

Why did the United Nations pass the resolution to go to war over South Korea?

The invasion of South Korea by North Korea was the first international crisis since the Second World War and the first crisis since the United Nations was created. The Korean war set the precedent for future disputes, and it is also partly responsible for the contempt countries would have in the future for the UN (for example a resolution was never passed on the Vietnam War, as both China and US had no respect for the UN). The consensus on the United Nations during the Cold War is that it was defunct however on the Korean War; a resolution calling for war was passed. By 1950 the world was bipolar and this was demonstrated in the United Nations. China, France, Great Britain, The Soviet Union and The United States all had the power to veto any legislation. The Security Council is ultimately responsible for the passing of the Korean resolution and therefore it is important to analyze the reasons why the resolution was passed.

China

Truman's strategy since the beginning of 1950 was to drive a wedge in Sino – Soviet relations. This was not thought of as impossible, relations between Stalin and China were often strained, Mao Tse – tung stressed on several occasions that “the Chinese revolution achieved its victory against the will of Stalin.” However it was widely perceived in the international environment that the Soviet Block dominated all Communist governments. Truman's policy however changed dramatically after the Sino – Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.

Communist China however did not care to have the United States as an ally. China more than the Soviet Union encouraged the North Koreans to go to war, however they perceived the war differently. They thought the war would be quick, and wouldn't provoke a lot of attention from the international community. China, the Soviet Union, and the United States were however sending military aid before the UN resolution.

However, the United Nations still recognised Chiang Kai-shek as the legitimate leader of China, and so he favoured war against North Korea. He was hoping to gain support for his party against the Communist government from the United States. China had long been a close ally to the United States, and so when the communist revolution occurred it did create a crisis. Chiang Kai-shek described the communist revolution as “World War III had already started with Russia's direct participation in an aggressive war against China (October 09, 1949).” He stated this before the Korean War but it shows his belief in Russian dominance over communist countries and also his belief in the domino theory.

However it is also important to note (as will be discussed later,) that western countries by the time of the Korean War had recognised the Chinese communist government as legitimate. Great Britain (January 04, 1950) was the first Western country to recognise the “People’s Republic of China.” The motives for Britain are more complex than that of the United States. Britain at this point still had colonies, one important one being Hong Kong. Therefore it was important to Britain to maintain relations to prevent a Chinese invasion of Hong Kong. It is therefore important to note that when they recognised the communist government they also stated that they “want to establish diplomatic relations based on respect for territory and sovereignty.”

Soviet Union

It is surprising that the Soviet Union did not veto the UN resolution calling for measures against Korea, especially as Stalin did not want war (Khrushchev later in his memoirs blames Stalin for not being supportive enough). However this shows that his contempt for the United Nations was greater than his desire to avoid war. The Soviet Union was not present and therefore unable to veto the resolution as they were in protest at the presence of Dr Tsiang. The Soviet Union believed that that the Communist Chinese government should be represented in the United Nations and therefore they refused to take part until they took presidency in August 1950.

However did Stalin think the UN was hopeless and that whatever happened war was inevitable? The Soviet Union and the US were already supplying Korea before the resolution was passed. The Soviet Union were sending 120 – 150 million rubles worth of military and technical equipment and the “South Koreans was armed and equipped by the USA and had been long waiting for the green light from Washington(M. Malik).” The environment was dangerous because of this, and as the League of Nations had proved international organisations was not important for countries. Did Stalin think that war was inevitable?

Or, did Stalin genuinely believe that if the Soviet Union was not present that this would equalise as a veto? The Soviet Union repeatedly called the Korean War illegal as all permanent members of the Security Council have to vote on the resolution. They also claim that it is illegal as it doesn’t represent the legitimate government of China. Did he believe that the United Nations could not pass a resolution without the Soviet Union being present?

Unites States of America

After the Second World War America had new influence among Asian countries, one of their main allies being Japan. America also believed in the domino theory and therefore America had to act to prevent a collapse of the democratic government in Japan. Japan was weak, struggling, which is an environment that lends itself to revolution and Korea is strategically placed. The way they use Asian countries seems an excuse, a way to gain popular support.

It wasn't about sovereignty; it was convincing people that the domino theory was a threat to society. Some memorandums do also support Stalin's idea that America was going to declare war with or without a UN resolution. If Korea fell America thought that the Soviet Union was going to get stronger and more powerful. America was sending more aid to South Korea than China and Russia together were. The way America perceived the Korean War to the Security Council and to the public was it was the Soviet Union trying to extend their dominance over the world. However America got the resolution passed as they increased the fear about the Soviet Union especially in countries in Europe.

Great Britain and France

Within the Cold War era it is true that the world was bipolar, it had two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. However regarding the United Nations, it is made up of five veto wielding powers. Therefore it is important not to dismiss Britain and France as merely allies of the United States, but to understand some of the other issues of the Cold War. As the Australian (member of the commonwealth) government states "Communist aggression stressed the possibility that the Communist guerrilla campaigns in Malaya and Indochina might be intensified as a result of the developments in Korea." This is what Britain and France truly cared about, the fighting in their colonies.

Britain agreed that South Korea should be protected however as Kenneth Younger argued the American's haven't tried to diplomatically resolve it. In a cabinet meeting Atlee and their ministers argued that "It had not been proved that, in carrying out this aggression on South Korea that North Korea had been acting on instructions from Moscow." This is predominantly the difference between Britain and America. America perceived communism as a whole evil, Britain only thought the Soviet Union was a threat.

The Korean War for Britain was something they ought to help the United States in, however they knew that any move they took against China could result in a Chinese attack on Hong Kong, and if Chinese invaded Hong Kong Britain knew that they could not repel the attack. In October 1949 Communist troops did land in Hong Kong and they occupied custom posts which had been abandoned by Nationalists. However they did

not launch an attack on the British troops stationed there. But did they do this just to take over Nationalist posts or was it also to show Britain their force? The Vietnam War was completely different however. Even then Britain refused to cut off trade with North Vietnam, British ships from Hong Kong was still trading. This was decided as they didn't want to create a crisis in Hong Kong and to annoy China.

Britain was more China friendly, on August 03, 1950 Great Britain voted to allow the "People's Republic of China" to be recognised in the United Nations. Great Britain voted with the Soviet Union, India and Norway and against the US, France, China and Cuba. Britain passed the Korean War as they thought they ought to support America, but also in the hope that if they supported America that they would in turn be more accepting of their colonial issues.

France

For France they had more to gain from the US stance against communism. In Indochina France was fighting trying to maintain their dominance over the communists. France more than Britain wanted to support America because it was in their national interest to. America didn't support colonialism so France was hoping through the threat of communism they could gain American support and assistance. France at first refused to send troops explaining that they were engaged in "a struggle analogous and parallel to that of the UN in Korea." They did however in the end send troops.

Britain and France however miss-judged America's hatred of colonialism. It is true that they were obliged to enter the war; however they in return didn't get the benefits that they wanted. This is demonstrated in 1956 when the US forced Britain and France to retreat from the Suez Canal, the US refused to support them and forced them to retreat, as if not, they were going to stop their Marshal Plan payments.

To conclude China, North Korea and the United States were the only countries really pro-war. However due to Britain and France supporting the United States the resolution was passed in the UN.