- Stalin wants
  - a warm water port in Korea
  - Commitment of Communist Chinese to help N. Korea to put CC on bad side of US and keep CC in Soviet camp
  - stabilize Korean peninsula
  - Maybe offset Japan – US defense treaty

N. Korea does not have quick victory and US and other UN countries send troops to South Korea in June/July 1950
Why the US sent troops to Korea (strategic interest?)

- Sees invasion backed by USSR and a breach of 1945 US/Soviet Korean co-op agreement
  - containment needed
  - No indication of Soviet or China hostile moves in other global areas (though Europe always in mind)
- Invasion violation of UN resolutions (threat to world order)
- 38th parallel restoration impossible without US troops
  - An unified communist Korea poses threat to Japan and Philippines – at edge of US peripheral zone of interest
  - Korea has no strategic interest in a general war though
- Broad support by US public and US allies
- US Divisions available in Japan without jeopardizing Japan
  - These divisions were weak in experience and equipment though
- NSC 68 was awaiting approval by Truman
- Europe and West Germany are watching
Goal of United States in Korean War

Unification of North and South Korea?

Or status quo ante bellum?

- Continued division would allow a North Korean hostile force that would attack South Korea again

- Continued division would put Korea as was before the invasion; North would pay no price as an aggressor

- Continued division demoralizes people of South Korea
Fear unification attempt may provoke a direct clash with Communist China or the Soviet Union

- Communist China indicated this through Indian interlocutor several times but seen as a bluff by US

- China felt threatened by US 7th Fleet sent to Taiwan at beginning of Korean War

- US mystified at Chinese concern of US invasion of China
- United States did not see itself militarily prepared to engage with China
- Fear of direct clash arose
  - in part from the successful testing by the Soviet union of a nuclear bomb in 1949,
  - the communist takeover of China in the same year, and
  - the Chinese-Soviet military alliance.
US tied up in Korea may allow Soviet Union to attack Europe while US was overstretched

- If allow Korea aggression, open divided Germany up to attack by Soviets

- Would reverse dangerous strategic trend in far east of communist takeovers (domino effect)
How Soviets saw Korea

US would not intervene

- Must avoid general war with US due to its nuclear capability

- Korea potential US distraction

- N. Korea and China could act as proxies though

Keep China hostile to US and remains in Soviet camp
China’s reasons for Korean intervention

United pro west Korea emboldens US to support invasion of Taiwan

Western Imperialism must be stopped

Must not have American capitalism on China border (a desired sphere of influence)

United Korea a point from which Chinese Nationalists counter attack mainland China

Must follow Stalin’s lead and he offered support
China routes MacArthur and UN/US forces in November 1950

- MacArthur at Wake Island meeting with Truman in October 1950 assured him China would not enter the war
- MacArthur given too much discretion above 38th parallel
- Truman Administration too heady after Inchon victory
- Route gives rise to debate in Truman Administration whether to withdraw completely
  - Too much at stake to do so; copy British at Dunkirk and Egypt and hang tough
- By June 1951 MacArthur has been dismissed and US below 38th parallel.
- Armistice talks begin in July 1951, concluding in July 1953 with divided Korea.
The Lessons of Korea

- Politics must drive military actions
  - Control the military
- Diplomacy and its channels are important
- Understand the other side’s point of view
- Be careful how you signal your intentions
- Understand containment vs dangers of roll back
- Increase military strength for aggressive communists
The results of the Korean War

- Truman signs NSC 68 expanding the strategic interests of the US

- Conventional weapons military budget increases from $12.3 B (1950) to $51.2 B (1953)
Questions?
Next Week

Containment Modified: Eisenhower and Nuclear Strategy