

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD  
KOREA, 1945-1950

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. EARLY US DIPLOMACY TOWARD KOREA.....	26
III. WARTIME DIPLOMACY.....	49
IV. LIBERATION AND MILITARY OCCUPATION OF KOREA.....	93
V. THE MOSCOW CONFERENCE AND THE JOINT COMMISSION.....	143
VI. TWO KOREAS AND WITHDRAWL OF FOREIGN OCCUPATION FORCES.....	176
VII. SYNGMAN RHEE AND THE FIRST REPUBLIC OF KOREA.....	199
VIII. CONCLUSION.....	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	256

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

American involvement in Korea before 1945 was minimal; since World War II America has been deeply involved in Korea because of US strategic interests in East Asia. The post-war involvement in Korea differed from relations during earlier periods. Americans now had to deal with a new configuration in domestic ethnic politics—namely a resurgent Korean nationalism<sup>1</sup>—that sometimes conflicted with or challenged the interests of the United States. Many American diplomatic historians who study U.S.-Korean relations during the Cold War have overlooked an important factor: the voice of the Korean people themselves.

Traditional historians contend that the United States was resisting the spread of communism in local areas as well as international arena. Thus, the United States saved Korea from the spread of communism during the period of American military government, as it did in the Korean War, too, to preserve a basis for future democracy. Policy makers in the United States believed that communists, or for that matter, any

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<sup>1</sup> The cultural dimensions of Korean nationalism and its limits, the means by which that heritage was transmitted, and how groups selectively appropriated from that thought system to generate the appearance of consensus all are important considerations for the study of the early Cold War period on the peninsula. Unfortunately, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this study. The stress herein is on how nationalism impacted unification. How the discourse on nationalism was normalized in public discourse is certainly worthy of a separate analysis. Instead, this study employs a more revisionist or post-revisionist approach to political study. Its focus is on the legitimized use of power rather than an emphasis on cultural competition over defining that concept.

leftists, were monolithic and Soviet-directed. According to the traditional historians, that was the main reason the United States government chose Syngman Rhee, a die-hard anti-communist, as the leader of South Korea. Revisionists counter the ideas of traditionalists with arguments that the United States pursued economic imperialism after World War II ended. A representative revisionist scholar, Bruce Cumings, denigrated Rhee as “the father of division of Korea,” criticized the policy of the United States that he felt betrayed the hope and desires of Korean people and asserted that it must be held responsible for the division of Korea and the outbreak of the Korean War.

Bruce Cumings framed his analysis upon a world system theory linking US hegemony strategy to the advancement of a world capitalist system; in his opinion, this is the key to understanding U.S. policy towards Korea. However, Cumings’ conceptual framework that stressed the structural position of the United States within the world system and the center-semiperiphery-periphery hierarchy within the world structure, which situates Korea on the periphery and marginalizes Korean history as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In other words, his methodology opts to subsume local historical events and personalities beneath an analysis of the development of world capitalism in the region as a whole. Therefore, by overlooking the internal energy and developments associated with the Korean people’s efforts to resolve the crisis of national division, Cumings’ analysis unfortunately takes on a one-sided viewpoint, and any indigenous practical efforts at resolving the national question are seen as trivial under the structured world system.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chung Yong Wook, “History of US Policy Regarding the Occupation of Korea (1945-1948): Trends in Existing Research,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, 7 (1994): 60-61.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



This study accepts the view of Choi Sang Yong, a noted political scientist of Korea, which attributes the response of nationalist movements to the external pressure of U.S. occupation and the effects of the Cold War within and outside Korea. This study examines relations between the United States and Korea and Korean efforts to build a durable nation-state on the peninsula in the post-WWII period. It stresses several important assertions, including many points American diplomatic historians, both traditional and revisionist, have usually slighted or ignored in their treatments regarding U.S.-Korean relations.

First of all, these scholars have put undue emphasis on an external factors—the Cold War context and the history of Soviet-American relations—to the neglect of close scrutiny of key individuals in more localized geographic settings and their role in local politics. Their actions, and inaction, impacted not only the interactions in Korea between regional power bases and the superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—but also the course of the Cold War in East Asia as a whole. That story is too vast an enterprise to undertake at present. Instead, this study focuses more narrowly on the prevalence, persistence, and influence of Korean nationalism.

A second point grows out of the first. Power relations, regardless of whether one is addressing the United States and South Korea or the Soviet Union and North Korea, rarely flow in a one-dimensional manner from the top down within any political framework. Considering the balance-of-power and degrees of leverage adds another dimension of analysis. In this case, American diplomatic historians traditionally have downplayed the influence of the Third World as an active player in geopolitical grand strategy. This study suggests a need to study both regional structures and superpower

contexts. For instance, even if the two superpowers occupied Korea and dictated much of its destiny, local leaders nevertheless used that circumstance to advance their own designs, including the pursuit of political hegemony throughout the peninsula, and not always to the delight of their superpower allies.

Third, many diplomatic historians have emphasized short term factors in postwar Korea. This study, though, probes deep into the period when relations between the United States and Korea were initiated. Finally, this analysis confirms that idealistic U.S. rhetoric, was often though not always, cloak for the pursuit of self-interest. Viewed from this perspective, United States aid to Korean democratization proved to have clear limits. Actions, simply put, fell short of words.

More than sixty years have passed since World War II ended. Upon the victory of the Allied powers, Korea anticipated becoming a liberated and independent country free from the longtime domination of the Japanese. Instead, on August 15, 1945, when the Japanese emperor unconditionally surrendered to the Allied powers, Korea was divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The Soviet Union controlled the north and the United States the south. Both powers intended the partition to be a ‘temporary military occupation’ until the Korean interim government could be established. Yet three years later, the United States and the Soviet Union created two separate Korean governments, the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north.

The partition along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel became permanent in 1948 because the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had deteriorated with the onset of the Cold War. This important change in context made the task of political

reunification of the peninsula even more difficult. Indeed, all efforts at unification during the five years after 1945 had proved disappointing. Then, a bitter war began in June 1950 and Koreans subsequently experienced the most tragic time in their modern history.

Among the countries partitioned by the foreign powers after World War II ended, such as Germany, Vietnam, or Korea, only the latter country is still divided into Communist North and Capitalist South at the beginning of the twenty first-century. The Cold War, we are often told today, ended almost two decades ago. Actually, it still persists in Korea until the present day and there is no end in sight.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1980s and early 1990s, scholars engaged in much controversy over the role of the United States in modern Korean history. The Kwangju People's uprising to democratize Korea, and the tragic results of the "Kwangju massacre" by the leaders of the military *coup d'etat* in May 1980, played a crucial role in shaping evaluations from hindsight about the role of the United States and democracy in Korea since 1945. In the aftermath of massacre, anti-Americanism became more visible and blatant. It was a shocking development for those observers who had long perceived the United States as a "benevolent Great Power" that defended the fragile democracy of South Korea, especially against communist aggression during the Korean War.

The Kwangju democratization movement became a turning point in U.S.-Korean relations as Korean people began to reassess the role of the United States in their history. Korean radical groups, including young scholars, student leaders in the colleges, and anti-government leaders, now depicted the United States as an imperialist power that had

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Cumings, "The Wicked Witch of West is Dead. Long Live the Wicked Witch of the East," ed. Michael J. Hogan, *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 98.

betrayed the hopes and desires of the Korean people to democratize their society. Many Koreans soon blamed the United States government for supporting the military dictatorship in Korea solely for American interests and purposes. According to David F. Schmitz, diplomatic historian, the United States at the time allied itself to dictatorship as long as its leaders provided “stability and order, welcomed and protected investments, and were bulwarks against communism.”<sup>5</sup> Schmitz argues that although the United States is philosophically and morally dedicated to broaden ideals such as supporting democracies and human rights abroad, as the Cold War deepened, it blinded American foreign policy makers to those concerns and instead prompted them to choose dictators who said they were against the Communists and desired to be a part of the “free world.”<sup>6</sup> In the long run, however, Schmitz points out how these “dictatorships created a backlash of anti-American sentiment in the Third World that radical nationalist movements led to establish socialist governments the United States most opposed and originally tried to prevent.”<sup>7</sup> American commitment to Korea, it seems, fits this scenario. At a minimum, it shows American foreign policy supported authoritarian regimes during the Cold War and relegated idealistic Wilsonian principles of democracy and self-determination of peoples to a subordinate status to the pragmatic dictates of expediency. After Korean radical groups reviewed the revisionist history of their country, they reached the conclusion that

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<sup>5</sup> David F. Schmitz, *Thanks God They're On Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 176.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

the United States was primarily responsible for the division of the peninsula, the Korean War, and the continued “colonial” rule of Korean society by the western superpower.<sup>8</sup>

Traditional or orthodox Korean historians deny that the United States was entirely responsible for the division of Korea. Traditionalists believe United States policy towards Korea was a means of protecting democracy and freedom against the Communist threat in East Asia after World War II.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, revisionist historians argue that the United States’ foreign policy was the most crucial determinant in the partition of the Korean peninsula, which eventually led to the Korean War. According to revisionists, even though the United States government demanded Korea become an independent nation, its establishment was imposed in an imperialistic manner designed to assure the continuation of a capitalist system which, in turn, preserved the continued prosperity and safety of American interests in East Asia. As a result, Korean self-determination was put on hold. In order to achieve its goal of containing Soviet expansion, the United States neglected to foster efforts among Koreans to reunify their

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<sup>8</sup> A younger generation of Korean scholars and students born in or after the Korean War have critically debated the period between 1945 and 1948, in particular, and the nature of Korean society since 1945. This period shows how the U.S. military government shaped the foundation of South Korean politics and society. The debate was tremendously influenced by Bruce Cumings’ work on the origins of the Korean War during the 1980s. *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). A young Marxist group has argued that Korea was a “colonial semi-feudal” society during the Japanese colonial rule and American military rule. Another Marxist group defines the period under American rule as “neo-colonial semi-capitalistic” society. Cho Hi-yon traces the historical background of the debate on the nature of Korean society and presents the debate in Cho Hi Yon, ed. *Hanguk Sahoi Kusonch’e Nonjaeng* (Debate on Korean Social Formation) (Seoul: P’ulbit Press, 1989) 2 vols; cited in Lee Sang Min, “The Political Economy of Occupation: United States Foreign Economy Policy in Korea, 1945-1949” (Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1991), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Joungwon Alexander, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Kim Hak Joon, *Unification Policy of South and North Korea, 1945-1991: A Comparative Study* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1978).

country. American objectives, intentions, and actions thereby changed the destiny of Korean people and tremendously influenced the direction of their modern history.

Most revisionists argue that the oft-proclaimed threat of the Soviet Union was not actually all that important to American policy makers. Gabriel Kolko, a revisionist historian, maintains that “The economic component remains the single most important factor in its [America’s] postwar conduct in the Third World, even if it is far from being a sufficient explanation.”<sup>10</sup> Another revisionist historian, Walter LaFeber, argues that “The expansion of the capitalist system is more important than the expansion of liberal democratic systems” in United States foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> In short, what was most important to Washington leaders, it seems, was to spread American ideas, values, institutions, and systems in other parts of the world where they suspected indigenous people might want to adopt them. In a similar vein, William Appleman Williams contends that, “America’s freedom and prosperity depend upon the continued expansion of its economic and ideological system through the policy of the open door.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, after World War II ended, Americans also evidently believed they should accept the moral obligation of world leadership earlier rejected after World War I. In the process, the line between idealism and realism continued to become more blurred.

Most studies of American policy toward Korea focus on the period either from the American occupation in 1945 to the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, or

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<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945-1980* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1988), 291. See also, Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and the United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Walter LaFeber, “Tension between Democracy and Capitalism during the American Century,” *Diplomatic History*, 23 (Spring 1999), 264-65.

<sup>12</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, revised edition, (New York: The World Publishing Co., Inc, 1959), 209

the American involvement in the Korean War from 1950-1953. These studies usually investigated broad questions: what were the causes for the division of the Korean Peninsula? Who was responsible for starting the Korean War? Due to the overt emphasis on Cold War conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, these approaches ignore much local context. In particular, they neglect Korean nationalist movements that emerged during Japanese colonial rule and climaxed under American military occupation, or how their call for national independence and creation of a united and democratic country eventually conflicted with goals of the United States government and policies more often designed to establish a friendly government as a “bulwark against communism.” Many studies also neglect the theme of continuity and change over time. They pay little attention to how American policy toward Korea evolved from 1945 through the period immediately before the Korean War as a response to contingent circumstances.

As a prelude, this dissertation carries the tale of national relations between Koreans and Americans back to 1882 when a modern nation-state began its historical development and contact was established between the two nations. The study, however, will deal primarily with American foreign policy toward Korea between 1945 and 1950. Part One covers the period from 1945 to 1948 when an American military government ruled Korea and explains how its policy and actions helped Korean rightists form South Korea. The second part, which addresses the period from 1948 to 1950, describes the establishment of this government and how Syngman Rhee tried to manipulate the local situation to maximize aid from the United States, build Korea’s military power, and facilitate an economic plan after the withdrawal of American army in 1948 to secure the

survival of the Republic of Korea. The last chapter, especially, illustrates how Rhee, as a leader of weak state, refused to accept American containment strategy as *status quo*, and instead sought to reverse American regional policies and unify the Korean peninsula through military force.

In other words, many pertinent questions remain outstanding: What was the American military government's original goal in Korea? How was American occupation related to the goals of Korean nationalism? How did American policy affect the formation of the Korean political party? Indeed, how was America's Korean policy even formulated? What disagreements, if any, existed between policy makers over the essential features of American policy toward Korea? If there were controversies, what were their contents and causes? Who or what department was responsible for American policy? Who came up with the decision to withdraw the United States from Korea? What were the activities of the U.S. Military Advisory Group in Korea after the withdrawal of the U.S. Armed forces? Why did the United States decide to intervene in the Korean War so quickly in spite of its former decision to withdraw from the Korean peninsula? What legacies did the American occupation policy leave to the Korean nation? What was the foreign policy of Rhee's government toward the United States? Much remains unanswered. This study will attempt to provide some tentative answers to some of these questions.

After liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Koreans faced problems demanding immediate attention, such as what to do about foreign intervention in their politics, the division of the peninsula, and how to construct a new polity. Yet, the movement to build a nation-state after liberation of Japanese rule failed to create a



unified, democratic, and independent Korea. With the assistance of former collaborators with the Japanese and North Korean émigrés, American military authorities established the Republic of Korea as an anti-communist bulwark. Actually, Koreans' efforts to build a modern nation-state were not new. They started in the late nineteenth century but were foiled by foreign imperial powers. Since then, the United States has joined in the concert. In the process, it has tremendously impacted modern Korean history for good and ill. Still, it should be noted that through this relationship Koreans clearly have suffered from contradictions between U.S. moral claims used to justify its "Manifest Destiny" as uplifting to all mankind and the reality that the United States, as a Great Power, overwhelmingly has shaped its policy in terms of national interest and security, especially during the heightened tension of the Cold War.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States greatly influenced the formation of the structure of North and South Korean politics, society, and identity after liberation. This was the starting point for a new conflict between South and North Korea as each struggled to legitimize its own government. The regions soon began to follow separate paths; one followed a capitalist model, the other followed a socialist/communist model. However, the creation of the Republic of Korea became the most important factor separating the two regions. North Korea accused South Korean politicians of taking the first step to create a divided nation and responded by declaring

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<sup>13</sup> The ideal of Manifest Destiny has been the ideological rhetoric that poses as the guiding principle of American foreign policy since the middle of the nineteenth century. According to Frederick Merk, historian who studied the origin of this idea of "Manifest Destiny," and its impact upon the history of American expansion, U.S. destiny ordained by God and its mission as a "Great Nation," is to spread its democracy and freedom. It was based on racism that Americans are superior race than non-Western peoples. This crusading ideology became a moral backbone of U.S. expansionist foreign policy ever since its inception. Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

its own independence in September, 1948. South Korea responded to the accusation with assertions that North Korea had been already following a “dependent” pro-Soviet course earlier.<sup>14</sup>

A close examination of circumstances in 1948 at the time of the founding of the two Koreas, as Chapter 4 through 6 will show, is important to a proper understanding of the political developments that led to the Korean War. In domestic terms, the Korean War had a tremendous effect on the national consciousness of North and South Korea. It confirmed that there were two distinct countries each with its own peculiar political, social, and economic culture. But cause and effect are not always congruous. Internationally, the Korean War intensified the Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and the United States; thus, superpower interest in unification quickly waned. It is worth noting that a better understanding of how great power interventions led to national division and the Korean War might ultimately prove useful to those making policies affecting any future reunification of Korea.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

While much valuable scholarship exists on the subject, too much of it is episodic or overly broad in coverage. More detailed and systematic assessments of local context and chronological development are in order. Diplomatic historians in Korea and the United States, for instance, have not adequately covered the period 1948-1950, between

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<sup>14</sup> These disputes over who started to establish separated nation the Korean peninsula became important points of contention between traditional and revisionist historians. Revisionists argue that Syngman Rhee with the support of American military government took the initiative to establish separated government in the South first. However, Russian archives that were recently opened by Russian Government contain historical documents showing that North Korea by the order of Stalin started to establish separated government in October 1945 or early 1946. Kathryn Weathersby found historical documents that support argument. Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and The Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence From Russian Archives,” Working Paper No. 8. (Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 1993).

the establishment of the Republic of Korea and the start of the Korean War. Very little research has been done on Rhee's foreign policy toward the U.S. between 1948 and 1950 probably, in large part, because of Korean antipathy for Syngman Rhee as a dictator. In addition, American diplomatic historians who have been influenced by Bruce Cumings' works during the 1980s in their approach to the study of U.S.-Korea relations also describe Syngman Rhee as responsible for the origins of the partitioning of the Korean peninsula. Cumings stresses that Rhee, with the help of General Hodge and his military government officials, gained political hegemony in Korean politics, and established a separate government that adopted hostile policies toward North Korea, and this agenda eventually led to the War. Most previous studies, including Cumings' works have interpreted Rhee's foreign policy through the lens of the Cold War. Yet, before rendering such judgments as conclusive, it is imperative to more thoroughly investigate Korean society before the War and to appreciate the perspective of Korean nationalism to thereby better understand local communities and politics that sometimes aligned with the Cold War template cast down upon them but often did not.

One problem historians will perennially confront is that government documents usually reflect an ideological bias; nevertheless, these works remain essential sources for any study of the United States occupation of Korea. These reports articulate the official position of the State Department, the Headquarters of the United States Armed Forces in Korea, and the Defense Department, and contain other first-hand testimony connected with the occupation of both an official and personal nature. As a result of American government officials' ideological preconceptions, however, they often convey a skewed interpretation of events in Korea. They were unable to understand the complexity of the

political situation in Korea. The historian, therefore, must make determinations as to the credibility and objectivity of these sources. To do so, however, more systematic and comprehensive research into contemporaneous sources is needed.

### ***Historiography***

George M. McCune's *Korea Today*<sup>15</sup> and Richard Robinson's unpublished work "Betrayal of the Nation,"<sup>16</sup> advance a traditional perspective found in most official writings. For the most part, these books provide a rather balanced view of the events of that time. Both authors observed American occupation policy first-hand as officers in the military government in Korea. Each of them, though, offers a different perspective. Espousing the traditional anti-communist and anti-Soviet view, McCune is primarily concerned with blundering and confusion among American occupation and military government officials. The 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, according to McCune, was not intended to be a permanent partition of Korea into two zones. Richard Robinson, an officer during the occupation, advances a different critique of American occupation policy. Robinson argues that the Soviet Union and the United States Joint Commission failed because the United States manipulated the "freedom of expression" strategy to discredit Russians and

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<sup>15</sup> George M. McCune, *Korea Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). McCune was born in North Korea, the son of a missionary, and worked as an advisor on Korean affairs in the US State Department from before World War II. He also had experience working as a specialist on the Far East in the OSS Division of Research and Analysis during World War II. McCune was the most well-informed specialist on Korea at that time. However, his early death in 1948 deprived of the future historian an outstanding authority on Korean history and politics. His widow, Evelyn McCune and his Ph. D. student, Arthur L. Grey had completed one tenth of this book and published it in 1950 in memory of Professor McCune. (Cited in Chung Yong-wook, "History of US Policy Regarding the Occupation of Korea (1945-1948): Trends in Existing Research," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 7 (1994), 52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Richard Robinson worked in the G-2 Historical Section, Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea and participated in the writing of the "History of the US Armed Forces in Korea." He was quite critical of US occupation policy and the high-level elites in the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea. While in Korea, he has secretly investigated and later unpublished his work containing his personal experience and observation during in Korea and in the United States in 1960.

to take the initiative in negotiations. Rather than overtly challenging the occupation policy directed from Washington, these works criticize the United States dealings with the Soviet Union, the implementation of the policy, and the officials involved in it. At present, these sources, despite their differences, remain the best and most valuable books contributing to our present understanding of the foreign policy of the United States in Korea at the time.

Other studies also have done pioneering work. *The American Military Government in Korea* (1951) by E. Grant Meade, an official of the United States Military Government in Korea, covers the first year (October 1945- October 1946) of the occupation and provides detailed descriptions of the activities of the US military government in one province (Cholla Nam Do) based on the author's experience, various occupation internal reports, and interviews with other participants. This book contains background and general information concerning the structure of the military government and attempts to evaluate the civil affairs of local administration in Korea while American foreign policy was implemented during this period.

Soon Sung Cho's *Korea in the World Politics, 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (1967) is a comprehensive survey of the Korean position in the world from 1940 to 1950 and deals with the role of the United States in Korean history during those critical years. During this period, the failure of the allies to achieve the unification of Korea led to its subsequent division, the emergence of two separate political regimes, and ultimately the outbreak of Korean War in 1950. After studying the memoirs of wartime negotiators, materials of the postwar occupation, and the United Nations documents pertaining to Korea, Cho evaluates American responsibility with

regard to its role in the trusteeship of Korea, the liberation and division of Korea between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the Korean War. Cho argues that a lack of information, inconsistencies, and inadequate preparations by the United States in determining its proper role and relationship with Korea, were the primary reasons for the ultimate division of the peninsula. He calls for more firmness and consistency from the United States and argues that the United States could and should have done much more than it did in its commitment in the south.

Gregory Henderson's *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (1968) covers Korean politics from the time of liberation to the 1960s. Henderson was a foreign diplomat and is the most renowned Korean specialist after McCune. He asserts that Korean society was homogenous and its politics were highly centralized. Therefore, he claims, the center dominated society. Yet Korea failed to develop "meaningful middle groups" in terms of interest groups and institutions. Based on his "theory of the vortex," Henderson argues that Korea lacked "intermediate groups, plural associations, viable political parties, and a balance of power between center and locality."<sup>17</sup>

According to Henderson, political democratization of Korea failed because the middle class was unable to close the gap between the central and provincial regions, as well as the chasm separating the upper and lower classes. The occupation policy of the United States, Henderson maintains, also failed because neither American policy makers nor the military government authorities understood the "vortex-like political patterns" in Korean society. Henderson's work provides a theoretical explanation of the internal factors behind modern Korean politics. Henderson suggests that the hope of a better

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 363.

future for Korea depends on a less centralized and more pluralistic society. However, in explaining his “vortex of politics” theory Henderson seems to have underrated the tragic experiences of Koreans such as external invasion and influence, colonialism, and foreign military occupation, treating them as secondary or rather unimportant factors. Nevertheless, Henderson’s study made an important contribution to understanding Korean politics and American political policy in Korea.

The 1970s was a watershed period in historiography. In that decade, revisionists, spurred by the anti-Vietnam War movement and the Civil Rights movement, now emerged as highly visible critics of the traditional perspective on the foreign policy of the United States. Unlike earlier writers, the revisionists, based in part on access to new material after the opening of secret documents, concluded that the United States bore major responsibility not only for the origins of the Cold War, but also for the division of Korea and the outbreak of the Korean War.

Even before then, however, the groundwork for this argument had been laid. Renowned revisionist historian D.F. Fleming, in his work *The Cold War and Its Origins* (1961), attempted a comprehensive survey of the Cold War. In it, Fleming argued that the United States and its policy, rather than communism and the Soviet Union’s aggression and expansion, brought about the Cold War. He provided a highly critical account of the occupation and an interpretation of the Korean War that touts the logical inconsistency of defending South Korea and then invading North Korea. Other revisionists, such as Joyce and Gabriel Kolko in their *The Politics of War* and *The Limits of Power*, argue that the United States emerged from the Second World War as the military and economic super power. Anxious about political hegemony, military

domination, and the spread of capitalism, American policy makers grossly exaggerated the ideological danger of communism. According to Kolko, Russian foreign policy was cautious, lacked a master plan, and was concerned largely with security and economic recovery. Yet, after the war, American diplomacy opposed the forces of the left wing everywhere in the world. The basic source of the world crisis, the Kolkos claim, was an expansive American foreign policy's interaction with decolonization, revolutionary forces, and the quest for national autonomy appearing throughout the globe. Kolkos' works are able to explain the foundation of the Cold War structure and United States foreign policy in less than flattering terms with regard to America's idealistic claims.

Since the Cold War was reputedly motivated by U. S. economic imperialism and American expansionism after the end of the Second World War, revisionists naturally argue the conflict was not inspired by the Soviet's military aggressiveness and ideological conflict. They also applied this framework and methodology to an understanding of the specific nature of United States foreign policy in East Asia. These works are significant to understand the background and the foundation of the Cold War and United States foreign policy as well as the formulation and implementation of the occupation policy in Korea but still left much to conjecture.

Thus, even though he accepted the Kolkos' main arguments, Bruce Cumings in his outstanding work, *The Origins of the Korea War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, offered a reinterpretation of the causes of the Korean War in 1981. Unlike previous writings that focused on short term factors, Cumings argues that the seeds of the Korean conflicts had roots deep in Japanese colonial rule as well as in the wartime and immediate postwar Korean policy of the United States. Therefore, he



emphasizes the importance of the nature of Korea's domestic society which the Japanese colonial legacy left as it passed under the American military government. After the war ended, according to Cumings, leftists in Korea probably could have won control of the peninsula in a matter of months. Korean society, he asserts, was ripe for a leftist social revolution. Nonetheless, he also emphasizes that a significant numbers of leftists were not communists, but rather moderate socialists.

According to Cumings, the left-right split, which emerged during the colonial period, became a crucial source of the domestic power struggle. These divergent political forces actively responded to the inconsistent American occupation policy with agendas of their own. Faced with a social revolution in Korea, American occupation authorities supported the rightists from the beginning. Cumings, through his insight about the language, culture, and history of Korea, greatly contributed to an improved understanding of postwar U.S. policy and offered a heightened level of research on the occupation policy of the United States and modern Korean history.

Cumings also edited *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, (1983) which is a collection of essays by several scholars on U.S.-Korean relations from 1943 to 1953. Drawing heavily on declassified U.S. government documents, the authors present interesting new insights on various aspects of relations between the United States and Korea during and after World War II. This book includes important points about how Korea was divided, why the Korean War occurred, how U.S. decision makers perceived South Korea before the Korean War, and how crucial decisions were made during the war. These essays offered a better understanding of the background behind the formulation of American occupation policy toward Korea.

In *Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (1985), James Irving Matray surveys U.S. Korean policy from 1941 to 1950 from the perspective of Washington officials. Matray begins with the period of World War II. Based on declassified U.S. government documents, Matray shows how American policy abandoned its supposedly traditional isolationism after 1945 and adopted globalism. At the same time, American policy evolved from indifference to military intervention in Korea. Matray analyzed America's Korean policy in the context of the postwar international struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union and viewed Korea as a 'test case' of the U.S. containment of Soviet expansion in Asia.

This research contributes to the literature by exemplification of a case study in the Third World. In particular, it demonstrates the significance of Korean nationalism in the shaping of relations between the United States and Korea. Despite the efforts of some scholars like Bruce Cumings to listen to the Korean voice, the Cold War has been the main tune scholars, sometimes even Cumings, have heard when it comes to the story of building a nation-state in Korea. In many previous works Cold War historians have tended to neglect Korean nationalism and limited their focus to how U.S. policy makers dealt with the Korean problem or why the U.S. supported South Korea in June, 1950. The Cold War approach, while helpful in some ways, misses the essential continuity in U.S. foreign policy toward Korea throughout the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, given the context of East Asian history. Even Cumings, who criticized American policy for failing to heed Korean desires to establish unity, independence, and democracy, agrees with other scholars that American officials were "neither sinister nor evil, *only misguided* [accent by author]." In his conclusion, Cumings notes that

“American leaders, on all sides of the issues we have discussed, were not ill-intended, nor were they conspirators, nor were they would-be exploiters....They were, however, historically shaped by the experience of their own country and therefore had little to offer a very different country, Korea.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the United States emerged from the Second World War with a willingness to use its power to recreate the world in its own image, which it encased in an idealistic vision but which many nationalists saw as blatantly self-serving. Cumings’ argument implies that democracy was not seen as a viable option for a newly independent country like Korea, at least for the moment.

Unimpressed with revisionists’ monocausal emphasis on economic motives and American capitalism, post-revisionist scholars argue that the revisionists “failed to differentiate between competing domestic interests, and ignored both the influence of legitimate national security concerns and the actions of other states on American diplomacy.”<sup>19</sup> Post-revisionist historians focus on “the state as the principal actor, on decision-making elites, on the strategic and geopolitical determinants of policy and on such traditional notions as national security, national interest, and the balance of power.”<sup>20</sup> One of the most influential post-revisionist articles, “The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War,” written by John Lewis Gaddis, argues that post-revisionist interpretation does not consider the drive for an economic empire after the Second World War to be the primarily motivating force behind American foreign policy. Gaddis holds the Soviet Union primarily responsible for

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<sup>18</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 443-444.

<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, “Introduction,” *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* edited by Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, *ibid.*, 5.

starting in the Cold War but stresses the absence of any ideological blueprint in Stalin's mind.<sup>21</sup>

According to Gaddis, post-revisionist historians argue that the United States did not impose "its empire on unwilling clients, forcing them into military alliances and into position of economic dependence against their will."<sup>22</sup> They claim that U.S. mistakes could be explained as the unfortunate by-product of an American effort to protect the free world against Soviet imperialism.<sup>23</sup> In his article, "Empire by Invitation," Geir Lundestad argues that European countries requested American involvement in its affairs and that the nature of the American empire differs fundamentally from earlier empires in history, since it does not have an imperial intention to control others at least in an overt manner.<sup>24</sup> Many post-revisionist historians, like Lundestad, maintain that "if American leaders were empire builders" (as revisionist historians argue), "the empire grew by invitation from abroad rather than from imperatives rooted in the American system."<sup>25</sup> Such an argument, however, does not apply well to the case of Korea, especially since 1945. Clearly, it seems, the United States was not an "empire by invitation" in Korea. Awash in oversimplified bipolar world views, American officials in the military

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<sup>21</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 7 (Summer 1983), 171-190.

<sup>22</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *ibid.*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> Michael J. Hogan, "State of Art: An Introduction," *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* edited by Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *The Cold War in Europe: Era of a Divided Continent* edited by Charles S. Maier (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1991), 152.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, *ibid.*, 5.

government incorrectly perceived Korean revolutionary nationalists and leftists as monolithic and Soviet-directed, not as an autonomous force, and viewed postwar indigenous radicalism and nationalism as equally threatening to American interests and security.

This dissertation is divided in two parts. In the first part, it analyzes United States' policy toward the Korean peninsula from the late nineteenth century until the efforts of the unification process by foreign powers failed in 1947. The first chapter summarizes how and why the Americans initially contacted Korean people in the late nineteenth century, how expectations about U. S. idealism were fostered, and why they withdrew their legation from Korea in 1905. The second chapter describes the relationship between Korea and the United States during the Second World War. The third chapter relates the domestic political and social situation of South Korea and the role of the United States military government. The fourth chapter deals with the Moscow Conference and the United States-Soviet Union Joint Commissions.

The second part of the dissertation examines United States policy toward Korea from 1948 until just prior to the Korean War. This section traces the trends and changes in the politics and society of South Korea. The fifth chapter deals with the origins of the establishment of the Korean government; in particular, the process of the Constitutional Assembly and the election of the first President of Korea. The last chapter describes the activities of the United States Advisory Group from 1948 to the Korean War. It also revisits the question of the intrinsic nature of Syngman Rhee's policy toward the United States *vis-à-vis* America's Korean policy and describes the development of the relations between South and North Korea immediately before the Korean War.

This study is important because it describes a time period dimly comprehended and one which many historians ignore. Chronologically speaking, it emphasizes the period from the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, to June of 1950 when the Korean War began. This dissertation shows how American policy toward Korea originated and evolved, and how Korean nationalism responded to it during and after World War II. In addition, this investigation looks at how American policy changed from the withdrawal in 1948 to the military involvement in 1950. Last, like several recent revisionist studies, this work indicates that Korean leaders like Syngman Rhee in the south and Kim Il Sung in the north had a capability to use their power base to pursue and accomplish their own goals and serve their own purposes. For example, despite nearly complete dependence on American military and economic assistance, Syngman Rhee's response to U.S. foreign policy toward Korea sought to reverse American regional policies and unify the peninsula through military force. Kim Il Sung also succeeded in persuading the reluctant Stalin and Mao to become involved in the Korean conflict in June 1950.

Although this study will focus on U.S. diplomacy toward Korea from 1945 to 1950, it will help to enhance our understanding of American foreign policy toward East Asia as a whole, and thereby contribute to the broader study of U.S. commitment to foreign policy and international relations. For example, the U.S. government and American military officials currently face the task of nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan today. As a case study which exemplifies U.S. commitments in Korea, Americans could learn a lesson about how to establish free and democratic countries for

people elsewhere in the world. Specifically, Americans might gain insight into how to deal with Arab nationalism in the Middle East.

As for primary sources, this study relies heavily on an extensive survey of declassified historical records of the U.S. military government in Korea for the period 1945-1948 and State Department papers stored at the National Archives and Record Administration in Maryland. These documents are especially valuable in describing the role of American military authorities and its occupation policies, as well as how occupation authorities viewed and responded to local conflict. Essential evidence includes “History of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea (HUSAFIK); U.S. military intelligence reports: G-2 “Periodic Reports” (G-2 P/R) and G-2 “Weekly Summary” (G-2 W/S) of the United States Army Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and the United States Military Advisory Group in Korea; Foreign Relation of the United States (FRUS); and Summation; documents from the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). This dissertation also uses South Korean daily newspapers from 1945 to 1948 and the writings of numerous participants, both Koreans and Americans, in the American occupation period. To gain a perception of events, this research looks as well at North Korean documents seized by American forces during the Korean War and presently housed in NARA. Secondary sources consulted include works written in both the Korean and English languages.

## CHAPTER II

### Early US Diplomacy Toward Korea

This chapter briefly reviews the nature of American foreign policy toward Korea between 1882 and 1905. More narrowly, it addresses questions which relate to long-term developments much later. For example, how did Koreans view foreign powers, in particular, why did they see the United States as a “benevolent Great Power.” Why did Korean efforts to build a nation-state on the model of western-style modernization fail? How was autonomy then lost and a nationalist movement rejuvenated which sought to restore an independent Korea. At the end of World War II, the peninsula was divided into North and South. In order to more fully comprehend unification debates on the Korean peninsula in the late 1940s, it is important to understand how Koreans earlier in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries perceived neighboring powers and the United States in historical terms. In short, earlier experience helps explain subsequent actions and reactions.

Korea has more than 4000 years of history and a size of 85,000 square miles (approximately the size of Minnesota). The Korean peninsula stretches south for more than 500 miles, while it spans 220 miles east and west at its widest point. In the north, the Yalu and Tuman Rivers separate Korea from Manchuria and the port of Vladivostok, Russia’s important naval base and vital outlet to the Pacific. Eastward, across the East



Sea (the Sea of Japan), the Japanese islands flank the peninsula. To the west, the West Sea (the Yellow Sea) divides Korea from China.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, Korea was a homogeneous society with the same language and national heritage. Koreans have achieved a highly developed culture in East Asia. Geographically, Korea is surrounded by larger and stronger neighbors - China, Russia, and Japan. The location of the Korean peninsula became a “bridge” between the power of the continent represented by China and Russia and the power of the ocean represented by Japan. Thus, Japan considered the Korean peninsula as either “a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan” or “Japan’s steppingstone to the Asian mainland.” China, however, regarded the peninsula as “a hammer ready to strike at the head of China.”<sup>27</sup> For Russia, Korea was a “back gate that needed to be locked against intruders and to be opened during any opportunity for expansion.”<sup>28</sup>

Because of the geopolitical situation, its strategic importance, and the unfortunate proximity to three great powers, Korea became a battleground for the venting of the rival neighbors’ power struggles throughout most of its history.<sup>29</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, a realist historian, argues that the geopolitical circumstance of the Korean peninsula plays an important factor in foreign policy with other neighbor countries. He states that:

From the thirteenth century to the decline of Chinese power in the nineteenth century, Korea stood in a relationship of subservience to China as its suzerain and

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<sup>26</sup> James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Soong Sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> James Irving Matray, “The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1977), 15.

accepted Chinese leadership in politics and culture. From the end of the sixteenth century Japan, after it had invaded Korea without lasting success, opposed to the claim of China its own claim to control of the country. Japan was able to make good that claim as a result of its victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Then Japan was challenged in its control of Korea by Russia, and from 1896 on the influence of Russia became dominant. The rivalry between Japan and Russia for control of Korea ended with the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.<sup>30</sup>

From ancient times until the mid-nineteenth century, China, as a big neighbor state, had an immense impact on Korea's internal affairs. China's suzerainty and influence over the Korean peninsula was continued until 1895. The Yi Dynasty or Choson, literally, "The Land of Morning Calm," from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century, aside from several military attacks from outside, (the Mongols 1258-1316, Toyotomi Hydeyoshi 1592-1598, and the Manchu [Ching dynasty] 1626-1636), almost completely closed its country from the rest of the world.<sup>31</sup>

During the long period of isolation, Korea had a special relationship with China known as the tributary system. The traditional relationship between China and Korea had been based upon their "suzerain and vassal" system that accepted Chinese superiority in the context of Chinese-centric world order. Through this relationship, while Koreans made efforts to maintain independence, China strengthened her suzerainty over Korea and would in turn protect the Koreans from threats emanating outside of the country.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 171.

<sup>31</sup> See more details about relation between China and Korea and the Korean view of the world, Kang Jong Il, "A Power Politics Analysis of Korea's Loss of Autonomy: Korean Internal and External Relations with the United States, 1871-1905" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1997), 47-51.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: Yur-Bok Lee, *Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Korea, 1866-1887* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 19-20.

When Western imperial powers opened China after the Opium War (1839-1842), these countries also soon began to appear on Korean shores seeking trade. Attempts by the French in 1866, and the Americans in 1871, failed to open the peninsula known as Chosen or the “Hermit Nation.” Finally Japan succeeded in opening Korea by the Kangwha Treaty in 1876. This treaty with a foreign country was a first and represented the beginning of a new era for Koreans. As the result of this treaty, Westerners recognized Korea as an independent nation and Koreans abolished its tributary relationship to China.<sup>33</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the United States had a strong interest in trading with the Far East. The United States government adopted the “Open Door” policy and in effect demanded that Asian countries open their ports to American ships in order “to obtain equal opportunity of commerce, and of the right of extraterritoriality, to secure the protection of nationals”<sup>34</sup> Initially the American desire for trade focused on China and Japan.<sup>35</sup> Later, Americans tried to expand their concerns for trade to Korea and also wanted protection of American sailors shipwrecked along the Korean coastline. A resolution introduced into the House of Representatives on February 15, 1845, called for a mission to open Korea to trade and stated that, “While we cannot expect anything like equal advantages from intercourse with Corea [sic], it seems desirable to included that country along with Japan... as negotiations... may be dispatched with little additional

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<sup>33</sup> A detailed account of forced opening of Korea by Japan can be found in C. I. Eugene, Kim and Han Kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876-1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1967), 207-18

<sup>34</sup> Samuel F. Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1955), 363.

<sup>35</sup> Sino-American diplomatic relations were established by the Treaty of Wanghsia signed on July, 1844; Japanese-American diplomatic relations started by the Kanagawa Treaty on March 31, 1854.

expense by the same ambassador.”<sup>36</sup> Secretary of State, William H. Seward, dispatched the *General Sherman*, an American merchant ship, to open Korea in 1866. However, while attempting to open Korea, the ship was destroyed, burned by Koreans, and the entire crew was killed.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1870’s, after having adopted the Open Door policy via “gunboat diplomacy” after the *General Sherman* incident, the United States continued its effort to open Korea. The Korean political leaders represented by Taewongun strongly maintained their anti-Western policy and tried to close the Yi Dynasty. In April 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant instructed Frederick F. Low, the American Minister in China, to negotiate a shipwreck convention and a commercial treaty with Korea.<sup>38</sup> Grant announced his message to the Congress on December 4, 1871:

Prompted by a desire to put an end to the barbarous treatment of our shipwrecked sailors [the *General Sherman* case] on the Korean coast, I instructed our minister at Peking to endeavor to conclude a convention with Korea for securing the safety and humane treatment of such mariners. Admiral Rodgers was instructed to accompany him with a sufficient force to protect him in case of need.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Department of States, “United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part I. 1834-1941,” Research Project No. 29, (May 1947) in *United States Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1950*, Department of State, the Division of Historical Policy Research, Office of Public Affairs (May 1947-December 1951), edited by the Institute of Asian Culture Studies and Published by Hallym University. (Chunchon, Korea: Hallym University Press 1987), 1; According to the earliest document, first the encounter between the Koreans and Americans was on January 30, 1853 when an American whale ship came to Pusan, Korea.

<sup>37</sup> The recent and most comprehensive work on early U.S.-Korean relations can be found in Jongsuk Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry: Korean- American Relations to 1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990). For the *General Sherman* incident see, 17-26; Kim Won Mo, *Kundae Han-Mi Kwan’ gyesa [The Modern History of Korean-American Relations]* (Seoul: Chorahak hwa hyonsilsa, 1992), 167-187; James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 5; see details on the incident of the *General Sherman*, Kang Jong Il, Ph.D. dissertation, 139-145.

<sup>38</sup> Department of States, “United States Regarding Korea, Part I. 1834-1941,” 2; Fish to Low, April 20, 1870, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1870: 334-35.

<sup>39</sup> James D. Richardson, ed. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the President 1789-1902 Vol. VII.* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1904), 145.

Hoping to open Korea by force, several hundred Americans with six ships stormed Kanghwa Island. However, the Korean government staunchly refused to talk to the American expedition group and was not willing to open its doors. Although American military power was superior, the American military expedition of 1871 failed in its mission to make an official diplomatic relationship with Korea because of the staunch resistance of the Korean government and its people. Moreover, during the military incident between the two countries,<sup>40</sup> Korea had heavy casualties - about 350 dead and 20 wounded. Disappointed with the results of their efforts in Korea, the American force returned to China on June 12.<sup>41</sup> Taewongun and his supporters promoted this incident to strengthen Korean anti-Western feeling and decided to close Choson tightly.

In 1880, the Rutherford B. Hayes administration sent Commodore Robert Wilson Shufeldt to Korea in order to make a commercial treaty. Although having Japanese assistance, Shufeldt failed to achieve his goal. Finally, with the mediation of Chinese Viceroy Li Hung-chang, in May 1882, the United States became the first Western nation to recognize the Kingdom of Choson by signing the American-Korean Amity and Commercial Treaty known as the Chemulpo Treaty.<sup>42</sup> Thus was started the official relations between the two nations. However, with assistance from the United States the Korean government's desperate efforts to reform the systems and achieve self-

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<sup>40</sup> Some Korean historians like Kim Won Mo argue that this case was the first war between Korea and the United States of America.

<sup>41</sup> Kim Won Mo, *The Modern History of Korean-American Relations*, 394-402; Yur-bok Lee, *Diplomatic Relations*, 19-33; Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 27-33.

<sup>42</sup> For the US-Korean relations before 1882 and Shufeldt's role in opening US-Korean diplomatic relations, see, Jongsuk Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 17-59. Chay argues that "Commodore Shufeldt's act of opening Korea in 1882 was one of the most vivid examples of episodes in a well-defined pattern of global gunboat diplomacy."

strengthening failed because of the interference and obstructionism of hindering by other imperial neighbors that had greater political and military resources and their own intentions for Korea. According to Robert T. Pollard, the treaty “set in motion the train of circumstance which led first to the Sino-Japanese War, then to the Russo-Japanese War, and finally to the annexation of Korea by force.”<sup>43</sup>

The treaty consisted of fourteen articles. One of the articles promised, “If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good office, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.”<sup>44</sup> After this treaty, the Korean government decided to make official relations with other Western countries—Britain on June 6, 1882, Russia on July, 1884 and France on June 4, 1886. In addition, this 1882 treaty misled the Korean government and people to expect too much American help in terms of ‘good office’ in maintaining their independence from hostile neighbors. King Kojong approved the treaty not only because “Korea looked to the United States as a kind of new elder brother that would willingly offer good offices and other assistance in times of distress”<sup>45</sup> but also because he hoped to strengthen his country by adopting western technology and its military system. Therefore, Koreans regarded the United States as the most trustworthy nation to guarantee Korean independence.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert T. Pollard, “American Relations with Korea, 1882-1895” *Chinese Social and Political Science Review* 16 (October 1932), 425.

<sup>44</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1954), 33; John Edward Wilz, “Did the United States betray Korea in 1905?” *Pacific Historical Review*, 54 (August 1985), 244.

<sup>45</sup> Yur-bok Lee, *West Goes East: Paul Georg Von Mollendorff and Great Power Imperialism in Late Yi Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 27.

During the negotiation to open Korea, the Chinese Viceroy Li Hung-chang not only attempted to retrieve traditional suzerainty lost by the Kangwha treaty of 1876, but also hoped the treaty could be used to halt the growth of Japanese influence and Russian expansion into Korean peninsula.<sup>46</sup> However, the United States steadfastly refused to acknowledge the Chinese claim of suzerainty over Korea.<sup>47</sup> Basically the United States considered Korea to be an independent state. In order to maintain the Open Door policy in the Far East, Americans attempted to ban the complete domination of Korea by any one imperial power. The Secretary of State wrote, “As far as we are concerned, Corea[sic] is an independent sovereign power, with all the attendant rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities; in her relations to China we have no desire to interfere unless action should be taken prejudicial to the rights of the United States...”<sup>48</sup> Commodore Shufeldt also contended that as long as Korea had sovereign power in dealing with its own domestic and foreign affairs, the United States had the right to make a treaty with its government. James Schnabel, a military historian, argues that this treaty was a golden opportunity for Americans to establish a dominant influence in Korea:

The treaty could have given the United States overriding influence in Korea. But when the Emperor sought an American foreign affairs adviser and Army military advisers, the United States moved slowly. The matter dragged on for several years. The American representative in Korea repeatedly appealed to Washington for action. Although requested in 1884, military advisers reached Korea only in 1888.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Tyler Dennett, “American ‘Good Offices’ in Asia,” *American Journal of International Law* 16 (January 1922), 1-3; See also, Kim Won Mo, “Chungil jonjaeng-gi migukeui daihanjungchaek-I ilboneeui hankuk chimryak-e kkichin younghyang,” [The Influence of US Policy toward Korea on the Japanese Encroachment upon Korea during the Sino-Japanese War], in *Hankuksa-yunkoohoei, chungiljonjaengkwa hanikwankye* [*Sino-Japanese War and Korea-Japan Relations*] (Seoul; Ilchokak, 1985), 146.

<sup>47</sup> Kim and Han Kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism*, 21-28.

<sup>48</sup> Department of States, “United States Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1941,” 5.

<sup>49</sup> Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year*, 4.

As such, the United States government did not concern itself much with expanding its influence in Korea after the treaty. The United States tried to help the Korean government maintain its independence as long as American government could remain militarily uninvolved. The United States' primary concern in opening Korea was to trade with Koreans and to assure the future rescue of any American ship-wrecked crews. According to American government documents, the major purpose of the treaty was to permit "United States vessels in stress or in need of fuel to enter any port harbor of Korea and United States citizens in Korea to receive the protection of local authorities."<sup>50</sup> Only a small number of businessmen and a handful of missionaries cared about expanding their influence in Korea further.

Earlier, in the mid-nineteenth century, the Korean government vehemently rejected Western overtures to open their country because Koreans knew that Western nations hurt the pride of the Chinese people.<sup>51</sup> After the Koreans decided to open their doors to Japan in 1876 and the United States in 1882, their government sought to open its country to additional Western states in hopes of reducing Chinese and Japanese influence on the peninsula. During this period, two important incidents altered the status of international relations; one was the old Korean military mutiny in July 1882 (Imo Kullan), and the other was the *coup d'etat* by the Progressive Party in December in 1884 (Kapsin Chongbyon).

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<sup>50</sup> Department of State, "United State Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1941," 8.

<sup>51</sup> Since the Opium War (1839-42), Ching China was faced with western intrusions and domestic instability until its reign ended in 1911. Tyler Dennett, *Americans in East Asia: A Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with References to China, Japan, and Korea in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1922), 468-470.



First, the old Korean military revolt, had occurred in July 23, 1882 because of the conflict in Korean military system between the traditional old military units and the new elite corps trained by the Japanese. The disgruntled military trainees, who were frustrated by discriminatory treatment and having not received their salary for over one year from the Korean government, attacked the prisons and the courts and killed the Japanese training officer of the elite corps. The Taewongun's military followers participated in the riots in hopes that Taewongun could return to office. However, they failed to accomplish their objective because Taewongun only took political power for a few weeks before he was kidnapped by Chinese troops and taken to China.

After suppressing the mutiny, Chinese troops remained in Korea and interfered in Korean domestic affairs. This action caused a confrontation between China and Japan. At this juncture, the United States responded to the situation by dispatching their gunboat, *Monocasey*, to protect American interests in Korea. Though Americans pledged strict neutrality, the immediate and stronger response of the United States in regard to the Korean crisis was to give some warning to China and Japan. Having the experience of American 'goodwill,' the Korean king came to expect more of Americans' role in advancing Korean independence and modernization.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, this crisis also provided a pretext for China and Japan to intervene in Korean domestic affairs and later gave them a chance to clash for hegemony over the Korean peninsula.

Actually, the military mutiny was related to the internal power struggle between the old generations known as the conservative groups, represented by Taewongun,<sup>53</sup> and

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<sup>52</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 63-64.

<sup>53</sup> Some Korean scholars classified them as "seclusionists" or "isolationists"; Lee Ki Baik, *A New History of Korea* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 2005), 262-263; Chay, *ibid.*, 34.

the new generations known as the Progressive Party that were supported by Queen Minbi clans. While the conservative groups backed the policy of isolation against the opening of Korea to Western countries, and espoused strong anti-foreign country slogans or the doctrine of “defending orthodoxy and rejecting heterodoxy” (wijong ch’oksa),<sup>54</sup> the new generations rallied under the Progressive Party, which had leaned toward pro-Japanese stances, tried to challenge their government’s policy, and got ready for action.

In December 1884 political *coup d’etat* (Kapsin chongbyon) led by a conspiring of young radical groups and pro-Japan reformists of the Progressive Party called for drastic reforms of the government system. The conservative group crushed the *coup d’etat* with the aid of Chinese intervention. As a result, China expanded its influence over Korea.

When Chinese and Japanese forces were on the verge of a clash in Korea as a result of the 1884 *coup d’etat*, the American government immediately dispatched ships to reduce rising tension between China and Japan and to protect American lives and national interests. Each time the two powers compromised their differences without resort to arms.<sup>55</sup> Thus, King Kojong trusted the United States and the Korean government asked the American government to help train and modernize their army. In return, the Korean court granted several important concessions to American business.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Kang, Jong Il’s Ph.D. Dissertation, 8; Lee Ki Baik, *ibid.*, 272.

<sup>55</sup> Department of State, “United States Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1941,” 11; Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia*, 468-470.

<sup>56</sup> To read more details, Kim Won Mo, *The History of Korean-American Foreign Relation during 100 years* (Seoul: Cheolhak kwa Hyonsilsa, 2002), 188-190.

A confidential letter of the American Minister in Korea to the Secretary of State on July 19, 1883 states:

On several occasions of late, I have received messengers direct from His Majesty asking information and even advice upon minor matters. These questions have pertained particularly to the methods of raising revenue in the United States. My advice has also been sought in reference to the granting of special privilege for mining in Korea. I fully appreciate the delicacy of such position and have on each occasion replied guardedly and in general terms.<sup>57</sup>

The last in this line of appeals for social and political reform started in May 1894. The Tonghak Revolution appealed to peasants forced into abject poverty by an increasing tax burden and exploitation by foreign countries. The Tonghaks denounced the corruption of government and foreign intervention. The Tonghak, literally meaning, “Eastern Learning,” against “Western Learning,” was anti-foreign and a counter-movement against Christianity.<sup>58</sup> Their revolutionary movement demanded comprehensive political and social reforms.

After the peasant revolt erupted, the beleaguered Korean government requested Chinese troops to quell a peasant uprising led by the Tonghak religious group. When the Chinese government dispatched troops to Korea, the Japanese government responded in accordance with the treaty of Tientsin of 1885 that stipulated mutual notification between China and Japan if they sent troops to Korea. Japan therefore also sent an army to the Korean peninsula under the pretext of protecting their national security and property.<sup>59</sup> It seems more probable that the Japanese government sought an opportunity to remove

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<sup>57</sup> George M. McCune and John A. Harrison, *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Vol. I, The Initial Period, 1883-1886* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Horace Horton Underwood, *Tragedy and Faith in Korea* (New York: Friendship Press, 1951).

<sup>59</sup> Kim Won Mo, *A History of Korean-American Foreign Relation during 100 years*, 105.

Chinese influence from Korea. Due to the contingent opportunity created by an internal Korean incident, two neighboring countries, China and Japan, opted to fight a war for control over strategic peninsula.<sup>60</sup> At this juncture, the Korean government tried to prevent war in its backyard. Koreans requested the United States government adhere its 'good offices' pledge as stipulated in the 1882 treaty.

The Article I of the Korean-American treaty had stated:

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the President of the United States and the King of Chosen and the citizens and subjects of their respective Governments. If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good office, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.<sup>61</sup>

However, during the Sino-Japanese War, the United States officially avoided involvement in Korean affairs under the pretext of a strictly impartial and neutral policy in the region. Frankly, the United States did not exert much effort toward mediation of the Korean problem, between China and Japan, because the American government supported the Japanese in the balance of power struggle in the Far East. The United States hoped that Japanese military power would halt Chinese intervention and Russian expansion to Korea. After the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War, signified by the Treaty of Shimonoseki, on April 12, 1895, Japanese supremacy was assured in the Korean peninsula. The treaty ended traditional Chinese suzerainty over Korea. Throughout the war, the United States regarded Japan as the most reliable power in the

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<sup>60</sup> Kim and Han Kyo Kim, p. 77; Chong Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 19-54.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Chung, *The Oriental Policy of the United States* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), 230; Frederick Arthur Mckenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1908).

Far East.<sup>62</sup> By maintaining its impartial attitude and acknowledging of Korea as an independent state, the United States, in practice, was supporting the Japanese position, which, since the Korean-Japanese treaty of 1876, was that Korea was in fact free from all control by China.<sup>63</sup>

In the end, though, victory over China in 1895 did not give Japan a free hand in Korea because Russia now began to challenge its new hegemony in Korea. Traditionally, Russia was very concerned about the Korean situation even though Russians did not often make contact with Korea. Russia made an incessant effort to seek the ice-free harbors in Korea during the winter season, especially after its southward movement was frustrated by Britain in Europe and Middle East. The Russian government thereafter attempted to enhance its influence and promote its interests in Korea. At the same time, the Korean king also began to rely on Russia in order to reduce Japanese influence and gain Russian support instead of the United States for assistance. However, cooperation between the Korean government and Russia was seriously challenged when Japanese military personnel and civilians, disguised in clothes of Korean rioters, murdered the Korean queen, Minbi, on October 8, 1895 because evidently she seemed to be plotting against Japan. In a desperate effort to cope with the situation, the King escaped his palace on February 11, 1896 and took refuge in the Russian legation for almost two years.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 98.

<sup>63</sup> Department of State, "United States Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1941," 10.

<sup>64</sup> Lee Ki Baik, *A New History of Korea*, 294.

With the Korean king in their custody (Akwan p'ach'on), the Russians tried to expand their influence in the peninsula. Threatened by this effort, Prince Yamagata Aritomo suggested a plan of dividing Korea into spheres of influence along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1896. However, neither Japan nor Russia trusted each other and Russians thought that they would be able to control the whole Korean peninsula someday. The United States and Japan felt threatened by the enhanced Russian presence in Korean officials when the Korean king appointed Kir A. Alexeieff as his advisor and head of the Korean customs in October 1897.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Russia obtained twenty-five-year leases from China in December 1897 on the ports of Dairen and Port Arthur in the Liaotung peninsula. Deprived of this territory by Russian's action, Japanese leaders were furious. From their perspective, Japan had acquired the Liaotung peninsula after the victory over China. However, because of three European powers—Russia, France, and Germany—Japan was forced to retrocede the Liaotung peninsula in 1895. By obtaining harbors close to the Korean peninsula, Russians could have an enormous influence on Korea's situation. As a consequence, Japan's position in Korea was directly threatened by Russia in the Far East. Thus, the Japanese government began to prepare for a war with Russia.

For the most part, the United States, along with Great Britain, accepted the Japanese position toward Korea because they hoped thereby to check Russian expansion into Manchuria and Korea.<sup>66</sup> Britain supported Japanese policy in the Far East because its interests in China were also felt to be threatened by the Russian push toward

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<sup>65</sup> Kim Won Mo trans., *Allen ui ilki* [Allen's Diary] (Seoul: Tan'guk University Press, 1991), 559.

<sup>66</sup> Tyler Dennet, *Americans in Eastern Asia*, 638-40.

Manchuria. Eventually, the joint-interest of Britain and Japan in Manchuria and Korea led to the formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on January 30, 1902 which helped Japan to win the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. In the second Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1905, the British government accepted Japan's right to establish a protectorate in Korea in return for a Japanese pledge of cooperation when it came to British interests in India. In any case, Russo-Japanese rivalry for control of Manchuria and Korea by 1903 was a disturbing factor in Far Eastern politics. In July of that year, Japan opened negotiations with Russia for a political settlement. Japan suggested that while Russia possessed rights in Manchuria, Russia in return should recognize that Japan had a similar mandate to control Korea. Russia provided a counter-proposal that both countries establish a neutral zone the north of 39<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea and neither Japan nor Russia were to introduce troops.<sup>67</sup> After Russo-Japanese negotiations in 1903 failed to reduce rising tensions, Japan decided to go to war with Russia over Korea.<sup>68</sup>

Again, the Korean King Kojong was eager to seek United States mediation to stop the war. Dr. Horace N. Allen, the first American missionary in Korea, a diplomat, and a political advisor to the king, warned the American government that its interests could not be protected by supporting Japanese aggressiveness.<sup>69</sup> He also wrote the Secretary of State on April 14, 1904:

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<sup>67</sup> Department of States, "United States Policy Regarding Korea, 1834-1941," 22.

<sup>68</sup> Carl Berger, *The Korean Knot: A Military-Political History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 24.

<sup>69</sup> See for details the close of U.S.-Korea diplomatic relations, Fred Harvey Harrington *God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korea-American Relations, 1884-1905* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1944).

All the matters (diplomatic pressure in regard to various concessions) are naturally of serious concern to the Korean emperor. He falls back in his extreme upon his old friendship with America. I may as well inform you that the Emperor confidently expects that America will do something for him at the close of this war, or when opportunity offers, to retain for him as much of his independence as possible. He is inclined to give a very free and favorable translation to Article I of our treaty of Jenchuan of 1882... I am obliged to assure his Majesty that the condition of Korea is borne in mind by the United States Government, who will use their good office when occasion occurs.<sup>70</sup>

In practice, United States policy toward Korea avoided direct involvement and pledged strict neutrality.<sup>71</sup> Washington instructed its diplomats in Korea not to interfere in the country's internal affairs. The Secretary of State wrote the American minister to caution all Americans in Korea not to express any anti-Japanese opinions:

You should ... inform all Americans resident in Korea that they should strictly refrain from any expression of opinion, or from giving advice concerning the internal management of the country, or from any intermeddling in political questions; that if they do so it is at their own risk and peril; that neither you nor the Government of the United States can approve of such action on their part or perhaps be able to adequately protect them should they disregard this advice. They should strictly confine themselves to their missionary work, whether it be teaching in schools, preaching the gospel, or attending to the sick, for which they went to the country.<sup>72</sup>

Despite Allen's effort to reverse Washington's policy, the United States remained neutral with regard to Korean affairs.<sup>73</sup> According to Dennett, "The Korean Government was in the position of an incompetent defective not yet committed to guardianship. The United

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<sup>70</sup> U. S. Congressional record, XLVIII, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1919; 6611; Quoted in Lee Won Sul, "The Impact of United States Occupation Policy on the Socio-Polical Structure of South Korea, 1945-1948" (Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve Universtiy, 1961), 19-20; John Edward Wilz, "Did the United States betray Korea in 1905?" *Pacific Historical Review* 54 (August 1985), 249.

<sup>71</sup> Chay, 173.

<sup>72</sup> Department of States, "United States Regarding Korea, 1834-1941," 15.

<sup>73</sup> Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 121; Oliver, Syngman Rhee, 26; Robert R. Simmon, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korea Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 12-14.



States was her only disinterested friend—but had no intention of becoming her guardian.”<sup>74</sup> The United States, in the end, chose to halt Russian expansion in Korean peninsula by supporting Japanese adventurism in the Far East.

In addition, it also should be noted that the United States in the late nineteenth century, was a growing imperial power itself—rather newly arrived. The United States purchased Alaska in 1867 as the “drawbridge between America and Asia”<sup>75</sup> and acquired Hawaii in 1878 as “a rendezvous for the Pacific Navy, and a resort for merchant ships.”<sup>76</sup> However, after the United States obtained the Philippines in 1898, the diplomatic situation changed drastically in terms of its imperialistic interests. Furthermore, President Theodore Roosevelt’s policy of realism called for a balance of power in the Far East, one in which Japan would check the influence of Russia. Roosevelt, moreover, instructed Secretary of State John Hay not to interfere in Korean affairs. He told Hay “We cannot possibly interfere for the Koreans against Japan... They could not strike one blow in their own defense... Japan ought to have a protectorate over Korea... While I should hope to see Manchuria restored to China.”<sup>77</sup> For Roosevelt, the Japanese had proved themselves an exceptional race among Asian countries by adopting Western

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<sup>74</sup> Donnett, *Americans in Eastern Asia*, 495.

<sup>75</sup> Walter LaFeber, *New Empire* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963), 29.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Jung Yong-Suk, “The Rise of American National interest in Korea: 1845-1950,” (Ph.D. dissertation, The Claremont Graduate University, 1970), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Department of State, “United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part I. 1834-1941,” 25-26; Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 323

systems and ways. The Koreans, on the other hand, were “the rotten product of a decayed Oriental civilization,” in the words of the elder George Kennan.<sup>78</sup>

The Russo-Japanese War began in Korea on February 10, 1904. From the beginning of the war, the United States showed a lack of interest in what happened to Korea. Secretary of War William H. Taft went to Japan, and negotiated a secret agreement with Prime Minister Taro Katsura. They approved a protocol, the Taft-Katsura Memorandum, on July 29, 1905 in which the United States agreed to allow Japan a free hand in Korea. In return, Japan approved the American domination of the Philippines.<sup>79</sup> In a memorandum Katsura disavowed any aggressive Japanese designs against the Philippines and emphasized Japan’s resolve that “a complete solution of the peninsular (Korean) question should be made as the logical consequence of the war.” Taft expressed the view that “the establishment by Japanese troops of a suzerainty over Korea to the extent of requiring that Korea enter into no foreign treaties without the consent of Japan was the logical result of the present war and would directly contribute to permanent peace in the East.”<sup>80</sup>

The Korean Emperor Kojong,<sup>81</sup> appealed to the United States. The emperor asked his personal friend, professor H. B. Hulbert, to deliver his letter to President Roosevelt.

The Emperor concluded his letter:

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<sup>78</sup> Richard C. Allen, *Korea’s Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Publishers, 1960), 43; Wilz, 1985, 256.

<sup>79</sup> Tyler Denett, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925), 112-114. This book is critical study of American policy in Eastern Asia in 1902-1905 and based primarily upon the private papers of Theodore Roosevelt.

<sup>80</sup> Kim and Han Kyo Kim, 126.

<sup>81</sup> The title “Emperor” was adopted in 1897.

Ever since 1883 the United States and Korea have been in friendly treaty relations. Korea has received many proofs of the good will and the sympathy of the American Government and people. The American representatives have always shown themselves to be in sympathy with the welfare and progress of Korea. Many teachers have been sent from America who have done much for the uplift of our people. But we have not made the progress that we ought. This is due partly to the political machinations of foreign powers and partly to our mistakes... It is now apparent that Japan proposes... to declare protectorate over our country, in direct contravention of her sworn promise in the agreement of 1904. It has been said that sentiment should have no place in such affairs; but we believe, sir, that sentiment is the moving force in all human affairs and that kindness, sympathy, and generosity are still working between nations and between individuals. We beg of your's [sic] to bring to bear upon this question the same breadth of mind and the same calmness of judgment that have characterized your course hitherto, and, having weighed the matter, to render us what aid you can consistently in this our time of national danger.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, King Kojong's expectation that "the United States will help us" received a negative response from the American government. The United States were prepared early in 1905 to wash its hands of Korea completely. Tyler Dennett explains why Roosevelt supported the Japanese control of Korea against Russian control. "If left to herself after the war Korea will certainly draw back to her habit of entering into any agreements or treaties with other Powers, thus resuscitating the same international complications as existed before the war."<sup>83</sup> Importantly, Roosevelt felt Japan maintained a balance of power in East Asia that included checking Russia's expansion into the region.<sup>84</sup>

On September 5, 1905, Russia signed the Treaty of Portsmouth officially ending the Russo-Japanese War under the auspices of President Theodore Roosevelt. The war ended Russian interference in Korea and also guaranteed Japanese suzerainty over Korea.

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<sup>82</sup> Congress Record, XLVIII, 66<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1919; 6814; Quoted in Lee Won Sul, "The Impact of United States Occupation Policy on the Socio-Political Structure of South Korea, 1945-1948": 20-21.

<sup>83</sup> Tyler Dennet, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War*, 114.

<sup>84</sup> Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of American World Power*, 256-57.

In November 1905, Korea was made a Japanese protectorate, and a Resident-General in Seoul was established. At the same time, the American government cabled its legation in Seoul to leave Korea. The United States was the first nation to terminate its legation in Seoul.<sup>85</sup> In protest, the Korean Emperor sent another secret mission to the Hague Peace Conference in 1907 to plead the Korean cause to world, but his effort was in vain because Japan interfered. With tacit approval of the United States, Japan showed no qualms about swallowing Korea in the next five years. In 1910, the Japanese officially annexed Korea. In *Korea in World Politics, 1940-1950*, Soon Sung Cho maintains that the United States was a friendly relations with Korea from 1882 to 1902 and even championed its sovereignty and territorial integrity, but then abandoned Korea in 1905 in its most desperate moment.<sup>86</sup>

International power politics forced Koreans to give up their sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as much of their culture and way of life. Due to poor political leadership, Koreans failed to transform Choson to a modern nation state.<sup>87</sup> As a result, Korea became the pawn in the bitter rivalry between the world's major powers-China, Japan, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. Koreans did not sufficiently understand or begin to prepare for the imperialistic situation and implications of international power politics. Russia's advance into Manchuria and Korea presented Japan with a very serious challenge. For Japan, Korea was a bridge of conquest to advance into Manchuria and China. The American government, as long as their interests

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 568.

<sup>86</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

and her people were secure, accepted Japanese hegemony in order to keep order and peace in East Asia.

After Japanese annexation of Korea, the disbanded soldiers and patriotic people formed the “Righteous Army” (uibyeong) to resist Japanese rule.<sup>88</sup> George McCune describes Korea’s fight against Japanese colonialism, “The independence movement began on the day that Korea lost its independence and never ceased to exist both as an organized movement and as a dominant spiritual force in the life of the Korean people.”<sup>89</sup> Although no Westerners supported Koreans’ quest for justice, the Koreans bitterly resisted the hated Japanese:

Between 1905 and 1910, uprisings and rebellions erupted frequently throughout Korea. Japan crushed them with efficient savagery. The Koreans had few weapons, and Japan was a powerful merciless nation. According to Japanese statistics, 14,566 Korean “rebels” were killed between July 1907 and December 1908.<sup>90</sup>

After the Japanese annexation in 1910, Korea became a ‘forgotten nation’ among Americans until 1943. In the modern history of Korea, the United States was the first Western country to open official diplomatic relations with Korea in 1882. Also, the United States was the first foreign nation to end twenty-three years of diplomatic relations when the American government decided to withdraw its legation from Korea in November 1905.<sup>91</sup> During this period, King Kojong hoped to strengthen his country by accepting western-style modernization. However, Kojong’s determined efforts failed to

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<sup>88</sup> F.A. McKenzie, *Korea’s Fight for Freedom* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920), 132-70.

<sup>89</sup> George M. McCune, *Korea Today*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Bailey, *Diplomatic History*, 568.

achieve reform and self-strength because of his poor leadership, misconception of U.S. intentions, and the external pressure of imperial rivalry in the region.

This chapter shows that Koreans regarded the United States as a “benevolent Great Power,” one not interested in territorial acquisitions in Korea. They generally believed that the United States could help Koreans, including the Korean king, to maintain their sovereignty and build a modern nation-state. However, King Kojong failed to achieve his goals because of countervailing external pressures from imperial rivals in the region, his own poor leadership, and misconceptions about U. S. intentions. In particular, the king’s perception of the United States as a “benevolent Great Power” misled many Koreans and himself, thereby prohibiting a real appreciation for the nature of international power politics and its emphasis on pursuit of national self-interest.

Actually, the U. S. policy of realism in East Asia called for a balance of power to check the influence of Russia and proffered paternalistic views of Koreans, compared to the Japanese, whom Americans perceived as an exceptional race among Asian peoples. The combined impact proved a hindrance to Korean efforts to transform Chosun into a modern nation-state. Eventually, it led Korea to become a pawn in bitter imperial and later Cold War rivalries. This earlier experience, nonetheless, foreshadowed what was to come and indirectly helped to shape those outcomes. Many Koreans still remembered America as an altruistic friend whereas others were disquieted by historical evidence that U. S. policy in the past had proved fickle when self-interest came into conflict with idealistic principles.

## CHAPTER III

### Wartime Diplomacy

This chapter describes the Korean nationalist movement for independence, its attempts to obtain recognition of the Korean Provisional Government from the United States government, and how the U.S. government responded. It also investigates the development of American policy on the postwar status of Korea in terms of wartime pledges. This chapter confirms that idealistic U. S. rhetoric and paternalistic attitudes toward Korea often served as a cloak for the pursuit of self-interest. Obviously, U.S. aid to the Korean Provisional Government had limits but did it have to be so meager? Moreover, Americans fumbled away opportunities to develop a specific plan of trusteeship, with a result that Korean self-determination was, in the short run, subordinated to U. S. economic and security concerns. Furthermore, the postwar Korean peninsula was divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

The Second World War officially began when the German army invaded Poland in September 1939. The escalation of this global conflict and hopes for a positive outcome forced U.S. officials and military planners to begin formulating plans for a postwar world. As early as December 27, 1939, Secretary of State Cordell Hull established a “committee on problems of peace and reconstruction” within the

Department of State to study postwar problems.<sup>92</sup> Later, the Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations was established to “survey the basic principles which underline a desirable world order to be evolved after the termination of present hostilities, with primary reference to the best interests of the United States.”<sup>93</sup> In response to the increasing significance of preparing and planning for a postwar world, the Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy, under Secretary of State Hull’s chairmanship, was established in December 1941.<sup>94</sup> The committee consisted of highly qualified public officials, including the top officials of the State Department and individuals from the private sector.<sup>95</sup> The outbreak of World War II led American leaders to reconsider their policy toward Asia and also ended the policy of American “indifference” toward Korea.<sup>96</sup>

The United States contingency policy for postwar settlement was based upon the hope that a possibility of cooperation with wartime allies, especially the Soviet Union, could be extended into the postwar period. Yet behind the cooperative diplomacy of the Grand Alliance, each nation—America, Great Britain, Russia, and China—each would

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<sup>92</sup> Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945*, U.S. Department of State, Publication 3580 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), Released 1950, 20.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 20; Cha Sang Chul, *American Foreign Policy Toward Korea Before and After the Liberation of Korea* (Seoul: Knowledge and Industry Co., 1991), 14. Cha Sang Chul, “The Search for a ‘Graceful Exit’: General John Reed Hodge and American Occupation Policy in Korea, 1945-1948” (Ph.D. dissertation, Miami University, 1986): The committee, under the leadership of the chairman of Summer Welles, Under the Secretary of State, was divided into three subcommittees: political problems, economic problems, and armaments.

<sup>94</sup> Cha. *American Foreign Policy Toward Korea*, 14-15; The Committee was consists of five subcommittees: Economic Reconstruction, Economic Policy, Political Problems, Territorial Problems, and Security Problems, see more details, Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945*, 82-83.

<sup>95</sup> Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation*, 69-71.

<sup>96</sup> James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 5; see also Matray, “An End to Indifference: America’s Korean Policy during World War II,” *Diplomatic History* 2 (Spring 1978): 181-196.



pursue its own national interest and security.<sup>97</sup> Thinking in terms of “World Policeman” or “four police states” in the postwar international order, President Franklin D. Roosevelt contrived a plan known as the “international trusteeship” to ease the conversion of liberated colonies in the post-war period into fully independent states.<sup>98</sup> Roosevelt believed that before complete independence and self-governance, colonial peoples would need a certain period of tutelage in order to develop systems of self-government and be able to conduct their own affairs. Roosevelt wrote after he met Churchill on August 1941:

Trusteeship is based on the principle of unselfish service. For a time at least there are many minor children among the peoples of the world who need trustees in their relations with other nations and peoples, just as there are many adult nations or peoples which must be led back into a spirit of good conduct.<sup>99</sup>

Roosevelt was convinced that his idea of trusteeship would work to protect American economic interests and security against inroads from European colonial empires and also it might prevent political problems in the colonial areas after World War II.<sup>100</sup> Roosevelt hoped to dismantle the colonial system and open American access to

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<sup>97</sup> According to Daniel Yergin, the Soviet Union’s foreign policy as a traditional Great Power pursued efforts to aggrandize historic Russian goals such as spheres of influence and secret treaties rather than to overthrow the international system. Yergin argued that the Russians’ foreign policy was sometimes “clumsy and confused but usually cautious and pragmatic.” Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 12.

<sup>98</sup> President Roosevelt realized that its principal wartime Allies—Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union—would decide the future of the postwar order. Thus, the victorious Allied leaders also supposedly would decide the future status of colonies such as Korea; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 24-25.

<sup>99</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the de-colonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 148.

<sup>100</sup> Cha, *ibid.*, 15-16; John J. Serega, “Determination versus Drift: The Anglo-American Debate over the Trusteeship Issue, 1941-1945,” *Pacifica Historical Review* 55 (May 1986): 256-280

colonial areas for economic resources after the war.<sup>101</sup> Churchill opposed Roosevelt's ideas and Washington policymakers could not agree, even after several wartime conferences, how to apply specific international trusteeships to the prospective former colonial states. Furthermore, the idea of trusteeship for Korea not only contributed to a deepening ideological confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States, but also intensified ideological division in Korean politics at the time.<sup>102</sup> Because of ideological conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union, the cleavage between the former allies began to widen as the Cold War intensified. As a result, the hope and possibility of unification of Korea grew dimmer.

From the time of the American government's decision to withdraw its legation in 1905 until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Korea was a "forgotten nation" to American policymakers. However, because of its geographical and strategic position, Korea continued to draw in its strong neighbors and remained a battleground in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>103</sup> During the Japanese colonial period, the issue of Korean independence was not a primary concern in East Asia for the American government, however, the war which erupted against Japan after Pearl Harbor not only forced a re-consideration of American policy toward Asia in general, but also changed the American attitude about Korea's situation. U.S. policy makers re-

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<sup>101</sup> Walter LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945," *The American Historical Review* 80, (December 1975): 1277-95; John J. Sbraga, "The Anti-colonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Reappraisal," *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (Spring 1986): 65-84.

<sup>102</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, (Seoul, Nanam, 1998), 49.

<sup>103</sup> Kim and Han Kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876-1910*: 61-73, 85-102; Fred Harvey Harrington, "An American View of Korean-American Relations, 1882-1905," eds. Yur Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson, *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882-1982* (Birmingham: The University of Alabama Press, 1986), 46-67; On American foreign policy toward Korea and international rivalries in Korea during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see John Edward Wilz, "Did the United States Betray Korea in 1905?" *Pacific Historical Review*, 1985: 243-270.

examined their diplomatic initiatives in that field. Their actions marked an end to the period of indifference in American policy toward Korea.<sup>104</sup>

In the Atlantic Charter agreed on certain war aims of August 14, 1941, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill proclaimed that all colonial people had a right to choose their own form of government as a term of “self-determination.”<sup>105</sup> American policy makers, however, determined to base policy on Korea foremost more upon the imperatives of broader East Asian strategic concerns rather than the aspirations and hopes of the Koreans themselves.<sup>106</sup> American policy makers always considered Korean issues as of secondary among their concerns. They did not agonize much over the problem of Korean independence.

After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, many Koreans emigrated abroad, particularly to China, Russia, and the United States, where they engaged in an independent movement in the hope of liberating their country. During 1919, a Korean movement known as the March First Independence movement (inspired by Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points Pronouncement calling for self-determination of the people and the dismantlement of all colonial systems) failed. Next, however, a group of Korean expatriates in Shanghai formed the Korean Provisional Government (KPG). Syngman Rhee led the Korean Provisional Government. He became the first President in 1919, petitioned the Wilson administration to support Korean independence at the Paris Peace Conference in January

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<sup>104</sup> James I. Matray, “An End to Indifference,” *Diplomatic History* 2, (1978): 181-196.

<sup>105</sup> For the text of the Atlantic Charter, see United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941, 1: General, The Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1958), 367-69. Hereafter cited as FRUS, followed by the year and volume; Department of State *Bulletin*, August 16, 1941: 125.

<sup>106</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 38.

1919, and tried to maneuver the State Department into recognizing the KPG and supporting independent Korea.<sup>107</sup> Yet, the United States government, despite its lofty rhetoric, did nothing.

After failing to gain international support for their cause, the Korean independence movement fell into a slump during the 1920s. Korean patriot groups faced serious factional struggles and financial difficulties. In addition, the United States did not alter its non-recognition policy toward the Korean independence movement. The State Department continued to discourage American citizens in Korea and the Far East from supporting such aspirations. The leaders within the Korean Provisional Government since the failure of March First Independence movement differed in their strategies to fight against Japanese aggression and to achieve Korean Independence. One group, under the leadership of Syngman Rhee, emphasized a peaceful diplomatic demonstration to attract the attention of the American people to Korea's claim for independence. A dissenting group, led by Yi Tong-hui, favored military action against Japanese aggression. Yet another group, under the leadership of An Chang-ho, accepted a long-range plan to help the Koreans' economic and self-strength power.<sup>108</sup> Tactical disagreements among Korean pro-independence activists disconnected the independence movement within Korea. The allies, meanwhile, limited themselves to general statements of support these Korean aspirations.

Afterwards, the various groups comprising the Korean independence movement remained splintered until the close of WWII. Furthermore, much earlier, the Russian

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<sup>107</sup> For further background, see Chong Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*; Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*.

<sup>108</sup> Chong Sik Lee, *ibid.*, 135-6.

Revolution in 1917 also had a tremendous residual impact on the cause of Korean independence and contributed to the waning of the KPG. The formation of a Communist Party of Korea in Shanghai, a year after the birth of the Korean Provisional Government, opened a fissure between the conservative nationalists and radicals of the independence movement that was to plague the movement for the next twenty-five years.<sup>109</sup> In the 1920s, many of the Korean independent movement groups in Korea, Japan, Manchuria, and Siberia joined the Communist movement. Especially after 1931, and due to heavy reliance on the support of the Chinese Nationalist government, the KPG represented only the conservative nationalist camp and lost its power or influence within moderate leftist or socialist groups. In 1941 the KPG moved from Shanghai to Chungking, the last wartime capital of the Chiang Kai-shek's government, and thereafter had little reach of power to influence Korean independence activities much.<sup>110</sup>

After Syngman Rhee left China in 1921, the Korean Provisional Government, under the leadership of Kim Ku, established links with the Chinese Nationalist Government. After following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Korean independence movement became revitalized. Korean exiles joined China's anti-Japanese guerrilla operations in northern China and Manchuria. The Korean Provisional Government moved with the Kuomintang Government to Chungking, and the Chinese government declared war on Japan in 1937. When the Japanese began their long expected takeover of China in the 1930s, many Korean exiles looked to China for help. During the 1930s, the Nationalist Government and the Korean government-in-exile

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<sup>109</sup> The best account of Korean Communism is Dae Sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967); Robert Scalapino and Chong Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>110</sup> Chong Sik Lee, *ibid.*, 156-233.

cooperated in opposing the Japanese aggression. In the early stage of the war, the Chinese government reestablished its former influence over its neighbors by supporting a Korean exile organization in Chungking led by Kim Ku. However, the outbreak of war between China and Japan did not change the official American policy toward the Korean independence movement. Throughout the 1930s, the United States government continued to ignore the Korean cause and remained apathetic about Korean independence.

The Korean expatriate organizations in Chungking and Washington both rejoiced at the news of the Japanese Pearl Harbor for the expected anti-Japanese ramifications attack on December 7, 1941, and hailed American entry into the Pacific War. These Koreans were convinced that an eventual American victory would destroy Japan's empire and Korea would resume—after thirty-six years of Japanese control—a sovereign state. At the same time, Korean leaders were confident of their ability to govern the peninsula. After the Pacific War began, Kim Ku with his followers, and Rhee with his American friends, saw an opportunity to gain American support for their cause and badgered the American government for recognition of KPG. Thus, after Pearl Harbor, the Korean Provisional Government at Chungking sent a letter Clarence E. Gauss, the United States Ambassador in China, seeking recognition and assistance. On December 17, 1941, when Gauss transmitted the letter to the State Department, he suggested the United States government should consider the use of Korean exiles in China to fight against the Japanese in East Asia.<sup>111</sup> Rhee arranged for the provisional government in Chungking to send a formal declaration of war against Japan to present to President Roosevelt. Rhee

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<sup>111</sup> United States Department of State, *FRUS*, 1942, 1: *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1960), 858-859.

felt confident that American recognition would soon follow, but the Americans treated Rhee with “careful circumspection.”<sup>112</sup>

The Chinese also had hailed American entry into the Pacific War. Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who faced serious problems of internal corruption yet neglect to implement any viable reform endeavor, desired America’s assistance to defeat Japan and renew dreams of Chinese hegemony in East Asia. Fearing the appearance of a Russian-sponsored Korean exile group in Siberia, the Kuomintang government championed Kim Ku’s organization in Chungking. Chiang Kai-shek requested American recognition of the Korean Provisional Government “without delay.” However, the State Department hesitated to endorse the suggestion. It seemed preferable to the United States to ignore the problems of Korea until postwar allied conferences could decide its fate.

On December 10, 1941, the State Department set forth the official American policy toward the activities of exile groups in the United States who fought to liberate their homelands from Axis powers. The State Department expressed its concern about the “free movements of exile groups” in the United States and adopted a very cautious approach of not recognizing any particular exile organization.<sup>113</sup> This policy also applied to Korean exiles. So far as the United States was concerned, Korean aspirations had to be considered in relation to the nationalist movements of other dependent peoples in Asia,

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<sup>112</sup> Oliver, *Syngman Rhee*, 175. Details on the strenuous efforts of the Korean provisional government to gain its recognition from the United States can be found in U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1942; *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, 1; 858-881.

<sup>113</sup> Following the military Axis occupation of many countries in Europe during World War II, a number of “free movements” developed in occupied countries, presuming to represent the people of such countries, organized groups of fellow nationals in the United States, and sought to liberate their respective countries from Axis domination. The best known “free movement” was the French National Committee, better known as the “Fighting French,” which was led by General Charles de Gaulle.” Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Office of Public Affairs, “United States Policy regarding Korea, Part II. 1941-1945.” Research Project No. 158 (May 1950), 5; Hong Kyu Park, “From Pearl Harbor to Cairo: America’s Korean Diplomacy, 1941-1943,” *Diplomatic History* 13 (Summer 1989), 346.

European governments-in-exile, and “free movements” that were actively resisting subjugation by the Axis powers. The State Department expressed a “sympathetic interest” in Korean exile organizations, guerrilla groups, and other resistance movements, but refused to extend any form of recognition to them as representative of the Korean people, “formal or informal.”<sup>114</sup>

On December 22, 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull cabled Ambassador C. E. Gauss in China (Chungking) to instruct him to make “very discreet inquiries” in regard to the Kuomintang’s attitude toward the Korean Provisional Government. Hull also wanted to know the organization and strength of KPG and the extent of its contact with people in Korea.<sup>115</sup> Ambassador Gauss reported to Secretary Hull the information about the Korean Provisional Government in Chungking and its links with Chiang’s regime. The report of Ambassador Gauss was mostly negative. Gauss contended that during the past decade the Chinese government had given Kim Ku a great deal of assistance in reestablishing traditional influence over Korea. However, despite Chinese aid, the Korean Provisional Government showed little strength and feeble organization. In addition, most of these nationalist leaders had left Korea years earlier and had not been in contact for the time with the Korean people at home. In addition, many leaders of the independence movement in Korea were in prison.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the present outlook of the Chinese government was not optimistic.

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<sup>114</sup> United States Department of States, *Department of State Bulletin*, December 13, 1941: 519-520.

<sup>115</sup> United States Department of State, *FRUS*, 1942, 1: *General, the British Commonwealth, The Far East*, (Washington, D.D.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 858; Hull to Gauss, tel. 320, December 22, 1941; in United States Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/54.

<sup>116</sup> Hull to President Roosevelt, April 29, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, 1: *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, 873.



By early 1942, United States officials now expressed fears that American support for Korean independence might lead the Japanese to retaliate against Americans in Asia. Nonetheless, Korean exiles diligently persisted in efforts to advance the cause of independence and obtain recognition of their provisional government. On February 12, 1942, acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles asked U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, John G. Winant, to inform the British Government that the State Department despite appeals by groups in China and the United States, would not contemplate the recognition of Korea, even though the American government remained “sympathetic to the plight of the Korean people under Japanese domination and ...anxious...to strengthen Korean resistance and opposition to Japan.”<sup>117</sup>

On March 2, 1942, acting Secretary Welles stated his views regarding Korean nationalist activities. He replied that he viewed such movements with “utmost sympathy.”<sup>118</sup> However, Stanley K. Hornbeck, special advisor on political affairs in the Department of State, also warned of the potential danger of the premature recognition.<sup>119</sup> Korean exiles received courteous treatment from most Americans but found them usually unwilling to translate sympathy into action in favor of a future independent Korea. The British Foreign Office indicated that their government supported the United States’ position. The Department of State transmitted the American and British views to Gauss

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<sup>117</sup> Hull to Winant, tel. 552, Feb 12, 1942; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/68a.

<sup>118</sup> United States Department of State, *A Historical Summary of United States-Korean Relations with a Chronology of Important Developments, 1834-1962* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 9.

<sup>119</sup> Hornbeck, memorandum to Welles, April 11, 1942, in Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 74; See also, Morris, “Korean Trusteeship, 1941-1947: The United States, Russia, and the Cold War,” (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1974), 64-65; For the development of planning groups within the State Department, see Harley Notter, *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation: 1939-1945*.

at Chungking for his use in discussing the Korean problem with the Chinese Government. Ambassador Gauss continued to lace his reports with negativity when it came to the KPG and stressed that the Chinese Foreign Office had clearly indicated that it was “not yet prepared to accord recognition to the Korean Provisional Government”<sup>120</sup> Displeased with this response, Rhee on March 24, 1942 sent a letter to the Secretary of State pointing out that the department was evading the issue of Korean recognition and added that “the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea is the sole representative of the Korean people... and regards itself ... not as a free movement in any sense whatever of that phrase, but as the only governmental agency of Korea that is in existence.”<sup>121</sup>

The politics of expatriate Koreans presented a picture of confuse and inefficiency to those in the U.S. Government from whom they sought recognition. Obviously, Syngman Rhee had an inside track with the American government. In some way, he was almost more American than Korean. He had left his homeland for the United States forty years before to earn a Ph.D. at Princeton, where Woodrow Wilson served as his thesis director. He also founded his own exile organization. Rhee set up the Korean Commission in Washington in 1919, and became the chairman of the Commission as part of a nationalist movement to plead the Korean cause. However, he failed to obtain a hearing for Korean independence at the Washington Conference in 1921-1922. Rhee’s close ties and influence with the government of the United States did not come without a great deal of effort on his part. He also arranged for two of his American admirers, John Stagers and Jay Jerome Williams, to get in touch with American missionaries driven out

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<sup>120</sup> Wells to Gauss, March 20, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, 1: 862-864; Gauss to Hull, tel. 285, Mar. 28, 1942, China (Washington, 1956), 731.

<sup>121</sup> Department of States, *United States Policy Regarding Korea 1941-1945*, 5; Rhee to Secretary of State, March 24, 1942; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/87.

of Korea by the Japanese in 1940-1941 and to ask them whom the Korean people believed to be their leader. On March 6, 1942, the Reverend Frederick Brown Harris, minister of the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, who along with Staggers and Williams was a trustee of the Korean-American Council, addressed a long letter to President Roosevelt. In their letter, they asked for immediate recognition of the provisional government and military aid. They got no answer.<sup>122</sup>

At this juncture, the Chinese Government suggested that the United States should recognize Kim Ku's organization and publicly promise independence for Korea after the war.<sup>123</sup> In March 28, 1942, Sun Fo, the son of the late Sun Yat-sen and President of the Chinese Legislative Yuan, urged the United States to call for Korean independence and recognize the Korean Provisional Government immediately.<sup>124</sup> Acting Secretary Welles urgently cabled the embassy in Chungking for its views, and Gauss replied that the embassy believed that Sun Fo had spoken as an individual. The Ambassador added that, "It is not believed, however, that his influence in party councils is commensurate with his position or that declarations by him are necessarily reorganized by the Chinese Government responsible officials."<sup>125</sup> This was difficult to believe because Chiang probably would not permit Sun Fo to act on his own. Thus, Welles suggested

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<sup>122</sup> United States Department of State, *FRUS*, 1942, 1; 866-868.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 868-9.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 869.

<sup>125</sup> Gauss to Hull, tel. 287, March 28, 1942,; in US Department of State, RG 59 decimal file, 895.01/98; For a complete text of Sun Fo's address, delivered on March 22, 1943, see Sun Fo, *China Looks Forward* (New York: John Day, 1944): 168-177.

organization of a Korean fighting force, along with recognition of any KGP, be postponed until a “more propitious time”<sup>126</sup>

In an effort to advance Kim Ku rather than give support to the exiled leader Rhee, the Chinese government now initiated a move toward recognition of the KGP. For instance, on April 6, 1942, the Supreme National Defense Council accepted a proposal that had been submitted by Sun Fo which called for immediate recognition of the Korean Provisional Government by the Chinese Government.<sup>127</sup> Again Welles urged restraint and cabled, “Please inform the Chinese vice Minister urgently that we hope that, before the Chinese Government takes any definitive action with regard to the question of recognition of a Provisional Government of Korea, it will be so good as to make available to us its views and conclusions in this matter.”<sup>128</sup> The Americans seemingly could not convey adequately to the Chinese their unwillingness to recognize a provisional government located at the remote capital of Nationalist China. Four days later, Gauss informed Welles that the Chinese Government would keep the United States informed of any contemplated action.<sup>129</sup>

All of these maneuvers formed part of what seems to have been Chiang’s plan to gain leadership of the expatriates. The Chinese government kept confronting the State Department with the Korean issue. Chiang Kai-shek wanted to recognize KPG “without delay” dispelling any suspicion that China had any territorial ambition regarding

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<sup>126</sup> *FRUS*, 1942, 1; 870-872.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 869.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 870.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 872-875.

Korea.<sup>130</sup> Such a move would demonstrate that the Chinese government respected the principles of the Atlantic Charter.<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, Chiang requested the United States government's views on the KPG. The US government responded and suggested Chiang delay Chinese recognition of KPG until "some more favorable time."<sup>132</sup>

On April 18, 1942, Secretary of State Cordell Hull sent Ambassador Gauss a telegram and explained that "this whole question of Korean independence and recognition of Korean government" had many complications and "delicate aspects."<sup>133</sup> Hull did not wish to dictate to the Chinese, but he felt it would be appropriate for the United States to point out the difference between advocating the independence of Korea and according recognition to any particular group as the provisional government of Korea. The United States would not accept recognition of the KPG, not only because it lacked the power to unify various groups interested in Korean independence. American diplomats also warned about the unrepresentative character of the Korean exiles and their lack of connection with the people at home.<sup>134</sup> Shortly thereafter, Gauss informed Washington that the Chinese government had agreed to delay recognition of KPG. Early in the war, American government policy toward the Korean Provisional Government did not regard it as a representative government and delayed any political decision about the future of Korea. President Roosevelt believed that Korea would not become an

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<sup>130</sup> Gauss to Hull, April 10, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942 1: 869; Gauss to Hull, April 18, 1942, *ibid.*, 872-873.

<sup>131</sup> In August 14, 1941, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill announced the Atlantic Charter. It was the basic principles of a peace in the future. It asserted the right of self-determination. The Eight Points of the Charter were heartening to the colonized peoples of the world who had long hoped for a better world order. *FURS*, 1941, 1, 367.

<sup>132</sup> *FRUS*, 1942, 1: 872-875.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 873.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 874.

independent country immediately after the war because of incapacity in terms of self-government. In a crucial memorandum on February 20, 1942, William R. Langdon, the officer of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs and later political adviser to General Hodge, proposed that the State Department implement an international trusteeship for postwar Korea. He pointed out that most Koreans were suffering from poverty, illiteracy, political inexperience, and economic backwardness. Langdon believed that the Koreans were not ready for granting an early independence and concluded that “for a generation at least Korea would have to be protected, guided, and aided to modern statehood by the great powers.”<sup>135</sup>

On February 23, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, for the first time, mentioned the Korean situation in one of his famous fireside chats on the radio. Roosevelt described a Korean experience of enslavement under Japanese rule which should be stopped. He also related the promise of national self-determination articulated in the Atlantic Charter to the whole world.<sup>136</sup> Yet Roosevelt did not grant official recognition to the Korean Provisional Government in Chungking. He believed that the United States must consider the views of Korea's neighboring countries that also had a crucial interest in the peninsula. In addition, Roosevelt worried that any initiative the

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<sup>135</sup> James Irving Matray, “The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950,” (Ph.D. dissertation, 1977), 29-30; See also, William George Morris, “Korean Trusteeship, 1941-1947: The United States, Russia and the Cold War,” (Ph.D. dissertation, 1974), 13-14.

<sup>136</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, radio address; United States Department State, *Department of State Bulletin*, February 23, 1942: 186-188.

United States took in recognizing the KPG would possible cause Soviet assistance to groups competing with the KPG to escalate, too.<sup>137</sup>

On December 18, 1942, Roosevelt sent a letter to Chiang, actually written by Owen Lattimore, political advisor to Chiang 1941-1942, which said, “After this war we shall have to think of China, America, Britain, and Russia as the ‘four big policemen’ of the world... it would be undesirable to attempt to exclude Russia from such problems as the independence of Korea.”<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, Roosevelt counted heavily on China to play a key role in a postwar settlement in the world. He believed that China would act as one of “four policemen” in world affairs, especially in Asia. Also, President Roosevelt emphasized Allied cooperation, especially the role of Russia, in winning the war.

Although the Soviet Union was not yet at war with Japan, Roosevelt believed that the United States must consult with the Soviet Union on the Korean question in terms of “a policy of cooperation.” If only the Chinese government recognized the KPG, then the possibility might arise that the Soviets might support other groups with more communistic leanings.<sup>139</sup> This would create tension among the Allies that U.S. wanted to discourage.

Despite the wartime coalition against the Axis powers, the United States as early as 1942 expressed concern about the Soviet sponsored Korean puppet government. Nonetheless, the United States sought to maintain a unified front with the Soviet Union on Korean policy. By late 1942, American policy makers now concluded Korea should

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<sup>137</sup> Welles, telegram to American Ambassador in China, Clarence E. Gauss, March 20, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, 1: 862-63; Hull memorandum to President Roosevelt, April 29, *ibid.*, 1: 873; Hull, telegram to Gauss, May 1, 1942, *ibid.*, 1: 874; Gauss, telegram to Hull, May 7, 1942, *ibid.*, 1: 875.

<sup>138</sup> United State Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1942, China: 186.

<sup>139</sup> *FRUS*, 1942, 1: 873.

be independent after the war. However, because of the Korean people's inexperience in self-government, they first should be placed under a temporary international trusteeship. In 1943, when the Allied powers engaged in some discussion of a post-war arrangement, Secretary of State Hull proposed an American draft entitled "A Declaration by the United Nations on National Independence," which emphasized the rapid realization of Korean independence through an Allied trusteeship.<sup>140</sup> Hull maintained that colonial peoples should be given the opportunity for study and experience in the political and economic fields.<sup>141</sup>

Roosevelt first discussed the trusteeship idea with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on his visit to the White House on March 27, 1943. Roosevelt suggested that Korea be placed under a trusteeship with China, the United States, and one or two other countries.<sup>142</sup> At first, the British were reluctant to accept trusteeship. While Roosevelt emphasized this idea in connection with small nations, deprived of independence by force, Roosevelt, at the same time, had to be concerned about promoting the trusteeship idea without alienating their American allies.

In April 1943, the State Department prepared an "International Trusteeship Draft" stating the objective and sketching the machinery for establishing the trusteeship. Stating that the goal was self-government, the Department suggested that Korea be temporarily

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<sup>140</sup> *FRUS*, 1943, 1: 747-9.

<sup>141</sup> *FRUS*, 1943, *The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, The Far East* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 3: 35.

<sup>142</sup> Hull Memorandum of Conversation, March 27, 1943, *FURS*, 1943, 3: 36-8; Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 124.



administered by a council composed of China, Russia, and the United States.<sup>143</sup>

However, the Koreans and the Chinese did not hesitate to raise the specter of the possibility of Russian hordes overrunning the Korean peninsula. In January 1943, for example, Rhee emphasized to Hull of Russia's ambitions in Korea. Failure to recognize the provisional government, he emphasized, would "inevitably result in the creation of a communist state." In May of that year Rhee wrote the President that "now we have reports indicating Russia's aim to establish a Soviet Republic of Korea... At the time it should be borne in mind that the danger of Russian expansion in the Far East, so feared and dreaded by the United States forty years ago, has not entirely disappeared."<sup>144</sup> In December 1943, Rhee claimed that Russia would use Korean divisions, trained as a part of the Soviet Far Eastern forces, to invade Korea and establish a communist republic. Rhee's solution was recognition of the provisional government with himself as its head. The Chinese likewise issued warnings against Russian intentions. Indeed, the Chinese desired the American Government to equip an army of 50,000 Koreans to counter the Soviet armed Koreans in Siberia.<sup>145</sup>

At the Cairo Conference (November 22 - 26, 1943), Allied leaders, Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek, and Churchill, agreed territories lost to Japan, including Formosa, Manchuria, and the Pescadores, should return to control of the Chinese government. In the meeting, Roosevelt in part wanted to bolster the prestige of Chiang's regime and

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<sup>143</sup> *FRUS*, 1943, *The Conference at Washington and Quebec* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 720-728.

<sup>144</sup> U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1943, 3: *The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East*; 1093-4, 1096.

<sup>145</sup> *FRUS*, 1943, 3; 1093-94, 1096.

discuss the post-war status of Asia. For the first time, these leaders openly proclaimed support for Korean independence.<sup>146</sup>

Yet the Americans at Cairo remained cautious about any involvement in the internal political problems of Korea and accepted the wording of the British draft for Korean independence rather than insist on an alternative version. This statement proved to be extremely vague; no one was willing or able to state exactly when and how, after liberation, Korea would receive independence.<sup>147</sup> Actually, the American draft of the conference communiqué, composed by Harry Hopkins, remarked that “we are mindful of the treacherous enslavement of the people of Korea by Japan and are determined that that country, ‘at the earliest possible moment’ after the downfall of Japan, shall become a free and independent country.” This draft was then amended by Roosevelt to replace the words “earliest possible” with “proper.”<sup>148</sup> The British draft, written in Churchill’s hand, stated that “the aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.”<sup>149</sup> The phrase, “in due course” was subject to varying interpretations. The *New York Times* editorialized that the phrase “must mean that Korea will be under some kind of protectorate, possibly that of China, until she can be made self-governing.”<sup>150</sup> Secretary

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<sup>146</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950*, 17-18; Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 787.

<sup>147</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 53.

<sup>148</sup> Department of State, *FRUS, the Conference at Cairo and Tehran*, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961): 401.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 1943, 248-61, 399-404, 448-449; *Department of State Bulletin*, 9, 393; U.S. Department of State, *A Historical Summary of United States-Korean Relations, with a Chronology of Important Developments, 1834-1962*; 4. The text of the Cairo Declaration is printed in Han Kyo Kim, ed., *Reunification of Korea: 50 Basic Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Asian Studies, 1972), 1.

<sup>150</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1943.

of State Hull later wrote in his memoirs that he thought the phrase “in due course” was unwise and unfortunate because the Korean people wanted their independence immediately after Japan’s defeat.<sup>151</sup> This qualifying phrase disturbed Korean leaders. The American Ambassador at Chungking reported that the Koreans indicated strong fears about Chinese intentions regarding post-war affairs, in view of the rumor that Korea was to be placed under a Chinese mandate, and that they were attempting to obtain an interpretation of “in due course” from the Chinese Foreign Office.<sup>152</sup>

After the Cairo conference, the United States government viewed the political future of Korea either partly or totally as an American responsibility. In order to fulfill pledges, Roosevelt brought the matter to the Teheran Conference (November 28-December 1, 1943) and discussed with Stalin the possibility of imposing a “trusteeship” on Korea before the nation would attain full-fledged independence. Although he could make no commitment to the Far Eastern problems, Stalin explained that he thoroughly approved of the Cairo Declaration and all its contents.<sup>153</sup> He also remarked, “It was right that Korea should be independent and the Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores Islands should be returned to China.”<sup>154</sup> At the Teheran Conference, Stalin gave Roosevelt a general promise that the Russians would fight the Japanese after the Germans had been defeated.

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<sup>151</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), 2: 1584.

<sup>152</sup> Gauss to Hull, December 7, 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 3: 1096.

<sup>153</sup> Minutes of the Pacific War Council Meeting, January 14, 1944; *FRUS*, 1943, *The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran*, 1943, 869; United States Department of State, *A Historical Summary of United States-Korean Relations with a Chronology of Important Developments, 1834-1963*; 10.

<sup>154</sup> Cho, 24.

After his discussing about Korea with Chiang and Stalin at the Cairo and Teheran conferences, Roosevelt seemed to have been confident that the United States would control the Pacific theater after the war. With regard to the Korea problem, Roosevelt agreed with Stalin that it should be placed under a 40-year trusteeship.<sup>155</sup> He explained that the American experience in the Philippines showed that newly liberated colonial peoples in Asia, especially in Korea and Indochina, would need a certain period of training in self-governance to survive in the post-war world.<sup>156</sup> The idea of trusteeship over Korea appears to originate from Roosevelt's personal idealism about peaceful postwar and cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. When Roosevelt wrote in September, 1941:

Trusteeship is based on the principle of unselfish service. For a time at least there are many minor children among the peoples of the world who need trustees in their relations with other nations and peoples, just as there are many adult nations or peoples which must be led back into a spirit of good conduct.<sup>157</sup>

However, it seems Roosevelt had little idea how much Koreans opposed the idea of trusteeship and did not really understand the hopes and aspiration of these people to be independent. Also, Roosevelt overlooked prior experience, such as three years of bloody insurrection between Filipino patriots and Americans after the Spanish American War.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>156</sup> Department of State, *FRUS, The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran*, 1943: 868-870.

<sup>157</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 24.

<sup>158</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 108; Kwon Oh Shin, *American Imperialism: The Ordeal and Resistance of the Philippines* (Seoul: Munhakkwajisungsa, 2000); Matray argues that Roosevelt had to adopt a Korean trusteeship as a practical solution for preventing Korea from becoming the victim of great power rivalry; see James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950*, 26-27. However, as David F. Schmitz argues, this trusteeship idea was based upon a paternalistic racism that non-Western peoples are inferior and do not have an ability to run democracy in terms of a political system. In addition, Roosevelt believed that this idea served to protect the former

Alarmed by the phrase, “in due course,” the Korean response was immediate. Rhee and Kim Ku denounced the communiqué, and Korean organizations in the United States and Hawaii protested to Congress. Syngman Rhee telegraphed asking Roosevelt and the State Department to clarify the Cairo Declaration “by guaranteeing territorial integrity and political and administrative sovereignty [of Korea] immediately upon the defeat of Japan.”<sup>159</sup> Rhee received no answer.<sup>160</sup> In the provisional government at Chungking many Koreans translated the English phrase—which had no exact equivalent in the Korean language—“in due course” as “immediately” or “within a few days.” Soon thousands of copies of the Declaration were smuggled in from China and circulated throughout the peninsula. Knowledge of this erroneous translation, which raised Korean hopes that they had been promised almost immediate independence and self-government after liberation, did not reach the State Department until the first American forces landed in Korea almost two years later.<sup>161</sup>

After the Cairo meeting, the State Department took a more serious look at the Korean problem and began to work out specific plans for the Korean trusteeship. On February 18, 1944, the War and Navy Departments asked the State Department for advice about a plan to introduce the possibility of military government in Korea.

Planners needed to know the extent of military responsibility for civil affairs in Korea

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colonies from the postwar threats of revolutionary nationalist movements were that often headed by communists.

<sup>159</sup> Rhee to Roosevelt and Churchill, September 11, 1944; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/9-1144.

<sup>160</sup> Oliver, *Syngman Rhee*, 190.

<sup>161</sup> E. Grant Mead, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1951), 44.

and whether these obligations would be shared with other Allies in the event of an American occupation.

By May, based on a series of papers by the Interdivisional Area Committee on the Far East, the State Department planners proposed that within whatever Korean territory was occupied in the course of combat operations, or after the general capitulation of Japan, an inter-allied military government should be established to consist of troops drawn from China, Great Britain, and the United States, as well as the Soviet Union if it entered the Pacific War against Japan. The Department looked forward to centralized—not zonal—administration. With respect to any future occupation forces, it seemed “politically advisable” to include contingents from the four Great Powers. There should be “substantial representation” for the United States, but under no circumstances should America undertake to handle the Korean occupation alone.<sup>162</sup>

The army of occupation would be organized quickly, integrating the four national commands. Nor would an occupation be a short affair. The department warned that a military government might have to rule in Korea for a “considerable duration.” The committee pointed out that there were 35,000 Korean troops recruited from Siberia or in guerrilla units the Japanese drove out of northern Korea and Manchuria. The Soviet Union trained them thoroughly and indoctrinated them with Soviet ideology to function as an active revolutionary faction in postwar Korea. These potential communist guerrillas vastly outnumbered those under the KPG supported by the Chinese Nationalist government. Therefore, fearing Communist domination of a liberated Korea, the State

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<sup>162</sup> Leonard Hoag, *American Military Government in Korea: War Policy and the First Year of Occupation, 1941-1946* (Washington, D.C.: The Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of Army, 1970), 23-25.

Department suggested joint occupation by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. If the Soviets occupied Korea alone, “the United States might consider such a development as a threat to future security in the Pacific.”<sup>163</sup>

In May 1944, Gauss reported a conversation with Cho So-ang, the Foreign Minister, of the Korean Provisional Government. Cho sought clarification of the Cairo Declaration as it pertained to the recognition of his government. With respect to clarification, Gauss stated as his personal reaction that the “military phase of expelling the Japanese from Korea must come first, followed by preparation for civil government and in due course independence.” Concerning recognition, Gauss indicated his view that the Korean provisional government was not a government-in-exile “but rather a Korean independence movement.”<sup>164</sup> In a memorandum of May 4, 1944, the Department’s Interdivisional Area Committee on the Far East summarized the dilemma of the United States over Korea by warning that an independent but weak Korea would again become subject to international pressure and intrigue, making it highly desirable that some form of interim supervisory organ be established.<sup>165</sup> American policy makers did not want sole responsibility for the postwar status of Korea.<sup>166</sup> In June 1944, the Korean Provisional Government appealed to Roosevelt. Kim Ku requested recognition so that his government could “co-ordinate the movement for our national liberation with the present

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<sup>163</sup> Memorandum Prepared by the Inter-Divisional Area Committee on the Far East, May 4, 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, 5; *The Near East, South Asia, Africa The Far East* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 1239-42.

<sup>164</sup> Gauss to Hull, no 2383, May 19, 1944; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/5-1944.

<sup>165</sup> *FRUS*, 1944, 5, 1241.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

and immediate operations of the Allied armies in Eastern Asia.”<sup>167</sup> Syngman Rhee continued to urge recognition of the Korean provisional government upon American officials. In August 1944 he wrote to the President:

Our word from Your Excellency to the proper United States authorities will include Korea among all the Allied nations that are fighting against the enemies of civilization and that will prove to the Korean people the fact that the great President of the United States is a true friend of Korean independence.<sup>168</sup>

In August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff mentioned to the Secretary of State that, “Whether or not Russia enters the war in the Pacific, the fall of Japan will leave Russia in a dominant position on continental northeast Asia in so far as military power is concerned.”<sup>169</sup> The JCS suggested that the best course was to have the USSR enter the war promptly, thus shortening it, while delaying the discussion of territorial trusteeship until the war was over.

At the Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945) the Korean question again resurfaced in discussions between Roosevelt and Stalin. The State Department prepared a briefing paper before the conference. It stated:

It is view of the Department that the problems of Korea are of such an international character that with the completion of military operations in Korea, (1) there should be, so far as practicable, Allied representation in the army of occupation and military government in Korea; (2) such representation should be by those countries which have a real interest in the future status of Korea, such as the United States, Great Britain, and China and the Soviet Union if it has entered the war in the Pacific; (3) the representation of other states should not be so large as to reduce the proportionate strength of the United States to a point where its effectiveness would be weakened... it is the Department’s tentative opinion that (1) an interim international administration or trusteeship should be established for

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<sup>167</sup> Kim Ku to Roosevelt, June 17, 1944, enclosed in Gauss to Hull, no. 2798, June 21, 1944; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/6-2144.

<sup>168</sup> Rhee to Roosevelt, Aug. 21, 1944; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/8-2144.

<sup>169</sup> United States Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1944, 701.



Korea either under the authority of the proposed international organization or independently of it; and that (2) the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union should be included in any such administration<sup>170</sup>

State Department officials emphasized the necessity for a trusteeship and military occupation of Korea. These policy makers thought that the military occupation of Korea by any single power might have serious political repercussions. In aforementioned paper, the Department expressed its desire that an early agreement be reached “on the question of whether an international supervisory authority is to be established for Korea and if so what powers are to be represented thereon in order to avoid the possibility of an extended period of occupation and to prevent an unnecessary postponement of Korean independence.”<sup>171</sup> Unfortunately, Department policy makers had not yet formulated a specific time frame for a supervisory authority or trusteeship. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed further discussions of trusteeships at this point because it would adversely affect relations with Russia.<sup>172</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that, with Russian help, it would take eighteen months after the defeat of Germany and cost at least five hundred thousand American casualties to subdue the Japanese.<sup>173</sup> Because of his illness, Roosevelt did not consult with the State Department officials before the Yalta meetings.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Department of State, *FRUS, The Conference at Malta and Yalta, 1945* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 359.

<sup>171</sup> “Inter-Allied Consultation Regarding Korea,” *FRUS, The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*, 358-361.

<sup>172</sup> Marshall to Hull, August 3, 1944, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1944, 700.

<sup>173</sup> William D. Leahy, *I was There* (New York: McGraw-Hill Books Company, Inc, 1950), 260; Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), I: 265.

<sup>174</sup> James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 23.

During the conference, President Roosevelt explained to Stalin that Korea, much like the Philippines, might need twenty to thirty years of trusteeship to be independent. Stalin replied, “The shorter the period the better.”<sup>175</sup> Roosevelt and Stalin agreed that multi-national military occupation was necessary and foreign troops would not be permanently stationed in Korea. Roosevelt also suggested that it was unnecessary to invite the British to participate in the Korean trusteeship. However, Stalin quickly responded that the British “would most certainly be offended,” and warned that Churchill “might kill us” if not included.<sup>176</sup>

Even so these leaders did not reach an agreement on the issue of Korea at the Yalta Conference. However, Stalin did promise to enter the Pacific War against Japan. Roosevelt and Churchill also recognized and accepted the rights Russia held before the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and a traditional Russian interest in the future status of postwar Korea.<sup>177</sup> The United States then began to work out the details of the international trusteeship. On May 21, 1945, the Acting Secretary of State sent a memorandum to James Forrestal, Secretary of Navy, recommending the establishment of a four power trusteeship to last five years. He emphasized the necessity of utilizing capable local Koreans in the administration and that all foreign troops should be removed

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<sup>175</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), II: 316-317; Cho, 31.

<sup>176</sup> “Inter-Allied Consultation Regarding Korea,” *FRUS, Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 1945, 770; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 31-32; Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 868; Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin*, 599.

<sup>177</sup> Truman, *Year of Decisions*, I: 265-66. The terms of Russian entry into the Pacific War can be found in U.S. Senate, *A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-1949*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 33-34. In December, 1944, when Stalin met Harriman, US Ambassador in Moscow, Stalin specified his demands that “the Soviet Unions wanted the Kurile Islands and lower Sakhalin, leases at Port Arthur and Dairen, control of the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian railroads, and recognition of the independence from China of Outer Mongolia.” John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, 78.

except for a token force not to exceed 5,000 men from each of the four powers at the time of the establishment of the trusteeship.<sup>178</sup>

President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. The new inexperienced president, Harry S. Truman, as Vice-President, had not been informed of the previous negotiations between the United States and its allies regarding post-war issues. Because of his inexperience and unpreparedness in foreign policy, Truman was left on his own to determine how to define Roosevelt's post-war ideals so that he could carry on consistently with a predetermined American post-war policy.<sup>179</sup> Truman needed to better understand Roosevelt's wartime diplomacy especially with respect to the various problems facing China and Korea. To effectuate that design, Truman sent Harry Hopkins on May 28, 1945, to confer with Stalin, with the special mission to reaffirm the Eastern Asian agreements and the matter of trusteeship for Korea. This task had been made difficult because Soviet-American relations had significantly deteriorated after the Yalta Conference because of growing Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, in response to Hopkins' inquiries, Stalin "fully agreed with the desirability of a four-power trusteeship for Korea."<sup>180</sup> Despite this understanding, however, no formal agreement was

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<sup>178</sup> Acting Secretary of State to Secretary of the Navy, May 21, 1945, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1945, 882-883.

<sup>179</sup> See, Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 69-86; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 15.

<sup>180</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, May 28, 1945, *FRUS, The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam Conference)*, 1945, 1, 47; Cho, 38-9; Sherwood, 903.

reached among four powers for a trusteeship administration for Korea before the surrender of Japan.<sup>181</sup>

As World War II drew to an end, Roosevelt's advisors warned Truman of Stalin's intentions in Eastern Europe and East Asia and called for a harder line against the Russians.<sup>182</sup> The prospects of post-war cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States grew dim as the Soviets' intentions in Europe and East Asia became more and more obvious. Also, the possibility of a successful trusteeship for Korea became increasingly doubtful. Therefore, the essential goal of forming the trusteeship changed. No longer was its foremost design the independence of Korea. It now served the purpose of building a bulwark in Korea against the communism in East Asia as a whole.

During the Sino-Soviet negotiations in July of 1945, Ambassador Harriman cabled President Truman about the Chinese government's anxiety towards the Korean question. He related that the Chinese Foreign Minister, T.V. Soong argued that, "The independence of Korea is of importance to the Chinese strategic location." According to Harriman, Soong also expressed the fear of the Chinese that, "even with a four power trusteeship the Soviets will obtain domination of Korean affairs," because "the Russians have two Korean divisions trained in Siberia"<sup>183</sup> Despite this warning, most advisors believed that the Yalta accord remained a satisfactory basis for Asian diplomacy and that the joint trusteeship would somehow materialize on the basis of postwar cooperation.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 40.

<sup>182</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, 200-204.

<sup>183</sup> Harriman to Secretary of State, July 3, 1945, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1945, 914; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, I: 317.

<sup>184</sup> Gaddis Smith, *American Diplomacy during the Second World War 1941-1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 164.

Meanwhile, expatriate Koreans seemed unhappy about Yalta and accused the United States government of secretly handing Korea over to the Soviet Union. In his appeal for recognition of the Korean provisional government, Rhee, on February 5, 1945, warned of Russian ambitions regarding Korea:

The Chinese government which showed no anxiety in this respect six months ago, is now willing to take the lead in recognition the Korean provisional government provided the United States would follow suit. I hope the United States government would feel free to cooperate with China regarding the recognition of Korea. The Chinese government would not move without an understanding with the Soviet Department. If the State Department gives China a tacit understanding that it will cooperate, China will formally recognize the de jure status of the Republic of Korea.<sup>185</sup>

Rhee telegraphed Senators Owen Brewster, Walter F. George, and Congressman Clare E. Hoffman that Truman had learned of a secret agreement at Yalta to turn Korea over to Russia. The agreement, Rhee alleged, signed by the United States, Britain, and Russia, declared that Korea would remain under Soviet influence after the war's end.

Emphasized the Soviet Union expansionism into the Korean peninsula, Rhee warned Ambassador Gauss that the Soviet Union would use the Korean divisions in its Far Eastern Army to set up a pro-Soviet government in Korea unless the United States recognized the KPG. Secretary of State, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., refused to discuss the matter.

The State Department did reply by urging Rhee to cease annoying the U.S. government. Truman denied the existence of any secret Yalta agreement and reiterated the U.S. position by emphasizing that:

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<sup>185</sup> Rhee to Grew, Feb. 5, 1945; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 895.01/2-545.

The United Nations which are represented at the San Francisco Conference all have legally constituted governing authorities, whereas the “Korean Provisional Government” ...has never had administrative authority over any part of Korea nor can it be considered representative of the Korean people of today. Its following among exiled Koreans is limited. [We will not] ...compromise the right of the Korean people to choose the ultimate form and personnel of the government which they may wish to establish ...This connection carries no implication whatsoever of a lack of sympathy for the people of Korea and their aspirations for freedom.<sup>186</sup>

He concluded by referring to Rhee and other individuals interested in the welfare of Korea and pointed to Rhee’s claim to official status.

Undaunted, Rhee also repeated his claim of the existence of a secret agreement. He said, “an American of unimpeachable reputation” had been his source of information. He also wondered why Soviet authorities had remained “ominously silent,” and why Churchill had declared that not all of the topics discussed at Yalta were for public consideration. Finally, Rhee charged that Korea was a perpetual victim of secret diplomacy. He wrote that he had the support of the Korean people, that he represented many shades of opinion, and that he enjoyed *de facto* recognition from both China and France. Yet, Rhee still feared that the Korean people would not succeed in obtaining independence.

Numerous unfortunate complications arose over the postwar government of Korea. Especially difficult to resolve was the unrepresentative character of the Korean exiles and their lack of connection with their homeland. The State Department knew that the exiles would not, perhaps could not, admit that the expatriates had lost touch with the political climate in Korea or the need for a radical solution to postwar reconstruction.

Joseph C. Grew, acting secretary of state, explained there undoubtedly would be

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<sup>186</sup> U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: *The British Commonwealth, The Far East* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), 1029-30.

“considerable confusion and chaos in the political, economic, and social affairs of Korea when Japanese rule ends. With the liberation of Korea, he predicted, tenant farmers would “undoubtedly expect sweeping agrarian reforms and may take definite steps to destroy control of the landlords, both Japanese and Koreans.”<sup>187</sup> The exiles, he said, did not represent such radical views. Indeed, the Korean situation demanded radical reforms, especially when it came to land distribution. At the time, three of every four Korean farmers were tenants on farms of three or four acres. Between one-third and three-quarters of their produce went to the landlord, with the remainder the farmer paid expenses including taxes and irrigation costs. By late winter-early spring, whole communities of peasants were reduced to eating root and bark. Many landlords and merchants, moreover, were in league with the Japanese.

In the post-war era, new elites revitalized Korean culture and politics. Neither Rhee nor Kim Ku, likewise a conservative, was capable of understanding the need for radical change nor could they see its international ramifications. American officials understood the relation between change and Soviet power. Grew even felt that the economic and political situation in Korea was conducive to the adoption of communist ideology though most Koreans feared Russia. He warned “The activities of a Russian-sponsored socialist regime in Korea might easily receive popular support.”

As the time approached for the Potsdam Conference, American policy makers believed there should be a “detailed discussion” of a postwar trusteeship for Korea and felt the idea of trusteeship seemed the best device to prevent Soviet domination. Assuming that the Soviets wished an agreement, the State Department prepared a series

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<sup>187</sup> U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: *The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, 561.

of briefing papers for the forthcoming Potsdam Conference. State Department officials not only sought Soviet agreement at the conference on joint action for the trusteeship, but also sought Soviet adherence to the Cairo Declaration. By doing so, American leaders still hoped to prevent Soviet domination by establishing a “friendly” government in Korea.<sup>188</sup> The State Department concluded Allied leaders should decide whether an “interim international supervisory administration” should be established for Korea, and if so, what powers should be represented.

Truman first met Stalin at the Potsdam Conference (July 17 to August 7, 1945). Along with Churchill, the three Allied leaders discussed how to deal with European problems created by the German surrender and how to conduct the war effort against Japan. While discussing the issue of international trusteeship on July 22, Stalin remarked that the Korean question merited discussion. However, Churchill interrupted and refused to discuss the trusteeship for Korea, “We can exchange views on any subject but at the end we have had only an interesting discussion.” Later that day Molotov tried to raise the question of Korea, with a similar result. At the end, Allied leaders failed to reach any specific agreement regarding Korea.<sup>189</sup>

On July 24, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George C. Marshall and the Soviet Chiefs of Staff, General Alexi I. Antonov met to prepare for Soviet entry into the Pacific War and to discuss a military plan for the Pacific War.<sup>190</sup> Clearly, it seems, the Soviet

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<sup>188</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 41.

<sup>189</sup> “Truman-Churchill Meeting, Sunday, July 22, 1945: Sixth Plenary Meeting.” *FRUS, The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam Conference, 1945)*, 2: 253, 264, and “Meeting of the Communique Subcommittee, Wednesday, August 1, 1945: Thirteenth Plenary Meeting. *ibid.*, 606. See also Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions*, 373-74.

<sup>190</sup> Truman, *Year of Decisions*, 382.



Union did not have specific designs on Korea before the Potsdam Conference because of their preoccupation with the Manchurian question. General Antonov himself explicitly stated that the primary interest of Russia was the occupation of the Liaotung Peninsula.<sup>191</sup> Upon this premise, American and Soviet Chiefs of Staff reached an agreement to synchronize efforts against Japan. The line delineating the Soviet area of operation ran from the northern tip of Japan across extreme northern Korea. At this meeting, the American military planners made a fatal mistake. General Antonov asked General Marshall about the possibility of a joint Soviet-U.S. offensive against Korea. Failing to realize the real motive behind this question, General Marshall replied that Americans did not have a plan to invade Korea.<sup>192</sup>

It is, therefore, evident that the Russians were fully informed by the American head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff himself that the United States had virtually no plan for Korea at all. When the Soviets decided to participate in the Pacific War, the Allied Chiefs of Staff agreed that there should be a line of demarcation in the general area of Korea between American and Soviet air and sea operations. According to the United States proposal: “the air operational line ran through the Sea of Japan (East Sea) and touched the Korean coast at Seishin, then turned north and west to Changchun in Manchuria, and the sea operational line through the Sea of Japan terminated on the Korean coast at 38<sup>th</sup> north latitude—the first appearance of this parallel in the United States-Soviet conversation.”<sup>193</sup> But there was no discussion of a plan for military

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 382-83.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>193</sup> Department of States, United States Policy Regarding Korea Part II 1941-1945, 57.

occupation of Korea by land forces. Moreover, in spite of a Soviet request, there was no further discussion of Korean trusteeship at Potsdam.<sup>194</sup> The Allied leaders may have thought that they would have time later to discuss Korea. At that present time it was not a main concern at that time.

The United States dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively on August 6 and 9. The Soviet Union declared war against Japan on August 8<sup>th</sup>. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Japanese government accepted the Potsdam Ultimatum and announced its surrender on the 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>195</sup> For United States policymakers, the collapse of the Japanese came much earlier than expected. On August 10<sup>th</sup>, two days after the Soviet Army entered in the Pacific War, the Soviets advanced to Korea and occupied the Najin port. The Soviets also began to push farther down the Korean peninsula. American military planners then suddenly realized that Korea, if dominated by the Soviet Union, would become a great menace to the security of Japan. Fearing the occupation of the whole Korean peninsular by Russia, American policymakers began to consider a possible division of a country with the Russians as a “temporary military expediency.”<sup>196</sup>

General MacArthur’s main concern was the occupation of Japan; for him leaving the Korean question was an afterthought. United States military leaders realized that unilateral occupation of Japan and Korea was impossible so the United States moved quickly to ensure at least partial control over the peninsula. During a midnight meeting on August 10-11, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes instructed the State-War-Navy

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<sup>194</sup> *FRUS 1945, The Conference of Berlin*, 2, 253; *ibid*, 2, 420-411, Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 383.

<sup>195</sup> Because of the time difference and the international date line, it was still August 14 in Washington.

<sup>196</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 51; Arthur L., Jr. Grey, “The Thirty-Eight Parallel,” *Foreign Affairs* 29 (April 1951), 482-487.

Coordinating Committee (SWNCC)<sup>197</sup> to make decisions concerning Japan's surrender, prepare a plan for occupation of Korea by the Americans and the Soviets, and to ensure American forces receive the surrender "as far north as practicable."<sup>198</sup>

American Ambassador Averill Harriman, Reparation Commissioner Edwin Pauley, and other American policymakers made the suggestion that the United States should occupy Korea as far north as possible to check Russian expansion.<sup>199</sup> However, the United States lacked military forces in the immediate area to occupy the northern part of Korea. At that time Russian troops were rapidly advancing into the peninsula through Manchuria. Dean Rusk argued that, "the military view was that if our proposals for receiving surrender greatly overreached our probable military capabilities, there would be little likelihood of Soviet acceptance."<sup>200</sup> Therefore, the War Department had no choice but to compromise the wishes of the State Department and acknowledge the limits of their military capability in that area.

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<sup>197</sup> December 1, 1944, the State-War-Navy Coordination Committee (SWNCC) was established to "improve coordination in matters of military and foreign policies within the government." Its task was to reconcile differences between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department before presenting recommendations to the President. SWNCC organized itself into various subcommittees which soon played a dominant role in the development of policy for Korea. A committee on the Far East (SFE) was created on January 13, 1945 and brought in experts from the various departments for advice and consultation. The members of the committee were James Clement Dunn as SWNCC chairman, State Department's office of European Affairs, John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, and Artemus Gates, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, H. Freeman Matthews, Director of the Office of European Affairs, and Eugene Dooman, a special assistant for Far Eastern Affairs; Judith Munro-Leighton, "American Policy vs. Asian Revolution: SWNCC Recommendation Regarding Post-World War II: China, Korea, and Vietnam" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1994), 26 and 36-7; Leonard Hoag, *American Military Government in Korea*, 26-30.

<sup>198</sup> Truman, *Year of Decisions*, 444.

<sup>199</sup> The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to President Truman and the Secretary of State, Moscow, 10 August, 1945, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1945, 967; Truman, *Year of Decisions*, I, 433-34.

<sup>200</sup> Memorandum by Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, to Chief of the Division of Historical Policy Research, July 12, 1950, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1039.

Colonel Charles H. Bonesteel, III and Dean Rusk, chief of the Policy Planning Section of the War Department, were assigned by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy to make a proposal for a Korean occupation. They worked at drawing a division line between US and Soviet forces taking the Japanese surrender. Harmonizing political desires and military capability, they proposed a dividing line along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Although it was unlikely American troops could reach the line, they thought that it was important to include Seoul, the capital of Korea, and the port of Inchon in the American zone.<sup>201</sup> Military planners proposed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as a dividing line because it cut Korean peninsula in half and gave the Korea's capital, Seoul, to the zone of the United States.<sup>202</sup>

On August 11, the War Department submitted the plan to divide Korea on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to the Department of State. It provided for the surrender of Japanese forces north of the thirty-eight parallel to the Soviet commander and those of south of that line to American forces. The 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was specified in General Order No. 1 as the dividing line for receiving the Japanese surrender.<sup>203</sup> Army authorities, faced with the scarcity of units immediately available and with difficult time and logistical space factors (the nearest American forces were on Okinawa), recommended the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, even though

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<sup>201</sup> Draft Memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Records of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, Lot 52-M45, *FRUS*, 1945, 6, 1039; Gye Dong Kim's "Western Intervention in Korea 1950-1954" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988) offers the most recent discussion of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel decision. See pp. 27-33; See also the following sources; Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of the United States Policy in the United Nations* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956), 12-16; Shannon McCune, "The Thirty-Eighth Parallel in Korea," *World Politics*, 1 (Jan. 1949); Cumings, *The Origins of the Korea War*; and James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction, The First Year* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 8-12.

<sup>202</sup> Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year*, 9.

<sup>203</sup> Department of State, *FRUS* 1945, 6; 635-639, 658-659.

it was farther north than could be realistically reached by United States forces in the event of Soviet disagreement.

This recommendation took account of the political importance of including Seoul, the Korean capital, in the area of responsibility of American troops.<sup>204</sup> Little thought seems to have been given to the impression a division of Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel would have on the Korean people themselves. Prior to the Russo-Japanese War the Russian Czarist Government proposed to the Japanese Government that a neutral zone be created in Korea north of the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel into which neither Russia nor Japan would introduce troops.<sup>205</sup> In any case, the draft plan was reviewed and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State-War-Navy Coordination Committee in August 14, 1945. It stated:

The parallel 38<sup>th</sup> north has been selected in Korea since this gives to United States forces the port and communications area of Keijo (Seoul) and a sufficient portion of Korea so that parts of it might be apportioned to the Chinese and the British in case some sort of quadripartite administration eventuates.<sup>206</sup>

The plan was immediately approved by President Truman on August 15, 1945. The decision to divide the Korean peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was “collective and approved by every appropriate and responsible authority within the government.”<sup>207</sup> The JCS telegraphed the draft to Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, who was charged with receiving the Japanese surrender, in Manila

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<sup>204</sup> Memorandum by Assistance Secretary Rusk, July 12, 1950, files of the Division of Historical Policy research, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1039. On August 11, 1945, the Secretary of the Navy suggested that the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel be used the dividing line so as to permit the occupation of Dairen, Manchuria, by American forces.

<sup>205</sup> Copy of telegram from Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs left with the Secretary of State by the Japanese Legation in Washington on Dec. 21, 1903, *Foreign Relations of United States*, 1903, 619.

<sup>206</sup> Memorandum by the Joint Chief of Staff, August 14, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 657-58.

<sup>207</sup> Hoag, *American Military Government in Korea*, 70.

on August 15, 1945, at the time when the Japanese government declared its unconditional acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. In the meantime, when Truman communicated with Stalin on August 11, 1945, he proposed that General MacArthur be designated Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to accept the Japanese surrender. Also, as previously noted, the Japanese forces in Korea north of 38<sup>th</sup> parallel were to surrender to the Soviet Commander, while Japanese soldiers in the South were to surrender to the American Commander.<sup>208</sup>

Stalin accepted the American proposal on August 16, only objecting to a portion of General Order No. 1 which provided that the Japanese forces in the southernmost Kurile Islands surrender to the United States command.<sup>209</sup> He suggested that Japanese forces in the northern half of Hokkaido, one of the four main islands of Japan, surrender to the Soviet command.<sup>210</sup> It does not appear that the Allies were consulted while General Order No.1 was being prepared in Washington. The President only sent it to the British Prime Minister on August 15, 1945.<sup>211</sup> Rusk later recalled that he was surprised that Stalin accepted the American proposal.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> US, House, *Background Information on Korea* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Stalin to Truman, tel., Aug. 16, 1945, enclosed in Leahy (Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, the White House) to Marshall (Sec. of State), Apr. 29, 1947; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Japan)/4-2947.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> See Byrnes to Winant, tel. 6935, Aug. 16, 1945; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Pacific War/8-1645.

<sup>212</sup> *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1039: *Dong-A Ilbo*, 15 August, 1970: Arthur L. Grey, Jr., "The Thirty-Eight Parallel," *Foreign Affairs* 29 (1951): 482-487: "Memorandum by the JCS," August 14, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6, 657-58.

Why had the Russians accepted the American proposals when the Soviet Army could have swallowed up the whole peninsula? First, the Soviet leaders were reluctant to arouse the suspicions of the American leaders concerning their ambition in Eastern Europe and Manchuria. Second, Stalin also had concerns about sharing the military occupation of Japan; he merely suggested that the Soviets occupy the northern part of Hokkaido Island when he replied to General Order No. 1.<sup>213</sup> Last, Soviet leaders believed that Soviet-supported Korean troops would eventually dominate the entire Korean peninsula, if not, they certainly could exert power in parts of the northern area. For Stalin, Korea was not the top priority in his agenda. The Soviet Union accepted the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel because they wanted to maintain Allied cooperation.<sup>214</sup>

As far as the United States was concerned, a division of Korea was no more than a “military expediency” to accept the surrender of Japanese troops. President Truman later admitted in his memoirs that the division of Korea was done on the assumption that “a trusteeship phase” for the Korean people before independence would materialize in a spirit of cooperation with Communist Russia. From the perspective of the Russian side, the 38th parallel satisfied the traditional Russian interest in the peninsula.<sup>215</sup> It was remarkably similar to the one proposed by Russia in 1903 in an attempt to prevent the

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<sup>213</sup> Truman, *Year of Decisions*, I, 439-441.

<sup>214</sup> Cho, 55-56; Max Beloff, *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 156; Arthur L., Jr., Grey, *ibid.*, 482-487.

<sup>215</sup> According to Henry Chung, the Russians of the late nineteenth century fixed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as “the minimum limit of their expansion on the Asiatic mainland.” This implies Russian intentions for control of at least all of North China including Dairen and Port Arthur, and all of Manchuria and northern Korea. Henry Chung, *The Russians Came to Korea* (Washington, D. C.: The Korea Pacific Press, 1947), 23.

Russo-Japanese War.<sup>216</sup> However, Gregory Henderson, who later served in the US Embassy in Seoul from 1947 to 1954, argued that the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was not a military decision, but a political one.<sup>217</sup> The American policymakers had been aware of the danger of communist expansion in the Far East. However, they did not know how to deal with yet-unknown Soviet intentions.<sup>218</sup>

During the war, there are indications that American policy makers gave serious attention to rising nationalism among colonial peoples. They believed that the people and their circumstances in colonial areas made them receptive to communism as the war ended. Given this context, contradictions in American foreign policy seemingly started at the very beginning of the postwar era. On one hand, American leaders were aware of the danger of Communist expansion in Asia. But on the other hand, they clung to the hope of postwar cooperation with the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Korea was chosen as one of the testing grounds to reconstruct the postwar international order between the two super powers without considering the desires of the Korean people. President Roosevelt envisioned a system that relied heavily on an international organization to keep the peace and order under the auspice of the “four police states.” Apparently, American policy makers did not foresee that division of the country would in 1950 lead to the bloody

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<sup>216</sup> Rusk later told Cumings in an interview for a Thames television documentary, that he and Bonesteel were unaware of the historical irony of their decision in Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 121;

<sup>217</sup> Harry S. Truman Library, Conference of Scholars on the Administration of Occupied Area, 1943-1955 during April 10-11, 1970 (Independence, 1970), 8.

<sup>218</sup> Revisionist scholars argue that American policy for Korean liberation was full of contradictions and ambiguity, lacking detailed, concrete preparation for postwar Korea. See, for example, Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 113; Carl Berger, *The Korean Knot: A Military and Political History*, 49. Gye Dong Kim has come to argue differently. According to Kim, Colonel Rusk and other military planners were actively engaged in forming “a positive policy” for Korea in early August 1945. Thus, the Americans initially had a concrete plan to occupy Korea and to set up a military government. Gye Dong Kim, *Western Intervention in Korea*, (Ph.D. dissertation, 1988), 32.



Korean War. Under-Secretary of State Webb summarized American short-sightedness on the Korean question. In testifying before Congress in 1947, Webb said:

The question of considering the viability of the economy or the feasibility of the arrangement from the standpoint of occupation...did not enter into the consideration. I believe it is fair to say that our authorities at that time felt that there would certainly not be the kind difficulty we have encountered in unifying the country.<sup>219</sup>

In sum, American idealism, as espoused in Wilson's famous Fourteen Points, called for national self-determination and inspired the Korean March First independence movement in 1919. In the end, though, it failed to gain international support. Korean nationalists associated with the independence movement did establish the Korean Provisional Government in China in 1919 and looked to the United States for moral support and official recognition of the KMG. Different stances on anti-colonial nationalism, after the March First independence movement, produced antagonism between the Korean left and right. This rivalry set limits on the course of state formation in postwar years. At the same time, at least until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Korea remained virtually a "forgotten nation" among U. S. policymakers.

Later, during several wartime conferences, Roosevelt and American policy makers now exhibited renewed concern for the Korean situation and rising Korean nationalism. After the war ended, given America's aspirations to world leadership, these concerns heightened. Within this context, contradictions existed between U. S. idealism, as represented by Roosevelt's trusteeship plan and the apparent need to pursue economic self-interest and security. In any case, a refurbished American foreign policy towards

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<sup>219</sup> United States Congress, *Congressional Record*, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 21.

Korea started at the very beginning of the postwar era. On the one hand, American policy makers were aware of the threat of Soviet expansion in Asia. On the other hand, they clung to the hope of postwar cooperation with the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Korea was chosen as a “testing ground” to reconstruct the postwar international order between the two superpowers and, in this case, that meant going forward without considering the desires and hopes of the Korean people. Policy makers in Washington instead chose at the end of the war to pursue a plan of zonal occupation for Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. By this partition, as a political calculation, Americans sought to expedite the surrender of Japanese soldiers in the South and also limit Soviet influence in Korea altogether. The Korean people became a matter of secondary or tertiary importance.

## CHAPTER IV

### Liberation and Military Occupation of Korea

This chapter investigates the struggle between Koreans and Americans over the process of building a new nation-state in Korea. It shows how the involvement of the foreign powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—should be considered as an “empire not by invitation;” actually, in Korea, it precipitated and fueled conflicts between left and right. This antagonism between left and right, in turn, set limits on the course of postwar formation of the state. Awash in an oversimplified bipolar worldview and influenced by paternalistic views, American policy makers in Washington and military officials in Seoul naively perceived Korean revolutionary nationalists and leftists as monolithic and Soviet-directed. From the beginning, General Hodge and American military authorities tried to build up the strength of the rightists as their allies in Korea in order to achieve their goals as the top priority. In order to understand the political process for unification in the south and north in more comprehensive and comparative fashion, this chapter also briefly examine the role of the Soviet Union in the establishment of the North Korean regime during the period 1945-1950 and proffer answers to such questions as the following: What were the objectives of the Soviet Union in Korea? How did the Soviet Union carry out their plans to attain their objectives in North Korea? Did the actions of the United States and Soviet Union follow a similar or different trajectory?

For Koreans, the victory of the Allied Powers and the end of Japanese colonial rule triggered a political explosion within their society. On August 15, 1945, when the people of Korea heard about the unconditional surrender of the Japanese emperor, they believed that the time had finally come to re-establish Korea as a free and independent nation. In anticipation of liberation, the Korean people were overwhelmed by joy and excitement.

One eyewitness later recounted:

Every street, every road, every alley is packed with people, waving flags, singing, shouting, greeting each other, everyone. Noises and sounds of all kinds fill the air—drums, bugles, whistles, buckets, pots, and pans, bells...the whole town is exploding with ecstasy, vibrating the hot air.<sup>220</sup>

They had been awaiting the day of independence for thirty-six-years since Japan annexed Korea in 1910, and now celebrated the end of Japanese occupation. Koreans were determined to destroy all vestiges of Japanese colonial rule and to carry out democratic reforms such as land policy.<sup>221</sup> However, at another level, as Kim Ku described “rather than joyous news, the surrender of Japan was like the collapse of the sky for me,”<sup>222</sup> because Koreans did not contribute to the liberation of their homeland; from the beginning, quite contrary to the indigenous people’s expectation, the decolonization in Korea resulted in a country divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and that decision was made by the superpowers. This division was caused by in part to the strategic importance the Soviets placed on Korea, and unpreparedness on the part of the

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<sup>220</sup> Richard Kim, *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 164-165. Cited in Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 47.

<sup>221</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 73.

<sup>222</sup> Kim Ku, *Paekpom Ilchi: The Autobiography of Kim Ku*, annotated by Do Jin Soon (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1997), 399.

Americans. When the Americans landed in Korea in early September 1945, the leaders and people of Korea welcomed occupation forces as liberators rather than as occupiers. Koreans expected the Americans to leave as soon as their mission was completed. By 1948, however, their mission had failed to establish a unified, democratic, and independent Korean government.

The Americans not only neglected the desires and hopes of the Korean people in order to maintain order and stability, but also failed to unify Korea as a bulwark against communism. As a result, Korea was divided into two areas along the line of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Each became increasingly hostile to the other; one was a democratic and capitalist country, sponsored by the United States of America, and the other was a communist country supported by the Soviet Union. Although only recently liberated from Japanese colonial rule at the end of the Second World War, Korea became a victim of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Few leaders of the Korean independence movement anticipated a division of the country would lead to the bloody war that erupted in 1950.

In his *Korea in the World Politics*, Soon Sung Cho traces the origin of the partition plan of the Korean peninsula by the foreign powers.<sup>223</sup> Traditional historians' arguments are based in large part upon "the theory of military expediency." They understand that the U.S. government divided the Korean peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel

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<sup>223</sup> Cho, *Korea in the World Politics*, 47-50. According to Cho, the idea of the division of the Korean peninsula by foreign countries can be traced the way back to the late sixteenth century. In 1592, Toyotomi Hideyoshi proposed that the southern four provinces of Korea be ceded to Japan, while leaving the remaining northern four provinces to the King of Chosun; in 1894, when a clash between Chinese and Japanese armies became imminent after the Tonghak Revolution occurred, the British government proposed that south be occupied by Japan and north by China. The exact line of demarcation for the division was not specified at this time. In 1903, Russia and Japan had engaged in secret negotiations regarding the possible division of Korea between themselves along the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel; Schnable, *Policy and Direction: First Year*, 3.

to expedite receiving the surrender of Japanese troops. However, revisionist historians, who instead embrace a “theory of political intention,” argue that U.S. policy makers proposed the 38<sup>th</sup> line to the Soviet Union because they wanted to block the influence and expansion of the Soviet Union in Korea as the Cold War took shape. For example, President Truman wrote in his memoirs that the division of the Korean peninsula was based upon the spirit of cooperation between U.S. and U.S.S.R to establish a joint trusteeship throughout the Korean peninsula. There was no thought of a permanent partition.<sup>224</sup> However, Max Hastings instead emphasizes a political intention scenario, arguing that the reason Stalin accepted the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel is:

If Moscow had declined the American plan and occupied all Korea, it is unlikely that the Americans could or would have forced a major diplomatic issue. To neither side, at this period, did the peninsula seem to possess any inherent value, except as a testing ground of mutual intentions... Beside the fates and boundaries of great nations that were now being decided, Korea counted for little.<sup>225</sup>

Stalin probably adopted his position in the hope of participating in the occupation of Japan as a *quid pro quo*.<sup>226</sup> Soon Sung Cho claims that the American proposal of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was motivated by a desire to prevent Soviet occupation of the entire Korean

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<sup>224</sup> Harry S. Truman; *Year of Decisions*, I, (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955), 445.

<sup>225</sup> Max Hasting, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 27

<sup>226</sup> James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 46; See why Stalin did accept the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel; Chong Sik Lee, “Why did Stalin accept the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel?” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (Winter, 1985): 67-73; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 55-56; Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: the First Year*, 9; Sandusky, *America’s Parallel* (Virginia: Old Dominion Press, 1983), 225-28; Max Beloff, *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951*, 156. See more detail about the U.S. proposal; Hoag, *American Military Government in Korea: War Policy and the First Year of Occupation, 1941-1946*, 64-66; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins*, 120-121; Cumings, “American policy and Korean liberation,” edited by Frank Baldwin, *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relations Since 1945* (New York: Random House, 1973), 46-48; Arthur L. Grey Jr., “The Thirty-Eighth Parallel,” *Foreign Affairs* (April 1951), 482-487; Shannon McCune, “The Thirty-Eight Parallel in Korea,” *World Politics*, 1949: 223-232; Erik Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin’s Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 63.

peninsular because such a Soviet occupation would have posed a great threat to Japanese security and the American military government in Japan.<sup>227</sup>

The 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, in short, arbitrarily divided the Korean peninsula. While the south, American-occupied area, contained 45 percent (37,000 square miles) of the total area on the peninsula and 21 million people, the north covered 55 percent (48,000 square miles) of the peninsula and 9 million people in the Soviet zone. The division of Korea by the Soviet Union and the United States also damaged to the local economy because the two areas previously had been heavily interdependent on each other. This artificial boundary line separated agricultural South Korea and industrial North Korea, with its abundant natural resources, especially coal.<sup>228</sup> 86 percent of heavy industrial production was concentrated in north, whereas 75 percent of light industry was in the south.<sup>229</sup> 64 percent of rice production and 63 percent of other grains were grown in the south.<sup>230</sup> This division of the country's economy wrought almost catastrophic results. There are some discernible differences in geography and the economics of north and south, however Korea was a historically and culturally a single entity prior to its division in 1945.

Immediately after World War II ended, the world's two superpowers-the United States and the Soviet Union- dominated a new world order. Their power and ability to

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<sup>227</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 56.

<sup>228</sup> Schnabel, 11; McCune, *Korea Today*: 53-54; Shannon McCune, "Physical Basis for Korean Boundaries," *Far Eastern Quarterly* (May 1946), 286-287; Jungwon Alexander Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 33-34.

<sup>229</sup> George M. McCune, "Essential Unity of the Korean Economy," *Korean Economic Digest* (January 1946), 7.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

influence not only the course of world events, but also the destiny of the Korean peninsula was immense. At the Cairo Conference in 1943, allied leaders, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of China, promised that Koreans would be liberated from Japanese rule. They declared that, “mindful of the enslavement of the Korea ... in due course Korea shall be free and independent.” That statement marked a significant turning point in American policy toward Korea because before then it was an all but “forgotten country” by the Americans, at least until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Many Koreans believed that the victory of the Allied powers over the Japanese empire might give them a chance to build Korea into an independent state.

Even though President Roosevelt avowed a belief in self-determination for all colonial people, he also came to advocate trusteeship<sup>231</sup> for them after war ended. He believed that colonial people, including Koreans, lacked ability and experience for self-rule, and therefore need a period of tutelage before their independence. The American government tried to execute this policy in Korea until the summer of 1947. However, American government was confronted with not only strong opposition to trusteeship from the Koreans but also from the Soviet Union. Washington changed its policy and worked to establish the South Korean government. Finally, Korea was divided into North and South Korea in 1948.

Many people wondered why Korea eventually was divided into two areas while Austria, another liberated nation after the war, was not. Instead Austria became a unified

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<sup>231</sup> See more details about the trusteeship idea of Franklin D. Roosevelt: William George Morris, “The Korean Trusteeship, 1941-1947, The United State, Russia, and the Cold War” (Ph. D. dissertation: The University of Texas at Austin, 1974).



and independent country in 1955 after foreign troops withdrew. The first and most important reason for this divergent path was its geographical location. Austria did not border the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet Union could afford to be more flexible with regard to the future of Austria. Also, political parties in Austria were moderate in orientation and could work together to achieve unified country. Austria did not have a recent colonial experience that caused division along political and therefore ideological lines and therefore could emerge relatively unscathed by the Cold War.<sup>232</sup>

It is usually said that the unconditional surrender of Japan came much earlier than American policymakers had expected. However, American military planners already were preparing for the possibility of an abrupt collapse of Japan in the aftermath of atomic attack. On June 14, 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed MacArthur and Chester W. Nimitz, Pacific Fleet Commander, to be ready for Japan's imminent premature surrender and to formulate plans for an early occupation of Japan.<sup>233</sup> Historian Marc S. Gallicchio argues that after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American army changed its plans to occupy Japan and Korea. Furthermore, the American military leaders anticipated a quick Japanese surrender to occur before August 15, 1945 at which time the Soviets were expected to enter the war.<sup>234</sup> As soon as the Japanese leaderships capitulated though, the Soviet Union and the United State came to Korea and divided the peninsula into two areas—north and south—to expedite the

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<sup>232</sup> Ho-Jae Lee, *Hanguk Woegyo Chongchek Isang kwa Hyonsil: Yi Sang-Man Woegyo wa Miguk [Ideology and Reality of the Korean Diplomacy: Syngman Rhee and the United States]* (Seoul: Bubmunsa, 2000), 114-122; Jeon Deuk Ju, *The Comparative Study of the Examples of the World's Division: Korea, Germany, Palestine, Vietnam, Yemen, China, and Austria* (Seoul: Pulunkil, 2004), 391-416.

<sup>233</sup> James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 37.

<sup>234</sup> Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia: American East Asian Policy and the Fall of the Japanese Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 60.

Japanese surrender. In the south, General Joseph Stilwell's 10<sup>th</sup> Army was supposed to occupy Korea. However, because of the objection of Chiang Kai-shek, General John R. Hodge, the commander of the United States XXIV Corps of the Eighth Army, and his troops in Okinawa, received orders from General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP), to go to Korea and accept the surrender of the Japanese forces in the area south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel line. General Stilwell was very disappointed by his government's decision and expressed his bitter feelings, "So they [Chiang Kai-shek and Chinese] cut my throat once more."<sup>235</sup>

MacArthur's order was prescribed in General Order No. 1:

Having in mind the long enslavement of the people of Korea and the determination that in due course Korea shall become free and independent, the Korean people are assured that the purpose of the occupation is to enforce the instrument of surrender and to protect them in their personal and religious rights. In giving effect to these purposes, your active aid and compliance is required.....

All power of government over the territory Korea south of 38<sup>th</sup> north latitude and the people thereof, will be for the present exercised under my authority.<sup>236</sup>

General Hodge, a native of Golconda, Illinois, had a distinguished combat record in the Ryukyus, Okinawa, Leyte, and the Philippine Islands during the Pacific War. He was a great soldier in battle but not fitted to lead the military occupation and administration of Korea.<sup>237</sup> Gregory Henderson claims that "General Hodge was very possibly the first man in history selected to wield executive powers over a nation of

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<sup>235</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), 521.

<sup>236</sup> See The Proclamation No. 1 to the People of Korea in SCAP, *Official Gazette*.

<sup>237</sup> John R. Hodge File, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1962), 7.

nearly twenty million on the basis of shipping time.”<sup>238</sup> General Hodge was assigned by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers to carry out the following missions:

(1) Take the Japanese surrender, disarm the Japanese armed forces, enforce the terms of the surrender, and remove Japanese imperialism from Korea; (2) maintain order, establish an effective government along democratic lines and rebuild a sound economy as a basis for Korean independence; (3) train Koreans in handling their own affairs and prepare [them] to govern [themselves] as a free and independent nation.<sup>239</sup>

While General Hodge was waiting for formal orders to enter Korea, in order to find out the situation there before the American occupation forces landed, he contacted the Japanese colonial authorities in Korea at the end of August. In response, the Japanese sent distorted information that misled the Americans about the situation conditions in the region. The Japanese claimed that many of the prominent Leftist leaders were Communists and that they caused civil disorder in Korea. They also stated that Leftist activists, including Yo Un-hyong and the People’s Committee, were under the influence of the Soviet Union and viewed them as a threat to Hodge’s military government.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Gregory Henderson, *Korea; The Politics of Vortex*, 123.

<sup>239</sup> MacArthur’s General Order No. 1, signed September 2, 1945, *Department of State Bulletin*, 1945, 1043-1044.

<sup>240</sup> I had a chance to look at a recent Ph.D. dissertation that deals excellently with the discussion on how and why Japanese leaders, even after their country was defeated, influenced the Americans. In her dissertation, Suh examined the activities of a few individual Japanese leaders who were in the Korean peninsula, especially the American zone, in the last months of 1945. According to Suh, the Japanese leaders of the former colonial government, as friends of the new American masters, played a significant role in shaping American attitudes towards Koreans, most importantly toward the CPKI, and American action taken in the south in the last months of 1945. Japanese officials helped to prejudice the U.S. occupation forces, even before their departure from Okinawa, against the CPKI and its *ch’iandae* (Peace Preservation Corps) by labeling them as Communists loyal to the Soviets. Japanese officials not only protected the lives and property of the Japanese in Korea, but also contributed to setting the course of a right-wing South Korea that remained primarily under the control of former Japanese collaborators and anti-communist Koreans. Jin Kyu (Suh) Roberson, “Legacy of Empire: Japanese Influence over the U.S. Military Government in Korea in 1945,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2006).

However, that information was not accurate. Actually, many Koreans considered Leftists, not so much in ideological terms but as the leaders of the anti-Japanese resistance movement. Some Leftists adopted Marxist ideas during the Japanese colonial period and moved closer to the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution and the establishment of Peoples Republic of the China. Richard Robinson, an American Military Government officer in South Korea, argues that “all political groups in opposition to the Japanese, both left and right, accepted this Communist leadership.”<sup>241</sup>

Dae Sook Suh, a Korean historian, described how communist resistance to the Japanese influenced the Koreans:

[The Korean Communists] succeeded in wresting control of the Korean revolution from the Nationalists; they planted a deep core of Communist influence among the Korean people, particularly the students, youth groups, laborers, and peasants. Their fortitude and, at times, obstinate determination to succeed had a profound influence on Korean intellectuals and writers. To the older Koreans, who had groveled so long before seemingly endless foreign suppression, communism seemed a new hope or a magic torch... For Koreans in general, the sacrifices of the Communists, if not the idea of communism, made a strong appeal, far stronger than any occasional bomb-throwing exercise of the Nationalists. The haggard appearance of Communists suffering from torture, their stern and disciplined attitude toward the common enemy of all Koreans, had a far-reaching effect on the people.<sup>242</sup>

It is fair to say that the Korean communists that fought against the Japanese gained a powerful influence among many Korean people. However, it is not correct to contend that all leftists were driven foremost by Communist ideology. As one Korean put it, “Many had leftist mouths and rightist stomachs.”<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Richard Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation* (Manuscript at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1947), 35.

<sup>242</sup> Dae Sook, Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement*, 132.

<sup>243</sup> Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 35; It is difficult to divide the Left and Right in the postwar Korea with a precision. Generally speaking, while the conservative Right wanted no important changes in the Korean social order, the progressive Left advocated a large measure of social change. According to an American

When the Japanese government was about to accept the Allied ultimatum, its colonial authorities in Korea were aware that the collapse of Japan was imminent and that surrender to the Allied powers was only a few days away. Given this desperate situation, they sought help from Korean leaders in maintaining order and guaranteeing Japanese lives and property. In return, the Japanese promised Korean leaders authority to govern their land. Japanese Governor General Abe Nobuyuki ordered Endo Ryusaku, the Governor-General's Security for Political Affairs, to contact Yo Un-hyong in the early morning on August 15.

Yo Un-hyong, a well-known, moderate Leftist leader and gifted orator, had been one of the original founders of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai in 1919. Yo had a remarkable career as an Asian revolutionary and had met Lenin and Trotsky in Moscow in 1921.<sup>244</sup> He had been closely associated with the left-wing movement of the Korean nationals in China since the early 1920's. He had traveled extensively for the cause of Korean independence until 1929, when he was sent back to prison by the Japanese secret police. After he served a three-year prison term, he became the publisher of the prestigious daily in Seoul, *Chung-Ang Ilbo*, and remained an important leader of the underground nationalist movement. Yo had the respect of many Koreans because he

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source, the Right was usually the "have" people and the Left was the "have-not" people. See Public Opinion and Political Trends, May 1, 1947; in the United States Army Forces in Korea, RG 332, XXIV Corps Historical File. For the more detailed differences between and the Left and the Right, see Department of the Army, Headquarters, Far East Command, History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, n.d.), vol. 2, ch 2, pp. 12-13 (hereafter cited as HUSAFIK); quoted in Kim, Jin Wung's "American Policy and Korean Independence: An Appraisal of American Military Occupation Policy in South Korea, 1945-1948," (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1986), 41.

<sup>244</sup> Yo's views were a mixture of socialism, Christianity, and Wilsonian democracy. Although he always was willing to work with communists and embraced Marxism as a "good idea," he never joined the Korean Communist Party and stated that he never could believe wholeheartedly in the materialist view of history. Bruce Cumings classified Yo as an Asian populist. Yo was known to Americans as Lyuh Woong Hyung; in Cumings, *The Origins*, 474-475.

was imprisoned many times for the independence movement.<sup>245</sup> Colonel Brainard Prescott, the civil administrator in December 1945, indicated that Yo “is regarded as more truly representative of a majority of the Korean people, inclined toward ‘liberalism,’ than such ‘elder statesmen’ as Kim Ku, Kim Kyu-sic and Syngman Rhee.”<sup>246</sup> On August 10, 1944, believing that the defeat of Japan was imminent, Yo had organized an underground secret group named the Korean Independence League (*the Choson Konguk tongmaeng* known as *Konmaeng* for short) to prepare for eventual Korean independence.<sup>247</sup>

With the request of Japanese help, Yo laid down five conditions on August 15 for his consideration of the Japanese offer. He demanded the transfer to himself of major governmental functions to preserve law and order. Specifically, his demands called for an:

- (1) immediate release of all political and economic prisoners;
- (2) noninterference in his activities for national reconstruction;
- (3) freedom to organize the student and youth corps;
- (4) free organization of labor unions by the working class;
- (5) and a guarantee of three months supply of food and grains.<sup>248</sup>

Japanese leaders accepted Yo’s conditions at that same day. On the next day, Yo and his followers organized a ruling committee known as the Committee for the Preparation of

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<sup>245</sup> Robinson asserted that with Yo’s death “died the hope of Korean liberalism.” See Robinson, *ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>246</sup> Colonel Brainard E. Prescott’s Remarks on Korea, January 5, 1946; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/1-546.

<sup>247</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>248</sup> Cited in Cho, *ibid.*, 67; Cumings, *The Origins*, 71.

Korean Independence (CPKI or the *Choson konguk chunbi wiwonhoe*)<sup>249</sup> which included both Nationalists and Socialists. It seems that there are two basic factions in the CPKI: One faction consisted of Yo and his Konmaeng adherents, and was largely noncommunist; the other group was made up mostly of communists.<sup>250</sup> The latter cohort was led by Park Hon-young,<sup>251</sup> the most influential Communist leader in the South. Yo became Chairman and Ahn Chae-hong, one of the remaining moderates, was named Vice-Chairman. The CPKI functioned as a central government and organized a People's Committee (*Inmin wiwonhoe*)<sup>252</sup> and Peace Preservation Corps (*Chiandae*) throughout the Korean peninsula. By the end of August, 145 People's Committees were organized in the south in spite of the lack of coordination with the CPKI.

Why did the Japanese even approach a left-wing Korean leader?<sup>253</sup> There was a rumor at that time that Russians would occupy Seoul, the capital, within a few days and

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<sup>249</sup> For the activities and organization of the CPKI, see Cumings, *The Origins*, 71-81; Seo Chung Sok, *Hanguk hyondaie minjok undong youn'gu* (A Study of the Modern Korean National Movement) (Seoul: Yoksa pip'yongsa, 1991), 195-230.

<sup>250</sup> Cumings, *ibid.*, 79. Cumings categorizes the "communists" into two groups: the former group consisted of people who were participated in the communist party with socialist or Marxist beliefs; the latter group was made up of anyone who worked on behalf of the poor or opposed those in power (in postwar south Korea). When Cumings mentioned the communists, he tried to restrict his usage to the former group.

<sup>251</sup> Immediately after liberation, Park Hon-young, and his followers controlled the People's Committee throughout the country. During the Japanese colonial period, Park participated in the independence movement in Korea. He was captured by the Japanese police and was in prison several times. He was a very popular leader before Korea was liberated in August 1945. Because of his popularity and the dominant influence of his Korean Communist Party, the People's Committees quickly leaned toward the communists.

<sup>252</sup> The outstanding work on the People's Committees in the central and local areas is Bruce Cumings, *The Origins*, I, chapter 3 and 8.

<sup>253</sup> According to Eric Van Ree, Japanese had contacted three prominent Korean politicians on August 14: right-wing Song Chin-u, moderate rightist An Chae-hong and leftist Yo Un-hyong.

eventually seize all of Korea.<sup>254</sup> Assuming that the Soviets would ultimately control the local situation, Yo tried to exclude extreme right-wing nationalist leaders and then include communists. Prior to American troops landing in Korea in early September, the law and order of the south Korea was relatively well maintained by a *de facto* governing body, the ‘People’s Committee’ in each province, even though anti-Japanese feeling ran so high. No groups or organizations challenged the People’s Committee’s authority or popularity. In addition, the Provincial People’s Committees continued to perform primary government functions until late October.

On September 6, 1945, the CPKI called a “People’s Legislative Assembly” meeting in Seoul of approximately one thousand delegates who represented various groups and professions throughout the country. This Assembly, two days before the Americans arrived, declared itself the Korean People’s Republic (KPR or *Choson Inmin Konghwaguk*)<sup>255</sup> and claimed jurisdiction over the whole peninsula.<sup>256</sup> The Korean People’s Republic appointed cabinet members and made Syngman Rhee its president. However, various cabinet members could not fill their posts because many exiled leaders were not in Korea; most of vice-ministries, moreover, were filled by the communists.<sup>257</sup> The main reason for hasty action to establish the KPR was the impending arrival of American occupation forces. The CPKI leaders wanted to establish the KPR, “both to show that Koreans could run their own affairs and to forestall either a prolonged

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<sup>254</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>255</sup> Robert A. Scalapino and Chong Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, vol. 1: 236-41.

<sup>256</sup> See views of the traditional and revisionist historians including Bruce Cumings; Hodge’s rough treatment of the KPR has been criticized by some revisionist historians.

<sup>257</sup> On September 8 the KPR published a list of the cabinet members.



American tutelage or the installation in power of other Koreans who might gain American favor.”<sup>258</sup>

Actually, the KPR, as a “governing body,” already had assumed “authority on such matters as the issuance of transportation licenses and the regulation of agriculture and [had been] infiltrating its people into industrial, educational and police activities.”<sup>259</sup>

As its main program, the KPR advocated the establishment of a politically and economically independent state, the elimination of Japanese collaborators, the realization of democracy based on fundamental human rights, social and economic reforms, and close cooperation with friendly nations to maintain international peace.<sup>260</sup>

However, news that the Americans would occupy southern Korea profoundly impacted the developing political situation in the south. While leftist groups now realized that they needed to expand and consolidate the base of the DPKI, rightists that had been severely weakened after liberation no longer tried to cooperate with the CPKI. Wielding much wealth and influence, rightists established their own organizations. On September 4, they held a meeting to develop a democratic political party. Four days later, they published first a leaflet entitled “Down with the KPR” (*Inmin kong-hwakuk tado*), and on September 16, The Korean Democratic Party (KDP or *Hanguk minju-dang*) was officially established. According to American sources, these landlords and

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<sup>258</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 84.

<sup>259</sup> Memorandum of conversation, July 2, 1946, in United States Department of State; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/7-0246.

<sup>260</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 69.

businessmen were “openly charged by Koreans with collaboration under Japanese occupation of Korea.”<sup>261</sup>

American troops finally landed in Korea on September 8, 1945. After General Hodge and his troops arrived, he declared that “United States policy prohibits official recognition or utilization for political purposes of any so-called Korean provisional government or other political organization by United States Forces.”<sup>262</sup> The United States had no intention of recognizing the *de facto* government of the Korean People’s Republic. However, Richard Robinson argues that the KPR had been “controlled by the non-communist Left and [there had been] a sincere effort on the part of Yo and others to establish a democratic government both on the local and national levels.”<sup>263</sup>

The postwar situation of Korea, in which a *de facto* government existed as well as a partition of the land by two foreign powers, did not present itself as an easy task for Hodge. Moreover, Hodge complained that he had not received “a single policy directive from Washington.”<sup>264</sup> He even asked for an immediate directive on Korea.<sup>265</sup> However, he did not receive any response until October. In addition, there were only a few men trained in civil affairs and there was no expert on Korea. Above all, from the beginning of the occupation, many Americans had an ethnocentric view of Koreans. General Hodge

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<sup>261</sup> Colonel Brainard E. Prscott’s remarks on Korea, January 5, 1946; RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/1-546; See more details about the rightist national movement including the KDP since the 1920s. Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 143-155.

<sup>262</sup> SCAP, *Summation of Non-military Activities in Japan and Korea*, No 1. September, 1945, 177.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 49.

<sup>264</sup> Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 225; see also, Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960: A Personal Narrative*, (Seoul: Panmun Book Company Ltd, 1978), 16.

<sup>265</sup> Steintorf to Secretary of State, August, 26, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1041; Richard E. Lauterbach, *Danger from the East* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 197-99.

himself once described Koreans as “the same breed of cat” as the Japanese.<sup>266</sup> Hodge also believed that Korea, as part of the Japanese empire, was our enemy. As Mark Gayn argues, that “we [Americans] were not an army of liberation...From the first day, we’ve behaved as enemies of the Korean people.”<sup>267</sup>

Furthermore, it was extremely difficult for Hodge and his staff to understand the political conditions in South Korea. Most of the Americans thought that the Korean People’s Republic in Seoul, the People’s Committees in local areas, and social organizations such as labor unions and the nationwide farmers association, could not be trusted because Americans felt that these groups were under the strong influence of the Left. The Leftists, in turn, were thought to be controlled by the Soviet Union and therefore posed a serious threat to American military government and American interests.<sup>268</sup>

At the outset, the American occupation authorities made a serious blunder. The day after the surrender ceremony, Hodge announced that the existing Japanese Governor-General Abe Nobuyuki, along with other high-ranking Japanese officials, would be retained in office temporarily in order to facilitate the administration of the military government and the orderly takeover of the civil government.<sup>269</sup> However, he initially relied upon some 70,000 Japanese officials for maintaining law and order, a decision that created serious resistance and anger among Koreans. Expecting an immediate expulsion

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<sup>266</sup> Cumings, *The Origins*, 138.

<sup>267</sup> Mark Gayn, *Japan Diary* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948), 428.

<sup>268</sup> See details about the attitude of the American Military Government toward the KPR, People’s Committee and social organizations during the early military occupation. Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 94-99.

<sup>269</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 64-65.

of all Japanese after liberation, the Koreans felt that they could not “continue to live under Japanese rule even though the government is directly controlled by the U.S. occupation force.”<sup>270</sup> One editorial asserted that Koreans would rather be governed by “some chiefs from Borneo” than by Abe Nobuyuki and alleged that it was the Japanese who should be celebrating the American arrival.<sup>271</sup> Joseph C. Goulden argues that:

His[Hodge’s] first blunder came the first day of occupation. The Japanese commander, after surrendering, asked for authority to keep Japanese police armed to protect his troops and the 600,000 Japanese civilians in Korea from reprisals. Already Korean street mobs were throwing rocks and garbage at the hated foreigners who had occupied their country.<sup>272</sup>

The State Department instructed General Hodge to remove immediately all of Japanese officials and Korean collaborationists with them. The *New York Times* reported that “the State Department...disclaimed any part in military orders leaving the Japanese in office temporarily...It was evidently a decision by the local theater commander.”<sup>273</sup>

The State Department sent a message to General MacArthur:

For political reasons it is advisable that you should remove from office immediately Governor-General Abe, Chiefs of all bureaus of the Government-General, provincial governors and provincial police chiefs. You should furthermore proceed as rapidly as possible with the removal of other Japanese and collaborationist Korean administrators.<sup>274</sup>

On September 12, 1945, Major General A. V. Arnold was appointed the military governor of South Korea. Two days later, all Japanese bureau chiefs were removed from their offices in the American military government and gradually replaced by Americans

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<sup>270</sup> G-2 “Periodic Report,” no. 2, September 10-11, 1945, in United States Army; RG 407, Entry 368, Foreign (Occupied) Areas Reports 1945-1949.

<sup>271</sup> *Seoul Shinmun*, September 10, 1945; quoted in Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 138.

<sup>272</sup> Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 20.

<sup>273</sup> *New York Times*, September 11, 1945.

<sup>274</sup> United States Department of State, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1045.

and Koreans. However, until January 1946, as many as 60 Japanese remained in high ranking positions. General Hodge started his duty of the occupation through the “Military Government.”<sup>275</sup> “Despite ignorance of their duties and their lack of background,” the American military government “was charged with the execution of vital American policies.”<sup>276</sup>

Even though General Hodge was an experienced battlefield commander during the Pacific War, he failed to understand Koreans’ anti-Japanese sentiment or appreciate their numerous political factions. In the absence of any directive from Washington, Hodge’s initial decision to retain high Japanese officials might suggest that he merely followed MacArthur’s example in the transition that occurred in Japan. This action, in any case, reduced the possibility of a power vacuum and revolution in Korea.<sup>277</sup>

During the initial period of American occupation, the American military government adopted a position of “neutrality” in local political struggles but “it was no secret that the military government favored the Right as its ally of anti-Communist groups and was anxious for the parties of the right to acquire strong popular support.”<sup>278</sup> William Landon, the State Department political advisor to Hodge in Korea, mentioned that the disorders were “the normal birth pains of a new nation or that they reflect an

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<sup>275</sup> *New York Times*, September 14, 1945, 3.

<sup>276</sup> Meade, *American Military Government*, 51-52; Henderson, *Korea; The Politics of the Vortex*, 124-125.

<sup>277</sup> Cumings, *The Origins*, 139.

<sup>278</sup> Merrell Bennighoff argues that: “The Conservative Group, which is much less aggressive but which is believed to represent the thought of the majority of thinking Koreans, are willing to cooperate with Military Government. Many of them have stated that they realize that their country must pass through a period of tutelage, and that they would prefer to be under American rather than Soviet guidance.” (See Bennighoff to the Acting Political Advisor in Japan (George Atcheson), October 10, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1070-71; Bertram D. Sarafan, “Military Government: Korea” *Far Eastern Survey* 25 (November 1946), 349; Cho, *ibid.*, 78; Choi, *AMG and Korean Nationalism*, 55-56.

awakening sense of individual rights against oppressive authority, fancied or real.”<sup>279</sup>

Despite American intentions to create order and stability, the Korean people began to view the occupation with suspicion and alarm. Koreans expected immediate independence and bitterly resented the arbitrary division of their country into two zones of military occupation.

Describing the situation of South Korea as a “powder-keg ready to explode at the application of a spark,” American military authorities turned to the KDP, whom they viewed as the most reliable group in Korea to ease the situation. On September 15, 1945, H. Merrell Benninghoff, political advisor to General Hodge, reported the Korean political situation to Washington:

The most encouraging single factor in the political situation is the presence in Seoul of several hundred conservatives among the older and better educated Koreans. Although many of them have served with the Japanese, that stigma ought eventually to disappear. Such persons favor the return of the “Provisional Government” and although they may not constitute a majority they are probably the largest single group.<sup>280</sup>

Benninghoff suggested to the State Department that Hodge needed a more efficient staff and that the Korean Provisional Government should be returned to Korea to provide conditions in which rightist and conservative groups could flourish. Benninghoff also requested that the State Department furnish detailed information on future American policy in Korea.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> The political advisor in Korea (Landon) to the Secretary of State, Seoul, November 1, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8, *The Far East* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 754; Gregory Henderson’s *Korea, the Politics of the Vortex*, is one of the best overall analyses of Korea’s internal milieu during the period. He points out that the United States “muddled through” in Korea without a concrete policy.

<sup>280</sup> Benninghoff to the Secretary of State, September 15, 1945; *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1049-53.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

On September 29, 1945, in his report to the State Department, Benninghoff claimed that the south was politically polarized into two distinct groups. One group was conservative and democratic. It consisted of the professional and educational leaders who were trained academically in the United States or in American missionary institutions in Korea or Japan. This group tried to emulate the Western democracies. They desired an early return of Syngman Rhee and the Provisional Government at Chungking. The other group was the radical group under the leadership of the Communists.<sup>282</sup>

Benninghoff argued that America should seek to cooperate with the KDP because he felt that they were the largest and most influential group. He maintained the KDP could form a bulwark against Communism. Benninghoff described the Communists, as follows:

Communists advocate the seizure now of Japanese properties and may be a threat to law and order. It is probable that well-trained agitators are attempting to bring about chaos in our area so as to cause the Koreans to repudiate the United States in favor of Soviet “freedom” and control. Southern Korea is fertile ground for such activities because USAFIK lacks sufficient troops to expand its area of control rapidly.<sup>283</sup>

In order to expand their influence within the military government and to destroy the KPR, the KDP leaders informed the American military government officers that the KPR was “a group of pro-Japanese collaborating Koreans and that Yo Un-hyong was “well-known to the Korean peoples as [a] pro-Japanese collaborator and politician.”<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Benninghoff to Secretary of State, September 29, 1945, *FURS*, 1945, 6: 1061-65.

<sup>283</sup> Emphasis in original; *ibid.*, 1051.

<sup>284</sup> G-2 “Periodic Report,” no. 2, September 10-11, 1945; Cited in Cumings, *ibid.*, 141.

They also described them as communists. Because of this distorted information about the KPR, the American military leaders, including Hodge, were immediately hostile to the KPR from the beginning of American occupation in Korea. As a result, Yo Un-hyong and KPR leaders did not succeed in meeting with General Hodge until early October.

The KPR issued a statement on October 5, 1945, and claimed that:

The government of the People's Republic of Korea is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. It stands for all classes. It has nothing to do with communist's dictatorship or capitalists' hegemony; it represents the will of the Korean people and is supported by them. Therefore, American authority should let the People's Republic of Korea take over all the administrative organs as well as economic establishments.<sup>285</sup>

On October 10, Hodge reasserted that the American military government was the "only legal government in Korea south of 38<sup>th</sup> parallel."<sup>286</sup>

In order to soften the constantly increasing Korean antagonism against the military government, General Hodge appointed a Korean Advisory Council of eleven prominent Koreans to assist the American military government on October 5.

Benninghoff stated:

On October 5<sup>th</sup> Major General Arnold, Military Governor, appointed an Advisory Council composed of 11 carefully chosen prominent Koreans including educators, lawyers, businessmen, "patriots" as well as the leaders of the two leading political groups (Left Wing or Radical and Conservative). General Arnold told them that they were selected to give him advice on Korean matters on an honest non-partisan basis, having in mind only the good of the country and not personal or party gain. The 11 men accepted appointment on that basis and in secret session chose one of their number, Kig [Kim] Sung Soo by name, to act as chairman.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Richard Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 53.

<sup>286</sup> Meade, *American Military Government*, 59; Lauterbach, *Danger from the East*, pp. 197-201; *Maeil Shinmun*, October 10 and 11, 1945.

<sup>287</sup> Benninghoff to the Acting Political Advisor in Japan, October 9, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 6: 1069.



However, the members of the Advisory Council except Yo Un-hyong were KDP leaders or Rightists. One of its members was Cho Man-sik, a famous Christian nationalist, in North Korea. From the beginning, Yo, the only representative chosen from the Left, did not participate in the meeting. Benninghoff admitted that, “so far the public announcement concerning the creation of the Council has not received much public reaction or comment in the press, perhaps because of similar council under Japanese auspices recently dissolved was regarded as a gathering of collaborationists.”<sup>288</sup> The official History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea (*HUSAFIK*) states that the Advisory Council “never exerted much of an influence on anybody and certainly did not live up to the hopes of those who created it.”<sup>289</sup>

Nonetheless, through this Council, the KPD expanded their influence to appoint people to military government positions. In his dissertation Lee Won-sul states that the Americans eventually filled 170,000 positions with Koreans.<sup>290</sup> The occupation authorities selected the appointees from either former Japanese Government-General employees or members of the Korean Democratic Party. Therefore, many of them were collaborators during the Japanese colonial period. According to Bruce Cumings, some 75,000 Koreans were either retained or newly appointed in the military government in the last three months of 1945.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> HUSAFIK, vol. 2, ch. 1, 8.

<sup>290</sup> Lee Won-sul, “The Impact of United States Occupation Policy on the Socio-Political Structure of South Korea, 1945-1948” (Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve University, 1961), 2.

<sup>291</sup> Cumings, *The Origins.*, 156.

These examples of American favoritism toward KDP leaders resulted in criticism and protest from Koreans, as well as from some Americans in the military government and in Washington. However, William Langdon responded to this criticism in the following manner.

How were we to know who was who among this unfamiliar people? For practical purposes we had to hire persons who spoke English, and it so happened that these persons and their friends came largely from moneyed classes because English had been a luxury among Koreans.<sup>292</sup>

However, Cumings argues that there were many leftist leaders who could speak English such as Yo Un-hyong, who was a graduate of Wooster College in Ohio.<sup>293</sup> This decision by the military government produced a bad image of the AMG among the Korean people as an “interpreters’ government.” E. Grant Meade, an official historian in the military government, described these interpreters in the American Military Government that

The Koreans who had attractive homes, who could entertain generously, who could speak English and talk of Western culture, were, of course, the wealthy class. Usually wealth in Korea in 1945-46, if it did not mean acquiescence to the Japanese regime or actual cooperation with it, did indicate a desire to preserve the existing social, political, and economical order with a minimum of change. Large land holdings were the most common form of wealth. Consequently the Americans were influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by a conservative landlord group whose point of view did not always make for the greatest good for the greatest number, even though it was patriotic according to their own lights. Many of the real patriots, those whose resistance to the Japanese had been consistent and lasting, barred by the language barrier, by obscurity and relative poverty, were usually disregarded or discredited.<sup>294</sup>

The council was supposed to advise on political and economic matters and to build up in the Korean consciousness a feeling of participating democracy in their

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<sup>292</sup> Langdon to the Secretary of State, November 26, 1945; in *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1135. Cited in Cumings, 151.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>294</sup> E Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 104.

government. Yet Hodge also emphasized that the American military government under General A. V. Arnold was the sole authority south of 38<sup>th</sup> parallel that was designed to keep peace and order.<sup>295</sup> As a result, the American military authorities favorable to the Right led to the rise of Korean conservatives in local politics. Arthur Bunce, Hodge's economic advisor, admitted that "we have accepted the advice of the Rightists and allowed them to obtain a dominant position through appointments in the government."<sup>296</sup>

On October 10, after Benninghoff assessed the Korean political situation, he reported to his superior George Atcheson, MacArthur's acting political advisor in Japan. Benninghoff came to the conclusion in his report that while the radical group [KPR] in South Korea was receiving "support and direction from the Soviet Union," the conservative group, which is less aggressive than KPR, represented "the thought of the majority of thinking Koreans." He assumed that latter group was willing to cooperate with the American military government.<sup>297</sup> Thus, alarmed by reports of Benninghoff, Atcheson recommended the State Department give up its policy of political aloofness in Korean political situations, and bring Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku back to Korea because their popularity and legitimacy could aid the American effort.<sup>298</sup> Atcheson's recommendation that United States government become more actively involved in Korean politics revised the previous American policy of not favoring any one group or leader.

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<sup>295</sup> Benninghoff to acting political advisor in Japan, October 9, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6; 1069.

<sup>296</sup> Arthur Bunce to Edwin Martin, February 24, 1947, RG 59, decimal file, 895.00/2-2447.

<sup>297</sup> Benninghoff to Atcheson, acting political advisor in Japan, October 10, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6; 1070-71.

<sup>298</sup> Atcheson to Secretary of State, October 15, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6; 1091-1092. Syngman Rhee returned to Korea aboard General MacArthur's personal plane on October 16, 1945. Kim Ku and a party of 13 arrived at Seoul on November 23, 1945. See also Hederson, *Korea*, 128-29.

On October 25, Secretary of State Byrnes replied to Acheson's recommendation and expressed that he still had a hope of working with the Soviets to preserve the postwar order and peace.<sup>299</sup> Hodge disagreed and wanted to fight against the communists in Korea. Hodge believed that KPG leaders such as Rhee and Kim Ku should be returned to Korea to use these rightist leaders as figureheads for the occupation. Hodge's views were transmitted, through MacArthur, to the Army of Chief of Staff George C. Marshall in Washington.<sup>300</sup>

The State Department, however, hesitated believing that any acts of favoritism toward the KPG would encourage the Soviet Union to take a similar action and would jeopardize the success of negotiations regarding the unification of Korea. Therefore, John Carter Vincent, the director of the State Department Office of Far Eastern Affairs, opposed the idea of Acheson to use the KPG in Korea. There existed crucial differences between the Department of State and the American military government towards the policy of Korea. These different attitudes and views were also reflected in the negotiations with the Soviets during the period of occupation.

On October 17, 1945, for the first time, General Hodge received the initial Korean policy directive from the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee in the form of a "Basic Initial Directive." It explained that "Korea should be developed progressively from the interim period of civil affairs administration to a period of trusteeship, and finally to the establishment of a free and independent nation. In order to achieve this goal, the directive stressed that the military government would require the elimination of

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<sup>299</sup> Byrnes to acting political advisor in Japan, October 25, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1104.

<sup>300</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, November 2, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6, 1106; MacArthur to Army Chief of Staff Marshall, November 5, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1112.

all traces of Japanese control over Korea and recommended that Japanese and Korean collaborationists only be used in “exceptional circumstance” and on a temporary basis. Also, the directive warned Hodge not to expand official recognition to “any self-styled Korean provisional government or similar political organization.”<sup>301</sup>

The State Department had tried to prevent the return of Syngman Rhee and other prominent Korean exile leaders to Korea because they were fiery advocates of immediate independence.<sup>302</sup> The State Department considered Rhee an unreliable troublemaker and refused to grant him a passport. However, at the recommendations of Generals MacArthur and Hodge, and with the assistance of Preston Goodfellow, a high-ranking official in the Office of Strategic Services during the war,<sup>303</sup> Rhee was allowed to return to Korea on October 16 and the other exiled leaders from China returned to Korea on November 23, 1945. General MacArthur supported Rhee, one of the most popular exiled leaders, and instructed Hodge to treat Rhee as the national hero.<sup>304</sup> Unfortunately, when the Korean exile leaders returned home, they had to sign an affidavit that they would return home as individuals, not as government officials. “Outright support of any one political group presently outside Korea is not contemplated,” Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson said, “but because of the chaotic conditions within Korea, elements having constructive ability and willing to work within the framework of military government are

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<sup>301</sup> The initial Korean policy directive is printed in *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1073-91.

<sup>302</sup> Oliver, *Syngman Rhee*, 210-13; Henderson, *Korea*, 128.

<sup>303</sup> Cumings, *The Origins*, 188.

<sup>304</sup> Oliver, 213.

encouraged to enter, and might be transported by airplanes controlled by the Army when space is available.”<sup>305</sup>

Actually, during the period of occupation, MacArthur often displayed a marked indifference toward Korea. When Hodge frequently sought MacArthur’s opinions on Korean affairs, MacArthur responded to his requests with brief and vague words. MacArthur, for instance, advised Hodge to “Use your own best judgment as to what action should be taken. I am not sufficiently familiar with local situation to advise you intelligently but I will support whatever decision you may take in this matter.”<sup>306</sup> Thus, MacArthur remained largely inattentive to Korean affairs and did not visit these before the Korean Government had been established in 1948.<sup>307</sup>

Soon after his return, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Rhee organized the Central Council for the Rapid Realization of Korean Independence (*Taehan toklip choksong chungang hyopui-hoe*) (CCRRKI). He asked all political parties and social organizations under his leadership to adopt his slogan, (*top’o nok’o mungchija*) “Let’s unite unconditionally” and “Let’s punish the pro-Japanese national traitors after independence.” On October 20, at the welcoming ceremony for the occupation forces, Rhee denounced the Soviet Union and its policies in the north. He also refused to join the KPR. For decades after he left Korea, Rhee displayed an attitude of an ardent anti-communist.<sup>308</sup> Therefore, leftist leaders such as Yo Un-hyong and communist Park Hon-young soon left the CCRRKI because they could not accept Rhee’s “unity” slogan that was supposed to embrace pro-

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<sup>305</sup> Acheson to U.S. charge in China, September 27, 1945, *FURS*, 1945, 6: 1060.

<sup>306</sup> MacArthur to Hodge, November 25, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1134.

<sup>307</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscence*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 319.

<sup>308</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *AMG and Korean Nationalism*, 161-2.

Japanese Koreans, who, in their eyes, were national traitors. Rhee thereby lost a chance to unify all parties and social organizations under his leadership. Rhee's CCRRKI instead became a conservative organization by December 1945.

As time went by, the KPR's power and influence increased. Hodge received information from occupation troops in the provinces in September that showed the KPR to be "organized into a government at all levels," whereas the KDP was "poorly organized or unorganized in most areas."<sup>309</sup> In order to uproot the formidable Leftist groups, Major General Archibald Arnold, the military government governor, published a statement against the KPR to the newspapers on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Archibald claimed that the KPR was "entirely without any authority, power or reality." He stated that the leaders of KPR were "so foolish as to think they can take to themselves and exercise any of the legitimate functions of the Government of Korea."<sup>310</sup> The official History of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea (HUSAFIK) stated "the *de facto* government was soon to bring it into sharp conflict with American Military Government."<sup>311</sup> American opposition to the KPR caused serious damage to American prestige and influence among Koreans. Actually, from the beginning, the conflict between the American military government and the KPR led to an ideological battlefield in the politics of Korea. General Hodge later confessed that "Flatly stated, one of our missions was to break down this

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<sup>309</sup> Cumings, *ibid.*, 193

<sup>310</sup> For more details, see HUSAFIK, vol. 2, ch. 2, 29-30.

<sup>311</sup> HUSAFIK, vol. 2, ch. 2, 27.

Communist government [the KPR] outside of any directives and without benefit of backing by the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the States Department.”<sup>312</sup>

In recognition of the strong opposition of the American military authority to these committees, many of the non-Communist leaders were eventually dismissed from them. The American military government ultimately did achieve success in suppressing the People’s Committees and the KPR. As a result, on November 11, Yo Un-hyong and his supporters organized the People’s Party (*Inmindang*) in order to establish a political organization that would be acceptable to the Americans. The American military government understood that the People’s Party consented to Hodge’s demand that the KPR should drop its claims to being a government and call itself a political party. At the same time the People’s Party “would include within its membership most of the members of the people’s committee which were acting as local government units under the [KPR].”<sup>313</sup>

The national meeting of People’s Committee representatives (*Chonguk inmin wiwonhoe taehoe*) took place from November 20-22 in Seoul. Approximately 1,000 representatives from the all over the country met in response to Hodge’s demand that the KPR drop the word *konghwaguk* (“republic) from its title and reorganize as a political party. Younger and more radical groups refused to change the name of the party. Hodge sent a cable to General MacArthur to warn about KPR strength:

This political party is the most powerful Communist-backed group in Korea and had some connections with Soviet politics. Included also consideration number

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<sup>312</sup> Leonard C. Hoag, *American Military Government in Korea: War Policy and the First Year of Occupation, 1941-1946*, 312; Cited in Cumings, *The Origins*, 194.

<sup>313</sup> HUSAFIK, vol. 2. ch. 1, 13. Richard Robinson thought the party was at first a more tractable middle-of-the-road organization. However, the Americans’ continued difficulties with Yo in early 1946 convinced them it was just another communist front camp.



of Leftists, not true Communists... [their claim to be a government] gained them many followers among the uneducated and laboring classes, and has fostered radical actions in the provinces under the guise of orders from the Korean People's Republic.<sup>314</sup>

MacArthur replied to Hodge's cable and advised Hodge to rely on his own best judgment. On December 12, 1945, Hodge's statement was the final blow to the KPR:

I feel it necessary to the public understanding to announce that... the Korean People's Republic is not in any sense a "government," and is not authorized to act in any capacity as such. The only functioning government, in Southern Korea is the Military Government of Korea... Therefore, in order to eliminate further misunderstanding and cloaked disorders, I have today directed my occupation forces and the Military Government of Korea that the activities of any political organization in any attempted operations as a government are to be treated as unlawful activities, and that necessary steps will be taken at once to insure that no political organization operates in any way as a government in any portion of the American occupied area without specific authority of the Allied Powers.<sup>315</sup>

E. Grant Meade indicated that "by suppressing the KPR and by identifying themselves with a minority group, the Americans distressed and antagonized the Korean people." The American military authorities lost "not only a major part of Korean friendships, but also the respect of some who once held the United States in high regard."<sup>316</sup> When the year 1945 ended, American military authority had effectively destroyed the KPR. In February 1946 the Left created new coalition, the Democratic People's Front (DPF or *Minjujuui minjok chosun*), a united movement which included all leftists, including the leftist faction of the Korean Provisional Government led by Kim Won-bong. The DPF programs were similar to those of the KPR. Actually, it was the direct successor of the KPR. Moreover, Edgar Snow, an American journalist, reported

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<sup>314</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, November 25, 1945; *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1133-34.

<sup>315</sup> HUSAFIK, vol. 2, ch. 2, pp. 35-38.

<sup>316</sup> E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 235.

that the membership of the DPF “unquestionably constituted the only large political organization in the country.”<sup>317</sup>

During November and December 1945, KPR affiliated mass organizations, such as labor unions and farmers’ unions, held national meetings in Seoul, and became objects of suppression at the hands of the occupation authorities. Unlike other officials in the military government, Stewart Meacham, Hodge’s labor advisor, had a different assessment of the situation and argued that “for a short period Chonp’yong [sic] was in almost complete control of those plants which had been Japanese-owned.”<sup>318</sup> Labor unions (*nodong chohap* or *Chonp’yong*) had success in unifying numerous unions into one body, the National Council of Korean Labor Union (*Chosun nodong chohap chonguk pyongui-how*), in November. Chongp’yong was the only labor organization in the south until mid-1946 and remained the strongest union until after the October people’s riots in 1948.<sup>319</sup> Many Americans within the military government recognized that Chonp’yong was representative of Korean workers and largely reformist in character. One memorandum on “Labor Section Policy” stated:

The Worker’s Committees, which have in many cases taken affairs into their own hands by throwing out the Jap owners, can be better controlled through regularly-constituted unions than by outright suppression. The policy of Military Government [should be] to foster truly representative unions and thus weed out leaders who are irresponsible agitators with only a vague program of kicking out

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<sup>317</sup> Edgar Snow, “We Meet Russia In Korea,” *Saturday Evening Post* vol. 218, (March 30, 1946), 117; William Langdon later reported: “Democratic People’s Front consisting of a number of youths, women, labor unions, and farmers’ alliance and two small splinter parties in addition to the People’s party and the Communists. It cannot be denied that the front is supported by a large number of genuinely patriotic Koreans with progressive leanings whose participation in Korean politics would be most desirable.”; Langdon to the Secretary of State, May 24, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 687-88.

<sup>318</sup> Stewart Meacham, Labor Department, U. S. Armed Forces in Korea, *Korean Labor Report*, Seoul, 1947, 10.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

former owners and no positive plan to open up the plants... [The Americans should not] jump to conclusions that every worker's Committee is communist-dominated... most of the so-called Communist groups have turned out to be pretty mild.<sup>320</sup>

Unfortunately, many American military authorities still regarded these Korean reformists as revolutionaries who threatened American interests and security.

The American military government systematically suppressed the local People's Committees because these groups supported the KPR. The Americans also arrested numerous leaders of the People's Committee and reinstalled rightist Koreans in the local communities to serve American interests:

A tactical unit occupying a community was to expel the former head of the local government, if he was a Japanese, but retain him as an advisor if necessary. Other Japanese were to be replaced by Koreans as soon as possible. If the head of the government was a Korean [pro-Japanese], he was to be retained until a suitable replacement could be found. If a political party [the KPR] had expelled the former officials and taken over the government, the officials put in by the party were to be arrested and suitable substitutes appointed.<sup>321</sup>

What was the object of United States Korean policy? Was the establishment of democratic, unified and independent nation their only objective? America was not necessarily ready to grant Korean independence at the risk of sacrificing own national interests. American authorities viewed the Korean People's Republic in Seoul and People's Committee as a front organization for communist activity allied with the Russians. They also thought that many social organizations such as the labor unions and farmers association were influenced by the Communists.

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<sup>320</sup> "Labor Section Policy," unsigned memorandum, Bureau of Mining and Industry, November 16, 1945; in XXIV Corps Historical File. See also Meacham, *Labor Report*, passim; Cited in Cumings' *The Origins*, 199.

<sup>321</sup> HUSAFIK, vol. 1, part. 1, ch. 6, 61.

As such, the American military government wanted to keep South Korea out of the hands of the Soviet Union. General Christ, G-5 for General MacArthur, wrote that one of the principal missions of military government in Korea was to provide for “a bulwark against communism.”<sup>322</sup> Later, after he traveled to Korea in 1946, Edwin Pauley, advisor to President Truman, expressed his opinion that “Communism in Korea could get off to a better start than practically anywhere else in the world.”<sup>323</sup> Impressed by the report of Pauley, President Truman declared Korea was “an ideological battleground upon which [America’s] entire success in Asia may depend”<sup>324</sup> George McCune also maintained that this development was unfortunate because Korea was proving to be ‘testing ground’ of American postwar policies in the Far East.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, unless the American military authorities changed their policy to suppress the leftists in the South, Koreans’ hope to build a unified and democratic in their country might fail.

During three months of occupation of South Korea, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) maintained the same policy that General Hodge should try to attain the “maximum possible coordination with the Soviet Commander.” To implement Washington’s policy, the American military government sought to

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<sup>322</sup> Meade, *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>323</sup> Ambassador Edwin W. Pauley to President Truman, June 22, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 706-709; For the Commission’s investigation of northern Korea, see McCune, *Korea Today*, 214-15 and Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, 45.

<sup>324</sup> President Truman to Ambassador Edwin W. Pauley, July 16, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 713-714; Charles M. Dobb produced one of the most cogent views on Truman’s policy toward postwar Korea. He argues that the Truman administration reacted to a different and confusing Korean case by avoiding reality, simplifying complexity, and creating a “symbol of postwar contention.” Charles M. Dobb, *the Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981).

<sup>325</sup> George M. McCune, “Occupation Politics in Korea, *Far Eastern Survey* 15 (February 13, 1946), 33.

eliminate the zonal occupation as soon as possible to solve the problems of South Korea.<sup>326</sup> The economic situation in South Korea became very critical. First, AMG's free market policy, especially, its rice policy, destroyed the economy of South Korea because of uncontrollable inflation.<sup>327</sup> Secondly, during the several weeks before the American occupation forces landed in Korea in early September, the Japanese colonial authority already exacerbated the inflation problem printed about three billion yen against an estimated five billion yen in circulation on August 15, 1945.<sup>328</sup>

From the beginning of the occupation, General Hodge tried to discuss with General Chistiakov practical problems including the reintegration of communications, the economic unification of the two zones, and the problems of currency. The economic disaster of North and South Korea under the dual occupation of foreign troops was a severe hardship for the Koreans and made it difficult for occupation authorities to prepare for the future independence of Korea. Therefore, Hodge believed that it was a first and crucial step for the social and economic unification of Korea to solve the problems through a liaison with the Soviet commander. Eventually, such cooperation between the two commanders in the two separate zones might lead to a centralized administration of all Korea. However, the Soviet occupation authorities in the north persistently rebuffed Hodge's efforts. Not only did the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United

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<sup>326</sup> Report by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee for the Far East, October, 20, 22, and 24, *FRUS*, 1945, 6; 1094-1103.

<sup>327</sup> See more details about the economic policy of the American Military Government, Kim Jinwung, "American Policy and Korean Independence" (Ph.D. dissertation, 1983) 135-148; Lee, Sangmin, "The Political Economy of Occupation: United States Foreign Economic Policy in Korea, 1945-1949," (Ph.D. dissertation, 1991), 55-65 and 226-254; Cumings, *The Origins*, 203-204.

<sup>328</sup> The Japanese stopped the printing of money "due to a shortage of paper." Department of Army Headquarters, Far East Command, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea*, vol 1, ch 3, 22-23; Cited in Kim Jinwung, "American Policy and Korean Independence," Ph. D. dissertation, 19.

States deteriorate, but any possible solution through negotiations between the two commanders in the local areas stalemated. The temporary line of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel became a “closed border” and international barrier.<sup>329</sup>

When he reported to Secretary of State Byrnes in November, Ambassador Harriman in Moscow pointed out that the Soviet Union historically compared Korea to “Europe’s Finland, Poland, and Rumania—a springboard for attack on the USSR,” therefore, the Russians “may be expected to seek predominant influence in Korea.” According to Harriman, Stalin believed that an international trusteeship by four powers would not guarantee Soviet domination because Korea had divided into two zones.<sup>330</sup> Harriman assumed that Stalin would try to build North Korea as a “friendly neighbor” to the Soviet Union after they withdrew.

In his report on “Conditions in Korea,” issued after three months of occupation, General Hodge explained to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the dual occupation of Korea between the Soviet Union and the United States created an impossible condition to establish a sound economy and prepare Korea for future independence. “The Korean people blamed the United States for the partition of their country and [there] is growing resentment against the Americans in the South.” He further reported that Korean people vehemently opposed the idea of trusteeship and claimed that it might be wise to give up the scheme.<sup>331</sup> Hodge believed that the situation in the South Korea was becoming an

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<sup>329</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The Record on Korean Unification 1943-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 4-5; McCune and Grey, *Korea Today*, 52-60; Carl Berger, *The Korean Knot*, 56; Beloff, *Soviet Policy*, 159.

<sup>330</sup> Harriman to Secretary of State, November 9 and 12, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1119, 1121-22.

<sup>331</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 318; Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), 125.

extremely fertile breeding ground for Communism. Thus, General Hodge strongly recommended that the United States should reach an agreement with the Soviet Union for simultaneous withdrawal of American and Russian troops and leave “Korea to its own devices and an inevitable internal upheaval for its self purification.”<sup>332</sup>

In opposing Hodge’s ideas, American policy makers decided to carry out the establishment of the Korean trusteeship by the four major powers. They believed that only a trusteeship of the four powers could bring about not only a free and independent Korea but also prevent ultimate Soviet domination of it. Finally, the United States government initiated discussions on the Korean problem at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in December 1945.

### **North Korea under the Soviet Occupation**

As previously noted, with the defeat of the Japanese, the Korean peninsula was divided into two halves along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel by the United States and the Soviet Union. While the American military government ruled in the south after early September in 1945, the north was occupied by the Soviet Union, which arrived almost one month earlier than American troops in this crucial period. During the initial period of the occupation of the Soviets they did not have a well-organized plan for North Korea. Beginning a different pattern of the nation-building,<sup>333</sup> the Soviet Union was much better informed about Korean politics and culture than the United States in the south. First, there were several hundred thousand Korean people in the Soviet Union and there were

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<sup>332</sup> MacArthur for Hodge to Joint Chief of Staff, December 16, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1144-48.

<sup>333</sup> Joungwon Kim, *Divided Korea*, 86.

approximately ten to thirty thousand Korean exiles, who were well indoctrinated and trained as communists by the Soviet Union, and returned to North Korea in 1945.<sup>334</sup> The second group that the Soviets worked with was the “Kapsan” faction, guerilla fighters against the Japanese, under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, a thirty-three-year old partisan leader.<sup>335</sup> They included several hundred native Koreans who had participated in anti-Japanese guerilla activities in Manchuria and stayed in the Soviet Union during the early 1940s. The last group was the “Yenan” faction, Koreans who had fought alongside of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), led by Mu Chong and the Kim Tu-bong.<sup>336</sup> After the Soviet Union declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, the Soviet military operation against the Japanese army in Korea began on August 10, 1945.<sup>337</sup> The Soviet army crossed the Soviet-Korean border on the night of August 11-12 and landed in Wonsan on August 21.<sup>338</sup> On August 24, 1945, the Soviet XXV Army under Colonel General Ivan M. Chistiakov, a veteran of Stalingrad, entered Pyongyang, the capital of

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<sup>334</sup> Dae-sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948*, 4-11; Glenn D. Paige, *Korean People’s Democratic Republic* (Stanford, California; Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1966), 57; Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex*, 325; The Koreans exiles, so-called Soviet-Koreans, who were either born in or resident in the Soviet Union during the colonial period; in Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korean Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 23.

<sup>335</sup> The Kapsan faction is labeled by Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee. The group was known as the Kapsan faction because of the Kapsan Mountain in which some their exploits took place. See Robert A. Scalapino and Chong Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 318; Simmons, *The Strained Alliance*, 23; anti-guerrilla activities against Japanese, see Henderson, *Korea*, 325-326.

<sup>336</sup> Simmons, *Strained Alliance*, 23.

<sup>337</sup> United States Department of State, *North Korea: A Case Study in the Techniques of Takeover*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 12.

<sup>338</sup> Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 62 and 90. See more details on the Soviet military operation in North Korea. Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone*, 62-67; Armstrong, *The North Korea Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 2003), 205.



the present North Korea.<sup>339</sup> On August 25 and 26 the first Soviet guards controlled the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>340</sup>

When the Russians entered northern Korea, they found that the People's Committees, the provincial branches of the Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI), like in the south, already existed.<sup>341</sup> In particular, the CPKI in the South Pyong'an Province under the leadership of Cho Man-sik, a Christian moderate nationalist, was very strong and popular organization.<sup>342</sup> On August 22, the Soviets established a new organization, the South P'yongan People's Political Committee (*inmin chongch'i wiwonhoe*), after merging of Cho Man-sik's South P'yongan CPKI and the P'yongyang city CPKI branch.<sup>343</sup> Actually, as Cumings argues, the Soviets recognized the People's Committee as "governing bodies," from the provincial level to the township level, to seize administrative power in the north which were recognized by the Central People's Committee in Seoul headed by Yo before the establishment of the People's Republic of Korea (PRK).<sup>344</sup> During the year 1945, these committees in the north recognized Seoul as the political center. Once the People's Republic of Korea was

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<sup>339</sup> Henry Chung, *The Russian Came to Korea* (Washington, D.C.: The Korean Pacific Press, 1947), 40-41.

<sup>340</sup> Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone*, 66.

<sup>341</sup> According to Van Ree, except in North Hamgyong, People's Committees in North Korea were established as a 'spontaneous base' and were nationalist-oriented. See Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone*, 89; Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, 52-53.

<sup>342</sup> Other provincial CPKI branches were also organized throughout North Korea from August 15 to 17. Cumings, *The Origins*, 391.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

established, the People's Committee of North Korea placed itself under its authority (PRK) and became a local government unit in the north after September 6.<sup>345</sup>

Unlike the American military government which governed directly in South Korea, the Soviet occupation authorities formally recognized local committees and gave them administrative power to govern themselves without a military government.<sup>346</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that Soviet occupation authorities still retained indirect control and closely supervised political events in North Korea.<sup>347</sup> According to George McCune, "the political officers attached to the Russian Command exercised final authority on all matters."<sup>348</sup> During the initial period of occupation, the Russians initially supported Cho's committees and wanted to form them to contain equal numbers of Communists and nationalists in coalition in North Korea.<sup>349</sup> Thus, they believed that Kim Il Sung as Cho Man-sik, who was from the same province as Cho Man-sik and came from a Christian family, was the right person to co-operate with Cho.<sup>350</sup> Immediately after the Soviet Army invaded Korea, the Soviets organized *komendaturas*, or bureaus of the local commanders, to disarm and establish local order in the North Korea.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> William Stueck makes a mistake in saying that "each of the occupiers set up a military government in its zone." Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); J. W. Washburn, "Russia Looks at Northern Korea," *Pacific Affairs* 20 (June 1947), 152-153;

<sup>347</sup> Cumings, *The Origins*, II, 334; Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and The Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* No. 8 (November 1993), 18; Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone*, 102; Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, 53-54.

<sup>348</sup> George M. McCune, "The Occupation of Korea," *Foreign Policy Reports* 15 (October 1947), 194.

<sup>349</sup> Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone*, 114-115; Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, 121.

<sup>350</sup> Van Ree, 115.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 85; Armstrong, 52.

By the end of September 1945, the Russians had established their authority over the whole of North Korea. The two occupation authorities showed different attitudes in their approach to the Koreans at the beginning of their occupation. While the American troops expressed their view that Koreans were incapable of governing the state when they entered in the south, the Soviets assured Koreans in the north that the Soviets troops were present in north in order to help Koreans to rule their government themselves during a temporary period until a smooth transfer of power was completed. Furthermore, after the Soviets completed removal of Japanese collaborators from the positions of power and replaced them with nationalists and Communists who fought against the Japanese, the Koreans accepted the Soviets as the decisive force in the “liberation” of North Korea from the yoke of Japanese colonial rule.<sup>352</sup>

When he arrived in North Korea, Soviet commander Colonel General Ivan M. Chistiakov announced:

Korean people! Remember that you have future happiness in your own hands. You have attained liberty and independence. Now everything is up to you. The Soviet Army will provide the Korean people with all conditions for the free and creative ventures you are bound to embark on. Koreans must make themselves the creators of their own happiness.<sup>353</sup>

It may be useful at this juncture to summarize some of the basic differences between Soviet and American policy in Korea during the first year. First of all, the Russians did not establish a military government.<sup>354</sup> The Soviet Union ruled their zone of occupation through the recognition and utilization of the People’s Republic of Korea and

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<sup>352</sup> U.S. Department of State, *North Korea: A Case Study in the Techniques of Takeover*, Far Eastern Series 103, Publication 7118, January, 1961: 2-5.

<sup>353</sup> Quoted in Joungwon Kim, *Divided Korea*, 88.

<sup>354</sup> Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement*, 297-99; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 88.

People's Committee in the local areas. On the other hand, the Americans not only established an American military government but also insisted that the military government was the only "legitimate government" in the south. Therefore, the military government did not recognize the KPR. These different approaches to the situation of the Korean people by the two powers did not mean that the Soviets and the Americans would give up their interests in order to establish a unified, independent, and democratic Korean government. Actually, even though the Russians came with a background knowledge about local context, the Soviets did not have a detailed plan of policy in Korea at the beginning of the occupation.<sup>355</sup> They intended to build 'a friendly neighbor' in the north to prevent future aggression against the Soviet Union.<sup>356</sup> According to Kathryn Weathersby, Soviet occupation authorities created Soviet-style institutions in North Korea.<sup>357</sup> However, the Soviets wanted to avoid conflict with the Americans over Korea because their primary concern in Asia was a resurgent Japan.<sup>358</sup>

On August 27, 1945, South Pyong'an People's Political Committee of North Korea was created and on September 2, the same type of People's Committee was also

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<sup>355</sup> Traditional historians argue that the Soviets had a master plan in which North Korea should be transferred into the Communist country when they entered. However, some Korean scholars deny that the Soviet Union had a specific plan early in their occupation of the north. In *Communism in Korea*, Scalapino and Lee argue that "the Soviet Command probably did not arrive in Korea with any fully worked out political plan or precise time-table. It is more likely that the Russians, like the Americans, came to Korea with nothing more specific in mind than such basic principles as the importance of seeing a 'friendly regime' established there." Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea I*, 337-338. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance*, 25. Van Ree, 95; Armstrong, 41. Recently, some Korean scholars supported this argument by studying the Soviet secret documents which were opened in Russia in the 1990s. See Kvan So Ki (Ki Kwangso), "Formation of the Political System in North Korea and the Soviet Role (1945-1947)" (Ph.D. diss., Far Eastern Institute, Russian Academy of Science, 1997) and Khun Su Zhon (Chon Hyonsu), "Socioeconomic Transformation in Postliberation North Korea, 1945-1948" (Ph.D. diss., Moscow State University, 1997); Cited in Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, 250.

<sup>356</sup> Weathersby, *The Soviet Aims in Korea*, 11.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

created in three other provinces in the north. However, it was the Soviet Civil Administration led by Major General Romanyenko and his political advisors that actually controlled the affairs of the People's Committee in each province.<sup>359</sup> On October 8, 1945, the Soviet Command called a meeting of representatives of the five provincial People's Committees, later reorganized into the "Temporary Five Provinces People's Committee," (*Imsi odo inmin wiwonhoe*) and then on November, 19, into "the Five Provinces Administrative Bureau," (*Puk Choson o-do haengjongguk*) as a liaison organ in the administration of the five provinces in North Korea, with Soviet advisors for each of the ten departments. The Russian representative in the department worked at the provincial people's committees as a Soviet advisor.<sup>360</sup> It was replaced by the North Korean Provisional People's Committee in February 1946. It then served as a basis for the establishment of a central government of North Korea. At this time Stalin planned to set up a separate government in the north apart from that in the south.<sup>361</sup> After the creation of Committee, the Communists moved rapidly to consolidate control over the governing organs which had become subordinate to the central People's Committee.

While the Soviet military authorities constructed the administrative organization, they also focused political concern on the development of the Korean Communist Party.

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet command called a Conference of the North Korean Five

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<sup>359</sup> For a study of Russian control of North Korea, see U.S. Department of State, *North Korea: A Case Study in the Technique of Takeover*; Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean People's Democratic Republic*. Cited in Hakjoo Kim, *Unification Policy of South and North Korea, 1945-1991: A Comparative Study* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1978), 33.

<sup>360</sup> Van Ree, 104; Armstrong, 53.

<sup>361</sup> It should be noted that unlike the revisionist historians, including Bruce Cumings argues, it was Stalin who had a plan that built a separate government earlier than the Americans and Syngman Rhee in the Korean peninsular.

Provinces Party Representatives. As a result of this conference, the “North Korean Branch of the Korean Communist Party” was established on October 13. However, most of the domestic Communists objected to this move because there was a pre-existing original Korean Communist Party in Seoul. On October 23, although Park Hon-yong, chairman of the Korean Communist Party, with headquarters in Seoul, and his followers objected to the Soviet plan by arguing the communist principle, namely, “one party, one country,” later they agreed to the extension of a separate North Korean Branch.<sup>362</sup> While the Soviets sponsored that move and the reorganization of the Korean Communist Party, they secured control over it through the agency of Soviet-Koreans who joined and overwhelmed the domestic Communists.<sup>363</sup>

Not until October 14, 1945 that did Kim Il Sung make a public appearance after he returned from the Soviet Union in August.<sup>364</sup> While Cho Man-sik organized the Choson Democratic Party on November 3, Kim Il Sung became the First Secretary of the North Korean Branch of the Korean Communist Party on December 17, 1945.<sup>365</sup> On February 9, 1946, the “Provisional People’s Committee of North Korea” was established to replace the “Executive Committee” as the central executive body.<sup>366</sup> On August 28, 1946, Kim Il Sung and his followers merged the North Korean Branch of the Korean Communist Party and the New People’s Party, which was organized by the Yenan faction

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<sup>362</sup> Dae-sook Suh, “North Korea: Emergence of an Elite Group,” in Richard F. Staar, ed., *Aspects of Modern Communism* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1965), 324. I believe that from this moment Kim Il Sung and the communists in the north had a initiative to control the leftists in the south.

<sup>363</sup> Joungwon Kim, *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>364</sup> United States Department of State, *Techniques of Takeover*, 13.

<sup>365</sup> See Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, I, 334.

<sup>366</sup> Washburn, “Russia looks at Northern Korea” *Pacific Affairs* 20 (June 1947), 154.

in March 1946, into a single party, “North Korean Workers’ Party.” Although Kim Tu-bong was elected chairman and Kim Il Sung and Chu Yong Ha became vice-chairmen of the new party, the real power was in the hands of Kim Il Sung who had support from the Soviets.

Following the announcement of the Moscow Agreement on trusteeship, Cho Man-sik refused to accept this decision and submitted his resignation in protest. The Soviets arrested him.<sup>367</sup> Most of Cho’s nationalist followers were forced to flee to South Korea. After the nationalists were eliminated from power, such as in the provincial and district committees, the political parties, and social organizations, the Communists now controlled all of the institutions in North Korea. The first local elections in November, held in provincial, city, county, and district People’s Committees (local governmental units) of the North Korean Provincial People’s Committee (the central government of North Korea) elected many supporters of Kim. Therefore, Kim Il Sung was able to increase his power both within the Workers’ Party and the governmental units of North Korea.

One of significant reforms that Kim’s groups undertook was land reform on March 5, 1946. As of 1946, between 6 and 7 percent of the farmers owned 54 percent of the cultivated land, some 51.5 percent of farmers owned only 5.4 percent, and 41.5 percent of farmers were tenants who owned no land.<sup>368</sup> Although the landlords of North Korea were not as politically powerful as their counterparts in the South, the landholding

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<sup>367</sup> For detailed information on trusteeship and the resistance of Cho, see Van Ree, 136-38 and 142-43.

<sup>368</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation—A History of the Korean People* (New Jersey: Hollym International Corp., 1996), 337.

pattern was still highly inequitable.<sup>369</sup> According to Andrew J. Grajdanzev, 25.8 percent of the rural population had owned land in North Korea in 1945, while 22.4 percent were part owners and part tenants, 44.9 percent were tenants, 5.4 percent were squatters, and 1.5 percent were farm laborers.<sup>370</sup>

Land Confiscated in North Korean Land Reform in 1946

Owners	Amount of Land (in Chongbo)*
Japanese	100,797
Collaborators	21,718
Landlords owning more than 5 chongbo	285,692
Landlords renting all their land	538,067
Landlords renting parts of their land	239,650
Religious organizations	<u>14,401</u>
Total Confiscated	1,000,325

\*One chongbo equals approximately 2.45 acres, cited in Joungwon Kim, *Divided Korea*, 96.

Redistribution of the land is estimated to have benefited more than 70 percent of the rural population, or about 50 percent of the total population of North Korea, and to have involved more than 50 percent of the cultivable acreage.<sup>371</sup> Some 2.4 million acres were given to 724,522 farm households, free of charge; each household receiving 3.2 acres of

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<sup>369</sup> See land distribution statistics in North Korea as of 1938, in Andrew J. Grajdanzev, "Korea Divided," *Far Eastern Survey* 16 (October 10, 1945), 282; re-cited in Joungwon Kim, 95.

<sup>370</sup> Joungwon Kim, 96.

<sup>371</sup> United States Department of State, *Techniques of Takeover*, 56.



farmland.<sup>372</sup> The land reform in the North was far swifter and more peaceful than in the South because many of the Korean landlords moved down to the south and there was no strong contingent of landed elites in the North.<sup>373</sup>

Land distribution in North Korean Land Reform

Category	No. of Households	Amount of Land Received
Landless peasants	407,307	583,304 chongbo
Smallholding peasants	255,993	336,039 chongbo
Agricultural laborers	5,540	14,855 chongbo
Landlords moved to other counties	3,911	9,622 chongbo

Cited in Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 416.

Land reform had important effects upon the politics and society of North Korea. The reform eliminated strong oppositional organization and at the same time gained strong supporters for the Communist Party in the North. As Cumings described the land reform, it left the new regime with a “vast reservoir of popular goodwill.”<sup>374</sup>

During the period from 1945 to 1948, there was significant change in North Korea. Unlike their American counterparts in the south, Kim Il Sung and his Communist Party enjoyed the full support of the Soviet Union. Although Kim Il Sung was handpicked by the Soviet military authorities, he maneuvered politically to establish and consolidate his leadership. He and his followers later changed its title to “North Korea Workers’ Party” by August 1946 and eliminated collaborators, religious groups, and the

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<sup>372</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea*, 337.

<sup>373</sup> Joungwon Kim, 96; Cumings, *The Origins*, I, 417; Armstrong, 81.

<sup>374</sup> Cumings, *The Origins*, I, 417.

nationalists to consolidate their political power. In mid-February 1947, the General Congress of People's Committees met in Pyongyang, and established the North Korean People's Assembly. Over the course of the three years, the official count of refugees to the south from the north numbered more than one and one-half million people and by 1950 the number was estimated at two million.<sup>375</sup> Out of an estimated population in North Korea in 1945 of 9,170,000, émigrés represented more than a 20 percent of the total. However, Kim's group was still not dominant in the politics of North Korea. Kim's followers still not entirely depended upon the support of Soviet-Koreans, and were challenged by some 22,000 Korean Communists of the Yen-an faction who entered North Korea via Manchuria at the end of 1945 and who belonged to the North China Korean Independence League under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung.

In sum, before the Americans arrived in Korea, and at the initial stage of liberation, Koreans established the Korean People's Republic, a *de facto* government, which enjoyed overwhelming support among the majority of Korean people, showing that Koreans did have a desire and capability to rule their own affairs. If General Hodge and military government authorities at the beginning of their occupation in the south had accepted or recognized the leadership of Yo and the People's Committee, later the Korean People's Republic, the future of Korea might have played out differently and perhaps have been more analogous to what happened in Austria or elsewhere.

Yet, the insurgency of Korean revolutionary nationalism was considered a threat to U. S. interests, so military occupation authorities denied the existence of the Korean People's Republic and made some of the most important decisions without local input

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<sup>375</sup> United States Department of State, *Techniques of Takeover*, 8.

during the first months of the occupation. In order to create an anti-communist bulwark in the south, Hodge became “a premature Cold War Warrior” and helped the rightists to gain political hegemony in Korea at the very beginning of military occupation. In the process, Hodge lost credibility as a political leader because of his leaning towards the rightists and his *status quo* policy that delayed progressive reforms in Korea. As Koreans remembered from their earlier experience decades before in their relations with the United States, Americans had previously betrayed Koreans’ expectations and hope for American aid to build a democratic and independent Korean government. Now, it seemed, they were prepared to do so again.

In the north, the Soviet authorities did not prepare much for their occupation of Korea and did not have a well-organized or specific plan when they arrived. Unlike the American government in the south, however, Soviet occupation authorities were much better informed about Korean politics and ruled the region in more indirect ways. The Russians wanted to build a non-hostile regime in Korea after liberation. Unlike in Eastern Europe, Stalin gave up the sovietization of North Korea and intended to establish a regime from the beginning of military occupation in collusion with both Communists and Nationalists. Thus, Russian military authorities recognized the People’s Committee and cooperated with Koreans to restore order and administrative power while the Soviets also strengthened the leftists and created Soviet-style institutions in North Korea. Had these coalition groups led by Cho Man-sik kept up their initiatives until the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Joint Commission, there would have been an opportunity to make the interim provisional government a vehicle through which to facilitate negotiations about the unification of

north and south. The Cold War context helped derail that chance. At the same time, though, the two superpowers did not act simply as mirror-images of each other.

## CHAPTER V

### The Moscow Conference and the Joint Commission

This chapter examines how the United States and the Soviet Union each had a distinct mindset at the meeting of the Moscow Conference and how Korean nationalists, especially rightists, responded to the decisions of the superpowers. The outcome of the Moscow Conference was shocking to the Koreans who had anticipated immediate independence. This historical event became a turning point not only in the history of Korean politics but also for the Cold War in East Asia overall. As for Koreans, deep-rooted domestic political and factional struggles stirred by the Moscow Agreement fueled divisions within the nation. Due to vehement resistance of rightists in the south and a lukewarm attitude among officials of the American military government, the decisions reached in the Moscow Agreement could not be fulfilled in Korea. This result, in turn, further illustrated that the relationship between the two superpowers was deteriorating. The hope for a unified Korea anytime soon was also fading away. At the same time, though, Korean leaders were not utterly powerless and subservient to superpower agendas.

On December 16, 1945, the Allied foreign ministers, Ernest Bevin of the United Kingdom, V. M. Molotov of the Soviet Union, and James F. Byrnes of the United States, had met in Moscow to discuss postwar problems such as peace settlements, atomic energy, and Far Eastern issues. At this conference, the Foreign Ministers made decisions affecting the future of Korea, including an expression of commitment to Korean unification through a trusteeship. This formal agreement was included in the official documents.<sup>376</sup> Previously, during the World War II, the Allied leaders had made agreement about Korea only through informal and verbal means, such as their acceptance of trusteeship in the Wartime Conferences. They had not made any specific plan regarding the timetable in postwar Korea that would establish a free and independent state, “in due course,” after the war ended.

At the first session of the Moscow Conference on December 16<sup>th</sup>, Secretary of State Byrnes proposed as among other things, “the creation of a united administration for Korea as a prelude to the establishment of an independent Korean government.”<sup>377</sup> The following day, Byrnes introduced the American draft proposal for Korea. It called for immediate action to abolish the separate zones of military occupation to be replaced with a unified administration under the American and Soviet commanders. This new arrangement would deal with any problems arising from the divided state of Korea, including the areas of commodity exchange, resumption of trade and transportation,

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<sup>376</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 100.

<sup>377</sup> James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 111; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 318-319; Berger, *The Korean Knot*, 58.

coastal shipping issues, and settlement of displaced persons.<sup>378</sup> Byrnes proposal specified that the unified administration authority should exercise its power and function through a High Commissioner and an Executive Council composed of one representative from each of the states. The council would organize a “popularly elected Korean legislature.”<sup>379</sup> Byrnes proposed that this administration allow the use of Koreans as much as practical in the government as administrators, consultants, and advisors.<sup>380</sup> He also suggested that the establishment of a four power trusteeship become a requirement prior to Korean independence. Korean independence would be granted within five years, but the trusteeship could postpone it for another five years if necessary.<sup>381</sup> British Foreign Minister Bevin agreed with Byrnes’ proposal while Molotov asked for time to study it.<sup>382</sup>

On December 20, Foreign Minister Molotov submitted the Soviet proposals: establishment of a provisional Korean government, a four power trusteeship to last for five years, and creation of a Joint Commission to assist in forming the provisional Korean government.<sup>383</sup> This commission would assist in establishing a provisional, democratic Korean government in consultation with the Korean democratic parties and social organizations. In other words, the Joint Commission, along with same involvement

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<sup>378</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *American Military Government and Korean Nationalism*, 179.

<sup>379</sup> William Stueck, *Rethinking The Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 14.

<sup>380</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *ibid.*, 179.

<sup>381</sup> Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, December 17, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 2: 642-643; Truman, *ibid.*, 318-319; Byrnes, *ibid.*, 221-222.

<sup>382</sup> December 17, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 2: 643; Berger, *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>383</sup> Memorandum by the Soviet Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, December 20, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 2: 699-700; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 319; Byrnes, *ibid.*, 222; Berger, *ibid.*, 59.

among the Korean democratic parties and social organizations, would work out the proposals for a provisional government and submit them for joint approval to the governments of the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, and China. The Soviet proposal also suggested that within two weeks the United States and Soviet commanders meet to consider urgent problems in both zones of occupation and to work out a means of permanent coordination.<sup>384</sup>

At the meeting on December 21<sup>st</sup>, three representatives accepted the final communiqué of the Moscow conference with a few minor changes. Thus, the Soviet proposal, which appeared to represent the American viewpoint, became the basis for the Moscow decision on Korea.<sup>385</sup>

1. With a view to the re-establishment of Korea as an independent state, the creating of conditions for developing the country on democratic principles and the earliest speediest possible liquidation of the disastrous results of the prolonged Japanese domination in Korea, there shall be set up a provisional Korean democratic government which shall take all the necessary steps for developing of the industry, transport, and agriculture of Korea and the national culture of the Korea people.
2. In order to assist in the formation of a provisional Korean government and with a view to the preliminary elaboration of appropriate measures, there shall be established a Joint Commission consisting of representatives of the United States command in southern Korea and the Soviet command in Northern Korea. In preparing their proposals, the Commission shall consult with Korean democratic parties and social organizations. The recommendations worked out by the Commission shall be presented for the consideration of the governments of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, China, the United Kingdom and the United States prior to final decision by the two Governments represented on the Joint Commission.
3. It shall be the task of the Joint Commission, with the participation of the provisional Korean democratic government and of the Korean democratic

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<sup>384</sup> Berger, *ibid.*; Cho, *ibid.*, 101.

<sup>385</sup> United States Delegation Minutes of an informal meeting, Conference of Foreign Ministers, Moscow, December 21, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 2: 716-717.



organizations to work out measures also for helping and assisting (trusteeship) the political, economic and social progress of the Korean people, the development of democratic self-government, and the establishment of the national independence of Korea.

The proposals of the Joint Commission shall be submitted, following consultation with the provisional Korean Government for the joint consideration of the Governments of the United States, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom and China for the working out of an agreement concerning a four-power trusteeship of Korea for a period of up to five years.

4. For the consideration of urgent problems affecting both southern and northern Korea and for the elaboration of measures establishing permanent coordination in administrative-economic matters between the United States command in southern Korea and the Soviet command in northern Korea, a conference of the representatives of the United States and Soviet commands in Korea shall be convened within a period of two weeks.<sup>386</sup>

On December 27, 1945, the foreign ministers released the final Moscow communiqué.<sup>387</sup> To wit: first, the conference proposed the establishment of a “provisional Korean government.” Second, the trusteeship was to be exercised, not by a four power administrative body, but by a provisional Korean government. Third, it provided for a four power trusteeship that would last up to five years for Korea, involving the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom, China, and the United States.<sup>388</sup> Finally, the proposal stated that within two weeks, the American and Russian occupational commanders in Korea would convene a joint conference to make recommendations, upon consultation

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<sup>386</sup> The full text of the communiqué, see in *FRUS*, 1945, 2: 815-824; *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1151; see also, United State, Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, December 30, 1945, 1027-1032.

<sup>387</sup> The communiqué of the three ministers at Moscow released at 10 P.M. on December 27 in Washington, 3 P.M. on December 28 in London, and 6 A.M. on December 27 in Moscow. Korea acquired the information regarding the Moscow conference decision of trusteeship for Korea on December; it was on December 28 (Friday) that the full text of the communiqué was introduced in the Korean press; cited in Choi Sang-yong, “Trusteeship Debate and the Korean Cold War,” edited by Bonnie B.C. Oh, *Korea Under the American Military Government, 1945-1948* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 35.

<sup>388</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 103-104; Choi Sang Yong, AMG and Korean nationalism, 183-84.

with democratic parties and social organizations, for the purpose of establishing a provisional Korean democratic government.<sup>389</sup> The Moscow agreement was significant because the Allied powers, especially the Soviet Union and the United States, for the first time, agreed on the unification of Korea in an official document.

American policy makers believed the Korean people could not satisfy the Moscow agreement, nevertheless they felt the measure represented a forward step in relations with the Russians toward the establishment of a provisional government. Moreover, it also reflected the Americans' belief that trusteeship was the best way to check Soviet domination in Korea.<sup>390</sup> Both sides believed that cooperation between the two countries might produce political stability and economic recovery for Korea.<sup>391</sup> However, Hodge and his advisors, since mid-October, had expressed strong opposition to the idea of trusteeship.<sup>392</sup> In Hodge's opinion,

If I see Koreans united and exert efforts worthy of independence, I will recognize that independence right now... With respect to the problems of the thirty-eighth parallel, if Koreans in the south follow my directions and unite as one body, we will see one national government and the division of Korea will be quickly resolved.<sup>393</sup>

The news of the Moscow agreement reached Korea on the morning of December 28<sup>th</sup>. It was a great shock and disappointment to the people who wanted immediate independence. Thus, the agreement immediately produced a hostile response and

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<sup>389</sup> Moscow communiqué regarding Korea, December 27, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1150-51.

<sup>390</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 104; Choi Sang Yong, *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>391</sup> Beloff, *Soviet Policy*, 160.

<sup>392</sup> See arguments on trusteeship between the Washington policy makers such as John Carter Vincent and local military authorities, such as Hodge and General Arnold; in Bruce Cumings, *The Origins*, 218.

<sup>393</sup> Quoted in Cumings, *ibid.*, 218.

resistance.<sup>394</sup> Even before the Moscow Conference, the Korean people had been openly hostile to the trusteeship plan. When John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs of the United States Department of State asserted, on October 20, 1945, that the “trusteeship” of Korea because of a perceived lack of capacity on the part of the Korean people to be able to “self-rule,” most Korean people, on the right or left, were offended and were firmly committed to opposing the trusteeship. The Central People’s Committee emphasized: “if America tries to implement a trusteeship system, then the Korean nation will surely fight against it even if the lives of the whole nation might be denied.”<sup>395</sup> Moreover, many Korean people vehemently opposed the “trusteeship” because it was reminiscence of the method used by the Japanese colonial rulers earlier.<sup>396</sup> These dissenters believed that the only difference between the two schemes was the number of rulers empowered over Korea.<sup>397</sup> The South Korean press variously described Moscow agreement as a second Munich, another mandatory rule, another agreement for international slavery, an insult to Korea, or a violation of international treaties.<sup>398</sup> Undeniably, discontent was rampant.

Faced with strong opposition of the Korean people to the Moscow decision, General Hodge stated that the question of trusteeship had not yet been decided in order to

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<sup>394</sup> *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 30, 1945; *Seoul Shinmun*, December 30, 1945.

<sup>395</sup> *Maeil Shinmun*, October, 26, 1945; Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate and the Korean Cold War,” 20.

<sup>396</sup> Robinson, *Betrayal of America*, 36.

<sup>397</sup> Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate,” 14; Cho, 61.

<sup>398</sup> *Seoul Shinmun*, December 30, 1945; *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 30, 1945; Arthur B. Emmons, telegram to Byrnes, December 30, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1152; Department of Army, SCAP, *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea*, No. 3 (December 30, 1945), 185, 189; cited in Cho, 105; A. Wigfall Green, *The Epic of Korea* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1950), 78-80; Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol*, 66-67.

minimize its immediacy and importance. Alternatively, he stressed that the removal of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel barrier and the creation of a provisional government were important first steps toward Korean independence.<sup>399</sup> Upon receiving Hodge's report about the Korean reaction to the Moscow agreement on December 30, Secretary of State Byrnes stated that "the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, working the Korean provisional government, may find it possible to dispense with a trusteeship," since the ultimate goal was to hasten independence.<sup>400</sup> In his State of the Union message on January 14, 1946, President Truman stated that the United States would proceed "as rapidly as practicable toward the establishment of a democratic government in Korea by the free choice of the people of Korea."<sup>401</sup>

Moscow Conference altered the relationship between President Truman and Secretary of States Byrnes. Max Hasting argues that:

The American themselves now stood their own proposal on its head, and indeed revoked their assent to it. In the wake of the Moscow meeting, President Truman determined that Secretary of State Byrnes had given away far too much; that the time had come for a determined stand against Soviet expansionism; that Stalin should be confronted on a range of critical fronts.<sup>402</sup>

As the result of a conference with Truman, Byrnes was forced to resign his position.<sup>403</sup>

Truman then adopted a "get tough" policy toward the Soviet Union:

[W]e should maintain complete control of Japan and the Pacific. We should

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<sup>399</sup> Emmons to Byrnes, December 30, 1945, and Hodge to MacArthur, December 30, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1152-54.

<sup>400</sup> United State Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, December 30, 1945, 1035-36; Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 222.

<sup>401</sup> Truman's State of Union message is printed in United States Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, February 3, 1946, 135-45.

<sup>402</sup> Max Hastings, *The Korean War*, 37.

<sup>403</sup> Truman, *Year of Decisions*, I, 551.

rehabilitate China and create a strong central government there. We should do the same for Korea.... I'm tired babying the Soviets.<sup>404</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, immediately after the announcement of the Moscow agreement, the Provisional Government of Korea and Kim Ku summoned the emergency council of state affairs (the Emergency National Assembly). Kim Ku and his followers urged all Korean officials of the American military government to conduct “an immediate walkout” to show their anti-trusteeship position and in addition called for the Korean people to resist any kind of international trusteehip of Korea.<sup>405</sup> Kim Ku and the KPG declared that “it is against the desire of the entire people of Korea, who uphold the principle of national self-determination.” They also predicted that “any trusteehip applied to Korea will eventually destroy peace in the Far East.”<sup>406</sup> In addition, immediate recognition of the KPG as the government of Korea was demanded. On December 31<sup>st</sup>, an anti-trusteeship resolution was adopted and addressed to the four powers:

1. It is against the desire of the entire people of Korea who uphold the principle of national self-determination.
2. It is against the assurance given repeatedly by your nation during the Second World War.
3. None of the three articles relating to the trusteehip contained in the United Nations Charter is applicable to Korea.
4. Any trusteehip applied to Korea will eventually destroy peace in the Far East.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 552; Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 80; Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 163; quoted in Cha Sang Chul, “The Search for a Graceful Exit” (Ph.D. dissertation, Miami University, Ohio, 1986), 129.

<sup>405</sup> SCAP, *Summation*, No. 4 (January 1946), 281; *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 30, 1945 and January 1, 2, 1946; Green, *Epic of Korea*, 78; Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 155.

<sup>406</sup> Hodge, telegram to MacArthur, December 30, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1154.

<sup>407</sup> Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate,” 15; *Dong-a Ilbo*, December 30, 1945; *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1154.

Koreans opponents of trusteeship now participated in daily demonstrations. All stores and schools were closed. Then, on January 3, 1946, the Communist Party and leftists suddenly reversed their position and started to support the Moscow agreement, arguing for “the trusteeship plan as a guarantee that Korea will not fall into the hands of the Western imperialists.”<sup>408</sup> The Korean people, many of whom considered communists as champions of the anti-Japanese movement during the colonial period, felt a deep sense of betrayal when the communists shifted to support of the trusteeship plan. The people in the south believed that the communists changed their posturing because of orders from Moscow and North Korea.<sup>409</sup> During this time of chaos on December 30, 1945, Song Chin-u, the leader of the Korean Democratic Party, who was also known to favor the trusteeship, was assassinated by a young man who defended his conduct as a righteous display of patriotism.

The Moscow agreement on Korea became the crucial issue that divided political parties into two hostile groups and intensified a domestic power struggle between the right and left centered on the question of the unification of Korea.<sup>410</sup> Bruce Cumings described this situation with an analogy: “two scorpions fought against each other in the bottle.” From the moment, that communists’ suddenly changed to support of the Moscow agreement, a marked polarization of the political climate occurred. Afterwards, the rift between left and right became irreconcilable.<sup>411</sup> Before then, the Korean people

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<sup>408</sup> *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 10, 1946.

<sup>409</sup> Oliver, *Syngman Rhee*, 217; Choi Sang Yong, *AMG and Korean Nationalism*, 207.

<sup>410</sup> Ho Jae Lee, *Hanguk Woegyo Chongchek ui Isang kwa Hyonsil: Yi Sung-Man Woegyo wa Miguk* (Ideology and Reality of Korean Diplomacy: Syngman Rhee and the United States (Seoul: Pangmun Sa, 1969), 137-38.

<sup>411</sup> Cho, 106.

regarded the anti-trusteeship campaign as an outburst of “anti-trusteeship nationalism.”<sup>412</sup> After the Korean Communist Party decided to support the Moscow agreement, much of their popularity, at least that portion predicted an anti-colonialism and anti-feudalism, disappeared. In addition, the anti-trusteeship campaign provided the rightists, whose ranks included many former Japanese collaborators, with an opportunity to transform themselves into an “anti-communist” and “anti-Soviet movement.” Thereafter, throughout duration of the anti-trusteeship movement, the right perennially challenged “the nationalist credentials of the Left” and smeared them as communists in order to pander for popular.<sup>413</sup>

Fully recognizing of the situation of anti-trusteeship movement, the American military government and General Hodge criticized Korean leaders for exploiting the situation for their own benefit. American officials emphasized that the Moscow agreement supported establishment of a provisional government and might lead to an early dissolution of the division of Korea and ultimately Korean unification.<sup>414</sup> Military authorities also asserted that “trusteeship was not a certainty and that it might not be necessary if better cooperation were obtained from the Koreans.”<sup>415</sup> William Langdon, General Hodge’s political advisor, thought that most of the resentment was directed at the Russians. However, Hodge reported to MacArthur that the leftist actions were creating

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<sup>412</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *AMG and Korean Nationalism*, 208.

<sup>413</sup> Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate,” 16; William Stueck, *Rethinking The Korean War*, 33.

<sup>414</sup> *Seoul Shinmun*, January 30, 1946.

<sup>415</sup> Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP), *Summation*, no 4, 1945, 282.

anti-American sentiments, too.<sup>416</sup> General Hodge came to view any support for a trusteeship as Communist-inspired. In his mind only the right represented truly popular desires in South Korea.<sup>417</sup>

In response to an urgent request from MacArthur for political guide lines, the JCS sent the SWNCC's recommendation to the general in Tokyo. The SWNCC 176/18 "Political Policy for Korea" of January 28 urged General Hodge to facilitate an agreement between the various Korean political factions and establish a provisional government. On February 8, 1946, rightists under the leadership of Syngman Rhee, Kim Ku, and Kim Kyu-sik established a National Council for the Rapid Realization of Korean Independence and also recommended that Hodge make a plan to establish a Korean advisory body. Therefore, before the opening of the Joint Commission in March 1946, Hodge set up the Representative Democratic Council (RDC) that was transformed from Kim Ku's Emergency National Council on February 14, 1946. The RDC consisted of twenty-eight members. Among them, twenty-five were from the rightist National Council, including former members of the provisional government and the KDP. However, moderate leftist Yo Un-hyong refused to participate in RDC because of its rightist membership orientation.

According to Peter Lowe, Hodge tried to block the Moscow agreement by cooperating with Rhee and Preston Goodfellow in the creation of the Representative Democratic Council (RDC). To fight against strong Leftists, the American Military

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<sup>416</sup> Hodge to General MacArthur, December 30, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1154.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*; Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of the United States Policy in the United Nations*, 53.



Government planned to create the RDC.<sup>418</sup> Grant Meade argues that, “the State Department expected the military government to continue operating behind a façade of political neutrality, and the Americans were expected to make every effort to secure a rightist victory.”<sup>419</sup> On February 16, 1946, prompted in response to action of the rightists, leftists that supported the Moscow resolution organized the Korean Democratic National Front (DNF) as a united front against the right.<sup>420</sup>

Faced with growing disgruntlement about the anti-trusteeship movement, General Hodge reassured the Korean people that a final decision on trusteeeship had not been reached, and that the United States did not intend to implement the Korean trusteeeship that the Korean people opposed.<sup>421</sup> General Hodge urged Korean leaders, including Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku, to call off the demonstrations and strikes that were sweeping across South Korea. Rightist leaders reluctantly ordered the protests to stop, but they continued to demonstrate against the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, accusing the Russians of delaying Korean independence. Hodge reassured the Korean people that the United States would pursue the goal of early independence for their country, but warned that continued demonstrations could only create an unfavorable impression of Korean political capabilities.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Longman, 1986), 25-26.

<sup>419</sup> Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate,” 20; Grant E. Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 165.

<sup>420</sup> Lowe, *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>421</sup> Mr. Arthur B. Emmons to Secretary of State, December 30, 1945, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Korea/12-3045; *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1137-1138; *New York Times*, December 31, 1945: 1 and 4

<sup>422</sup> *New York Times*, January 20, 1946, 19 and January 21, 1946, 6.

The Joint Conference met between January 16 and February 5, 1946. During the fifteen sessions held in Seoul, the two delegations tried to solve the “urgent problems” that stemmed from the division of Korea. In practice, though, they held very different views and offered distinct solutions about the unification of Korea. While the United States wanted to eliminate the barrier of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and integrate the two separate zones for administrative and economic purposes, the Soviet delegation thought the problems could be solved better by exchange and coordination between the two commanders in the separate zones.

Cognizant of with the deteriorating economic situation, the Soviet delegation asked the United States for rice in exchange for raw materials and electric power. The Americans, however, rejected the Soviets’ proposal because of a serious lack of rice in the south stemming from the failure of its economic policy.<sup>423</sup> After three weeks of discussion, the Joint Conference achieved limited agreements between the two delegations: exchange of first-class mail; movement of Korean citizens from one zone to the other; liaison between the two commands; allocation of radio frequencies; rail, motor and water-borne transportations; and establishment of joint control posts.<sup>424</sup>

On January 23, 1946, Stalin met Harriman, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, he was suspicious of American aims. He bemoaned to Harriman that American military authorities supported the anti-trusteeship activities of the rightists. He also pointed to newspapers in South Korea that reported “only the U.S.S.R. and not the U.S. had insisted

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<sup>423</sup> For more details about the economic situation and policy of the south, see Lee San-min, “The Political Economy of Occupation: United States Foreign Economic Policy in Korea, 1945-1949” (Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1991); 55-83.

<sup>424</sup> Department of States, *United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part III, December 1945-June 1950*, Research Project No. 252, the Division of Historical Policy Research, Department of State, December 1951, 2-3; Benninghoff, letter to Byrnes, February 15, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 633-36; Cho, 114-17.

on trusteeship.” Harriman could do nothing but claim that the “alleged statements” attributed to American officials in Korea were not representative of his government’s policy.<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, Stalin blamed the American military governor, General Archer Lerch, for encouraging criticism of the Moscow agreement.<sup>426</sup>

On January 25, 1946, Tass, the Soviet news agency, claimed that American military authorities permitted verbal attacks, not only on trusteeship, but also on the Soviet Union. Tass published a statement in the South Korean press denying that the Soviet Union alone supported the trusteeship of Korea. The Russians insisted that the United States had initiated the discussions proposing trusteeship at the Moscow Conference. The Russians argued that their proposal had been much more generous than the American plan, for it limited the trusteeship period to five years and provided for the creation of a Korean provisional government.<sup>427</sup> The Soviet Union presented itself as the true protector of Korean interests.<sup>428</sup>

The Tass statement shocked the Korean people and caused serious damage to the prestige and credibility of the American military authorities. In 1905, the United States abandoned Korea to Japan after the Russo-Japanese War. Koreans now believed that the United States had again discarded them to the Russians instead of the Japanese. General Hodge and his staff were embarrassed and disturbed by dissemination of the news that the United States not only originally proposed trusteeship but also that in their version it

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<sup>425</sup> Harriman to Secretary of State, January 25, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 622.

<sup>426</sup> James. I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 73.

<sup>427</sup> Kennan to Secretary of State, January 25, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 617-619. See also *New York Times*, 27 January 1946, 19.

<sup>428</sup> *New York Times*, January 25 and 26, 1946.

might last as long as ten years. Staggering from the severe blow to their credibility and prestige, AMG asked SCAP and Washington for information on the Russian statement and inquired as to what direction they should take now. Hodge had also ordered that the Tass press release be censored in South Korean newspapers.<sup>429</sup>

The State Department verified to the AMG on January 26 that the Soviet Union's claims were correct: the United States offered the trusteeship plan first.<sup>430</sup> Washington informed Hodge that it would have been impossible for the United States to prevent the domination of the Soviet Union in Korea without the trusteeship.<sup>431</sup> John Carter Vincent, chief of the Far Eastern Affairs Division of the State Department, on January 27, 1946, stated that "trusteeship is only a procedure, which may or may not be necessary since independence of Korea is the goal." He further stated that whether or not there was a trusteeship depended upon the ability of the Korean people to work with the joint U.S.-Soviet commission in establishing a democratic provisional government capable of unifying and governing Korea.<sup>432</sup>

Complaining of a lack of instructions from Washington, Hodge offered to leave his post if such an action would save American credibility and prestige in Korea. If he were not removed, Hodge demanded to be kept fully informed about future American

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<sup>429</sup> *HUSAFIK*, vol. 2, ch. 2, 53; Richard Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 30.

<sup>430</sup> *New York Times*, January 26, 1946; *Seoul Shinmun*, January 26, 1946; Acting Secretary of State Acheson emphasized that the American proposal had been submitted as a "basis of discussion" not as a "concrete plan."

<sup>431</sup> *HUSAFIK*, vol. 2, ch. 4, 88; MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 2, 1946, *FURS*, 1946, 8: 628-30; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 109.

<sup>432</sup> United State Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, January 27, 1946, 108; Hodge, radio to MacArthur, January 28, 1946, quoted in "History of USAFIK," vol. 2, ch. 4, 92.

policy decisions in Korea.<sup>433</sup> General MacArthur, Hodge's superior, refused to accept his resignation because he had faith in Hodge's ability. Hodge blamed the State Department experts for the fiasco, claiming they did not know anything about Korea. He stated that the State Department should more seriously consider some of his recommendations and information forwarded from Seoul which, he insisted, was "based on fact and not theory."<sup>434</sup>

E. Grant Meade argued that the problem basically stemmed from a faulty command structure. MacArthur should not have been given responsibility for both the Japanese and Korean occupation. The two situations were, in fact, quite different. Japan was a defeated enemy; Korea was a liberated nation. There should have been a separate channel of communication between Seoul and Washington.<sup>435</sup> As a result the judgment of the local commander's decisions in Korea was not given enough consideration. If American policymakers had been in closer coordination with General Hodge, that fatal mistake might have been avoided on the Korean peninsula.

Immediately after he landed in Korea, Hodge found that trusteeship in Korea, with its emphasis on collaboration with the Russians, would not work. He believed that North and South Korea could not be united until Russia was certain that the Korea would remain a friendly country to the Soviet Union.<sup>436</sup> George F. Kennan, the United States Ambassador in Moscow, supported General Hodge's views. Kennan said that "there can

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<sup>433</sup> Berger, 65.

<sup>434</sup> Hodge, radio to MacArthur, Tokyo, for JCS, February 2, 1946, RG 59, Confidential File, box 212; MacArthur, radio to JCS, February 2, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 628-630.

<sup>435</sup> E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 76.

<sup>436</sup> MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 2, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 628-30; Mills, *The Forrestal Diaries*, 135.

now be little doubt that the U.S.S.R. wishes to assure [the] earliest and most complete exclusion of other great powers from all connections with Korean affairs.”<sup>437</sup>

Historical arguments on the meaning of the Moscow Conference for Korea vary. Traditional historians argue that the Moscow communiqué could not be fulfilled because the Soviets attempted to win a propaganda victory at the expense of the United States in the wake of the agreement. On the other hand, revisionist historians blame the United States for the ultimate failure of the Moscow agreement. They claim the Soviets were prepared to grant immediate independence to Korea and believe American policy makers used trusteeship as a tool to check possible Soviet domination in the region. According to revisionist historians, General Hodge was adamantly opposed to the agreement. In 1980s and 1990s, revisionist Korean historians now argued that the leaders and people of Korea during that time should have accepted a trusteeship because that was the last chance to unify the Korean peninsula within an agreement fostered between the two super powers.<sup>438</sup>

In accordance with the Moscow agreement, the Joint Commission between the Soviet Union and the United States convened at Seoul on March 20, 1946. At the opening commencement of the Joint Commission, Colonel General Terenti Shtikov, the chief of the Soviet delegation, claimed that:

The future provisional Korean democratic government must be created on a basis of wide unification of all the democratic parties and organizations, supporting the decision of the Moscow Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs... the Soviet Union has a keen interest in Korea being a true democratic and independent country, friendly to the Soviet Union, so that in the future it will not

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<sup>437</sup> Kennan to Secretary of State, January 25, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 619-21.

<sup>438</sup> The six-volume *Haebang chonhusa ui insik* [Understanding Pre-and Post-Liberation History] ed. By Song Kun Ho (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1989).

become a base for an attack on the Soviet Union.”<sup>439</sup>

The Soviet delegation contended that those political parties and social organizations that opposed the trusteeship and participated in anti-trusteeship activities were not eligible for consultation about establishing the provisional Korean government. The Russians demanded the exclusion almost all from the American delegation of the rightists who supported the anti-communist parties. As General Hodge recommended to Washington in February, while the Joint Conference was adjourned, the U.S. delegate should issue the statement entitled “Statement of Aims, U.S. Delegation on Joint American-Soviet Commission in Korea.” In the statement, its drafters argued that:

Freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and press are absolute and not relative or subject to exceptions. They apply to all democratic persons, all democratic schools of thought, all democratic parties, no matter how small their following or whether or not their programs may correspond to the ideas of the existing authorities.<sup>440</sup>

In other words, the American delegation argued that the Koreans ought to be permitted to express their views on any issue, including trusteeship, in terms of the right of “freedom of expression.”<sup>441</sup> This statement not only represented the idea of American democracy but also showed the intention of American delegation also was to prevent the domination of Korea by the Soviet Union.<sup>442</sup> When both sides expressed their ideas about the Joint Commission at the Joint Conference, neither side was able to agree on the

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<sup>439</sup> See the text of Shtikov’s address in *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 652- 654; RG 59, decimal file 740.00119 Control (Korea)/3-2246; *New York Times*, March 21, 1946, 1.

<sup>440</sup> United States Department of Army, U.S. Army Forces in Pacific, Headquarters, Office of the Commanding General, *Summation of United States Army Military Government Activities in Korea*, no 8, 20.

<sup>441</sup> USAMGIK, *Summation*, no. 11 (August 1946), 101.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 21; Choi Sang Yong, *ibid.*, 27-28.

definition of “democratic.” As a result the conference failed because neither side could agree as to the qualifications of the political parties and social organizations that were to participate in the Joint Commission.

When it came to the Joint Commission, the United States faced a dilemma. If it abided by and implemented the Moscow agreement, the delegation from the United States would be forced to eliminate almost all rightists and allow only Communists and their sympathizers in South Korea to participate in the establishment of the provisional government. If the United States of America did not participate, it would violate the compromise between the two countries in Moscow and the Joint Commission would collapse.<sup>443</sup>

President Truman also wrote an account of the meeting in his memoirs:

This Commission, which was, of course, the key element in the plan agreed upon at Moscow, was dead-locked almost from the start. We took the position that all Koreans were free to express their opinion and that the Commission should listen to representatives of any Korean political or social group that wished to be heard. The Russians, however, insisted that only those Koreans should be allowed to address the Commission who had given full support to the terms of the Moscow agreement. Virtually all the political parties active in our zone, however, had expressed their disappointment that independence would be postponed and a trusteeship phase instituted first, and by Russian standards that disqualified them from being heard by the Joint Commission. Korean Communists, of course, had refrained from open opposition to the Moscow agreement, and because of this, if the Russians had had their way, no one but the Communists would have been allowed to speak on behalf of the Korean people.<sup>444</sup>

To solve the dilemma stemming from the earlier opposition of the rightists to trusteeship, and at the same time not break the agreement, the United States adopted the policy of “freedom of expression” that guaranteed the right of the political parties and

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<sup>443</sup> McCune and Grey, *Korea Today*, 62.

<sup>444</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 320.



social organizations to express opposition against the trusteeship even if they agreed to sign it as a prerequisite for participating in the establishment of an interim government.<sup>445</sup>

As Richard Robinson argues, the policy of freedom of expression was “a false issue manufactured for the occasion to cloud the real issues and discredit the Russians... and was a necessary maneuver to prevent Russian domination of all Korea.” The Soviets rejected the AMG’s interpretation of the Moscow agreement. The Joint Commission deadlocked on this question until the middle of April. The Soviets then offered a new proposal that guaranteed to “consult with political parties and social organizations that acknowledge their mistake despite their former opposition to the Moscow Agreement, and support the Agreement.”<sup>446</sup> However, the Soviet delegation insisted that no party, regardless of its adherence to agree upon formula, could be represented by an individual who had expressed opposition to the trusteeship provision of the Moscow agreement. Ultimately, the Joint Commission failed and adjourned without any success on May 6, 1946.

In a final statement on the Soviet position, Shtykov told Hodge:

The main reason why the Soviet delegation insisted on barring certain persons from consultation is that Russia is a close neighbor to Korea and, because of this, is interested in establishing in Korea a provisional democratic government which would be loyal to the Soviet Union....If they [the Koreans who raised their voices against the Soviet Union] seized power in the government, the government would not be loyal to Russia, and its officials would be instrumental in organizing hostile action on the part of the Korean people against the Soviet Union.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Choi Sang Yong, *AMG and Korean Nationalism*, 229.

<sup>446</sup> Cited in Choi Sang Yong, “Trusteeship Debate,” 30.

<sup>447</sup> “*HUSAFIK*,” vol. 2, ch. 2, 212-213, as quoted in Berger, 69.

After the Joint Commission had failed to establish a provisional government, the United States government and occupational authorities began to analyze the failure of the Joint Commission. In addition, aware of the declining popularity of the AMG and in order to gain popular support of Koreans, the United States began to adopt a new policy designed to give Koreans of the American zone practice in self-government and to set up a coalition between the moderate rightists and moderate leftists. October 7, 1946, five months after the Joint Commission had adjourned, the Left-Right Coalition Committee under the leadership of Kim Kyu-sik, a moderate rightist, and Yo Un-hyoung, a moderate leftist, established “a democratic transitional government” in accordance with the Moscow agreement.

On October 13, the AMG announced the creation of the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly (SKILA; *Nam Choson Kwado Ippop Uiwon*), which was to be a branch of the proposed South Korean Interim Government (SKIG; *Nam Choson Kwado Chongbu*). The SKILA replaced the Representative Democratic Council of South Korea.<sup>448</sup> Half of the ninety members of the assembly were to be elected on the basis of population and the other half Hodge would appoint.<sup>449</sup> The military government excluded the extremists of the right-wing that caused the breakdown of the Joint Commission. To strength the position of the United States vis-à-vis the Soviets in future negotiations in the Joint Commission,<sup>450</sup> the military government adopted the policy of

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<sup>448</sup> Ordinance No. 118 of the Military Government, promulgated on August 24. See USAFIK, *Official Gazette*, August 24, 1946, 1.

<sup>449</sup> For the function and power of the Assembly see *Summation*, No. 13 (October, 1946), 13-15; cited in Cho, 132.

<sup>450</sup> Department of State, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 697-98; *United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part III December 1945-June 1950*, 7.

coalition between the right and the left rather than trying to enhance the right-wing group alone.

From the adjourning of the first Joint Commission in early May to the opening of SKILA on October 13, 1946, the Left-Right coalition movement emerged as the crucial political force in the south under American occupation.<sup>451</sup> The military government announced its intention to hold the elections in late October. It was the first election in South Korea since liberation from the Japanese. The handling of the process and result of the election disappointed the coalition group. It became apparent that the rightist forces, led by Rhee and Kim Ku, would overwhelmingly dominate the new Assembly. The leaders of the coalition movement now charged that the election was undemocratic and unlawful<sup>452</sup>; Kim Kyu-sik, the president of SKILA, asked the military government for a complete re-do over of the election, and Yo Un-hyong announced his retirement from politics on December 4, 1946. The Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku faction, along with the left, established the Legislative Assembly in the south on September of 1947, despite America military attempts to eliminate political extremism.<sup>453</sup>

	Elected	Appointed	Total
Right	38	17	55
Moderate	1	15	16
Left	2	12	14

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<sup>451</sup> *HUSAFIK*, vol. 2, ch. 2, 91-92.

<sup>452</sup> Because of the complaining from Kim Kyu-sik and Yo, Hodge ordered new election in Seoul and Kwangwon Province on November 25. However, like the Coalition Committee expected, the result of the new election did not come out and ended with a victory of the rightists.

<sup>453</sup> The composition of the Legislative Assembly in September, 1947. See *Summation*, no. 24, September, 1947, 115-116.

Vacancies	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
	45	45	90

Cited in Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 132.

The Left-Right Coalition policy of the military government to consolidate the moderate forces failed. The main reason for supporting the moderate forces was the AMG fear that if the military government supported the rightist group, the majority of moderates would join the communist camp. Lacking genuine support from the military government, Yo Un-hyong and Kim Kyu-sik's Coalition policy between the moderate right and left political forces designed to establish a unified and independent Korea. That eventuality would have conflicted with American policy which considered the Coalition movement as a mere consolidation of the rightist forces and eventually doomed to fail. In the end, Yo Un-hyong's assassination on July 19, 1947 by the rightist group seemed to doom the last chance of national unification for Korean people.

Korean rightist leaders considered the policy of the AMG an invitation to establish a "separate government" under the mandate of the election in South Korea.<sup>454</sup> The leftist forces, including the communists, opposed the election because they believed it would further divide the country. Facing outright opposition from the left, the military government in September 1946, closed three left-wing newspapers and arrested many prominent Communist leaders. This suppression of the Communist Party marked an important departure from the previous policy under American occupation.<sup>455</sup> In June of 1946, Syngman Rhee while traveling provincial regions also began to make public

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<sup>454</sup> McCune and Grey, *Korea Today*, 76.

<sup>455</sup> Cho, 133.

speeches calling for the establishment of a separate government in the south.<sup>456</sup> When Rhee went to Washington in December 1946 to persuade leaders of the American government that “Russia would not agree to the establishment of a free government for all Korea,”<sup>457</sup> he recommended that the United States support the establishment of a separate government in the south, too.

After the first Joint Commission adjourned in May 1946, General Hodge wrote a series of letters to General Chistiakov, the Soviet commander, to seek a resumption of the Joint Commission for the unification of Korea. His effort failed. He reported to Washington in July that there would be no possibility to reconvene the Joint Commission at the local level and recommended that an effort be made to break the deadlock on the U.S.-Russian governmental level. Approved by SWNCC, the State Department replied to Hodge’s letter on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, and explained that:

State, War and Navy Departments agree that it may eventually become necessary to approach Soviets on a governmental level...For tactical reasons it is not desirable to do so at this time. It is felt that such an approach now would indicate U.S. impatience which would be interpreted by the Soviets as an indication of weakness of our position in Korea. It is felt that desirable to indicate to Soviets in every way possible that U.S. is determined to remain in Korea until U.S. objectives have been achieved.<sup>458</sup>

In October 1946, Major General A.V. Arnold, the chief American delegate on the Joint Commission, expressed that “there was no hope” of negotiation between the two superpowers and recommended that “if nothing is done, it must be on a higher level.”<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> *Seoul Shinmun*, June 8, 1945.

<sup>457</sup> Oliver, *Syngman Rhee*, 231.

<sup>458</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff to General MacArthur, tel. WAR 96485, August 3, 1946, secret; files of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee.

<sup>459</sup> *New York Times*, October 11, 1946.

People in south were becoming very disillusioned by the results achieved by the Joint Commission. October 18, the Coalition Committee issued a request for the reopening the American-Soviet Joint Commission:

In accordance with the decision of the Moscow three-power conference, Soviet Russia and the US, in order to accomplish the assigned task toward the people of Korea, had formed the American-Soviet Joint Commission and had for some time carried on its sessions. But the sudden indefinite adjournment of the said Commission (since May 6, 1946) is not only a matter of deep regret but also retards the realization of the burning aspiration of the Korean people to reestablish their country as an independent state.<sup>460</sup>

On January 20, 1947 General Hodge reported that there was danger of “full-fledged civil war” in Korea “unless positive and cooperative international action is taken immediately.”<sup>461</sup> General MacArthur also urged that “measures [should] be taken immediately to break the U.S.-Russian deadlock in Korea by diplomatic means.”<sup>462</sup> In order to solve the crisis situation in Korea, a Special Inter-Departmental Committee on Korea, consisting of members of the War Department and the State Department, submitted a draft report on February 25, 1947 suggested holding a separate highest level meeting between the United States and the Soviet representatives to resolve all current problems in Korea during the Council of Foreign Ministers, which was supposed to convene in Moscow on March 10, 1947.

On basis of reports from local commanders and a special committee, President Truman gave approval to Secretary of State Marshall to reconvene the Joint

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<sup>460</sup> United State Department of State, October 18, *FRUS* 1946, 8: 749.

<sup>461</sup> Hodge, telegram to MacArthur, January 20, 1947, RG 332, USAMGIK, XXIV Corps; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/1-2247.

<sup>462</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, II, 323.

Commission.<sup>463</sup> While in Moscow, on April 8, 1947, George C. Marshall raised a question which he sent a letter to Soviet Foreign Minister, V. M. Molotov:

I wish to call to your attention to the situation in Korea. The representatives of the Soviet Union and the United States on the joint U.S.-U.S.S.R. Commission in Korea have been unable to make progress towards the establishment of a Korean provisional government. It has been 19 months since the Japanese surrender, yet Korea has profited little. The country is divided into two zones. The Soviet Commander in northern Korea has refused to permit freedom of movement and free economic exchange between these zones. This has precluded freely chosen political amalgamation of the Korean people and has resulted in grave economic distress.

Marshall explained that the policy of the United States toward Korea had the following basic objectives:

1. to assist in the establishment as soon as practicable of a self-governing sovereign Korea, independent of foreign control and eligible for membership in the United Nations;
2. to insure that the National Government so established shall be representative of the freely expressed will of the Korean people;
3. to aid the Koreans in building a sound economy as an essential basis for their independent and democratic state.

If, in the view of your Government, there seems little hope that the Joint Commission in its new meetings can achieve the results expected of it in the Moscow Agreement, I will be pleased to discuss reconsideration of the Moscow Agreement in the effort to find a better way to bring about the establishment of Korea as a genuinely free, independent and stable nation.<sup>464</sup>

In May of 1947, after a subsequent exchange of letters, Molotov responded favorably and agreed to reopen the Joint Commission without clarifying the issues to be discussed or confirming that it would operate on the basis suggested by Secretary Marshall. Marshall stated that the position of the United States was that “Korean

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<sup>463</sup> Truman, *ibid.*, 323.

<sup>464</sup> United State Department of State, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 624-625.

representatives of democratic parties and social organizations shall not be excluded from consultation with the Commission...because of opinions they might hold or may have expressed in the past concerning the future government of their country, provided they are prepared to cooperate with the Commission.”<sup>465</sup>

The Molotov-Marshall correspondence led directly to the second and final meeting of the Joint Commission on May 20, 1947. Why did the Soviet Union resume the Joint Conference? It seems that further delay in negotiations might leave the United States no other choice than to increase economic aid to South Korea and to establish a separate South Korean government.<sup>466</sup> Another reason, according to Soon Sung Cho, is that it seems the Russians may also have believed that the left in Korea would be strong enough to win against the right by the time a general election could be held.<sup>467</sup> While rightists led by Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku were opposed to joining the Joint Commission, the moderate groups and leftists declared their support of the ideas.

By the end of June, there was some progress in consulting with political parties and social organizations in North and South Korea by the Soviets and the Americans. Four hundred sixty-three political parties and social organization submitted applications for consultation. Among them, four hundred and twenty-five were from South Korea: fifty-five percent rightist and forty-five percent leftist. According to the poll, the majority of Koreans favored that some parties and social organizations be eliminated from consultation with the Joint Commission. The poll results were as follows: the KDP

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<sup>465</sup> Marshall to Mr. Molotov, May 2, 1947, unclassified; in US Department of State, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/5-547; *Korea's Independence*, 38-39.

<sup>466</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, May 18, 1947, 995-996; see also, *Korea's Independence*, 39-41.

<sup>467</sup> Cho, 143.



(1227), the Korean Independence Party (Kim Ku's party) (922), the NSRRKI (Rhee's group) (309), the South Korean Labor Party (174), the DPF (9), Nochong (rightist labor union) (91), and Chongpyong (leftist labor union) (14). The poll shows that many Koreans felt the rightist anti-trusteeship parties and social organizations should be excluded from the consultation. The poll also indicates that many Korean people favored the KPR as the country's name (70%) and the people's committees as its governing political body (71%).<sup>468</sup>

The Soviet agreement implied that Moscow would drop its opposition to the participation of Korean political parties which had opposed trusteeship. However, once again, by July, Moscow was insisting on the exclusion of all Koreans who had joined in political parties and social organizations which had participated in the anti-trusteeship activities. The second and final Joint Commission met for five months but it failed, too, because of the same reason; disagreement as to which political parties and social organizations should be consulted in establishing a Korean provisional government.<sup>469</sup>

Faced with the complete stalemate in the Joint Commission and in hopes of finding a way to break the deadlock the Acting Secretary of State, Robert A. Lovett on August 26, 1947, wrote a letter Molotov that "the four powers adhering to the Moscow Agreement meet to consider how that agreement may be speedily carried out." Lovett proposed that representatives of the four powers begin their conversations in Washington

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<sup>468</sup> G-2 "Periodic Report," no. 478, July 11, 1947; cited in Kim Jinwung, "American Policy and Korean Independence" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1986), 185-186.

<sup>469</sup> Detailed information of the process and failure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint –Commission between the Soviet Union and the United State, see Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 143-152.

on September 8, 1947.<sup>470</sup> However, the Soviet Union rejected the offer and replied that the proposed conference was outside the scope of the Moscow agreement. Molotov maintained that the Joint Commission was the only proper agency for implementing the Moscow agreement. He also argued that the impasse “is primarily the result of the position adopted by the American delegation.”<sup>471</sup>

After the Joint Commission adjourned, on September 16<sup>th</sup> Robert Lovett advised Molotov that the American government had resolved to submit the Korean problem to the United Nations.<sup>472</sup> On September 26, the Soviet Union responded by offering the joint withdrawal of occupation forces in order to give the Koreans a chance to solve their problems by themselves and to organize their own government without outside intervention.<sup>473</sup> However, neither side was willing to give up their interests in Korea and it proved impossible to reach an agreement between two countries.

Historian Carl Berger blames the permanent division of Korea on Truman’s belligerent foreign policy against the Soviet Union. According to Cho, Russians viewed American new policies such as the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan “not only as barriers to the spread of communism, but also as serious threats to herself.”<sup>474</sup> Truman’s policies intensified the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. The

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<sup>470</sup> Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Korea, August 26, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 773-774; *Korea’s Independence*, 53-56; Letter from Acting Secretary Lovett to Molotov, August 26, 1947, unclassified; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/8-2647.

<sup>471</sup> Molotov to Acting Secretary of State, September 4, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 779-781; *Department of State Bulletin*, September 7, 1947, 474; *Korea’s Independence*, 53-56 and 57-59; *Department of State Bulletin*, September 28, 1947, 623.

<sup>472</sup> Robert Lovett to Embassy in Moscow for Molotov, September 16, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 790.

<sup>473</sup> For the text of the Soviet proposal, see September 26, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 816-817.

<sup>474</sup> Cho, 157-158.

chances for fulfillment of the Moscow agreement on Korea, he contends, were slim and the possibility of unification of Korea was unlikely.<sup>475</sup> Furthermore, as Cho points out, after World War II “the reduction in the number of states able to play a major role in international politics seriously affected diplomatic flexibility, partly because of the disappearance of an effective balancer.”<sup>476</sup> Thus, there were no nations to break the Korean impasse between the United States and the Soviet Union by their “good offices.”

In conclusion, I believe that an important cause of the failure of the Joint Commission in 1946-1947 was the mindset of the American military government. From the perspective of the Soviet Union, as Shytikov illustrated in a statement at the opening day of the first Joint Commission in May 20, 1946, the Soviet Union had a keen interest in Korea. Therefore, the Soviet Union wanted to build a Korea “friendly” to the Soviet Union and one that would “not become a base for an attack on it” in the future.<sup>477</sup>

Accordingly, the determination of the Soviet Union to fulfill the Moscow agreement was more serious than the United States. Thus, Stalin decided to send higher ranking generals than the United States did. In the Joint Commission, the Soviets emphasized not only Korean independence but also Soviet interests in Korea. As Cumings argues, it was the Soviet Union that suggested the arrangement for a provisional government in the Moscow agreement. Second, the Soviet position was more logical and consistent

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<sup>475</sup> Berger, 73.

<sup>476</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*, 322-362; cited in Cho, 158.

<sup>477</sup> United States Department of State, March 22, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 8: 653; Cho, 156.

throughout the whole conference because they planned to stick to the Moscow agreement.

After adjournment of the Joint Committee, the Left-Right Coalition Policy of the military government was designed to set up a new political structure in the south. Having become weary of the rightists, who proved an obstacle at the conference, the American military government feared that if it only supported the rightist groups, moderates would join the communists. At the beginning of the occupation, had the American military authorities offered administrative power to the coalition groups or the moderate rightists and leftists groups, which comprised a majority of Korean nationalists, rather than belatedly, the coalition groups, which were more acceptable to the Soviets, could have gained political hegemony in the south and possibly built a united, independent, and democratic country.

In the end, as Cumings claims, the military government was fixated on building an anti-communist bulwark in Korea and therefore did not consider Yo Un-hyong and Kim Kyu-sik's coalition groups as the legitimate and proper political forces to carry out reform in the south. They viewed it as a mere instrument to expand the influence of the rightist group. When the coalition group's ideas and policies came into conflict with the American military government policy, it finally was doomed to failure. In any case, the Moscow agreement became a turning point in the politics of Korea. Throughout the duration of the anti-trusteeship movement, the rightists, including many former Japanese collaborators, challenged "the nationalist credentials of the Left" and transformed themselves into "anti-communist" patriots in the south. The rightists reminded the people that the Moscow Agreement resembled the methods of Japanese colonial rulers

earlier. Ultimately, they rallied Koreans together through their leadership of the anti-trusteeship movement and began to oppose decisions of the superpowers. Historical, collective experience and reminiscences of Korean leaders and the people about earlier relations with foreign powers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century now prohibited Koreans from considering the only viable chance for unification of Korea at the time.

More important, as the Cold War climate more deeply influenced politics in Korea, it also intensified the polarization of rightists and leftists. Due to vehement resistance of rightists in the south and a lukewarm attitude among officials of the American military government, the decisions reached in the Moscow agreement could not be fulfilled in Korea. This result, in turn, further illustrated that the relationship between the two superpowers was deteriorating. The hope for a unified Korea anytime soon was fading away. As the trusteehip plan in Korea shows, however, the power relations between local leaders and the superpowers were not one-dimensional, flowing merely from the top down. Sometimes powers relations seemingly flowed in a different or even inverse fashion.

## CHAPTER VI

### Two Koreas and Withdrawal of Foreign Occupation Forces

This chapter investigates why and how the United States took the Korean problem to the United Nations after the repeated failures of the U.S.-Soviet Union Joint Commission and why the Soviets boycotted the American plan. It also describes the political landscape on the Korean peninsula, dramatic changes that occurred since the failure of the Joint Commission, and how Korean nationalists, faced with a permanent division of Korea, tried unsuccessfully to revive efforts to unify the south and north. It shows how South Korea was established and how political and ideological divisions were transformed into a climate of competition between North Korea and South Korea.

After the breakdown of the Joint Commission, the American government realized that the Korean unification problem could not be solved by bilateral negotiation between the Soviet Union and the United States, so it therefore sought a different solution. The United States government encountered increasing pressure from the American public, who wanted their soldiers back home as soon as possible and reduced military spending. President Truman described the situation, writing: "I instructed the State and Defense Departments to weigh our commitments and consider where we might safely withdraw."<sup>478</sup> The American military government in Korea also dealt with increasing

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<sup>478</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325.

disdain among the Korean people who were disappointed with the results attained by the Joint Commission. Thus, policy makers in Washington reviewed Korean policy during the summer and fall of 1947, and as a result, the United States government decided to submit the Korean issue to the United Nations despite strong opposition by the Soviet Union.<sup>479</sup> United States decision makers believed that submission of the Korean problem to the United Nations offered “the greatest chance of bringing about the most favorable conditions for early U.S. withdrawal... without serious damage to the military security position of the United States in the Far East.”<sup>480</sup>

On September 17, 1947, having submitted the Korean question to the United Nations, Secretary of State George C. Marshall told the United Nations General Assembly, saying “We do not wish to have the inability of two powers to reach agreement delay any further the urgent and rightful claims of the Korean people to independence.”<sup>481</sup> Yet, this American action ultimately led to the emergence of separate

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<sup>479</sup> Joungwon Alexander Kim, *Divided Korea*, 79; Soon Sung Cho, *Korea in the World Politics*, 182-83; Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, 41. Faced with the opposition of the Soviet Union, the United Nations had practically no means of unifying of Korea. Goodrich criticize that it merely received a “hot potato” from the United States. For a strong argument against the United Nations role in Korean affairs, see Jon Holliday, “The United Nations and Korea,” in Frank Baldwin (ed.), *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship Since 1945* (New York: Random House, 1973), 109-142. Holliday writes: “The United Nations was not called in to concern itself with Korea by the people of Korea. It was mobilized by the United States to add the weight of what was alleged to be ‘world opinion’ in support of America’s policy,” 109; cited in Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policies of South and North Korea, 1945-1991: A Comparative Study* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1992), 61.

<sup>480</sup> “Strategic Importance of Korea,” Annex to Appendix B, September 16, 1947, 092, RG 319. The State Department plan referred to was that outlined in Lovett’s letter to Molotov of 26 August; cited in William Whitney Stueck, Jr. *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 86.

<sup>481</sup> Address by Secretary Marshall before the UN General Assembly, September 17, 1947, unclassified; *Department of State Bulletin*, September 28, 1947, 618-622; For an excellent study and detailed information the United States government policy in the United Nations, see Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*.

Korean states in 1948. Actually, the United States policy makers sought United Nations involvement for several reasons. First, previous bilateral negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States about Korean unification question did not succeed and led only to stalemate. Secondly, the American leaders understood that the reach of United States' power could sway the opinion of the other members in the United Nations and thereby pressure the Soviet Union to make concessions. Finally, the United States government needed to support the South Koreans who were struggling against the Communists and could not afford to withdraw from Korea until the Korean peoples established their government.<sup>482</sup>

In *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, Leland M. Goodrich explains Washington's decision for United Nations involvement:

Bringing the question before the General Assembly for a United Nations solution seemed, under the circumstances, the most promising course. On the one hand, this would meet a criticism of American policy which had been made at the time of enunciation of the Truman Doctrine that the United States was bypassing the United Nations. On the other hand, it would place on the United Nations and its members some of the responsibility which the United States had hitherto assumed alone. At the same time, since American military security was not considered to be at stake, no vital interest would be jeopardized.<sup>483</sup>

Some historians, however, criticize the Truman administration's decision to involve the United Nations in the Korean situation. In *The Origins of the Korean War*, Peter Lowe argues that the United Nations had no power to bring about a compromise between two countries especially when the United States had undue influence over its members. The

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<sup>482</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 168.

<sup>483</sup> Goodrich, *Korea*, 28-29.



United Nations' resolution, Lowe maintains, was merely a reflection of American policy and was doomed to failure because of Soviet suspicions.<sup>484</sup>

As for the withdrawal from Korea, the State Department officials thought that it was impossible to make and adhere to a firm withdrawal timetable. They believed that United States troops should stay in Korea long enough to build a South Korea strong enough to resist any Communist threat.<sup>485</sup> Like Joseph E. Jacobs, political advisor to General Hodge, they argued that the United States would lose prestige and credit among the Asian peoples, especially in Japan, if they withdrew from Korea.<sup>486</sup> On the other hand, military leaders, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the officials in the Defense Department, regarded the Korean peninsula as a low priority in terms of geo-political strategy or for the security of the United States. They concluded that "the United States has little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea."<sup>487</sup> The continued presence of American troops in Korea, they asserted, caused excessive military expense and trouble. American troops, it seemed, should be withdrawn as soon as possible before they suffered a serious loss of prestige. These United States officials also recommended that Korea receive economic aid while the withdrawal took place.<sup>488</sup>

President Truman sent General Albert C. Wedemeyer to China and Korea from July 23 to September 3, 1947 to assess the situation before making a decision. General

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<sup>484</sup> Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 43.

<sup>485</sup> Butterworth Memorandum, March 4, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1137.

<sup>486</sup> Jacobs to Secretary of State, July 7, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 690-91.

<sup>487</sup> Memorandum to the Secretary of State, September 25, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 815-816. See Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325-26.

<sup>488</sup> Forrestal to Secretary of State, September 29, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 817-18; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325-327.

Wedemeyer recommended in his report to President Truman that to achieve a successful withdrawal, the United States should build up South Korea's strength to enable the newly freed country to resist any potential military threat posed by the Communists.<sup>489</sup>

Wedemeyer believed that a Soviet invasion was "currently improbable," yet also felt American troops should remain in South Korea until the Soviets also withdrew their forces.<sup>490</sup>

At the U.N., the General Assembly voted on September 23, 1947, to place the Korea question on its agenda and referred it to the First Committee for consideration and report.<sup>491</sup> The Soviet Union, however, was not willing to work with the United Nations. Three days later, on September 26, the Soviet delegation on the Joint Commission in Seoul proposed a simultaneous withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea "during the beginning of 1948" and that the Koreans organize their own government themselves without outside interference.<sup>492</sup> The American delegation rejected the Russian proposal, claiming the Joint Commission did not have the authority to consider the question. On October 9, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov offered the same proposal to Secretary of State Marshall. On October 18, Acting Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett replied to Molotov's proposal, stating "the question of withdrawal of foreign occupation forces from Korea must be considered an integral part of the solution of the problem of setting

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<sup>489</sup> The Wedemeyer Report to President, September 19, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 796-803.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*; *New York Times*, 29 August 1947, 7.

<sup>491</sup> U.N. *Official Document, Verbatim Record*, Second Session, 1947, the Plenary Meeting, Vol. 1, 299.

<sup>492</sup> Tel. 381 from Seoul, September 26, 1947, secret; in US Department of States, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/9-2647.

up an independent government for a unified Korea, and added that the Soviet suggestions had been called to the attention of the General Assembly.”<sup>493</sup>

The Soviet proposal created a dilemma for the United States government because American policy was to maintain its troops in South Korea until the establishment of an independent government there while, at the same time, rejecting suggestions for withdrawal of occupation forces.<sup>494</sup> Disregarding evidence that 57 percent of the participants in the survey favored the Soviet proposal,<sup>495</sup> the United States representatives on October 17, 1947, submitted a draft resolution in the First Committee of the General Assembly that the Soviet Union and the United States hold elections in their respective zones of Korea under United Nations supervision no later than March 31, 1948, for the purpose of electing a national assembly and forming a national government. As representation in the Korean National Assembly was to be apportioned on the basis of population,<sup>496</sup> South Korea would be assured two-thirds of the elected representation. Elected members of the national assembly would then be responsible for establishing a national government. In turn, this new government, in consultation with the Commission, would negotiate with foreign occupation authorities for the withdrawal of their troops from Korea.<sup>497</sup> The United States resolution also proposed the creation of a

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<sup>493</sup> Acting Secretary Lovett to Mr. Molotov, Oct. 18, 1947, unclassified; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/10-1747; U.S. Department of State, *Korea, 1945 to 1948* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1948), 6-7.

<sup>494</sup> Hodge to Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 3, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 852-53.

<sup>495</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation—A History of Korean People*, 336.

<sup>496</sup> U.N. Documents, A/C. I/218.

<sup>497</sup> U. N. General Assembly, *Official Record*, Second Session, General Assembly Resolution 112(11), 16-18; Austin to United Nation Secretary-General, October 17, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 832-35; *New York Times*, October 18, 1947, 2; William Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, 90.

United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to observe national elections in the country.<sup>498</sup>

When the First Committee of the United Nation General Assembly took up the Korean question on October 28, 1947, the Soviet Union turned down the American offer and suggested instead counterproposals in a draft resolution. Those documents called for a withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea and establishment of a Korean government by the indigenous people themselves. The First Committee rejected the Soviet resolution. The Soviet delegate submitted another draft resolution to invite elected representatives of the people from North and South Korea to participate in the discussion of the Korean question.<sup>499</sup> On November 5, the First Committee adopted a resolution based chiefly upon the American draft that led to the creation of UNTCOK. The committee then made their report to the General Assembly. On November 14, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly finally adopted the American resolution recommended by the First Committee without change.<sup>500</sup> The main provisions of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly were as follows:

1. Elected representatives of the Korean people should be invited to take part in the consideration of the Korean question, and in order to facilitate and expedite such participation and to observe that Korean representatives were in fact duly elected by the Korean people and not mere appointees of military authorities in Korea, a nine-nation United Nations Temporary Commission on

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<sup>498</sup> United States Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, March 7, 1948, 247-298; United Nations Document, A/C. 18/31.

<sup>499</sup> U.N. Document, A/C. 1/229; Goodrich, *Korea*, 31; U. N. General Assembly, *Official Records*, Second Session, Comms, 1-2 (1947), 606; Stueck, *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>500</sup> U.N. *Official Record*, Second Session, General Assembly Resolution 112(II), 16-18; *New York Times*, November 14, 1947, 11; U.S. Department of States, *Korea 1945 to 1948*, 51-65.

Korea<sup>501</sup> should be established, to be present in Korea, with the right to travel, observe, and consult throughout Korea.

2. Elections should be held in Korea not later than March 31, 1948, “to choose representatives with whom the Commission may consult regarding the prompt attainment of the freedom and independence of the Korean people and which representatives, constituting a National Assembly, may establish a National Government of Korea.”

3. As soon as possible after the elections, the National Assembly should convene, form a National Government, and notify the Commission of its formation.

4. Upon the establishment of a National Government, that government should, in consultation with the Commission, constitute its own national security forces and dissolve all military or semi-military formations not included therein, take over the functions of government from the military commands and civilian authorities of north and south Korea, and arrange with the occupying powers for the complete withdrawal from Korea of their armed forces as soon as possible, if practicable, within 90 days.

5. The Commission may consult with the Interim Committee of the General Assembly in the light of developments.

6. The Member States concerned should afford every assistance and facility to the Commission in the fulfillment of its responsibilities.<sup>502</sup>

Thus, UNTCOK was created to supervise elections throughout the Korean peninsula and had its first meeting in Seoul on January 12, 1948. The next day, it adopted a resolution that “every opportunity be taken to make it clear that the sphere of this Commission is the whole of Korea and not merely a section of Korea.” On January 15, the Commission decided to communicate with the military commanders of North and

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<sup>501</sup> The nine nations named to the Commission: Australia, Canada, China, El Salvador, France, India, the Philippines, Syria, and the Ukraine. The Ukrainian representative did not participate in the activities of the Temporary Commission.

<sup>502</sup> Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Nov. 14, 1947, unclassified; U.S. Department of State, *Korea, 1945 to 1948*, 66-67; U.S. Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin* (November 30, 1947), 1031-32; U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 857-59; Goodrich, *Korea*, 215-17.

South Korea. However, Soviet occupation authorities refused to cooperate with UNTOCK as far as any nationwide election in Korea was concerned.<sup>503</sup>

In response to the Moscow's boycott, UNTCOK decided to consult with the Interim Committee of the General Assembly in February 19, 1948. After hearing from Chairman K. P. S. Menon of India a detailed survey of the political situation in Korea, and despite opposition to separate elections of members of UNTCOK,<sup>504</sup> the Interim Committee adopted a resolution on February 26, 1948 that stated: "as a necessary step therein, the UNTCOK should proceed with the observance of elections in all Korea or, if that were impossible, in as such much of Korea as was accessible to it."<sup>505</sup> This decision meant that there would be election in the south alone and not in North Korea for the time being. It seemed to establish a permanent division of Korea and, thus, America's mission to achieve independent and a unified Korea seemingly had failed.<sup>506</sup> On March 11, despite the opposition from Australia and Canada, UNTCOK decided to observe elections in South Korea on May 10, 1948.<sup>507</sup> The elections were to be conducted on the basis of an adult suffrage and by secret ballot.

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<sup>503</sup> U.N. Document, A/575, add. 1, 8; McCune, *Korea Today*, 223-224.

<sup>504</sup> On opposition to a separate election existed among some of America's allies. From the start, Australia and Canada in UNTCOK maintained that the United Nations should not hold elections in South Korea alone unless the North participated because this unilateral action would actually result in permanent division and two hostile governments in Korea; in United Nation Document, A/AC. 18/SR. 9.

<sup>505</sup> Resolution of the Interim Committee of the General Assembly, Feb 26, 1948, unclassified; UN doc. A/AC. 18/31; *Korea, 1945 to 1948*, 70-71; *New York Times*, February 27, 1948, 10; Austin to Secretary of State, February 24 and March 1, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1128-29, 1134-36; Landon to Secretary of State, March 10, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1146-47.

<sup>506</sup> Goodrich, *Korea*, 49-50.

<sup>507</sup> U.N. Document, A/AC. 19/48.

Meanwhile, the decision of the United Nations-supervised election in Korea had brought about tremendous resistance among the Korean peoples and produced a sharp division among the political groups in South Korea. Except for some groups of the right wing such as Syngman Rhee and KDP, who supported the United Nations' decision to hold immediate general elections, leftists and moderates such as Kim Kyu-sik, Yo Unhyong, as well as the die-hard rightist Kim Ku, opposed the United Nation's plan. Kim Ku argued that the U.N. did not have a right to intervene in the internal affairs of Korea.<sup>508</sup> The latter groups believed that separate elections held only in South Korea created a dangerous situation and perpetuated the division of Korea. These groups in February 1948 formed the National Independence Federation, a loose coalition of rightists and leftists opposed to the United Nations plan. On February 16, 1948, Kim Kyu-sik, Kim Ku, and five other prominent political figures in the south proposed convening a joint conference of political leaders of the South and North to achieve Korean independence.<sup>509</sup>

In an attempt to forestall national elections, North Korea, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, called a North-South Korean Leaders Conference at Pyongyang to discuss plans for the unification and independence of Korea.<sup>510</sup> Some notable leaders in South Korea such as Kim Ku and Kim Kyu-sik, one of the leaders of the American sponsored coalition, who

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<sup>508</sup> Kim Ku, *Paekbom Iichiji*: The autobiography of Kim Ku, annotated by Do Jin Soon, (Seoul; Dolbagae, 1997), 1-9.

<sup>509</sup> The idea of holding a joint conference between North and South Korean leaders to establish national independence was not new. In late January 1948, Kim Kyu-sik, realizing that the Korean question could not be settled either by the Moscow Agreement or by the United Nation, gave serious thought to convening Korean independence without external interference and proposed a conference of northern and southern leaders under UNTCOK's observation; United States Department of Army, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces, Japan, *South Korean Interim Government Activities* 30 (March 1948), 153-154.

<sup>510</sup> *SKIG Activities* (March, 1948), 153-54,

opposed the separate election on the grounds that it would be a permanent division of the country, accepted the North Korean invitation.<sup>511</sup> Prior to his departure for Pyongyang, Kim Kyu-sik issued a statement that contained five principles for national reconstruction:

1. Any form of dictatorship shall be rejected and a truly democratic government should be established.
2. Monopolistic capitalism shall be rejected and private property ownership should be recognized.
3. A united central government shall be established through a general election of the entire nation.
4. No military bases shall be allowed to any foreign power.
5. Regarding the early withdrawal of the two occupation forces, the powers concerned should immediately open negotiations for reaching an agreement as to the time and conditions of withdrawal and make a definite pronouncement to the world.<sup>512</sup>

This conference, in which renowned South Korean political leaders participated, gave Kim Il Sung a golden opportunity to claim that he and his communist party tried to unify Korea with the full support of the entire people.<sup>513</sup> The North-South Joint Conference occurred in Pyongyang on April 19-26, 1948. At the conference, leaders criticized the United Nation plan and passed a series of resolutions. A joint communiqué was issued on April 30. The main points of the communiqué were as follows:

1. The only solution for Korea under the present situation is the immediate and simultaneous withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea.
2. Leaders of both the North and South will never permit an outbreak of civil war or any disturbance which might militate against Korean desire for unity after the withdrawal of foreign troops.
3. Following such withdrawal, a political conference of all of Korea will be convened for the purpose of establishing a democratic provisional government,

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<sup>511</sup> United Nations Document, A/575, add. 2, 90.

<sup>512</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation—A History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Hollym International Corp., 1996), 359-360.

<sup>513</sup> Chong Sik Lee, "Negotiations among Private Groups: The Case of the 1948 South-North Consultative Conference," *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* (December 1970), 384. Quoted in Hanjoon Kim, *Unification Policies of South and North Korea, 1945-1991: A Comparative Study* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1992), 57.



which in turn will “elect” a United Korean Legislative Organ on the principles of universal, direct and equal elections and on the basis of a secret ballot. This legislative organ will then adopt a constitution.

4. The signatories of this declaration will never acknowledge the result of a separate election in South Korea nor support the separate government so established.<sup>514</sup>

When the leaders returned from the north in early May, they reported to the people that Kim Il Sung would not establish a separate government in the north. Furthermore, they announced that the North Koreans would continue to supply electricity to the south and that Cho Man-sik, who was under house arrest, would soon be released.<sup>515</sup> However, the week following the issuance of their joint statement in Pyongyang, the supply of electricity from the north was suddenly cut off.<sup>516</sup> On May 1, the North Korean Supreme People’s Assembly adopted a new constitution. Many hopeful people who supported the North-South Joint Conference now realized that the North Koreans also were preparing to establish a separate government in the north just as the south did.<sup>517</sup> As a result, the movement of the leaders of the south to unify the Korean peninsula failed. It was the last effort for unification by the Koreans themselves. Because of the deterioration in Cold War relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, South Koreans were unable to progress further in their efforts for unification at the time.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea*, 360-361.

<sup>515</sup> *Dong-A Ilbo* (May 7, 1948); Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, 98.

<sup>516</sup> George McCune, *Korea Today*, 147.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-152; George McCune, “The Korean Situation,” *Far Eastern Survey* 17 (1948): 197-202.

<sup>518</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 203; Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policy*, 58.

In South Korea, the struggle between various groups those in support and opposition to the separate election intensified. Throughout the south many bloody events took place. On April 3, 1948, an uprising on Cheju-do, an island located some fifty miles from the southern coast of the peninsular, was partly motivated by the residents' determination to prevent the elections. Erupting suddenly on April 3, the revolt spread. The American military government dispatched reinforcements to the island, but many defected to the rebels. The situation grew so desperate that newspapers in Seoul began to speculate that American troops might be needed to suppress the guerrillas. Such an intervention never occurred, and the rebels on Cheju-do were finally defeated in the spring of 1949. There were a large number of casualties and more than 12,000 houses were destroyed.<sup>519</sup>

According to historian John Merrill, Pyongyang was not in support of the rebellion on Cheju-do. Although the Communist leaders in the North opposed the elections, they realized that the southern guerrillas were too weak to threaten the elections seriously. They preferred to resort to a united front strategy. Accordingly, a conference was held in Pyongyang in April 1948.<sup>520</sup>

At this crisis moment, in order to overcome formidable obstacles, the National Security Council issued the report of April 2, 1948 (NSC 8) which summed up American policy toward Korea on the eve of the elections.<sup>521</sup>

(1) To establish a united, self-governing, and sovereign Korea as soon as possible, independent of foreign control and eligible for membership in the UN.

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<sup>519</sup> John Merill, "Internal Warfare in Korea, 1948-1950: The Local setting of the Korean War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1982), 63-70.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> NSC-8, April 2, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1163-68.

(2) To ensure that the national government so established shall be fully representative of the freely expressed will of the Korean people.

(3) To assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy and educational system as essential bases of an independent and democratic state.

To these may be added that South Korea forces should build up as soon as practicable consistent with the foregoing objectives.<sup>522</sup>

UNTCOK also discussed the subject of the election, and on April 28, it adopted a resolution that the Commission would observe the elections to be held on May 10.<sup>523</sup>

They insisted that the elections were to be held in “a reasonable degree of free atmosphere and the democratic rights of speech, press and assembly were to be respected and observed.”<sup>524</sup> In spite of the bitter opposition of leftists and attempts of Communist terrorists to obstruct and sabotage the elections, general elections were held in South Korea on May 10<sup>th</sup> to elect members to the National Assembly. The election resulted in an overwhelming victory for the rightists including Syngman Rhee and the Korean Democratic Party. It was not surprising that the National Assembly was dominated by rightists: first, many leaders such as Kim Ku and members of the coalition committee, including Kim Kyu-sik, did not participate in the election. Second, the Communist party was outlawed by the military government. Third, Yo Un-hyong was assassinated on July 19, 1947.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> United States Department of State, April 2, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974): 1164. The National Security Council came into being in September 1947 under the terms of the National Security Act. The Council was the supreme coordinating agency in the area of foreign policy; re-cited in William Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, footnote, 115 (274).

<sup>523</sup> The election date, on May 9, was postponed to May 10 because on 9 May an eclipse of the sun was to occur. Hodge felt superstitious Koreans might regard the day as one of “ill-omen.” *New York Times*, 4 April 1948, 11; cited in William Stueck, *ibid.*, footnote, 101 (273).

<sup>524</sup> Jacobs to Secretary of State, April 29, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1184; Cho, 206; Henderson, 155-57.

<sup>525</sup> Jungwon Kim, *ibid.*, 81.

In the first election in Korean history approximately 95 percent of the registered voters turned out to vote.<sup>526</sup> General Hodge announced that the May 10<sup>th</sup> election was “a great victory for democracy and a repudiation of Communism.”<sup>527</sup> On June 25, 1948, the Temporary Commission reported that the results of the election are “a valid expression of the will of the electorate in those parts of Korea which were accessible to the Commission and in which the inhabitants constitute approximately two-thirds of the people of all Korea.”<sup>528</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the announcement that “the elections were in fact a free expression of Korean will,” is questionable.<sup>529</sup> The Korean police intimidated the persons who opposed the election and the rightists were intolerant of their opponents’ political activities, especially the leftists. Max Hastings claims that 589 people were killed by Korean policemen and soldiers in the six weeks before the elections.<sup>530</sup> Also, UNTOCK could not possibly have observed the election because the observers were too few to cover the geographical scope of the election in South Korea. One of obstacles faced by the Temporary Commission was that the Koreans had almost no experience with elections.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> McCune, 229; UN Document A/AC, 19/80, 121.

<sup>527</sup> *SKIG Activities* (May, 1948), 143; *New York Times*, May 11, 1948, 1.

<sup>528</sup> Resolution of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea, June 25, 1948, unclassified; United Nations General Assembly, *Official Records*, Third Session, Part 2, Supplement 9 (A/575/Add 3), 1948, 3; UNTCOK Press Release No. 70, June 30, 1948; Hodge to Marshall, June 28, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1229-30; U.S. Department of State, *Korea, 1945 to 1948*, 725-731; *New York Times*, May 14, 1948, 13.

<sup>529</sup> George M. McCune, *Korean Today*, 229.

<sup>530</sup> *SKIG Activities* (April, 1948), 203; Hasting, *The Korean War*, 41.

<sup>531</sup> Goodrich, *Korea*, 58.

Meanwhile, Richard C. Allen, a military historian on the AMG, describes the elections as “a qualified success.” Allen argues that Rhee’s popularity, first and foremost, in the south cannot be denied. There were some threatening and violent acts, nevertheless many Koreans participated in the election.<sup>532</sup> Joseph E. Jacobs asserts that Rhee, in fact, was:

the outstanding leader in a confused, ill-informed society lacking in leadership—no doubt a bad, self-seeking and unwise leader, but nevertheless a dominating, shrewd, positive, feared character. His large following has nothing to do with love or veneration for the man... It is ... the result of a wide belief that Rhee is the source of all present and future political power in South Korea, the supreme protector of vested interests and the existing order of things, and that he is the man on whom to stake all one’s fortunes. Although treatment of him by the United States and events at times should have created doubts on this score, his unflinching success, through a variety of circumstances in stealing every important and historical public show in South Korea confirms and reconfirms this belief.<sup>533</sup>

Jacobs believed that Rhee probably could have won an election because he was the best-known candidate. He was well known as a Korean patriot. His political connections and strength of personality helped to create the government of South Korea.

#### National Assembly Election Results, May 10, 1948

Party or Organization	Leader	No. Candidates	No. Elected	Percent Elected
Independent	---	417	85	20.3
National Society	Syngman Rhee	235	55	23.4

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<sup>532</sup> Richard Allen, *Korea’s Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Publishers, 1960), 97.

<sup>533</sup> Jacobs to Marshall, February 9, 1948, Box 7125, RG 59; Quoted in William Stueck, *ibid.*, footnote 109, (273-74).

KDP	Kim Song-su	91	29	31.9
Great Korea Youth				
Alliance	Kim Ku	87	12	13.8
Radical Yough				
Corps	Yi Bum-sok	<u>20</u>	<u>6</u>	30.0
		893	198	

By Jungwon Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development 1945-1972*, 82.

Although members of varied political affiliation were elected, there was essentially a three-way alignment within the assembly: 80 members including some of independent members were controlled by the KDP, 61 members committed to Rhee, and 57 affiliated with the KPG group.<sup>534</sup> The most significant factor in the election was that most eligible adults, including women in South Korea, for the first time, enjoyed their suffrage in modern Korean history: 7,837, 504 eligible voters, or 79.9 percent of the Koreans above the age of 21 had registered. Of this number, 51 percent were men and 49 percent were women.<sup>535</sup> The result of the May 10<sup>th</sup> election did not represent “the birth of Western-style pluralistic democracy.” However, it was an expression of desires among Korean people for independence while at same time it represented “a tactical victory for the United States policy.”<sup>536</sup>

The May 10<sup>th</sup> elections produced 198 elected representatives in the Korean National Assembly. Originally, the National Assembly consisted of 300 members. One

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<sup>534</sup> Jungwon Kim, *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>535</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *ibid.*, 362.

<sup>536</sup> Stueck, *ibid.*, 98.

hundred seats, though, were tentatively “reserved” for representatives from the north. The members of the National Assembly represented single district with approximately 100,000 constituents each. The members consisted of large landowners, industrialists, as well as small businessmen, professional men, scholars, and former participants in the provisional government.<sup>537</sup> Syngman Rhee’s the National Society for the Acceleration of Korean Independence won 55 of the 200 seats in South Korea’s new assembly. Rhee easily reached agreements with other rightist parties, giving him a governing majority. On May 31, 1948, the National Assembly convened for its first meeting and elected Syngman Rhee as chairman by an overwhelming majority vote of 180. The Assembly established rules of procedure, organized special committees, and set up a liaison system between UNTOCK and the U.S. military government. On July 12, the Assembly adopted a constitution.<sup>538</sup> It provided for a strong executive branch of government.

In the early stages of the National Assembly, its members discussed a constitution for the Republic of Korea. Like the constitutional founding in the United States, two groups, generally speaking, offered competing visions on how to build the form of government: one favored a strong executive form of government; the other favored a parliamentary system in which the cabinet would be responsible to the legislative body.<sup>539</sup> The National Assembly decided in favor of a strong executive power for the

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<sup>537</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *ibid.*, 377.

<sup>538</sup> The text of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea is printed in U.S. Department of State, *Korea 1945 to 1948*, 78-95; Butterworth Memorandum to Lovett, Under Secretary of State, July 20, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1248; Henderson, 158-59.

<sup>539</sup> Hakjoon Kim, “The Influence of the American Constitution on South Korean Constitutional development since 1948” in his *Korea’s Relations With Her Neighbors In A Changing World*, 139-143.

Republic of Korea on July 12, 1948. The delegates signed and promulgated it into law on July 17.

The constitution provided for three branches of the government—executive, legislative, and judiciary—within a system of a checks and balances. Under its terms the people of Korea would elect their President and Vice-President as well as members of the National Assembly. The President of Korea would appoint all officials of the government including the Chief Justice of Supreme Court and the Prime Minister,<sup>540</sup> although the appointments had to be confirmed by the Assembly. The Constitution also provided the Assembly power to impeach the President. A State Council of eight to fifteen members was created as more or less a consultative body to assist the President. All heads of the eleven executive ministers were made members of this Council, and the President was empowered to appoint or discharge them without the approval of the legislative body.

On July 20, the National Assembly elected Syngman Rhee President of the Republic of Korea and Lee Si Young Vice-President.<sup>541</sup> President-elect Rhee appointed Lee Bum-suk as Prime Minister. The formation of the new republic was completed by early August. On August 9, President Rhee notified the occupation authorities of the official existence of the new government and requested that governmental authority be placed in its hands. On August 12, the American government stated: “it is the view of the United States government that the Korean government so establishment is entitled to

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<sup>540</sup> The Office of Prime Minister was abolished in 1954 by constitutional amendment; Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policy*, 58.

<sup>541</sup> By constitutional amendment in 1952, the President and Vice-President are elected by popular vote.



be regarded as the Government of Korea envisaged by the General Assembly resolution on November 14, 1947,<sup>542</sup> and designated John J. Muccio as special representative of President Truman with the rank of ambassador, to the Republic of Korea.<sup>543</sup>

On August 15, 1948, the third anniversary of Korean liberation, the new government of the Republic of Korea was inaugurated. On December 12, 1948, the United Nation General Assembly expressed its approval for the election and adopted a resolution declaring that “there has been established a lawful government (the Government of the Republic of Korea) having effective control and jurisdiction over that part of Korea where the Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult... and that this is the only such Government in Korea.”<sup>544</sup> In other words, the United Nations had recognized the Republic of Korea with the status of being the only legitimate government on the Korean peninsula,<sup>545</sup> and it was so recognized by the nations of the non-Communist world. However, the new South Korean government was not able to control their new domain. For example, the ill-equipped and ill-trained South Korean army was inadequate to cope with internal security problems.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> *New York Times*, 13 August 1948, 1; U.S. Department of State *Department of State Bulletin* (August 22, 1948), 242.

<sup>543</sup> *New York Times*, 2 January 1949, 1; John J. Muccio File, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence Missouri.

<sup>544</sup> United Nations General Assembly, resolution 195 (III), December 12, 1948; U.S. Department of State *Department of State Bulletin* (December 12, 1948), 729; The text of the U.N. Resolution of December 12, 1948, can be found in Goodrich, *Korea*, 217-19.

<sup>545</sup> Marshall to Lovett, November 16, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1327-29.

<sup>546</sup> Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 230-31.

Soon after American troops started to withdraw, the situation of South Korea became plagued by acts of sabotage and the outbreak of riots. Less than two months after the inauguration of Republic of Korea, there was a serious army mutiny at Yosu and Sunchon when on October 2, 1948 the constabulary forces sent to suppress the revolt on Cheju Island rebelled against the central government. It quickly spread to the southern Cholla province. Some one thousand lives were lost before the rebels were defeated after a month's fighting. According to a report of the U.N Commission in Korea, 9,536 rebels were killed or captured between October 1948 and August 1949.<sup>547</sup> The historian Max Hastings asserts that there were a total of 89,710 police arrests from September 1948 to April 1949 and only 28,404 of the victims were released without charge.<sup>548</sup> On November 2, at Taegu, another constabulary troops' revolt broke out. However, it was also quickly suppressed.

After the Yosu and Taegu revolts, Rhee declared martial law in one-fourth of South Korea<sup>549</sup> and transformed the country into a virtual police state. Rhee asked the United States government to maintain American troops in Korea until Korean forces were able to maintain law and order.<sup>550</sup> In this emergency situation the newly-born Republic of Korea was on the verge of collapse because of a lack of internal security, and the reality that the Department of Army had adopted a schedule to remove all American troops from Korea by the end of 1948. Army leaders believed that their mission to

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<sup>547</sup> Cho, *ibid.*, 232.

<sup>548</sup> Hasting, *The Korean War*, 42.

<sup>549</sup> *Seoul Shinmun*, November 2-8, 1948.

<sup>550</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The Conflict of Korea: Events Prior to the Attacks on June 25, 1950* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), 17.

establish a South Korean government was completed and that the time had come for American troops to withdraw. Accordingly, the army under the National Security Council directive (NSC-8) began its withdrawal. Then, the State Department requested the military leaders to temporarily halt withdrawal and remain in Korea until South Korean forces were able to protect their government from internal conflicts. Consequently, the withdrawal was delayed until June 30, 1949.

In sum, as a result of the breakdown of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Commissions, the United States and the Soviets could not fulfill the Moscow agreement. Also, after World War II ended, Truman faced strong pressure from the people and Congress to bring the soldiers home and reduce the military budget. In addition, due to fears that leftists might soon dominate the Korean peninsula, the U. S. government decided to submit the Korean issue to the United Nations in order to establish a separate government as the best way to guarantee the interest of Americans. Again, U. S. interests took priority. After the announcement of the results of the South Korean election, the rightists supported the decision of the United Nations. Korean nationalists, however, such as Kim Kyu-sik and the die-hard rightist Kim Ku (who, ironically, had helped consolidate rightist political power until then), met together to prevent the permanent division of Korea and to hold the North-South Korean Joint Conference on March 25, 1948. Their efforts came too late. The different regimes already were established in North and South. Furthermore, the onset of the Cold War brought deteriorating relations and less frequent cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union and that development, in turn, impacted local community and politics as well.

As a result of the May 10<sup>th</sup> elections in the south, Syngman Rhee proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948. In response to the formation of the new government in the south, the Russians and Kim Il Sung in the north established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on September 9, 1948 and the Supreme People's Assembly appointed Kim Il Sung as the premier of the DPRK. The existence of two different governments at the time further cemented the division of the peninsula. Yet, at the same time, these two new governments both claimed jurisdiction over all of Korea. The two men who led these rival regimes, Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung, were equally determined to reign over a united nation. Since each viewed the other as nothing but a usurper or a puppet of a foreign country, peaceful unification now seemed unlikely.

## CHAPTER VII

### Syngman Rhee and the First Republic of Korea

This chapter examines who or what department was responsible for the American decision to withdraw from Korea. It also explores Rhee's foreign policy toward the United States. I deal, moreover, with the activities of the U.S. Military Advisory Group in Korea after the withdrawal of the U.S. Armed forces. Lastly, this chapter investigates why the Truman administration decided to intervene in the Korean War. In each case, it appears self-interested agendas were at the core of U. S. policy.

On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (hereafter cited as ROK) was established in the south. Syngman Rhee and the KDP advocated the establishment a separate government to prevent overrun by the Communists.<sup>551</sup> President Rhee was confident in the procedure for establishing of Korea, not only because of his political victory, but also because the United Nations agreed to accept responsibility for the independence of a unified Korea and had shown support for his new government. Rhee believed that the United Nations decision on Korean unification was proof that “even a powerful nation like Russia cannot afford always to ignore world opinion.”<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> Cho, 173-174

<sup>552</sup> Cited in Pyo Wook Han, *The Problem of Korea Unification; A Study of the Unification Policy of the Republic of Korea, 1948-1960* (Seoul, Korea: Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, 1987), 47; U.N. Document, A/575-Add. 2, 63.

On September 12, 1948, the optimism of Rhee and his followers was reflected in the National Assembly which adopted the following resolution for Korean unification:

We hope you, our fellow countrymen in North Korea, will hold a general election soon in a free atmosphere, in accordance with the United Nations resolution, as we did, and elect the true representatives of the people, sending them to the National Assembly.<sup>553</sup>

The National Assembly, it should be remembered, had reserved 100 seats in the Assembly for the representatives of North Korea, once that region held elections under the observation of the United Nations Commission, similar to the action taken in South Korea.

However, contrary to Rhee's expectations, the first Republic of Korea began with a turbulent domestic and international environment. Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, many tragic incidents took place in the south. Internationally, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had deteriorated during the early stage of the Cold War, thus making it difficult to build a democratic country. These internal and external situations shaped the character of South Korean society as it is today.<sup>554</sup>

With the inauguration of the Government of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) was terminated and began to negotiate for the transfer of its authorities. After August 15, the United States Armed Forces in Korea (USAFIK) needed a new agency for assisting the Korean forces. General Hodge was replaced by General John B. Coulter on August 27. General Coulter organized a Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG) under the

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<sup>553</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The Record on Korean Unification 1943-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 12

<sup>554</sup> Andrew Nahm, *Korea*. 372.

command of General William L. Roberts.<sup>555</sup> During the remainder of 1948 PMAG had problems: first, small numbers of advisors in PMAG (100 in August to 241 by the end of the year because of the riots) could not fully train Korean units. Second, the members of PMAG were mainly relegated to administrative purposes.<sup>556</sup> Thus, PMAG officially ended on July 1, 1949 when the withdrawal of the United States troops had been completed. It was then reborn as the United States Military Advisor Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG) under the jurisdiction of Ambassador Muccio.<sup>557</sup>

In the meantime, before the ROK was established, the Joint Chiefs Staff had made plans for the gradual withdrawal of American troops from Korea in the latter part of 1947. They were concerned primarily with three major problems: (1) withdrawal of United States troops; (2) giving military aid and assistance, including training of Korean security forces and furnishing of equipment and supplies; and (3) rendering assistance so as to enable the Republic to develop a viable economy.<sup>558</sup> On August 4, 1947, the SWNCC established an *ad hoc* committee to formulate a withdrawal policy for Korea. Although the United States military authorities favored an early withdrawal, they worried about negative ramifications of pursuing such a course. The planners of the Department of State argued that “the United States cannot at this time withdraw from Korea under circumstances which would inevitably lead to Communist domination of the entire country. The resulting political repercussions might seriously damage U.S. prestige in

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<sup>555</sup> Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 35.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Cho, 251.

<sup>558</sup> *United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part III, December 1945-June 1950*, Research Project No. 252, December 1951, Division of Historical Policy Research, Office of Public Affairs, Department of State, 20

the Far East and throughout the world, and would probably discourage those small nations that currently relying upon U.S. support to resist internal or external Communist pressure. Every effort, it seemed, though, should be made to liquidate or reduce the U.S. commitment of men and money in Korea as soon as possible without abandoning Korea to Soviet domination.”<sup>559</sup>

President Truman dispatched General Albert C. Wedemeyer to China and Korea on a fact-finding mission in July 23, 1947 to evaluate U.S. commitments in Korea, and General Wedemeyer submitted an extensive report to the President on September 19, 1947. The report stated that it would be unacceptable to the American public if American troops indefinitely occupied South Korea. Although he agreed the United States had little strategic interest in Korea, he argued that a withdrawal from Korea would cost immensely in moral prestige and credibility among Asians and allies throughout the world. Therefore, in order to withdraw United States troops from Korea, Wedemeyer recommended that the United States should actively train and equip Korean security forces to fight against the Communists’ threats.<sup>560</sup>

A political advisor in Korea, Joseph E. Jacobs, recommended that policy makers should thoroughly examine this policy before the United States decided to withdraw its troops from Korea: Was Korea vital to the security of the United States and its fight against the Soviet Union? If ROK was crucial to the American policy of containment of the Soviet Union, Jacobs argued, then the United States should liquidate the Moscow

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<sup>559</sup> The Department of State, August 7, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6, 738-39.

<sup>560</sup> Report to the President on China-Korea, September 19, 1947, Submitted by Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, (known as Wedemeyer Report), September 19, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6, 796-803; William Stueck, *The Wedemeyer Mission: American Politics and Foreign Policy during the Cold War* (Athens; The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 29-85.



agreement “as quickly and gracefully as possible” and begin to make South Korea a strong bastion against Soviet dominion. If not, the United States should “get out of Korea as quickly and gracefully as possible,” and make peace with the Soviets in Korea for important leverage in “bargaining in other fields.”<sup>561</sup>

In September 1947, the Soviet Union suggested a proposal in the Joint Commission that in order to allow Koreans to establish their own government, U.S. and Soviet troops should withdraw immediately.<sup>562</sup> Military leaders in Washington thought the Soviet proposal seemed a good opportunity to withdraw American soldiers from Korea as the region was deemed to have little strategic importance and required large expenditures for maintaining American troops. President Truman ordered the State and Defense Departments “to weigh our commitments and consider where we might safely withdraw.”<sup>563</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff<sup>564</sup> on September 26, 1947 presented its views on the troop withdrawal from Korea. This study concluded:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that, from the standpoint of military security, the United States has little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea for the reasons hereafter stated.

In the event of hostilities in the Far East, our present forces in Korea would be a military liability and could not be maintained there without substantial reinforcement prior to the initiation of hostilities. Moreover, any offensive operation the United States might wish to conduct on the Asiatic continent most probably would bypass the Korean peninsula.

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<sup>561</sup> SWNCC176/30, August 4, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 738; Jacobs to Secretary of State, September 19, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6, 803-7; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/9-1947; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325-326.

<sup>562</sup> The Political Advisor in Korea (Jacobs) to Secretary of State, September 26, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6, 816-7; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 324.

<sup>563</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325.

<sup>564</sup> At that time, the JCS was composed of Admiral William D. Leahy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, and General Carl Spaatz.

In light of the present severe shortage of military manpower, the corps of two divisions, totaling some 45,000 men, now maintained in south Korea, could well be used elsewhere, the withdrawal of these forces from Korea would not impair the military position of the Far East Command unless, in consequence, the Soviets establish military strength in South Korea capable of mounting an assault on Japan.<sup>565</sup>

The decision to withdraw American troops from Korea was a sign of American military leaders' reluctant commitment in the area. American military leaders, despite North Korea's threat to South Korea, maintained a limited military commitment to Korea because of little military strategic importance for the security and interests of the United States. They believed that the containment policy should not extend to Korea because of a scarcity of military spending such as money and manpower. General MacArthur supported the JCS decision because he believed that Korea was doomed in any event to become a Soviet satellite. George Kennan, head of the PPS, and Harriman, the former Ambassador to Russia, did not regard Korea as militarily essential to the United States. Kennan felt that U.S. policy should cut its losses and get out of there [Korea] "as gracefully but promptly as possible."<sup>566</sup>

In October 1947 the JCS requested General MacArthur and Hodge's opinions on establishing South Korean armed forces.<sup>567</sup> To create conditions for American

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<sup>565</sup> A Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee on Military Importance of Korea, September 24, 1947, RG 218, CCS 383.21 Korea (3-19-45), sec., 13 and RG 165, ABC 014 Japan (13 Apr 44), sec., 17-E, NA; Memo by the Secretary of Defense (James Forrestal) to the Secretary of State (George C. Marshall), September 26, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6, 817-8; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/9-2647; For the text, see Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 325-6.

<sup>566</sup> JCS memo., JCS 1483/44, September 22, 1947, JCS Records, CCS 383.21 Korea (3-19-45), sec.13, RG 218, NA; Kennan to Butterworth, September 24, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6: 814-5.

<sup>567</sup> Message from War to CINCFE, Oct 16, 1947, Appendix A, SANACC 176/13, SWNCC/SNACC Case Files 1944-1949, edited for microfilm publication by Martin P. Claussen (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1978) (hereafter cited as SANACC).

withdrawal, Hodge claimed that it was necessary to have 100,000 troops for South Korea within a year under substantial U.S. support. He recommended a school to train the Koreans in the use of American equipment. However, unlike Hodge, MacArthur commented that it would be inadvisable to create a South Korean armed force as long as the United Nations handled the Korean problem.<sup>568</sup> MacArthur recommended instead increasing the Korean Constabulary up to 50,000 men.<sup>569</sup>

The resolution of the General Assembly of November 14, 1947 now recommended that the occupation troops be withdrawn “if possible within ninety days” after the establishment of the Korean government.<sup>570</sup> As early as March 1948, as the Temporary Commission on Korea engaged in the implementation of the UN resolution, the State Department took the position that the Department of Army should be requested to “maintain flexibility” in its plan for withdrawal of occupation forces “pending the outcome of anticipated further developments.”<sup>571</sup> In the meantime, Secretary Marshall affirmed the mission of the Korean Constabulary as follows: (1) to show loyalty to the ROK government and insusceptibility to defection in event of abstention from attempted *coup d’etat* by political factions or individuals, (2) to demonstrate capability of maintaining internal order amidst conditions of political strife and inspired disorder, (3) to offer the capability of maintaining border patrols and of offering at least token

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<sup>568</sup> Message from CINCFE to DA, Oct 22, 1947, Appendix B, SANACC 176/13.

<sup>569</sup> Note by the Secretaries to the JCS on South Korean Armed Forces, November 24, 1947, RG 218, CCS 383.21 Korea (3-19-45), sec., 13, NA.

<sup>570</sup> United States Department of State, *Korea, 1945 to 1948*, 66-67; U.S. Department of State *Department of State Bulletin*, November 30, 1947, 1031-1032; U.S. Department of States, *FRUS*, 1947, 6, 857-59; U.N. Resolution 195 (III), in *Year Book of the United Nations 1948-1949*, 290; Goodrich, *Korea*, 215-17.

<sup>571</sup> Memorandum of Conversation by the Chief of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison), March 5, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1139-1141; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/3-548.

resistance to invasion from the north, and (4) to organize in manner to indicate clearly its peaceful purpose and to provide no plausible basis for allegations of its constituting a “threat” to North Korea. In order to carry out such a mission effectively, the Korean Constabulary needed adequate equipment for at least two years normal operation.<sup>572</sup>

On April 2, 1948, the National Security Council (NSC) adopted a policy paper (NSC 8) from the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee (SANACC 176/39) on United States policy in Korea. NSC 8 compromised the State Department and the Department of Army’s withdrawal plans from Korea. To achieve that result, NSC 8 decided the United States government would assist Koreans by extending economic aid to establish a sound economy and creating a 50,000 South Korean Constabulary for self-defense against any overt act of aggression by North Korea. NSC 8 concluded that the United States military commitment should be carried out “within practicable and feasible limits of support” of the government established in South Korea as a means of facilitating the liquidation of United States expenditures in Korea with a minimum of bad effects. NSC 8 also suggested that every effort should be made to create conditions for the withdrawal of occupation forces by December 31, 1948. On April 8 President Truman approved NSC 8.<sup>573</sup>

On same day the Department of Army directed Hodge to create conditions in Korea so that the United States could withdraw forces by the end of the year. Hodge was to train and equip Korean forces primarily for defense and internal security. Therefore, it was anticipated, the South Koreans would not use their forces in an aggressive manner

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<sup>572</sup> The Secretary of State to the Secretary of the Army (Royall) September 17, 1948, *FRUS* 1948, 6, 1302-1303.

<sup>573</sup> NSC-8, April 2, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1163-1169; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 328.

which might cause U.S. involvement in a war. The United States envisaged, after the withdrawal of its occupation forces, the establishment of a diplomatic mission with a military advisory group attached if necessary to administer economic and military aid to South Korea.<sup>574</sup>

While the Department of Army prepared for withdrawal shortly after the South Korean election of May 10, the State Department officials and the occupation authorities in Korea tried to postpone the withdrawal because they believed that a hasty departure of American troops would inevitably have a bad effect upon the Korean situation. On June 23, 1948, Secretary of State George C. Marshall informed the Secretary of Army Kenneth C. Royall that the State Department was making every effort to achieve withdrawal by the end of 1948, but that it still was necessary to maintain sufficient flexibility in the withdrawal plan.<sup>575</sup> Royall replied that the mission in Korea would minimize any anticipated bad effects from the withdrawal. He informed Marshall that the withdrawal would be completed by December 31, 1948 as planned in NSC 8.<sup>576</sup>

Those who opposed the withdrawal of American troops tried to postpone the evacuation until the decision of the United Nations General Assembly on the South Korean government. General Hodge also recommended that delay was essential for stabilizing South Korea and claimed that “the saving of a few days on withdrawal may result in the three years of work and millions of investment in developing of a substitute

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<sup>574</sup> Sawyer, 30.

<sup>575</sup> Secretary State Marshall to Secretary of Army Royall, June 23, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1224-25.

<sup>576</sup> Royall to Marshall, June 23, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6: 1225-6; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/6-2448.

for Communism in Korea being literally thrown away.”<sup>577</sup> Political advisor Jacobs advised against any “unilateral” withdrawal until the United Nations took definite action as “our relationship with Korea is based on the General Assembly resolution.”<sup>578</sup> Based on these recommendations and the pending actions of the General Assembly scheduled to convene on September 21, 1948, the State Department agreed with the recommendation from the field that stressed flexibility.<sup>579</sup>

In order to transfer authority smoothly to the new government, on August 24 General Hodge and President Rhee signed an interim military agreement for the relationship between the USAFIK and the ROK government. It was agreed that the USAFIK would continue to assist the ROK government in training and equipping of the security forces including the Korean Constabulary, coast guard, and police and that the Americans could retain jurisdiction over facilities and base areas necessary for the maintenance of their troops until the completion of their withdrawal from Korea.<sup>580</sup>

The internal situation was also extremely unfavorable for the effectuating decision to withdraw throughout 1948. The Cheju-do rebellion on April 3, 1948, the Yosu and Sunchon rebellion by the ROK Constabulary Regiments in October, and the Taegu riot on November 2, in the end, were suppressed by Korean Constabulary with the help of

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<sup>577</sup> Hodge to Secretary of State, August 14, 1948, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Butterworth), August 17, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1276-1279.

<sup>578</sup> Jacobs to Secretary of State, August, 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1272.

<sup>579</sup> US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea) /6-2348, NA; *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1224-1225; Memorandum by Assistant Secretary Butterworth to Secretary Marshall, August 17, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1276-9; file 501. BB Korea/3-1748.

<sup>580</sup> Jacobs to Secretary of State, August 24, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1287-1288; George M. McCune and John A. Harrison, eds., *Korean-American Relations*, 70.

American military advisory officers.<sup>581</sup> But these tragic incidents also served to destabilize the Rhee government. The American military government handed over South Korea in economic shambles to the Rhee government in August 1948. The continued division of Korea combined with the legacy of a colonial economy that lacked self-sufficiency, trained management, and technical personnel further dislocated the Korean economy.

In addition, rapid population growth due to a high birthrate and heavy influx of refugees from the North and elsewhere brought about added economic problems. South Korea, whose population grew from 15 million in 1945 to 21 million in 1948 with the influx of some 1.1 million Koreans who returned from Japan and China, and over 2.5 million Koreans who fled from the north to the south between August 1945 and June 1950, continued to witness steady population growth with an annual birth rate of 3.0 percent.<sup>582</sup> These growing population pressures, particularly in large cities, created serious shortages of food, clothing, and housing.

In an effort to meet the basic needs of the people, Rhee's government sought economic assistance from the United States. The shortage of food, housing, fuel, and medical supplies threatened the health of the people and created serious social problems. During the period of American military government in Korea economic assistance under the name of "Government and Relief in Occupied Areas Appropriations" (GARIOA) focused on food, clothing, fertilizer, and petroleum. From the liberation of Korea in September 1945 through the end of the fiscal year 1948 the United States made available

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<sup>581</sup> Sawyer, 39-40.

<sup>582</sup> Nahm, 383.

\$212 million in assistance under the GARIOA program.<sup>583</sup> Then Congress allotted \$144 million for the fiscal year 1949 to the GARIOA activities related to the Korean program.<sup>584</sup> Toward the end of the occupation, the United States had two goals for the new Republic: (1) a gradual shift from relief to economic assistance in terms of capital investment, and (2) the strengthening of Korean security forces.<sup>585</sup>

On September 23, 1948, President Rhee sent Chough Pyong-ok, Special Representative of the President of Korea, to the United States to ask for military and economic assistance. Chough expressed the view that the ROK, as a “bulwark of democracy” in the Far East needed United States support until the new Korean government was strong enough to stand alone. Then he presented the essential elements of US support needed: (1) the retention of U.S. occupation forces in Korea for the time being, (2) development in the meantime of effectively trained and equipped ROK security forces, and (3) continued U.S. economic assistance to the new government with emphasis on the rehabilitation of electric power facilities and light industries. Chough emphasized that the disparities between the North Korean armed forces and the South Korean Constabulary and warned that an early completion of the American withdrawal left an unpredictable situation in South Korea.<sup>586</sup>

The Rhee government also had to deal with many other economic problems. Inadequate tax collection, uncontrolled deficit spending, and the steadily increasing

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<sup>583</sup> Cho, 238, cited in footnote 33; Department of the Army’s total allocations under the GARIOA program for Korea were as follows: 1946—\$6,000,000; 1947—\$93,000,000; 1948—\$113,000,000; 1949—\$144,000,000; total—\$356,000,000.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Cho, 239.

<sup>586</sup> The Department of States, September 23, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 6, 1309-1311.



amount of currency in circulation<sup>587</sup> created rampant inflation that worsened the existing economic problems. As for a strategy improve the economic situation, the United States and South Korean governments were in conflict. American policy makers in Washington were highly critical of Rhee's unwillingness to increase taxes as a means of controlling the inflation as strongly recommended by the State Department.

American policy focused primarily on promoting economic stability because survival of the Republic of Korea as a part of the fight against the Communism concerned the United States most. In the wake of those riots and unstable political and economic conditions, John J. Muccio, Special Representative of the President in Korea, recommended on November 12 that the United States government delay the completion of the withdrawal of occupation troops for "several months." Muccio believed that only the presence of the United States Army would guarantee minimum Korean internal and external security.<sup>588</sup>

President Rhee also appealed to President Truman to retain U.S. troops on November 19, 1948 saying that "it is imperative that until the complete loyalty of all the defense forces is assured and until the defense forces are capable in dealing [sic] with any threat from without or within the country, the United States should maintain an occupation force for the time being and establish a military and naval mission as a deterrent to aggression and consequent civil war."<sup>589</sup> Rhee requested additional security

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<sup>587</sup> Between December 31, 1948 and January 1950, the government printed some 150 billion won of currency, making the money worthless.

<sup>588</sup> *Dong-A Ilbo*, November 20, 1948; Muccio to Marshall, November 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1325-27; Department States Records, RG 59, decimal file 740.00119 Control (Korea)/11-1248; Tel. 197 from Seoul, November 12, 1948, secret.

<sup>589</sup> President Rhee to President Truman, November 19, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 2, 1332; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/11-1948.

forces of 50,000 to control subversive elements. In the same month, the National Assembly of Korea passed a resolution calling for postponement of the withdrawal of the United States troops until the ROK established adequate security forces.<sup>590</sup>

Several civilian representatives, including Mr. Muccio, and military leaders of the United States in Korea, now had recommended against a hasty withdrawal from Korea and warned that such a move could trigger the downfall of Republic of Korea. The State Department agreed with their opinions and delayed withdrawal of U.S. troops until the Korean government established a solid internal security force. On November the JCS ordered MacArthur to retain a maximum strength of 7,500 men.<sup>591</sup>

However, military leaders in Washington thought responsibility for the defense of Korea would continue to fall primarily on the United States government as long as United States troops stayed in Korea. Shortly after the United Nations General Assembly adopted its second resolution on Korea on December 12, 1948, William H. Draper, Under Secretary of the Army, suggested to Assistant Secretary of State, Charles E. Saltzman on December 22, 1948 to initiate the withdrawal on February 1, 1949 for the remaining troops in Korea and that it be completed no later than March 31, 1949.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Muccio to Secretary of State, November 19, 1948, *FURS*, 1948, 6, 1331-32; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/11-2748, NA; U.S. Department of State, *The Conflict of Korea*, Far Eastern series 45, 17.

<sup>591</sup> Sawyer, 37; JCS to MacArthur, November 15, 1948, JCS Records, CCS 383.21 Korea (3-19-45), Sec. XVIII, RG 218.

<sup>592</sup> The Under Secretary of the Army (Draper) to Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas (Saltzman), December 22, 1948, FRUS, 1948, 6:1341-3; file 501. BB Korea/12-2248.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union announced that the evacuation of its troops had been completed on December 25, 1948.<sup>593</sup> After the Soviets left North Korea, the United States, with the only foreign troops on the peninsula, was placed a difficult position and Soviet Union propaganda sources relished in their dilemma. After the Second World War ended, the Russians argued, the people of Asia wanted “above everything else to have freedom from Western colonialism,”<sup>594</sup> however, the officials in the United States and the Rhee government strongly opposed a hurried withdrawal. It proved problematic for the Truman administration that the United States troops’ withdrawal from Korea could result in communist domination of Korea and thereby Japan would be surrounded by communist threats on three sides.<sup>595</sup>

To improve the Korean economy Truman announced on August, 1948 that the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) should take over the responsibility for the economic aid program in Korea from the Department of Army effective January 1, 1949.<sup>596</sup> Operating the aid program as the sole agency during the period between the establishment of Republic and the outbreak of the Korean War, the ECA devised the long-term aid program to promote economic stability in an effort to contribute to the political stability of the new Republic.<sup>597</sup> In turn, the ECA recommended that the Korean government (1) balance its budget throughout the governmental economy and increase

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<sup>593</sup> *New York Times*, December 31, 1948; Department of State, *The Conflict in Korea*, 6.

<sup>594</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948, 1967), 327.

<sup>595</sup> The Assistance Secretary of State for the Occupied Areas (Saltzman) to the Under Secretary of the Army (Draper), January 25, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7,2: 944-45.

<sup>596</sup> Memo by President Truman to the Secretary of State, August 25, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 6, 1288-9.

<sup>597</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Director of the Bureau of the Budget (Frank Pace, Jr.), May 16, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1024-1029.

revenues; (2) maintain controls over the issuance of currency and over credit in the interest of economic stability; (3) regulate foreign exchange transactions and foreign trade to insure that all foreign exchange resources made a maximum contribution to the welfare of the Korean people and recovery of the Korean economy, etc.<sup>598</sup> The State Department supported the ECA plan by arguing that South Korea “is the only effective foothold of western democracy on Continental Northeast Asia,” a place from which the United States could not withdraw without serious damage to American prestige.<sup>599</sup>

The Economic Cooperation Administration’s program of assistance to Korea went beyond the relief plan and eventually looked toward a rehabilitation program to achieve self-sufficiency for the Korean economy. The ECA requested a \$150 million aid bill for the fiscal year 1949. President Truman submitted the request to the Congress on June 7, 1949 and argued that the aid bill was “the minimum aid essential... for progress toward economy recovery.” Truman explained that “the aid already being provided was essentially for basic relief and that without the continuation of that relief the Korean economy would collapse inevitably and rapidly.” Truman also stated that “relief alone would not make it possible for the Republic of Korea to become self-supporting” and that “the Republic would remain dependent upon the level into the indefinite future—and subject to the same inevitable collapse at any time the relief should be withdrawn.” In short, he recommended that the aid program should be not only for relief but also for

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<sup>598</sup> Eighth Report to Congress of the Economic Cooperation Administration, Supplement (H.Doc. 645, Part 2), 1950, 46-53.

<sup>599</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Budget Director, May 16, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 1024-1029.

recovery. Truman explained that the ROK would “stand as a beacon to the people of northern Asia to resist the control of the Communist forces” with U.S. assistance.<sup>600</sup>

Attacking the State Department’s policy in the Far East, and especially in China, Republicans insisted that \$150 million of aid for Korea would be useless. After the fall of China, Republicans thought there would be no chance for the survival of South Korea in case of a full-scale invasion from the North. After nearly three weeks of heated discussion and testimony, the Korean aid bill was approved by the committee and reported to the House on July 1, 1949. However, despite strong lobby by the Truman administration, it was not brought to the floor of the House until January 1950, because the Rules Committee decided to postpone a vote until China policy was settled.<sup>601</sup> On January 19, 1950 when the Korean economic aid bill was brought to a vote, the House narrowly rejected it, 193 to 191.<sup>602</sup>

Shocked by the defeat of the bill, the Truman administration compromised with Republican leaders in the Senate. Acheson warned Truman that “this action, if not quickly repaired, will have the most far-reaching adverse effects upon our foreign policy not only in Korea but in many other areas of the world.”<sup>603</sup> As a result, the Truman administration replaced the Korean aid bill with the ‘Far Eastern Economic Assistance Act’ which included \$103 million to the Chinese Nationalists. It authorized a total of \$110 million to South Korea for the fiscal year of 1949-1950, the first year of a

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<sup>600</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Department State Bulletin*, June 19, 1949, 782-83.

<sup>601</sup> *Dobbs, The Unwanted Symbol*, 161-168.

<sup>602</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, February 6, 1950, 212; see also U.S. Congress, House Report No. 962, *Aid to Korea*, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, HR 962 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949).

<sup>603</sup> Letter from Acheson to Truman, January 20, 1950. *Department of State Bulletin*, February 6, 1950, 212.

contemplated three year program with an estimated total expenditure of about \$285 million.<sup>604</sup> (Actually, Congress took no action on the Korean aid bill during 1949 and only gave the ECA \$60 million for economic aid—\$30 million by the Third Deficiency Appropriation Act and another \$30 million by the Second Supplemental Appropriation Act)<sup>605</sup>

After the House rejected the Korean economic aid bill, an amended bill (which provided \$60 million instead of \$90 million) passed both the House and the Senate on February 14, 1950.<sup>606</sup> Congress later cut Korean aid to \$50 million, and the appropriation under this authorization was not actually made until June 29, 1950, after the Korean War broke out.<sup>607</sup> Economic assistance from the United States was essential to the consolidation of the new Korean government. As Arthur C. Bunce, the head of the ECA in Korea, claims, the Korean aid bill symbolized the U.S. containment to defend the free world against Communist threat.

Nevertheless the long delay of American aid by Congress during this critical time, the economic situation, especially inflation, in Korea improved to achieve a stable economy before the outbreak of Korean War.<sup>608</sup> The State Department in Washington emphasized to President Rhee that the military and political situation could not be considered “more important than the economic situation or as not being directly affected

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<sup>604</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, February 6, 1950, 212; State Department, *The Conflict of Korea*, 8. For detailed information see U.S. Congress, House Report 2495, *Background Information on Korea*, 27-33.

<sup>605</sup> U.S. Congress, House Report No. 962, *Aid to Korea*, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 21-26; U.S. Congress, *Background Information of Korea*. 27.

<sup>606</sup> Department of States, February 14, *FRUS* 1950, 7, 12.

<sup>607</sup> U.S. Department of State, *A Historical Summary of US-Korean Relations*, 74-5; Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1039-40; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 329.

<sup>608</sup> Cho, 243.

by the latter.” They feared that the irresponsible financial policies of the Korean government, such as uncontrolled deficit spending, and the increasing amount of currency in circulation, if continued, would nullify the economic aid program. Unless the Korean government showed the “willingness and the ability to inaugurate measures designed to stabilize the internal economy of Korea,”<sup>609</sup> in the early 1950s, Secretary of State Dean Acheson warned President Rhee that the United States would have to “re-examine, and perhaps make adjustments” in the aid program to Korea.<sup>610</sup>

As the situation in China deteriorated with the collapse of the Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist regime in January 1949, the United States no longer intended to resist Communist aggression on the Asian continent.<sup>611</sup> The Chinese situation now made the defense of South Korea appear to military planners as strategically impracticable. However, in opposition to this view, some officials in the State Department also reiterated that Korea’s importance to American policy.<sup>612</sup> They argued that the Republic of Korea was “the only remaining foothold of democracy in Northeast Asia.” If the communists overran the Korean peninsula, it would encourage the Communists in Japan and discourage Japanese people who were striving to build a democratic nation. Edgal T. Johnson, the director of the ECA, claimed that a strong Korea would also protect Japan and further American interests despite Mao’s victory in China.<sup>613</sup> The Japanese economy

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<sup>609</sup> US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 895b. 13/4-350; *Department of State Bulletin*, April 17, 1950, 602.

<sup>610</sup> *New York Times*, April 8, 1950; *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 9, 1950.

<sup>611</sup> Cho, 245.

<sup>612</sup> Dobbs, 161-163.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

needed support from outside sources, and Korea was a natural and complementary trading area.<sup>614</sup>

Thoroughly reviewing the Chinese and Korean situations, the NSC decided to develop a Marshall type plan for Korea, the new “symbol in the Cold War.” The NSC concluded that sufficient economic and military aid should be continued to enable the Korean army to fight against the Communists. W. Walton Butterworth, the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, advised Rhee to avoid repeating Chiang’s mistakes:

I said that I also felt that it was essential that the new Korean Government avoid the mistake of becoming static and anti-progressive, and thereby losing the support of the people...I added that the static character of the Nationalist Government and its failure to accommodate itself to the developing needs of the Chinese people had alienated the support of many Chinese who were in no sense of the word Communists.<sup>615</sup>

In January 1949, Muccio reported that the ROK government was still weak but stronger than in earlier months. Also, ROK security forces were improving and now capable of dealing with sizable internal disturbance, revolt, and border attacks but not ready to defend against an outright invasion from the North. Muccio recommended an increase on the Korean army to 65,000 men, 45,000 police, and 4,000 coast guards. Muccio stated that U.S. support would contribute not only to the survival of the ROK, but also provide greater security for the U.S. position in the Far East. Muccio suggested that additional weapons, equipment, and other items should be provided to the security forces

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<sup>614</sup> In his article Ronald L. McGlothen argues that the primary area of concern for American policymakers, and of Dean Acheson in particular, was not the economy of Korea itself but for its psychological impact to Japan and for regional recovery and Japan-centered plans in Asia. Ronald McGlothen, “Acheson, Economics, and the American Commitment in Korea, 1947-1950,” *Pacific Historical Reviews*, (1988): 23-54; For more details on the relation between Acheson and the American reconstruction of Japan and the American commitment in Korea, see, Ronald L. McGlothen, *Controlling The Waves: Dean Acheson and U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), ch. 2 and 3.

<sup>615</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 941.



and that the final withdrawal of the American troops should be postponed until July 1, 1949, which was less than two months beyond the date the Army favored.<sup>616</sup>

General MacArthur, however, favored an early withdrawal of American troops from Korea. He maintained that the United States did not have the capability to train and equip South Korean troops to enable them to resist a full-scale invasion if accompanied by internal disturbances fomented by the Communists. The South Korean defense forces, MacArthur asserted, should be able to resist internal conflicts, not overt aggression from the outside. If a serious threat developed, the United States would have to give up active military support of the ROK forces.<sup>617</sup> But MacArthur suggested May 10, 1949 should be the last date for withdrawal to thereby gain the psychological benefit of the date—the anniversary of the first general elections in Korea.<sup>618</sup> Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall agreed.<sup>619</sup>

On February 8, 1949, President Rhee met with Secretary of the Army Royall, General Wedemeyer, and Ambassador Muccio to review the question of American troop withdrawal and the training of the Korean army in Seoul. In this meeting, Royall expressed the opinion that American troops should withdraw as soon as possible to relieve burdens of the United States army. On the other hand, Muccio was concerned with credibility and the moral responsibility of the United States. To him, the survival of the

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<sup>616</sup> US Department of State, *FRUS* 1949, 7: 947-952; *Tel.* 69 from Seoul, January 27, 1949, top secret; in US Department of States, RG 59, decimal file, 740.00119 Control (Korea)/1-2749.

<sup>617</sup> Sawyer, 37; Schnabel, 34-5; Butterworth Memorandum, January 10, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2, 942; William Stueck, et al., "An Exchange of Opinion—Cold War Revisionism and the Origins of the Korean Conflict: The Kolko Thesis," *Pacific Historical Review* 42 (1973): 541-42.

<sup>618</sup> Sawyer, *ibid.*

<sup>619</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 946.

ROK was important to United States prestige among its other allies. He argued that until the preparation of at least a minimal South Korean defensive capability, America should not withdraw its troops.<sup>620</sup> On March 12, 1949, the Department of the Army recommended that the ROK receive minimum equipment and supplies essential for an Army of 50,000 men and a Coast Guard contingent of 3,000 sailors. In practice, the Army rejected any expansion of military assistance to the ROK.<sup>621</sup>

On March 22, 1949, the State Department and Defense and the National Security Council thoroughly reappraised the position of the United States Korean policy. The report, called NSC 8/1, analyzed developments in Korea based on the broad objectives of U.S. policy. Consequently, NSC 8/1 was revised, and then presented to the NSC meeting as NSC 8/2. On March 23, 1949 President Truman signed it as policy.<sup>622</sup> NSC 8/1 not only pointed out a serious military imbalance between the North and the South and the existence of an increasing North Korean threat to the South, but also indicated the United States had three possible alternative courses of action: (1) to abandon the ROK to Communist domination, a course of action which...would do violence to the spirit of every international commitment undertaken by the U.S. during and since the war with respect to Korea and which might damage irreparably American prestige and influence throughout the Far East (2) to guarantee unconditionally the political independence and territory integrity of South Korea, by force arms if necessary, a course of action which would commit the United States to continued direct political, economic and military

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 956-959.

<sup>621</sup> JCS 1483/62; in RG 218, JCS Records, CCS 383.21 Korea (3-19-45), Sec. 13.

<sup>622</sup> NSC Report to the President, March 22, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 969-78.

responsibility in Korea, even to the extent of risking involvement in a major war in an area in which virtually all of the natural advantages would accrue to the USSR; or (3) as a middle course, to establish within practicable and feasible limits conditions of support for the government of the Republic of Korea as a means of facilitating the reduction of the U.S. commitment of men and money there while at the same time minimizing to the greatest practicable extent the chances of South Korea's coming brought under Communist domination as a consequence of the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces.<sup>623</sup> Favorably disposed to implementing the last option, the State Department limited U.S. assistance in training and equipment to a level needed to maintain current strength.<sup>624</sup>

The NSC 8/2 planned to maintain a well-trained and equipped Army of at least 65,000 men (formerly the constabulary) for internal order and border security, 4,000 coast guard for suppression of smuggling, piracy, illegal entry and hostile infiltration by sea into South Korea and 45,000 police for law enforcement and cooperating with the Korean army in the preservation of public order.<sup>625</sup> While the JCS, the Army, and MacArthur stressed that a withdrawal of remaining United States troops should be completed no later than June 30, 1949, Ambassador Muccio emphasized the importance of Korea for U.S. prestige or credibility in Asia. The weak ROK government wanted to keep the American troops until its forces were capable of mounting a viable defense against North Korea. President Rhee, too, had continuously requested military and

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid; US Department of State, *FRUS* 1949, 7, 2: 975; Department of State, *The Conflict in Korea*, 6-10.

<sup>624</sup> NSC 8/1, JCS 1483/63; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, II, 328.

<sup>625</sup> NSC 8/1, March 16, 1949, DA Records, P&O 091 Korea, Sec. 1-A, RG 319, NA; NSC 8/2, March 22, 1949, *FRUS* 1949, 7, 2: 969-78; A Report to the President by the NSA Decision on the Position of the United States With Respect to Korea (NSC/2), March 22, 1949, RG 319, R&O 091 Korea, sec., 1-A, sub. Nos., 1-10, NA; NSC-8/2, NSC File, NA.

economic aid. Although it directed the completion of the withdrawal, NSC 8/2 made clear that it would not lesson US support to the ROK government.<sup>626</sup> When Ambassador Muccio requested more offensive equipment from the United States government, military planners in Washington dismissed such requests as completely beyond the scope of NSC 8/2.

During late 1948 and 1949, Rhee's government tried to stall the American troop withdrawal. The South Korean government argued that it would induce a North Korean invasion, thus American troops stayed in South Korea until the ROK security forces were strengthened. However, the United States was determined to complete the withdrawal of its troops from South Korea on the assumption that there would not be a North Korean military attack. Rhee realized that his government could not stop the withdrawal and, therefore, sought military and economic assistance from the United States government as an alternative.

Concerned about the security of the ROK, President Rhee expressed great anxiety for the future of South Korea in his statement announcing the withdrawal time table:

The United States has left us with a problem too great to be solved by ourselves alone, especially with half of our strength shorn away. We do not believe that the United States can or will withdraw its remaining troops until it has answered our question as to what will be done to aid us in case of a communist attack from across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel line.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS* 1949, 7, 2: 969-978.

<sup>627</sup> Memo by Butterworth to Secretary of State, April 18, 1949; President Rhee's statement, in Muccio to Secretary of State, May 7, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 992-3.

President Rhee and the United States Army seriously disagreed over the question of American military assistance and defense commitments to South Korea. For his part, Rhee demanded one of three conditions from the U.S. government:

What I am advocating as a solution to the grave threat against Korean and all Asia by the aggressive forces of Communism is adoption of one of the following three things: (1) the formation of a Pacific Pact similar to NATO; or (2) an agreement between the United States and Korea alone, or with some other nations, for mutual defense against any aggressor nations; or (3) a public declaration by the United States of a pledge to defend a reunited, democratic, independent Korea, in accordance with the policy of President Truman respecting Communist aggression.<sup>628</sup>

Rhee was most interested in a mutual defense treaty with the United States. Thus, in July 1949, Rhee sent Chough Pyong-ok, a special envoy, to Washington to ask for increased armaments to defend against a North Korean invasion. At the meeting on July 11, 1949, the Secretary of State Dean Acheson rejected proposals submitted by Chough; including, first, the expansion of the Korean army from 65,000 to 100,000; second, a public American assurance to assist South Korea in the event of an armed attack; and third, the formation of a "Pacific Pact" similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>629</sup> Rhee's government alleged that a North Korean invasion was imminent. However, Washington regarded such claims with some skepticism. In order to guarantee the security of the ROK, Rhee sought to establish a regional defense body among anti-communist nations in the Pacific like the NATO. In August 1949, Rhee received Chiang Kai-shek to discuss the matter further. The Chinese leader had been an advocate of a Pacific defensive alliance since May 1947.

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<sup>628</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 992.

<sup>629</sup> Memo of Conversation by the Secretary of State, July 11, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1058-59.

President Truman recognized the importance of Korea, yet believed that South Korea could survive a communist threats with American assistance. On June 7, 1949, Truman appealed to Congress for a continuation of military and economic assistance to South Korea because “the Korean republic, by demonstrating the success and tenacity of democracy in resisting Communism, will stand as a beacon to the people of northern Asia in resisting the control of the Communist forces which have overrun them.”<sup>630</sup> As noted earlier, President Truman asked for economic aid to Korea in the amount of \$150 million for the fiscal year of 1949. Truman’s message to Congress on June 7 was a new direction for American policy toward South Korea and its effort to create a stable nation.

On June 29 1949, the withdrawal of the last United States troops from South Korea was completed. However, in accordance with the request of the Korean Government, the American Military Advisor Group in Korea (KMAG) was established with only some 500 military advisors under Brigadier General William L. Roberts to train the Korean security forces.<sup>631</sup> KMAG was put under direction of Ambassador Muccio. During the period of July 1949 to June 1950, United States military assistance to South Korea can be categorized into two parts: (1) the military advisory group’s training of the ROK forces, and (2) the aid of military equipment for Korean security forces.<sup>632</sup> Despite completing its withdrawal, the United States left behind nearly \$56 million worth of

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<sup>630</sup> US Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, June 19, 1949, 781; Quoted in *Glenn D. Paige, ed., 1950: Truman’s Decision* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1970), 28-29; Cho, 241.

<sup>631</sup> *Department States Bulletin*, June 19, 1949, 786-7.

<sup>632</sup> US Department of State, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 969-978.

small arms, ammunition, light artillery, and small vehicles “sufficient for a force of 50,000 men under the Surplus Property Act.”<sup>633</sup>

The mission of KMAG was to develop internal security forces for the Republic of Korea, especially apt in defensive training and weapons within the limitations of the Korean economy rather than assume an aggressive posture.<sup>634</sup> As a result, the South Korean army had few offensive weapons such as tanks, artillery or bombers. One American military advisor claimed the ROK army “could have been the American army in 1775.”<sup>635</sup> In July 1950, three weeks after the Korean War began, Brigadier General Roberts, former head of the U.S. Military Advisory Group in Korea, explained that “South Koreans had not been given tanks, heavy artillery, or combat airplanes because the U.S. was afraid that the South Koreans would attack Communist North Korea.”<sup>636</sup> Muccio stressed the importance of granting additional military assistance for strengthening the Korean Coast Guard and creating a Korean Air Force. On September 1949, Muccio sent a report to Washington warning of North Korea’s growing airpower:

In this connection, recent and persistent reports from North Korea suggest that the Soviets are supplying the North Koreans with a relatively sizable number of comparatively high-performance military aircraft. Should it be confirmed, as now seems indicated, that the North Koreans are in possession of military aircraft giving them a greater superiority, it will then be necessary to consider steps looking to the strengthening of the air arm of the Republic of Korea.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 30, 1949; Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, 35; Sawyer, 96-97.

<sup>634</sup> Sawyer, 57.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>636</sup> *New York Times*, July 24, 1950.

<sup>637</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1042.

President Truman believed that U.S. economic support could not ensure the safety of South Korea and that military assistance was necessary. On October 6, 1949, Congress approved Truman's Mutual Defense Assistance Act and authorized the allocation of \$10.2 million to Korea.<sup>638</sup> The MDA program would provide equipment for the existing ROK internal security forces to do their missions under three priorities: (1) to preserve internal security, (2) to prevent border raids, (3) and to deter armed attack from North Korea. Thus, a bilateral agreement between the two nations was signed on January 26, 1950.<sup>639</sup> On March 29, 1950, a final determination on the specific items most urgently required by the Korean government received priority. By June 25, 1950 when North Korea invaded, the South Korean military had received only \$52,000 worth of signal equipment, and spare parts valued at \$298,000 were *en route*, however, only \$1,000 worth of spare parts actually had been received before the Korean War.<sup>640</sup>

Although realistically facing increasing threats from the North, South Korean officials also exaggerated the strength of North Korean military forces when pleading for additional aid to strengthen ROK forces. President Rhee appealed directly to Truman for more military assistance, citing the danger of a Communist assault from North Korea "in the immediate future."<sup>641</sup> Rhee informed Truman that "we have ammunition available

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<sup>638</sup> This fund was essentially for the maintenance of material and spare parts for the substantial quantity of military equipment already given to Korea.

<sup>639</sup> For the text of the treaty, see U.S. Department of Army, U.S. Agreement with Republic of Korea (Washington, 1954), 9 & 11; cited in Cho, 253.

<sup>640</sup> Sawyer, 103; US Congress, House, Foreign Affairs Committee, Report 2495, *Background Information on Korea*, 34; Department of State, *The Conflict in Korea*, 11.

<sup>641</sup> President Rhee to President Truman, August 20, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1075-1076; file 895.20/10-749, encl. 1.



only for two days... We will not attack the territory north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.”<sup>642</sup> Truman replied to Rhee’s plea and emphasized that the development of a sound economy was far more important than the insupportable burden resulting from amassing large military forces.<sup>643</sup> Truman stressed the importance of an economically stable environment because political insecurity and social disorder in the world was an open invitation for communist infiltration.<sup>644</sup>

Ambassador Muccio reported that the \$10.2 million program was “patently inadequate” for Korea’s needs and recommended that the State Department provide additional assistance of \$9.8 million which would bring the total sum available for military aid to Korea for fiscal year 1950 to a minimum of \$20 million to fund counter mobilization against steadily expanding North Korean forces.<sup>645</sup> Muccio urgently asked for funds that could be made available from the \$75 million authorized to President Truman for China and the “general area” by the MDA Act of 1949.<sup>646</sup> However, Washington rebuffed Muccio’s proposal. The JCS and Defense Department believed that “there is no military justification for additional military assistance to Korea,” and that Korea had already received all the necessary aid it needed.<sup>647</sup> Later, Truman argued that

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> President Truman to President Rhee, September 26, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1084-85.

<sup>644</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 330.

<sup>645</sup> Muccio to Secretary of State, November 18, December 1, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 1099-1101, 1102-4; Sawyer 102.

<sup>646</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS* 1949, 7, 2: 1122; *FRUS* 1950, 7, 2: 15-18; U.S. Congress, *Background Information on Korea*, 33-40.

<sup>647</sup> Memo by the Acting Director of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (Ohly) to the Assistant Secretary of State for the Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), May 10, 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7, 82-3.

there were many “points of contact between East and West, from Norway through Berlin and Trieste to Greece, Turkey, and Iran; from the Kurile in the North Pacific to Indo-China and Malaya.”<sup>648</sup>

On January 12, 1950, Secretary Acheson made a controversial speech before the National Press Club in Washington, D. C. where he described an American “defense perimeter” that excluded Korea and Formosa in the Pacific. The Pacific defense perimeter of the United States ran along the Aleutians to Japan, the Ryukyus, and down to the Philippine Islands. He stated that

So far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific was concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack... Should such an attack occur... the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitment of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations... to protect their independence against outside aggression.<sup>649</sup>

Acheson implied that Korea, though not within in the defense perimeter in the Pacific, would not be utterly abandoned and that the United States would continue to support South Korea in association with the United Nations until ROK could establish itself firmly.<sup>650</sup>

Revisionist historians like I.F. Stone and Bruce Cumings argue that Acheson’s speech gave Stalin and Kim Il Sung the wrong signal, it seemed that the United States would not intervene if the North attacked. They maintained that MacArthur, Syngman

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<sup>648</sup> Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 331.

<sup>649</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 357-8; Cho, 259-260; For the full text of Acheson’s statement, see *Department of State Bulletin*, January 23, 1950, 111-116.

<sup>650</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, January 23, 1950, 116-117; Cho, 261.

Rhee, and Chang Kai shek invited the Communist attack on South Korea.<sup>651</sup> Traditional historians claim that Acheson's speech was not intended for that purpose. His speech was the confirmation of long-standing U.S. military strategy toward Korea. Since September 1947 the NSC had decided that Korea had no strategic importance for American defenses, the same conclusion that would be reached by the same agency again NSC in 1949.<sup>652</sup> The defense perimeter, it should be noted, had not been drawn by Acheson but by the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the concurrence of the National Security Council and President Truman.

On March 1949, General MacArthur had also proposed a line of defense that ran through a chain of islands from the Philippines to the Aleutians through the Ryukyu Archipelago.<sup>653</sup> United States policy makers considered Japan and the Philippines the most vital to United States security interests and stability in the Pacific. In case of full-scale war in East Asia, the Korean peninsula supposedly would be by-passed. The United States' fears were primarily about internal threats rather than external ones. Therefore, the United States became increasingly concerned about South Korea's critical economic situation and its political development. Acheson's speech not only led to great controversy among the American people but also contributed to critical consequences in South Korea.

As Senator Arthur Vandenburg described the situation, the United States now faced a different world because of the explosion of the Soviet atomic bomb in September

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<sup>651</sup> I.F. Stone, *The Hidden of the Korean War* (New York; Monthly Review Press, 1952); Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War II: The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>652</sup> Cho, 260.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

22, 1949 and the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's forces in China December 8.<sup>654</sup> President Truman, with the National Security Council, made a readjustment of policy and approved a paper known as NSC-68. This paper called for a massive rearmament program and stressed the expansion of the military strength of the United States and its allies including both atomic capabilities and conventional forces.<sup>655</sup> Although NSC-68 required an immediate and large scale military build-up, there was no chance of this proposal passing Congress. However, the outbreak of the Korean War saved NSC-68.

From the beginning of their occupation, the Soviet Union had actively assisted the military and economy of North Korea, especially during the six months before the invasion. The North Korean forces had doubled in size, supported by a substantial amount of equipment from the Soviet Union.<sup>656</sup> Compared to the South Korean Constabulary, the overwhelming superiority of the North Korean army was not recognized by United States military authorities before the invasion.<sup>657</sup> Nevertheless, several months before the Korean War started, the US government had received warnings and information on the military build-up in North Korea and the imminent invasion of South Korea.

In his report to the State Department, on June 14, 1950, Muccio maintained the material superiority of North Korea in air power, tanks, and heavier artillery.<sup>658</sup> On June

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<sup>654</sup> LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, 1945-1966, 79.

<sup>655</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1950, 7, 234-292; *Acheson*, 373-374.

<sup>656</sup> Roy E. Appleman, *US Army in the Korean War: South to Naktong, North to the Yalu*, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1961), 13-17; Sawyer, 104-109.

<sup>657</sup> Cho, 255-56.

<sup>658</sup> Muccio to Acheson, June 14, 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7, 105.

19, 1950, six days before the outbreak of the war, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) finally recognized the capability and superiority of the North Korean armed forces. However, this agency thought North Korea would not have sufficient military power to control the whole Korean peninsula without Russian assistance. Also, most American leaders believed that North Korea was firmly controlled by the Soviets and depended entirely on their support for existence. Therefore, as long as the United States continued to support economic and military assistance to South Korea, ROK would survive the threat of the Communists.<sup>659</sup>

The CIA made it clear that it believed the ultimate goal of North Korea and the Soviet Union was to unify the Korean peninsula under Communist domination. To this end, an overt invasion of South Korea by North Korea was delayed because the Soviet Union and North Korea thought they still had a good chance of taking over South Korea through political pressure, subversion, propaganda, intimidation, economic pressure, and military actions by infiltration of guerrilla forces.<sup>660</sup> The CIA did not think an invasion of Communists was imminent. Nonetheless, the Korean War started on June 25, 1950. This brings up several questions for historians to ponder. Why did the Korean War occur in 1950? Who was the responsible for its outbreak? What were the reasons for the rollback of Americans in the Korean peninsula?

After establishment of separate governments in 1948, it is apparent that both leaders, Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung, cherished a common goal to unify the Korean peninsula by any means, including military force. After foreign troops withdrew, the two

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<sup>659</sup> Sawyer, 104; CIA Memorandum, June 19, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 109-111.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21.

Korean governments initiated and sometimes escalated border clashes in order to obtain military assistance from the former occupying powers and to boost the morale of their people.<sup>661</sup> South and North Korean armies frequently participated in regional combat to “liberate” countrymen oppressed under reactionary regimes during the two years before the outbreak of Korean War.<sup>662</sup>

As noted earlier, Rhee participated in the independence movement, and believed that the South Korean government was the only lawful and legitimate government in the Korean peninsula because the United Nations created the Republic of Korea. Therefore, South Koreans could not negotiate with North Koreans and did not recognize their government because Rhee’s government thought that Kim’s government was an illegal organization. However, it should be noted that this resolution carefully avoided declaring that the ROK was the national government of Korea throughout the peninsula.<sup>663</sup> Rhee’s government believed that the immediate task of his government, as the only lawful national government, was to restore “lost territory.” As a result, President Rhee publicly and frequently demanded a “March North.”<sup>664</sup> On July 17, 1949, Shin Sung Mo, South

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<sup>661</sup> See more details on the process of the border fighting, Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, 379-398; John R. Merrill, “Internal Warfare in Korea, 1948-1950: The local setting of the Korean War,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1982), 296-324; Park Myung Lim, *Korean War: The Outbreak and Its Origins, volume II: The Origins and Cause of the Conflict* (Seoul, Nanam, 1996), 19-642.

<sup>662</sup> Some scholars such as Cumings, Merrill and Gye-Dong Kim argue that in many cases the South Korean government started to provoke border incidents and North Koreans just responded to the provocation from the South.

<sup>663</sup> Cited in Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policy of South and North Korea*, 65; for a detailed discussion on the subject, see Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, 220-221.

<sup>664</sup> See Rhee’s arguments on March North in *FRUS*, 1949, 7, 2: 957, 966, 987, and 1061; Cited in Merrill, 307.

Korean's Defense Minister, told reporters that "South Korea could occupy Yangyang or Wonsan in a day" if President Rhee ordered.<sup>665</sup>

In reality the military forces of South Korea were not strong enough to even resist military attack from North Korea, much less go on the offensive. Some scholars argue that Rhee's rhetoric for a "March North" unification policy was a "policy of bluff" to get military and economic assistance from the United States.<sup>666</sup> General Roberts also believed that border incidents were deliberately exaggerated by the South in order to obtain more aid.<sup>667</sup> President Rhee knew that the United States Congress hesitated to provide further aid to South Korea so he attempted to escalate border clashes against North Korea and disseminate propaganda of a "March North" by demonstrating his determination to fight against Communism.<sup>668</sup>

President Rhee warned the US of the imminence of war in Korea and criticized current United States policy in Korea.

A few days ago an American friend said that if the United States gives weapons to South Korea, she feared that South Korea would invade North Korea. This is a useless worry of some Americans who do not know South Korea. Our present war is not a cold war, but a real shooting war. In South Korea the United States has one foot in South Korea and one foot outside so that in case of an unfavorable situation it could pull out of our country. I daresay that if the United States wants to aid our country, it should not be only lip-service. General Roberts and Ambassador Muccio have worked to obtain more arms for Korea, but people in the United States are dreaming.<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Merrill, 313.

<sup>666</sup> Ho-jeh Lee, *Han'guk Oekyojongch'aekui Yisangkwa Hyonsil: Yi Sungman Oekowa Miguk* [The Idealism and Realities of the Korean Foreign Policy: Diplomacy of Syngman Rhee and American Policy of Korea 1945-1953] (Seoul: Bobmun Sa, 2000), 423-435.

<sup>667</sup> Merrill, 307-318

<sup>668</sup> Hakjoon Kim, *Unification Policy*, 67; Merrill, 309.

<sup>669</sup> US Department of States, *FRUS*, 1950, 7: 85n.

As Charles Armstrong points out, the North Korean government came to be dominated by individuals who participated in the anti-colonial guerrilla struggle in Manchuria during the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>670</sup> North Korean leaders, therefore, regarded themselves as “good nationalists.”<sup>671</sup> In *The Korean War: The Outbreak and Its Origins*, Korean scholar Park Myong Lim argues that North Korean leaders have remarkably transformed their state and society into a radical nationalist and militarist state. As a consequence, the North Korean leaders believed that they were fit to liberate South Koreans from American imperialism. In late 1949 and early in 1950, Kim Il Sung visited Moscow several times to get permission for a war plan from Stalin. Even though Stalin hesitated to approve it until he could make sure that the United States would not intervene in the war, and the new Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung agreed with the decision of the North Koreans. According to Chinese historian Chen Jian in *China’s Road to the Korean War*, Stalin recommended Kim Il Sung travel to Beijing to secure Mao’s consent to the invasion.<sup>672</sup> It is almost certain that China did not play a major role in preparations for the war. However, Jian argues that in order to enhance communist control of China’s state and society and to promote its international prestige and influence, Chinese leaders, including Mao Tse-tung, intended to win a glorious victory in Korea by driving the

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<sup>670</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, (Ithaca, Cornell University, 2003), 241.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>672</sup> Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 111-113.



Americans out of the peninsula.<sup>673</sup> Later, Stalin approved Kim's war plan, at least passively.<sup>674</sup>

North Korean leaders believed that their invasion plan for South Korea was well designed and ready, now that the support of the Soviet Union had been attained. More important, as noted earlier, the situation in East Asia, they believed, favored their plan in the early 1950s. Had the United States expressed a firm determination to defend South Korea, the Korean War might probably not have occurred. It is clear that the time was a transitional period in United States policy in the context of the global war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Due to preoccupation with the Cold War, the Truman administration limited economic and military assistance to South Korea because it was deemed of no strategic importance for the security of the United States. The United States misunderstood Stalin's intention and plan, and the contingency of local Korean actions, because the United States policy makers believed that next war would be a global war and that the Soviet Union was not yet ready to start a war against the United States. Historian William Stueck argues that "the Korean War was substituted for World War III"<sup>675</sup> and the Korean War, in turn, transformed and intensified the Cold War.

The outbreak of the Korean War was not only a by-product of the ideological confrontation between the two Koreas intensified by the international powers, but also

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>674</sup> In his "*The Korean War*," Park Myung-Lim argues that Kim Il Sung should be seen as 'initiator' and Stalin the 'facilitator.' Kathryn Weathersby agreed with Park's opinion. Kathryn Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Korean War: The State of Historical Knowledge," in William Stueck, ed., *The Korean War in World History* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press: 2004). On the other hand, Cumings argued that although Kim probably consulted with Stalin, Kim largely acted on his own plan to initiate an attack on South Korea to North Korea based on reputed a provocation from the South. Cumings, *The Origins, II*.

<sup>675</sup> William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

the result of an imbalance in the military strength of the two sides. Before the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. military believed that direct involvement of U.S. troops in any Korean conflict would be “ill-advised and impracticable in view of the potentialities of the over-all world situation and our heavy international obligations as compared with our current military strength.”<sup>676</sup>

When the Korea War did break out in June 25, 1950, however, American leaders thought that if North Korea overran South Korea, it would prove not only a direct challenge to the free world and collective security system of the United Nations that established the ROK under its auspices, but also it would tremendously impact Japanese security in a negative fashion.<sup>677</sup> If the United States failed to protect ROK from the attack of the Communists, the result would be rising criticism of the foreign policy of the Truman administration. Throughout America, Truman was increasingly accused of being “soft” and willing to appease Communists, while on the international front, the United States still feared direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. As a result, it seemed might spell total failure for the United States foreign policy during the Cold War to contain the Communists.

In sum, after the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—compromised their own interests in Korea somewhat, each of them sought a policy of withdrawal without further endangering their interests. The two rival regimes in North and South Korea, however, were unable to compromise their differences and co-exist

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<sup>676</sup> Army Department memo., June 27 1949, *FRUS* 1949, 7:2: 1046-48, 1052-56.

<sup>677</sup> Cho, 269-277.

peaceably. Painfully aware of his government's vulnerability, Syngman Rhee, as a leader of a weak state, adopted a "March North" unification policy. He thereby designed to manipulate the Korean situation to maximize military aid and economic assistance from the United States and also to turn American containment policy to the aid of unifying the Korean peninsula through military force. In short, Rhee was not a pliant tool of the United States. However, Rhee's hostile policy toward North Korea instead prompted Washington to become hesitant about supplying offensive weapons. That decision left a military imbalance between the armies of North and South. In addition, the relationship between North and South deteriorated further.

In a parallel development, North Korean leaders also viewed themselves as "good nationalists." They tried to persuade a reluctant Stalin and Mao that North Korean people were ready to liberate the South Korean people from the imperialist grasp of the United States. As Weathersby and Park Myong Lim argue, Kim Il Sung, if the "initiator" of the Korean war, also was able to manipulate the rivalry between Stalin and Mao for his own political ends. Actually, the international situation at the time was quite favorable for Kim Il Sung. The Soviet Union acquired atomic capability in September 1949. Mao's communists in China defeated Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists that December. Earlier, moreover, the Truman administration—after Republicans accused him of being "soft" on communists, decided to withdraw U. S. troops from Korea by June.

Meanwhile, Kim Il Sung and his followers, ever since 1945, had been busy transforming North Korean society into a "radical nationalist and militaristic state." Buoyed by both internal and external developments, North Korean leaders started the attack on South Korea on June 25, 1950. The two leaders in Korea no longer tried to co-

exist by peaceful means. Instead, the two Koreas become more hostile to one another, even after the foreign occupying countries withdrew. In addition, more direct confrontation deepened the ideological conflict between the Great Powers, escalated hostilities in the local region, and eventually led to a bloodbath. Again, Koreans would become a victim of the early Cold War in East Asia but not a completely passive one.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Conclusion: Summary and General Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to better comprehend the relationship between the Korean nationalist movement and foreign powers when it came to building a nation-state, set in the broader context of Korean history. More narrowly, it examined how Koreans and foreign powers viewed each other, the origins of Korean nationalism, the Korean response to foreign powers during the period of Japanese colonialism and American military government from 1945 to 1948, and how U.S. policy impacted the fate of Korea. In particular, it examined how Korean nationalism was framed during the Japanese colonial era, and how this framing affected the postwar formation of the state during the period of American military government. It postulates that Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung, after the two Koreas were established in 1948, each viewed himself as a “good nationalist.” Both favored unification of some kind and, as leaders of a weak state, both used the Korean situation to manipulate their sponsor countries—the United States and the Soviet Union—to accomplish their oftentimes divergent goals and purposes.

The story of what happened in the late 1940s also has deeper roots. As described in Chapter 1, the United States was the first country to withdraw its legation when Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905. Even though the Americans seemingly betrayed Korea, most Koreans did not abandon their initial image of the United States as a

“benevolent Great Power” and hopes for American assistance to help regain independence. Until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, however, Korea essentially remained a “forgotten nation” to the American people. The outbreak of the World War II ended this policy of American indifference.

Prior to the Second World War, many Korean nationalists involved themselves in the independence movement both in Korea and abroad. After the March First independence movement in Korea, Korean exiles established the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai in 1919. Under the leadership of Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku, Korean nationalists tried to gain American recognition of the Korean Provisional Government and sought American military and financial support to regain independence from Japanese colonial rule. The KPG’s efforts were unsuccessful. As shown in Chapter 2, different stances on anti-colonial nationalism produced antagonism between Korean left and right. The existence of left and right during the Japanese colonial period set limits on the course of postwar state formation. Realizing a complicated political situation existed, with China and the Soviet Union also having interests in Korea, the United States chose not to recognize the Korean Provisional Government.

Much later, at the Cairo Conference in 1943, the Allied leaders, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek, and Winston Churchill, discussed policies for the postwar world, including for the first time the future of Korea. President Roosevelt presented a multinational trusteeship plan for consideration. He advocated a certain period of tutelage for liberated countries like Korea to improve propensities for self-rule before achieving their independence. The Cairo Declaration asserts that Allied leaders were “determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.” At the

Teheran conference, Stalin also accepted Roosevelt's idea of international trusteeship for Korea. However, during several other wartime conferences, Roosevelt and American officials failed to devise specific plans to implement the international trusteeship idea for postwar Korea.

Regardless of Korean sentiment, the trusteeship plan, Roosevelt believed, gave the United States an opportunity not only to dismantle older imperial systems but also to check the Soviets and Chinese in East Asia. Roosevelt never thought his trusteeship idea would bring chaos and turbulence, or lead to a deepening ideological struggle between rightists and leftists in Korea, much less eventually contribute to the emergence of two separate and hostile governments and a tragic war. Churchill vehemently opposed the trusteeship idea, not wishing to set a precedent that could apply to the former British colonies. Furthermore, American policy makers also did not make a specific plan for Korea because of its low priority in terms of U.S. strategic interests. As revisionist Korean historians argued, had Korean leaders accepted a trusteeship plan, Korea might have followed a different path after December, 1945 because that was the last tentative agreement for Korea's independence and reunification between the two superpowers.

The United States' non-recognition policy toward the Korean Provisional Government remained intact until the Japanese surrendered to the Allied powers in August 1945. During the war Korea was not a major concern to Roosevelt and policy makers in the United States because their first priority was winning the war with the assistance of its allies. The focus was on Japan, given Korea's limited strategic importance for the security of the United States. Moreover, Korean liberation was achieved not by the fighting of Koreans but by the victory of Allied powers. Therefore,

the future of Korea was not decided based on the desires and hopes of Korean people, but by the interests and priorities of the Allied powers.

As described in Chapter 3, the Truman administration suggested the partition of Korea at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to accept the surrender of Japanese troops and to prevent the Soviet Union from dominating Korea. When Korea was on the verge of being occupied by the Soviet Union during the last few days before the Japanese surrendered to the Allies, the best option seemed to be to divide the Korean peninsula to protect U.S. interests. In the south, the United States became the dominant force ruling Korea through a military government from 1945 to 1948 and shaping local society and politics in significant ways.

The involvement of the United States and the Soviet Union in Korea, as related in Chapter 3, precipitated ideological conflicts between Korean left and right. Given their naïve bipolar worldview, American policy makers in Washington and military officials in Korea perceived local revolutionary nationalists and leftists as monolithic and Soviet-directed. In addition, the rising tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union immediately had ramifications which impacted and soured relations between the two occupying authorities in Korea. The Cold War also left its imprint on internal political forces and the American military government.

The Japanese emperor's announcement of unconditional surrender in 1945 had excited the Korean people. They now anticipated building an independent and democratic country. But an end to Japanese colonial rule did not bring independence to Koreans. The Allied powers instead imposed a military occupation, and not only thereby denied the hope of Koreans to immediately build a democratic country but also fostered



division among Koreans. After thirty-six years of Japanese colonial rule, the Korean people wanted their independence posthaste. The sudden surrender of the Japanese led to resurgent Korean nationalism that persisted during the period of American military government in the south from 1945 to 1948. The ensuing chaos and turbulence were typical phenomena of a newly liberated country emerging from long years of imperial rule. Korea thus was ripe for a social revolution. Led by Yo Un-hyong and the leftists, the “People’s Committee” had enjoyed a window of self-rule until the Americans arrived in South Korea in September 1945. Furthermore, Korean people were determined to get rid of all vestiges of Japanese colonial rule. They wanted to build an independent and democratic society by removing collaborators from positions of power. They also sought political and socioeconomic reforms, such as in land and labor policies, which set the stage for clashes with U.S. interests.

No one can know for sure what would have happened in Korea if the American military government, like the Soviets in the north, had accepted the leadership of Yo and his CPKI from the beginning of their occupation of the south. Perhaps Korea would have gone in a different direction, such as Austria did, as noted in Chapter 3. However, the American military authorities denied the existence of the Korean People’s Republic, the *de facto* government, and People’s Committee. Yet, according to James Matray, “the KPR had demonstrated efficiency and popularity during its short period of ascendance. Genuine impartiality and a desire for national self-determination would seem to have required that the United States at least cooperate with Yo” from the beginning of occupation before control was lost to the Communists because of the U.S. oppression.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> James Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 54; as cited in Suh Jin Kyu’s Ph.D. dissertation, 327.

American military leaders regarded the volatile political and social situation in Korea as a product of communist insurgency and as a threat to American interests and security needs.<sup>679</sup> In particular, General Hodge, the commander of the American military government, was not the best “soldier-statesmen” for the critical situation in Korea. As an essentially “counterrevolutionary force,” the American military authorities apparently misunderstood or chose to ignore the urgency of Korean nationalism. Due, in part, to fears of a leftist dominated Korea, General Hodge became a “premature Cold Warrior;” in turn, his influence served as a vehicle to facilitate rightists in their efforts to gain political hegemony after the Japanese surrender. Therefore, Hodge lost credibility as a political leader among much of the local populous because of his leaning toward the rightists and his *status quo* policy delayed progressive reforms.

As the Moscow Conference began in December 1945, tensions mounted between American and Russian military authorities and the internal politics in the south, as depicted in Chapter 4, became increasingly more polarized because of ideological confrontations between leftists and rightists in their respective quests to seize political power. After a few months, Hodge realized the trusteeship plan would not work in this situation. Thus, he recommended that the United States government abandon the idea and create a Korean ‘governing commission’ to succeed the American military government in November 1945. His suggestion was not accepted in Washington. From the beginning of the occupation, Hodge faced a confused situation and suffered embarrassment from interdepartmental disagreements over the Korean situation between

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<sup>679</sup> According to Suh Jin Kyu, the Japanese leaders of the former colonial government played a significant role in shaping American attitude toward Koreans, most importantly, Yo and his CPKI. Japanese leaders effort to portray Yo and his CPKI as Communists loyal to the Soviets and led Americans hostile those groups at the most significant period of the occupation.

the Department of State, the War Department, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He blamed officials in the State Department; its Korean policy, it seemed to him, was not based on realities but mere theory.

The Moscow Conference agreed that American and Soviet commanders in Korea should establish a joint commission to work for unification. However, the Joint Commission failed to form a provisional government through consultation with Korean political parties and social organizations. To make matters worse, deep-rooted domestic political and factional struggles within Korea, stirred by the Moscow Agreement, fueled divisions within the nation. After the Korean Communist Party decided to support the Moscow agreement, the Korean people--many of whom considered communists as champions of the earlier anti-Japanese movement--felt a deep sense of betrayal. Moreover, many Korean people vehemently opposed "trusteeship" because it was reminiscent of the method by which the Japanese ruled earlier in the colonial era. Korean leaders like Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku regarded the trusteeship idea with suspicion; implicitly, it appeared to them that the United States government in practice was willing to hand Korea over to the Soviet Union. At the same time, important memories with deep historical roots shaped the collective attitudes of Korean leaders.

This period was a turning point in the internal politics of Korea. Thereafter, throughout the duration of the anti-trusteeship movement, the right perennially challenged "the nationalist credentials of the Left." The anti-trusteeship campaign, as an outburst of "anti-trusteeship nationalism," provided the rightists, whose ranks included many former Japanese collaborators, with an opportunity to transform themselves and the government in the south into "anti-communist" patriots and an "anti-Soviet movement."

Due to vehement resistance of rightists in the south and a lukewarm attitude among officials of the American military government, the decisions reached in Moscow Agreement could not be fulfilled in Korea. This result, in turn, further illustrated that the relationship between two superpowers was deteriorating. In the case of the trusteeship plan in Korea, the framework of power relations between regional politics in the local area and the superpowers did not feature a one-dimensional flow from the top down. Sometimes power relations reflected such a pattern yet often the trajectories were distinct.

After the first Joint Commission, United States policy makers belatedly tried to consolidate the moderate left-right represented by Yo Un-hyong and Kim Kyu-sik as a group acceptable to both occupation forces in 1946. However, Yo and Kim's coalition groups could not consolidate their political bases because of a lukewarm attitude on the part of the American military authorities and increasing ideological polarization in South Korean politics. The American military authorities did not consider coalition groups the proper political forces to carry out progressive reforms, but instead regarded them as instruments to expand the influence and power of the right. Also, Hodge's efforts came too late because Rhee and KDP already had moved to consolidate their power and were prepared to establish a separate government in the south. Later, the efforts of these coalition groups, including die-hard rightist Kim Ku consolidated the position of the right-wing until 1948, brought about North-South Korean Leaders Conference for a peaceful unification. This effort, though, proved barren of results. From the beginning of the occupation, had the American military authorities offered administrative power to the coalition groups or the moderate rightist and leftist groups, which comprised the majority

of Korean nationalists, the Americans would have obtained more comprehensive support among the Korean people who wanted to eliminate the legacy of Japanese colonial rule and build a free, independent, and democratic country.

From early 1946 to the summer of 1947, the Korean unification problem could not be solved through bilateral negotiation between the two occupying foreign powers. As a result, the United States by the end of 1947 gave up its initial goal of securing local self-determination and instead decided to establish a separate government in the south. Dissatisfied with the Moscow agreement and feeling that Secretary of State Byrnes was too “soft on communism,” Truman soon adopted a “get tough” policy toward the Soviet Union. At this moment, the United States government chose to endorse the extreme rightists, who were the most anti-communist in sentiment and who were thought to best serve American interests in the Cold War. The extreme rightists, represented by Syngman Rhee and the Korean Democratic Party, had advocated a separate government in the south since the first Joint Commission had failed. With support from the American military government in Korea and the United States, Rhee now finally seized power. The United States, for its part, heralded the Republic of Korea in idealistic terms as a symbolic “outpost of democracy” against communist expansion in East Asia.

As illustrated in Chapter 3, in a comparative sense, when the Soviet troops arrived almost one month earlier than American troops at this crucial juncture, the Soviets were much better informed about Korean politics and culture even though they did not have a master plan for North Korea. According to Kathryn Weathersby, Charles Armstrong, and Park Myung Lim, Stalin did not want to sovietize North Korea while North Koreans tried

to build their nation and integrate it into a Soviet style state.<sup>680</sup> Unlike the American military government which governed directly in South Korea, the Soviet occupation authorities formally recognized local committees and gave them administrative power to govern themselves without a military government. However, Soviet occupation authorities still retained indirect control and closely supervised political events in North Korea. They more easily adapted to the ongoing social revolution and proceeded to implement a thorough liquidation of the colonial legacy in the north. That mission was made easier due to the circumstance that not many social groups, such as landlords, businessmen, or religious organizations, existed to resist the change. Regarding themselves as “good nationalists” because of their background in the anti-guerrilla fight in Manchuria in the 1930s, North Korean leaders believed that they should ultimately liberate South Koreans from American imperialism. As Park Myong Lim argues, North Korean leaders had remarkably transformed their state and society into a “radical nationalist and militarist state.”

After the Second World War ended, the Truman administration faced strong pressure from the people and Congress of the United States to bring their soldiers home and reduce the military budget. After the breakdown of the Joint Commission, the Truman administration, as described in Chapter 5, next decided to hand the Korean problem over to the United Nations, establish a separate government in the South, and withdraw U.S. troops from Korea “without serious bad effects.” Under a decision of the United Nations, the United States established an official South Korean government in 1948. However, the newly born Republic of Korea still faced many problems, especially

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<sup>680</sup> Kathryn Weathersby, “The Soviet Aims in Korea,” 16; Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*; Park Myung Lim, *Korean War: The Outbreak and Its Origins*.

a military build up in the North, domestic economic problems, social instability, and intense political struggles. Most of all, internal local resistance seriously challenged the survival of Rhee's government in the south. The more Rhee's government and the extreme rightists suppressed left-wing nationalists, including the communists, the more opposition groups escalated their challenge to the central government's authority in local areas, radicalizing many Koreans.

As described in Chapter 6, Rhee, fully aware of his government's vulnerability, and as leader of a weak state, adopted a "March North" unification policy. It was not only designed to manipulate the Korean situation to maximize aid for military and economic assistance from the United States but also to turn American containment policy to the aid of unifying the Korean peninsula through military force. Because of Rhee's hostile policy toward North Korea, however, Washington hesitated to supply offensive weapons such as tanks and heavy artillery. Therefore, the ROK armed forces could not prepare for a large-scale war, leaving a military imbalance between the South and the North Korean armies. In short, North Korea had a decisive military advantage over the South. Contrary to its intended purpose, Rhee's "March North" unification policy not only failed to build up the military but also deteriorated the relationship between North and South.

Reluctant to accept the decision to withdraw from Korea due to its value as a symbol of the Cold War in East Asia, the State Department recommended delay several times because of the unstable situation of South Korea. Nevertheless, the plan was finally completed on June 30, 1949. After the American troops withdrew, the United States government continued to assist the South Korean armed forces through

deployment of the Korean military advisory group. The United States continued to provide other forms of military assistance and economic aid, too.

The United States chose Korea as its “showcase of democracy” in Asia to demonstrate how the American way of life would be better than communism and as a symbol of the containment of Communism in East Asia. Therefore, the United States gave priority to economic aid over military assistance. When Americans did assist to build up ROK military strength, their main concern was that a large military force in the formative period of the new republic might damage the economy. As a result, military assistance was limited to arms used primarily for maintaining internal security. Among military leaders in Washington, Korea had little strategic value for the security of the United States, except for the defense of Japan. In case of a full-scale war in East Asia, the Korean peninsula, it was anticipated, would be by-passed because Japan and Manchuria were more important strategic targets.

The United States’ determination to withdraw from Korea stemmed from a misjudgment by the Truman administration of Stalin’s intentions, and the volition and abilities of North Korean leaders. Americans believed after the Second World War ended that Stalin did not want war in Korea because it was not very important to Soviet security and Stalin could control Kim Il Sung and his regime through other means. They also believed that as long as overt aggression did not come from the outside, the South Korean internal forces could handle internal conflicts.

However, the international situation was more favorable for Kim Il Sung. The Soviet Union not only acquired atomic capability in September 1949 but also Mao Tse-tung’s communists in China defeated Chang Kai-shek’s nationalists that December.



Inspired by these international developments, Kim Il Sung tried to persuade a reluctant Stalin and Mao that North Korean people were ready to liberate the South Korean people. We now know that Kim Il Sung was able to manipulate the rivalry between Stalin and Mao, both of whom were hesitant to get involved in the Korean conflict in June 1950. As Park Myong Lim and Kathryn Weathersby argue, Kim Il Sung was the “initiator” of the Korean War and Stalin its “facilitator.”

Then, Secretary Acheson’s national press club speech excluded Korea from America’s defense perimeter in January 1950 and several interviews of Congressmen at the time also gave the wrong message at the wrong time. Due to such utterances, Stalin and Kim believed the United States would not intervene in Korean internal affairs. However, the communists miscalculated. The Korean War resulted not only from the ideological confrontation between two Koreas but also was spawned in the psychological confidence of North Korea’s leaders in their superior position. Stimulated by the international situation unfolding at the time, North Korean leaders believed their military power was dominant, their army was more experienced, and that Soviet aid would ensure victory. Believing they could wipe out the South quickly, North Korean leaders ordered a sudden invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950.

Contrary to North Korean expectations, as well as those of Stalin, the United States government did opt to intervene in the Korean War as a measure of its Cold War commitments. Americans thought that if they failed to protect Korea from the communist threat internationally, it would seriously damage the credibility and prestige of the United States in the world, given the recent fall of China, and impair the collective security system of the United Nations designed to ward off Communist aggression. In

the public forum, President Truman was accused of being “soft” on the Communists. Therefore, to avoid pressures emanating from both at home and abroad, Truman acted against the aggressive actions of the Communists. The Korean War was a turning point for United States foreign policy in the early stages of the Cold War and, at one level, must be understood in the context of global American strategy to contain aggressions of communism. But the story is actually much more complex.

For Americans and Russians, the goals of occupation might be attained if the two occupation authorities could establish two Korean governments with socialism in one zone and capitalism in the other. In retrospect, however, their policies not only failed to fulfill the promise to establish a united, independent, and democratic country for Koreans but also failed to establish two Koreas which could live peacefully side by side. Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung of South and North Korea each respectively claimed that their governments represented all of Korea. After foreign troops withdrew, while Syngman Rhee appealed to a “March North” unification policy, Kim Il Sung transformed North Korean society into a “radical nationalist and militarist state” that was detrimental to the unification of North and South.

Thus, the radical communists/militarists in the North and the extreme rightists in the South hoped that they could unify the country, by any means if necessary, even by military force under their own initiatives. After the foreign occupying countries withdrew, the two Koreas became even more hostile to one another. At this early point in the existence of the North and South governments, neither tried to co-exist by peaceful means or utterly avoid escalating hostilities which could eventually lead to a bloody war. As a result, the temporary geographical division of 1945 became a more durable political

division in 1948. Finally, the tragic Korean War, beginning on June 25, 1950, transformed two Koreas into a more permanent ideological division.

In conclusion, I have made several general assertions in this dissertation. First, this study demonstrates that many American diplomatic historians, including traditional and revisionist historians, unduly downplay the influence of Third World leaders as an active players in geo-politics. In the case of Korea, in terms of building a nation-state, these diplomatic historians neglect the influence of key individuals in local areas and local politics, each of whom affected relations not only between local power bases and the superpowers but also between the two superpowers. In part, local developments eventually changed the overall course of the Cold War in East Asia. As described in Chapter 4, the Moscow agreement, whereby the two superpowers attempted to decide the future of Korea for the first time, could not be fulfilled because a strong Korean nationalist movement persisted in trying to establish an independent, unified, and democratic country. This local situation not only tremendously influenced internal politics in Korea but also contributed to the deteriorating relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union and to an early onset of the Cold War in Korea and the East Asia as a whole. Simply put, this study emphasizes the influence of Korean nationalism alongside analysis of superpower relations.

Second, I have pointed out that relations between local power bases and the superpowers were not one-dimensional in practice; power often did not always flow from the top down within this framework. Countervailing forces also were operative. Future study of diplomatic relations between Korea and the United States needs to scrutinize a fuller range along a spectrum of attitudes simultaneously. Before the Korean War, but

after two Koreas were established, Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung each viewed themselves as “good nationalists.” Both on occasion influenced and used the sponsor superpowers for their own purposes to attain local political goals, even if at many junctures they were used by these foreign powers for their own aggrandizement.

Third, I stress the need to consider the impact of earlier experiences before 1945 as long-term factors affecting U.S. policy toward Korea or how Koreans felt towards the United States afterwards. In other words, some important events and attitudes had deep historical roots. For instance, the Moscow agreement was the most important historical event in modern Korean history in terms of unification of Korea. Yet perhaps Korea might have followed a different path if its people had not experienced Japanese colonialism. However, the lessons and experiences of the past would not dispose Koreans to take the trusteeship seriously at that time, a time when the situation could easily have gone in a different direction, as the Korean nationalists wanted, in particular Kim Ku and Korean Provisional Government.

Last, this study also confirms that idealistic U.S. rhetoric was often though not always, cloak for the pursuit of self-interest. Viewed from this perspective, the United States aid to Korean democratization proved to have clear limits. Actions, simply put, fell short of words.

The legacy of the United States occupation left a more permanent imprint than simply three years of military government. It had impacted five decades of Korean history ever since 1945: it left an ultra conservative ruling class party, as well as an authoritarian state ruled by physical force, such as the police and military. It unintentionally generated recurrences of radical Korean nationalism. Actually, it

provided the origins of dictatorial governments lasting from the 1960s through the 1980s. which featured a contest between the outpost of democracy and communism on the Korean peninsula as well as the oppression of democratic movement leaders and groups in the name of anti-communism. In the name of democracy, moreover, it introduced an unstable political system. All of these outcomes trace their roots to this earlier period. In short, American policy toward Korea failed to achieve national unification and, for the time being, tended to obstruct Korean efforts to build a genuine democratic society. Overall, the image of America from the nineteenth century until the Korean War as a “benevolent Great Power” changed to that of an imperial nation bent only on pursuing its own interests and, in the process, betraying the hopes and desires of many Koreans. In particular, that is what happened between the United States and South Korea since the Korean War and demonstrates why the Americans have and continue to face strong anti-Americanism from Korea and the Third World.

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This study scrutinizes relations between the Korean nationalist movement and occupying foreign powers when it came to building a nation-state in the aftermath of World War II, set in the broader context of Korean history. Unlike some post-revisionist scholars, I find that the United States and Soviet Union were not “empires by invitation.” Each superpower, to varying degrees, in practice faced strong resistance from Korean nationalism.

Actually, this study finds that no school of thought—be it traditionalist, revisionist, or post-revisionist—is definitive. Each approach contributes something to our understanding but none is without flaws. The traditional approach is correct to note the importance of the Cold War context but overstresses that factor and oversimplifies it. There is much merit in revisionist arguments but not in every case. Finally, post-revisionist emphasis on national interest and the balance of power in diplomacy is a helpful model but focuses too much attention on superpower relations and neglects local context.

I make several additional assertions, too. First, this study demonstrates that in the case of nation-building in Korea, diplomatic historians in America, whether traditionalist or revisionist, overly neglect the influence of key individuals in local areas and politics. Second, relations between local power bases and the superpowers were not one-



dimensional in practice; power often did not flow from the top down. Third, I stress earlier experience before 1945 and long-term factors affecting Korean attitudes towards continuity and changes in U. S. policy towards their homeland, as well as short-term catalysts. Last, this study confirms that idealistic U. S. rhetoric often, if not always, was a cloak for the pursuit of self-interest. From this perspective, United States aid to Korean democratization had clear limits. Actions, simply put, fell short of words.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Laura Belmonte

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