**What was the significance of the Korean War in the course and development of the Cold War?**

The Korean War made it clear that the struggle against communism could not be confined to one area (Europe) and one enemy (the USSR). This movement of the Cold War into Asia, and the involvement of communist China in the conflict, led to a wide range of changes in American policymaking based on the escalated scale and intensity of the threat at hand.

**1. USA: Domestic Effects**

*"NSC-68 provided the blueprint for the militarization of the Cold War from 1950 to the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s"* (Ernest R. May)

*“[The Korean War] confirmed the ideas behind NSC-68, with its call for US to expand its military and to lead an anticommunist alliance”* (Goldfield).

**MILITARY = USA military further strengthened – NSC68 and the military-industrial complex**

▪ Following the Kennan Telegram, the USA saw the USSR as threatening but weak; expansionist but cautious.

▪ NSC-68 was a much more robust document claiming that the Soviets were threatening, strong, expansionist and reckless, and that on this basis the USA needed to rapidly escalate its “dangerously inadequate” military capabilities to meet this challenge. It made the rollback of global Communist expansion a high priority and rejected the alternative policies of friendly détente and containment of the Soviet Union.

▪ The Korean War ensured that the thinking of NSC-68 was adopted ("Korea... created the stimulus which made action" – Acheson). The coming years saw the massive expansion of the US military to such an extent that Eisenhower was to warn his own people of the growing power of the ‘military industrial complex’ in his final presidential speech.

**SOCIAL = USA public further radicalised – McCarthy and the “Red Scare”**

▪ The belief that communism was now a monolithic, multi-headed beast with its tentacles spread around the world struck fear into the hearts of millions of Americans. This panic was channelled and heightened by Senator Joe McCarthy, who became the public face of the “Red Scare” in 1950s America. Initially claiming to have a list of public officials who were ‘card-carrying’ members of the communist party, his smear campaign was even directed against President Truman, whom he called a “Son of a bitch” for firing MacArthur.

**PUBLIC = USA presidents further radicalised - Massive Retaliation**

▪ Ike’s policy, drawing on the lessons of Truman’s perceived ‘failure’ in standing up to communism, was to threaten nuclear war against any communist nation that threatened vital American interests. In Eisenhower’s view, as per NSC-68 and even the Kennan Telegram, communist nations understood only one language: force. By threatening “Massive Retaliation” against any enemy, Ike did a great deal to raise Cold War tensions with the USSR and accelerate the arms race which brought the world to the brink of nuclear Armageddon during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

**2. USA: Diplomatic Effects**

*“It was from the Korean War onward that we had a permanent, global American military presence that we had never had before. It was a real turning point for America’s global role”* (Professor Charles Armstrong)

**Europe and Asia: Multilateral Alliances**

**Asia: SEATO**

▪ In the aftermath of the Korean War, the USA quickly established an Asian equivalent of NATO to block further communist gains in Southeast Asia: The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), an international organization for collective defence in Southeast Asia created by the Manila Pact (1954).

▪ Like NATO, the military forces of each of the member states would be coordinated to provide for the collective defense of the members' country. Its members were Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan (including East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), the Philippines, Thailand, South Vietnam, the United Kingdom and the United States.

**Europe: NATO**

The North Atlantic Treaty was largely dormant until the Korean War initiated the establishment of NATO to implement it, by means of an integrated military structure: This included the formation of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in 1951, which adopted the Western Union's military structures and plans. In 1952 the post of Secretary General of NATO was established as the organization's chief civilian, the first major NATO maritime exercises began; Exercise Mainbrace, and Greece and Turkey acceded. In 1955 West Germany was also incorporated into NATO, which resulted in the creation of the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact, delineating the two opposing sides of the Cold War.

**Asia: New Enemies**

**New enemies: Mao (China)**

General MacArthur took the view, accepted by Truman, that communist China was still too weak after the Revolution of 1949 to pose a major Cold War threat. Chinese intervention in the Korean War demonstrated that this judgement was catastrophically wrong, and that the US would now have to face the threat not only of Stalin, but of Mao. In fighting against the US in the first war the United States entered and did not win, China established itself as a power to be reckoned with, and a communist power at that.

**New enemies: Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam)**

By demonstrating that the Cold War would now be fought in several continents, the USA abandoned the limited geographical perimeter of the Cold War as recommended by Acheson and which had incited the North Koreans to attack South Korea. The 1950s and 1960s therefore saw the USA getting increasingly drawn into Vietnam in particular – and then into Laos and Cambodia in turn – in a desperate attempt to stand firm against the communist ‘threat’ posed by Ho Chi Minh. The irony of course is that the mistakes of Korea (in particular the difficulty of winning a limited war in a faraway country against an enemy supported by a communist superpower) were not learned.

**Latin America: New Allies and Enemies**

**New allies: Support for dictators, not just democrats**

The Truman doctrine was based on the idea of protecting ‘free peoples’ from the threat of ‘communist subversion’. However, after the Korean War it was only anti-communism, rather than any commitment to freedom, which was required for American support. This set the scene for US support of Latin American dictators including *Batista* in Cuba, *Trujillo* in the Dominican Republic, *Papa Doc Duvalier* in Haiti and *Pinochet* in Chile.

**New enemies: Castro (Cuba)**

It was United States support for Batista, the brutal anti-communist dictator of Cuba, that fuelled the growth of Castro’s rebel guerilla army in the Sierra Maestra mountains which seized power in 1959. Although Castro presented himself as a nationalist, not a communist, and made initial attempts to win the support of US government, his nationalisation of industry and agriculture convinced the paranoid Eisenhower administration that he was a communist. In a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, their blockade of Cuba then drove Castro into the arms of the USSR, with Cuba remaining a communist country to this day. Che Guevara, then a Cuban government minister, visited North Korea in 1960 and proclaimed it a model for Cuba to follow.

**Discussion point**: 90% of UN troops in the Korean War were provided by the USA. What conclusion(s) do you draw from this?