2010


Brett Michael Reilly
Bucknell University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/honors_theses

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/honors_theses/39

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Bucknell Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Bucknell Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dadmin@bucknell.edu.
From "Unsuitable Ally" to Vital Partner:

by

Brett M. Reilly

A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council
For Honors in the History Department

May 21, 2010

Approved by:

Advisor: David Del Testa

Department Chairperson: Leslie Patrick
Acknowledgements

Throughout this thesis’ research and writing process I received a wealth of support, advice, and assistance from various people. First and foremost, I must thank my parents for their continued support of my academic studies. Their moral support and encouragement was instrumental in the completion of this work. In particular, my mother served as an expert travel and logistical resource. Without her aid, I certainly could not have made all the research trips that contributed to this work.

If I had to point to the defining moment of my scholastic undergraduate career at Bucknell University it would be 8:00 am on August 23, 2006—the very first class and very first day of my freshman year. Serendipitously, I happened to be placed into Professor Jeremy Kuzmarov’s survey of modern American history. For the next three years I gained a broad view of the foreign relations of the United States and learned a great deal about the historian’s profession. Professor Kuzmarov’s relentless work, research, passion for historical inquiry, and professional activism drew me into the field. In addition, he encouraged
me to pursue this thesis’ topic during my junior year and advised I visit the nearby archive at the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks. Without his advice and support this thesis would never have come into existence and I doubt I would have developed the passion for history that I now harbor.

Finally, I must thank Professor David Del Testa for serving as my advisor throughout this thesis’ duration. Even before this year, Professor Del Testa helped alert me to various sources of funding at Bucknell and served as my faculty advisor in the Bucknell Program for Undergraduate Research. I am sure that the past year was no small feat, as he advised two other students’ projects in addition to mine, all while attending to his other professional duties. Certainly, Professor Del Testa’s enthusiasm and dynamism exemplify the finest attributes of Bucknell.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..............v
Abstract............................ix
1. Origins of Intervention .......1
2. The Third Republic ..........45
3. Armed Intervention ...........75
Bibliography ......................103
Abstract

This is the history of the decade prior to the entrance of Korean troops into the Vietnam War, roughly covering the years 1953-1965. The story begins with the turbulent relationship between the Eisenhower Administration and Korea’s President Syngman Rhee. In 1954, fearing abandonment and a permanently divided country, Rhee first offered the use of his country’s soldiers to President Dwight Eisenhower. But owing to several key political factors, Rhee was seen as an “unsuitable ally” in Southeast Asia and his offer was not endorsed. For the next decade, Korea continued to offer its army’s services to the US government for use in Vietnam. But it was not until 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson began escalating the US role in South Vietnam that Korean President Park Chung Hee’s offer to provide Republic of Korea soldiers became operationally desirable and necessary. Park then used the Vietnam War to build a more equitable relationship with the United States, one that gave Korea a newfound ability to dictate its own future and emerge from endemic poverty.
1. ORIGINS OF INTERVENTION
Syngman Rhee’s Drive for Unification

I feel sorry for the old man. He wants to get his county unified, but we cannot permit him to start a war to do it. The consequences would be too awful. But he is a stubborn old fellow, and I don’t know whether we’ll be able to hold him in line indefinitely.

-President Dwight Eisenhower, 1954

In late July 1965, United States Ambassador to Korea, Winthrop G. Brown, and General Dwight E. Beach drove north from Seoul to a Korean army base and observed the soldiers of South Korea’s Capital Division. “We were very much impressed by the rigor of the training and the quality of the officers,” Brown later recorded, “especially General Chae, the commander.” The diplomat was sufficiently impressed, noting the general was “every inch a professional.” When Ambassador Brown parted ways with the commander he took a moment to express his personal approval and gratitude for Korea’s decision to send a full division. In an impassive tone Chae remarked, “We have not forgotten what you and others did for us not so many years ago, and now we have a chance to repay in some small part. Moreover,

2 Letter, Winthrop G. Brown to J. Graham Parsons (United States Ambassador to Sweden), August 1, 1965, J. Graham Parsons Papers, Box #4 Folder #36, Georgetown University Library, Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C.
I come from North Korea, I have lost all my family to the Communists and I intend to fight them to the last drop of my blood.”

Had he been a witness to the meeting, Korean President Park Chung Hee would have been pleased. After all, General Chae Myung-Shin was charged with leading the Republic of Korea Army’s first combat contingent into South Vietnam. When the Capital or “Tiger” Division completed its deployment, it would become the first Republic of Korea military force sent to fight an enemy beyond its borders. Ten months prior, Korea made its first contributions to the battle against the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. Heeding the United States’ pleas for assistance, President Park and the ROK National Assembly consigned a Reinforced Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, a dozen Taekwondo instructors, and a Korean Marine Corps Engineer Company to the government of South Vietnam. But before the entire group was deployed, the war plan changed, and the U.S. implored Korea to make the ultimate commitment: dispatch their nation’s soldiers to fight for the Free World beside American Marines in Southeast Asia. Once again Park and the Assembly responded, ordering General Chae to prepare his soldiers for deployment. Chae’s public declaration and presentation were a vital component of Korea’s image and relations.

Several weeks before he visited the army base, Brown cabled the State Department and asserted that a “new dimension” would develop in US-ROK relations if Korea sent a combat group to the Republic of Vietnam. The prescient

---

3 Ibid.
comment was largely ignored. President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisors were preoccupied with the escalating war in South Vietnam and anxiously waiting for the Tiger Division’s arrival—as they had been since shortly after United States Marines had landed near Da Nang in March. The presence of allied soldiers in Vietnam would allow Johnson to defend publicly the United States’ troop deployments as a component of an international coalition and relieve the U.S. military’s manpower burden. At the time, by all official accounts it appeared as though Korea sent its soldiers for the same reasons General Chae enunciated to Ambassador Brown—repayment of a moral debt incurred when the United States came to the ROK’s aid during the Korean War and a determination to fight “Communist aggression” outside Korea’s borders. Could such a simple deduction explain how or why an impoverished and divided country, technically still at war with the North, and located far from Vietnam, came to provide “substantially greater combat manpower than any other free world country great or small except the United States?”

The publically cited basis for Korean intervention in South Vietnam was not an adequate explanation for the Republic’s unprecedented deployment. Even if some members of the ROK government identified with those lofty principles, they were not an inveterate component of the government’s justification for war. Chae’s comments fit into the larger mold of Korea’s official rhetoric, that is, the rhetoric

that the ROK and US government conveyed to the American people and international community. As will be demonstrated in the next section, adequate public support for troop deployments was directly tied to the expectation that Korea would accrue substantial economic and military benefits as a result of its sacrifice. Thus, justifications including moral and “cold warrior” sentiments were hollow and did not provide the critical impetus behind Korea’s commitments. In fact, ROK offers of troops to serve in Vietnam had a historical precedent. The only unique aspect of President Park’s 1965 troop offer was that the United States government accepted the proposal. Over a decade earlier, Korea’s first President, Dr. Syngman Rhee, made repeated overtures to the U.S. government, offering to transfer as many as three ROK Army Divisions to Indochina or elsewhere abroad. Rhee, not Park, was the first Korean official to volunteer his country’s soldiers for duty in Southeast Asia. In the twelve years since the initial proposal, the Republic’s two presidents and a multitude of diplomats issued an astonishing number of requests to the United States, each time asking if the ROKA was needed to fight outside of Korea. Surprisingly, the unofficial tactic was only held in abeyance for one year (1960-1961) between 1953 and 1965, during the short political reign of Chang Myông.

Understanding Korea’s sanguine proposals to bear a large portion of the Free World’s fight against Communism requires an analysis of the partitioned Peninsula’s early interactions with the United States. When Rhee framed and proposed the
dispatch of Korean forces to Southeast Asia in 1953, he did so because he believed the dispatch would prevent the United States’ “abandonment” of Korea, which would weaken his personal power and authority. Beginning with his self-imposed exile in the United States in 1904, Rhee attempted to use the prospects of Korean manpower and resources as leverage for his own gain—going so far as to offer Korean land and soldiers to the United States Army. Amid the stormy months surrounding France’s defeat in Indochina, Rhee proffered Korea’s soldiers to the US for use in Laos or Vietnam with the hope of gaining U.S. acquiescence—intentionally or unintentionally—for South Korea’s invasion of North Korea. Rhee’s designs were different from the ones harbored by Park, which were largely economic, when he proposed the United States’ use of the ROK Army and Marines first in 1961 and then repeatedly throughout 1964-65. Ultimately, Syngman Rhee’s proposals were rejected as President Eisenhower was unwilling and Secretary Dulles was unable to employ Korean soldiers.

The Eisenhower Administration seriously considered the Korean offer; several studies of the matter were ordered and the issue was broached again when a French military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 appeared imminent. For its own political reasons, France rejected the seemingly generous offer almost instantaneously, although senior US officials never acknowledged this and it did not
affect their military and political planning. President Eisenhower and his advisors ultimately rejected the troop offers for several reasons. First, South Korea was economically and militarily dependent on the United States in 1954. Domestic opinion, it was hypothesized, would not favor the deployment of ROK soldiers while American soldiers guarded the 38th parallel. In addition, if Washington sanctioned the removal of Korean soldiers it would also have needed to provide for their replacement. Second, any Korean division would have required transportation, logistical support, and possibly even leadership. If the US government provided these tools, the American flag and prestige would become inexorably linked to Indochina. French support for ROK soldiers, even if funded by expanded US monetary aid, was not possible. France and Korea, for separate political reasons, only desired the military assistance of the United States. Finally, less than a year after the Korean armistice, the specter of Chinese intervention still hung heavy in the National Security Council’s meetings

“An Unsatisfactory Ally”
The United States and Korea in 1953

Fate was not kind to Korea in the early twentieth century. For the better part of fifty years the Korean Peninsula was exploited as part of Japan’s powerful imperium.

Suppressed and governed by the Japanese, the majority of people lacked basic resources. When Japan was defeated in August of 1946, Korea was split into two zones of occupation—north of the 38th parallel was guided by the Soviet Union and south was controlled by the United States. Cold War ideological tensions prevented the world’s powers from reconciling their differences and unifying the Peninsula. With official unification hopelessly mired in politics, two separate nations were formed, each opposed to the other’s existence. South of the demilitarized zone, Dr. Syngman Rhee won the Republic of Korea’s first presidential election in 1948. Northward, Premier Kim Il-sung, a veteran revolutionary leader that battled Japan’s army, led the Soviet sponsored Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. (DPRK)

Syngman Rhee took a long and unconventional route to power, one that left an indelible mark on his psyche. Born in 1875, he witnessed the fall of the Choson dynasty, Japanese colonization, liberation, division, and the Korean War—although, he spent the majority of the colonial period in the United States. When Japan began its territorial conquest of the peninsula in the late 19th century he participated in demonstrations that led to his arrest. Upon release, Rhee began a self-imposed exile in the United States. He completed his undergraduate degree at Harvard University and received a doctorate in international law in 1910 from Princeton University. During his studies and travels, Rhee spent a great deal of time lobbying different government officials and offices for Korea’s right to independence, and, not coincidentally, his qualification as its leader. Certainly, Rhee did have support in the
community of Korean exiles. His prison dissertation, *The Spirit of Independence*, was printed in the United States, but his influence should not be overstated. Even as late as 1944, Secretary of State Cordell Hull believed that a group of Rhee’s acolytes were attempting to meet him in the US in order “to give support to the position of Syngman Rhee which [was] believed to be somewhat insecure.” In post-World War I America, Rhee’s Christianity, self-ascribed “Jeffersonian democratic” values and advocacy of Woodrow Wilson’s “self-determination” for Korea earned him allies in the US. Some of those allies became paid advisors to Rhee after he won the presidency. His pronounced anti-communism greatly aided his domestic appeal and led Henry Luce’s *Time* magazine to write an exaggerated account of the statesman, claiming that, “to his countrymen,” Rhee had the “stature of George Washington.”

While heralded as a patriot, Rhee was also decried as an autocrat, but in fact, Rhee was the latter and only nominally the former. Followers cited his nationalist credentials by pointing to his stature in the Korean Provisional Government. Centered in Chungking after Japan’s annexation of Korea, the KPG was a constellation of exiled Koreans—many of whom, like Rhee, had lived and studied in foreign countries. The members of the KPG (headed by Chairman-elect Syngman Rhee) beseeched US politicians to aid Korea under the provisions of the 1882 Amity Treaty. The future president was charged to lead the KPG in the west and he

---

6 The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in China (Gauss), 28 March 1944, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, V:1290 (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*);
devoted a considerable effort toward this endeavor. In pursuit of his objectives, Rhee did not shy from employing a great deal of latitude in his appeals. Displaying his zeal for exaggeration, Rhee routinely proclaimed to Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Truman that his government, alone, spoke for the 23,000,000 souls living in Korea—an absurd statement since Korea was fragmented and an inchoate entity during World War II. Rhee’s protestations for independence were notable for his pronounced declarations that he had the expertise (or right) to lead a free Korea. The State Department remarked in 1946 that Rhee’s great efforts to place himself at the front of the independence movement were probably an attempt to “steal the show at home,” lest he not become Korea’s first leader.  

Three decades of exile and diplomatic fighting profoundly affected Korea’s future president. Rhee’s efforts to “steal the show” in 1946 were his attempts to expand and cultivate a “personal popularity” based on “his legend as a resistance hero. Rhee continued to see himself as the center of current events in Korean life.” The legend was based largely on Rhee’s anti-Japanese resistance and political imprisonment, but it was also founded on his repute as the preeminent Korean independence lobbyist in America. And in fact, Rhee did possess a lengthy resume of correspondence and meetings with various US statesmen. Less than a year after

\[^8\] The Political Advisor in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State, Undated (Early December 1946), FRUS, 1946, 13:778.
arriving in the United States, Rhee met with Secretary of State John Hay in February 1905. That same year Rhee arranged a meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt and implored the statesman to honor America’s treaty responsibilities with Korea and halt Japanese imperialism in Northeast Asia. Roosevelt did not come to the Korean’s assistance; rather, he struck a compromise with Japan, known as the Taft-Katsura agreement, which allowed each country to respect the other’s colonial designs in the Pacific—thus paving the way for Japan’s 1910 annexation of the Korean Peninsula. When the sub rosa pact was later exposed, along with Roosevelt’s complicity, Rhee and the KPG believed that the United States abandoned their country to colonial dereliction. 

Adding insult, Woodrow Wilson, his former university’s president, refused to incorporate Korea’s independence into the Treaty of Versailles, not wanting to upset Japan’s relatively stable control of Northeast Asia. The president’s character development began a profound change at this point as he devoted his time trying to redress the wrongs he believed were committed against his country; and more, Rhee largely undertook this gargantuan task alone. According to Robert Oliver, (Rhee’s friend, advisor, and biographer) the future Korean president was at this time “a David without a slingshot, assailing an army of Goliaths,” in what had become a “painful and lonely endeavor.”

It is probable that during these decades Rhee saw himself as a crusader who was carrying forth his

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}} \text{John Edward Wilz, “Did the United States Abandon Korea in 1905?,” The Pacific Historical Review 54 (1985): 243-270.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}} \text{Robert T. Oliver, Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth (NY: Dodd Mead & Company, 1954), 156.} \]
people’s chance to escape their colonial fetters. The time spent fighting for his country in forums as large as the League of Nations and US State Department, engendered his belief that Korea’s hopes for independence and his ability to win personal and political power were inextricably linked.

By the 1940’s he was a man with a highly hubristic and mercurial demeanor. John Muccio, the United States Ambassador to Korea from 1949-1952, believed that General MacArthur, Chiang Kai-shek, and Syngman Rhee shared similar flawed personalities. “Ego,” he described, “was a predominant trait in each,” fostered by a sense of “isolation.” Indeed, the ego aspect of Rhee’s temperament was the primary impulsion behind his policies, actions, and statements. The Princeton graduate suffered repeated humiliation when American statesman rebuffed him, fueling his desire to establish virility as a leader and prove Korea’s capability to become a regional power. In this way, part of the president’s authoritarianism and brutal suppression of opponents was more a result of his time spent in the west, and not, as the racial stereotypes of the 1950’s defined, his oriental background.

Even though Rhee was dependent on economic and military aid from the United States, he was far from a complaisant ally; much of the president’s diplomacy was conducted through brinksmanship, bluffing, and autocratic policies. The president’s ego, but lack of conventional diplomatic power, led to his unique tactics. Using deceit and stubbornness to his advantage, Rhee declared apparently spurious

---

and desultory policies. His obdurate stance earned him a poor reputation in the Washington, where US officials frequently described the president as stubborn, intractable, and recalcitrant in their memorandums. The Korean president’s intransigence frequently drew severe criticism from the highest levels. On different occasions President Eisenhower bitterly complained about Rhee’s use of “blackmail” and referred to him as one of those "penny ante dictators“ that was an “s.o.b.” and “an unsatisfactory ally.” 13 In one National Security Council meeting, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles became enraged while discussing Korea and quipped that the Korean President was a “master of evasion,” and an “Oriental bargainer.”14 Certainly, Rhee’s use of defiant acts made him appear cantankerous (and even insane) to many American diplomats, but all policies were guided by one incontrovertible rule: never jeopardize personal power.

In advance of the Korean War, President Rhee advocated war with the communist elements of his country—the underlying goal being the consolidation of power under his offices. The Soviet Union’s paramilitary organizations worked with Korean guerilla fighters during the latter half of World War II. Much like the United States’ Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had done in Southeast Asia, the Russians collaborated and trained with the local revolutionaries in order to defeat Japan’s

Imperial Army. Rhee used this fact to make exaggerated claims that the USSR was creating a proxy government in his home country and warned diplomats that if the KPG were not recognized, Korea would be lost to the Soviets forever. Even as early as 1946, Rhee tried to obtain US backing for a military “mop up” of communists in the north of Korea. His most likely fear was that guerilla leaders, who spent the war battling the Japanese in Manchuria and Korea and not in Ivy League school rooms, would exert more influence in his country than himself: the chairman of Korea’s “official” government. His opinion was no different in the 1946-1950 period of tentative peace. In one particular incident, Ambassador Muccio recommended a small fleet of US Naval vessels visit Korea after the 1949 US troop withdrawal, mainly as a show of support. When the USS Saint Paul sailed into Inchon, the cruiser’s sailors welcomed President Rhee for a lunch and photo opportunity. After the meal, the ship’s commander invited the president to speak to the crew and reporters. After he issued a cordial welcome and thanked his visitors, Rhee launched into a tirade, “declaring war against the communists throughout the world.” In summarizing the autocrat’s antagonistic demeanor, a former ambassador lamented, “Well, we had recurring problems with old man Rhee. We just couldn’t shut him up.” President Eisenhower was also conscious of the impromptu outbursts and accordingly refused to allow television cameras that could record sound to be at his reception for President Rhee’s visit to Washington.

When the United States responded to the DPRK’s 1950 southward offensive, its goal was a restoration of the pre-war status quo. United Nations’ Resolution 84 recommended a UN coalition commanded by the U.S. military “assist the Republic of Korea in defending itself against armed attack and thus to restore international peace and security in the area.”\textsuperscript{16} Spurred by early victories, General Douglas MacArthur stormed north of the 38th parallel in fall of ’50 and declared that he was close to achieving the U.N.’s “objective to bring unity and peace to the Korean Nation.”\textsuperscript{17} MacArthur’s bravado and comments exacerbated President Rhee’s defiant position that the U.S. mission should be unification of the Peninsula—not simply a ceasefire, peace, and a restoration of the status quo. By spring of 1953 the U.N. nations were weary of the stalemated war and armistice talks were resumed with seriousness.

When Washington appeared receptive to China and the DPRK’s offer to resume negotiations, Rhee realized his fate was being sealed and, accordingly, he employed his most radical political tactics. His agents launched a successful propaganda campaign that included a 50,000-person “Unification or Death” parade and an April 21\textsuperscript{st} National Assembly resolution to pursue military reunification of

\textsuperscript{17} “Text of MacArthur Statement,” New York Times, 6 Nov. 1950. (my emphasis)
Korea.\textsuperscript{18} From this time forward, Rhee’s threats to march north and fight alone occurred with regular frequency. The ploys helped stave off peace in the near term, but by summer the negotiations were nearly complete. One of the pending, and highly contentious, issues was prisoner of war repatriation. Despite Rhee’s vociferous opposition to a lengthy detention of Korean POWs, the U.S. negotiators agreed to a compromise without Rhee’s consent. Three weeks after he was informed of the concession, the president staged a mass escape of 25,000 North Korean POWs who did not want to return to the North. The same day, in a prepared radio announcement, he avowed his responsibility for the escapes. POWs were unjustly imprisoned, Rhee claimed, and deprived of human rights “due to international complications.” The president concluded unequivocally, “The reason why I did this without full consultation with the United Nations Command and other authorities concerned is too obvious to explain.”\textsuperscript{19} At this moment, Rhee must have recalled his years as a revolutionary slighted by the world’s great powers. The POW issue was an opportunity to assert his influence. Ironically, weeks before Rhee’s act of defiance Eisenhower’s staff considered creating a fake POW escape to resolve the prisoner debate. At the following meeting of the National Security Council, the US President was still furious with his “client’s” intransigence. Ike complained with notable asperity, “[i]f [Rhee] did not behave himself we might have to move out,”


which would mean “goodbye” to Korea. Harold Stassen, the Director of Mutual Security, voiced the lone justification, asking the obvious question: How could the U.S. accuse President Rhee of breaking his word if he never agreed to the terms of the armistice? Dulles and Eisenhower countered by telling Stassen that Rhee needed to be rebuked or the United States “would go down as the biggest frauds in history.”

The Eisenhower Administration was not willing to let Rhee fully dictate Korea’s future. It began to hedge its bets after the anti-armistice events in April. General Maxwell Taylor, Commander U.S. Eighth Army, created a military contingency plan the very next month. EVER READY was the U.S. military’s response for Rhee’s unwillingness to comply with the State Department’s Korea policy. It was designed to subvert or overthrow Rhee’s government with the aid of ROKA officers trusted by the U.S. Army.

EVER READY [revised edition] provides for the safeguarding of UNC forces and supplies and insures that the UN position, relative to the armistice, is maintained in the event operational control of the ROK forces is weakened or lost prior to, during, or following the political settlement...

The over-all assigned tasks...

20 It is relevant to note that Mr. Stassen was a progressive and open-minded politician in the 1950’s. During his time as Governor of Minnesota, prior to WWII and the integration of the U.S. military, he brought the first black officer into the state National Guard, in Albin Krebs, “Harold E. Stassen Dies at 93,” NYT, 5 March 2001.; Record of NSC Meeting, 19 June 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1201-1204.

2. Relieve disloyal ROK commanders...
4. Withdraw air support, ground the ROK Air Force, and bomb designated ROK ammunition-supply points.
5. Secure custody of dissident military and civilian leaders...

The Eight Army Commander may also recommend to CINCUNC (General Hull)...

1. Demand that Rhee comply with the UNC declaration of policies and disseminate this decision to the ROK Army, et al...
3. Withdraw recognition of the Rhee government and expel ROK forces from the UNC...
6. Initiate an anti-Rhee publicity campaign
7. Proclaim martial law.\textsuperscript{22}

The president’s continued defiance of the armistice hardened American sentiments. In the immediate aftermath of the POW release, General Clark, Commander in Chief Far East and United Nations Command, proposed meeting with military leaders from North Korea and China. According to Clark, U.S. delegates needed to share their honest appraisal of Rhee, explain what avenues of control were available to the United Nations Command, and ascertain if the Communists were still willing to sign an armistice.\textsuperscript{23} Clark’s proposal was rejected in a joint State-Defense telegram the next day, but the implication was significant. Cold War solidarity weakened in East Asia as enthusiasm waned, the American public soured, and policy maker’s expectations leveled with reality. The concept of rolling back Communist aggression was popular, but a protracted war in Asia was not acceptable. For the Eisenhower Administration, stalemate in Korea was not a loss;

\textsuperscript{22} The tasks chosen to appear are those that would be particularly threatening to Rhee. Walter Scott (Director of the Executive Secretariat) to Dulles, 28 Oct. 1953, \textit{FRUS}, 1952-1954, 15:1569-70.
\textsuperscript{23} Clark to the Department of the Army, 21 June 1953, \textit{FRUS}, 1952-1954, 15:1230.
rather, it was a welcomed solution that allowed reallocation of valuable time and resources to regional theaters deemed more pressing.

President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles made it abundantly clear in subsequent weeks that they only favored a peaceful unification of Korea. However, Rhee continued to advocate, whether justified or not, that the United should prosecute the Korean War until unification was achieved. In late June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) members thoroughly discussed the options available to win (or force) the ROK’s acceptance of peace. When a participant suggested moving ahead without Rhee’s consent, the entire group was reminded that General Clark had spoken with Rhee about this possibility. In such an event, the ROK, according to its president, would withdraw its armed forces from the UNC, refuse to withdraw to the armistice line, and continue fighting. Aware of the Rhee’s desire for a defense treaty, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pondered a trade—a US-Korea security pact in exchange for the ROK’s compliance and acceptance of an armistice. The offer was substantial. Since the war’s inception, the US had maintained, although on a tenuous basis, that the Republic of Korea’s defense was the responsibility of the United Nations, not America. The generals were reminded that Rhee had already refused to barter for the armistice. Even though an official alliance would give Korea the ability to remain sovereign, lest the DPRK attack southward and incur Dulles’ often cited massive retaliatory attack, it did nothing to ensure unification. Rhee continued to hope that he could fuse the country together through war and maintain his presidential
position. At this early juncture of post-armistice relations, Rhee did not have to concede easily. The threats were a relatively new tactic and therefore held more weight. Exasperated, the JCS discussion ended on the same tone as Eisenhower’s earlier NSC meeting where Ike condensed the Korean position. “The long and short of it” was the “simple fact that President Rhee and his supporters wanted to keep on fighting.”

Walter Robertson spent the better part of the summer of 1953 trying to dissuade President Rhee of his opinions. As Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs he was responsible for implementing Washington’s decisions in Korea, and in late June and July that entailed exchanging proposals with the ROK president. In late June he was still locked in negotiations with Rhee, whom he characterized as a “shrewd, resourceful trader.” As time began to run short the Secretary once again tried to cajole the stubborn leader. His recent string of harangues, which focused on the world battle against Communism and Korea’s role in the struggle, fell on, not so much deaf, but exhausted ears. The U.S. position on Korea had hardened, and the State Department approached Rhee as someone who needed to be “pushed.”

Altering his approach, the president sent a letter to Robertson that gave subtle mention of what Korea was willing to do for the Free World. “We hope, however,” Rhee wrote, “that the further strengthening of the ROK forces may be found

\[\text{24 Record of NSC Meeting, 19 June 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1202.}\]
\[\text{25 Robertson to the Dept. of State, 1 July 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1291.}\]
\[\text{26 Ibid.}\]
desirable with a view to fitting the Korean military build-up into the American plan of global strategy. We have tasted the benefits of collective security, and we feel it our duty to subscribe to it not merely in words but in deeds.”

The subtle message, possibly meant to elicit a troop request from the United States, was the first attempt made by President Rhee to raise Korea’s worth and stature in Washington’s calculations. It also marked the first time Rhee mentioned Korea’s involvement in “collective defense” and the ROK’s willingness to participate actively in the form of “deeds.” The tone was surprising, but it did not appear spontaneously, Rhee was merely repeating what he had been told by Secretary Dulles three years earlier. On that occasion, the written record noted:

Mr. Dulles went to considerable length to explain that formal pacts, alliances or treaties were not necessarily the prerequisite to common action against a common foe and that the important thing was for a government to prove by its actions that it was in fact a loyal member of the free world in which case it could count on the support of other members of the free world against the forces of communism.

President Rhee’s rephrasing of this language was specifically used to heighten his nation’s worth at a time when his its value was plummeting fast and entangle his nation’s global worth with that of Indochina—an area of the world that was rapidly overshadowing and minimizing Korea.

---

27 Rhee to Robertson, 1 July 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1294.
The Korean president’s willingness to offer Korea’s resources, without any mandate, dates back to World War II; and it highlights the overriding goal of his machinations—power. As early as 1943, Rhee tried to barter for recognition of his government, telling President Roosevelt that if he and the KPG were anointed the official government of Korea, they would be able to organize an armed resistance to Japan and deter Soviet expansion in the peninsula. Rhee condensed and concluded his position by stating that recognition of the KPG would “thereby render a material service to the United States.”

Five years later he did more to entice US support for his position. Months before the presidential election, while Rhee was in no position to do so, he offered use of Cheju Island as a United States Naval base to Under Secretary of War, Admiral William Draper. Roughly a month later, Rhee again offered the prospective naval base to Draper. But tied to the offer, which Rhee claimed with certainty the future Korean government would approve, was one important corollary. In return for the island, Rhee wanted assurances that the US would help him “drive the Soviets from Korea.”

Washington’s persistent avowal of the necessity of a truce and Eisenhower’s stiff admonishment of the Korean president impressed upon Rhee the strength of US intentions. Despite his outwardly volatile temperament, Korea’s president was a

---

29 Rhee to President Roosevelt, 15 May 1943, FRUS, 1943, 3:1094.
30 Jacobs to the Secretary of State, 30 March 1948, FRUS, 1948, 6:1163; Draper’s account quoted in Bruce Cumings, Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 816n.
“genius of political manipulation” that exercised his power and persuasion to the fullest extent, but still knew when to concede. As events in July wore on, Rhee’s previously defiant stance continued to soften. Secretary Robertson received a letter from President Rhee, which adopted a conciliatory attitude that appeared anachronistic in light of his recent resistance to US policies. Robertson quickly relayed the letter’s contents back to the State Department, noting in particular that while the ROK would not sign the armistice agreement, it pledged not to obstruct it. In addition, Rhee dropped his demands for a unification of the peninsula prior to the armistice and withdrew his refusal to submit Korea’s predicament to a political conference. “While Rhee’s letter is not entirely satisfactory,” Dulles replied to the cable, “it represents great progress from [the] situation that existed at [the] time you undertook your mission and probably is about all we will be able [to] obtain from him at this time.” By the end of July, Korea had assented to the armistice and the fighting had stopped. Rhee was not left empty handed, though. He managed to keep the Tasca report alive, which proposed awarding Korea a much-needed $300 million in US aid after the ceasefire. Additionally, Rhee wrested from the Eisenhower Administration what would become the Mutual Defense Treaty. Paramount, though, in the president’s mind was the United States agreement to

32 The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, 9 July 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1362.
walkout of the forthcoming Korean unification conference if an agreement was not concluded after 90 days—actually a watered down version of Rhee's demand that war be resumed at full force if negotiations were unsuccessful. The negotiation issue highlights the president's continued aversion to sacrifice part of his personal power. The walkout clause was, in Rhee’s estimation, an avenue through which the war could be resumed. If the conference failed to unify the peninsula, as Rhee believed, he would have a better chance of convincing the US to resume war through his frequent assertion that negotiations with China and North Korea were a hopeless endeavor.33

As discussed, President Rhee’s decision to extend Korean military aid to Indochina was triggered by an amalgamation of factors, but the first offer was most directly precipitated by the Pentagon’s reduction of US military forces in South Korea. The Eisenhower administration was determined to reel in the vast military budget with the so-called “New Look” doctrine, which emphasized mobility in response and the

33 In October of 1953, the CIA, Joint Staff and Departments of Army, Navy, Air Force and State collaborated to write an assessment of the ROK’s probable actions regarding the armistice. In it, they agreed “Rhee will attempt to make the conference an object lesson for the US on the futility of negotiating with the Communists.” Special Estimate, 16 Oct. 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1539.
threat of massive nuclear retaliation. The eight divisions stationed in Korea were a drain of capital and manpower resources, and accordingly on December 26, 1953 the White House announced that two of the eight divisions in Korea would be recalled in the immediate future followed by a reduction of another two divisions. Ambassador Briggs reported Rhee’s displeasure and “apprehension over abandonment.” In a heated response, Rhee penned a letter to President Eisenhower that was so vitriolic and bitter the State Department refused to deliver it to the White House. 34 The withdrawal of soldiers was a definitive sign of the changing world dynamic and Rhee recognized that his role was diminishing in US foreign policy. Korea and its mercurial leader had enjoyed a consequential bump in prestige following Chiang Kai-shek's expulsion from Mainland China, an “ally” and competitor for military aid who had always held a more influential position in US diplomacy and domestic opinion. Rhee demonstrated his intent to maintain this advantage when he categorically rejected Chiang’s offer of supplies and troops for the Korean police action.35 Ironically, Chiang, who became increasingly

34 Briggs to Dept. of State, 26 June 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1816; For the text of Rhee’s undelivered letter see: Ibid., 1745-1747.
35 Chiang made an initial offer of assistance when the war broke, but it was rejected for fear of Chinese intervention and poor publicity. But, in a June memorandum to the NSC, a possible reaction to China’s entry into the war was the “employment, as desirable and feasible, of anti-communist Chinese forces, including Chinese Nationalist forces in military operations in Southeast Asia, Korea, or China proper. Memorandum of the Executive Secretary of the NSC (Lay), 11 June 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954, 12:112. In early 1954, President Eisenhower recalled, “We wanted to use them [Republic of China troops] in Korea, but Rhee wouldn’t have anything to do with them.” As cited in James C. Hagerty, The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Mid-Course, 1954-1955, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 15.
marginalized after 1950, probably made this gesture inspired by some of the same motives as Rhee's Indochina offers.

The Pentagon’s troop reduction was the latest sign of Indochina’s elevated importance. Three months prior, *Life* magazine ran an article written by Donald Heath, the United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. “France is fighting the good fight in Indochina,” he contended, and that fight was “the fight of the free world against Communism.” Heath contextualized his argument when he concluded, “Just as the U.N. fought to check Communist aggression in Korea,” France was fighting the same battle.  

While this statement was not revolutionary, it demonstrated the global shift. Korea had “fought” Communism much like Chiang had fought the Chinese Communist Party— to a standstill. In contrast, France was “fighting” at the moment to halt the Vietminh and, as US policymakers were convinced, world Communism. Early into 1953, President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, and Secretary of Defense Wilson concluded matter-of-factly over breakfast that Indochina was “the top priority in foreign policy,” and “more important than Korea because the consequences of loss there could not be localized.”

In 1953 alone, Congress allotted close to $550 million in aid for France’s war, which accounted for 80 percent of the conflict’s cost, and the Pentagon had already created the Military Assistance Advisory Group to monitor the distribution of supporting

36 “‘France is Fighting the Good Fight’,” *Life*, 21 Sept. 1953.
37 Memcon by the Secretary of State, 24 March 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 8:419.
aid.\textsuperscript{38} Syngman Rhee was no longer at the vanguard of the Cold War. From his vantage point, he appeared destined to occupy a role similar to the marginalized Chiang and the Republic of China, where Eisenhower had strategically removed the US Navy’s 7\textsuperscript{th} Fleet during the Korean War. The impending withdrawal of 20,000 American soldiers was an unfavorable harbinger of Washington’s shifting focus.

Syngman Rhee made his first explicit offer of military aid to Indochina in 1954 with specific designs to tighten his relationship with the United States. Had his maneuverings actually resulted in the deployment of Korean soldiers, it would have been among the cleverest of his political maneuverings. Ironically, in spite of their frequent complaints of Rhee’s “oriental bargaining”, neither Eisenhower nor Dulles raised doubts about the origins of Korea’s proposal. In early February 1954, during a private meeting, President Rhee informed the Commander of the Far East, General Hull, that the Kingdom of Laos had recently requested the Republic of Korea lend its military assistance to defeat the Vietminh—a concept that appeared credible, as the Laotian royal capital of Luang Prabang was under siege at that moment. Rhee explained that he was inclined to offer one ROKA division to the Laos, but wanted Washington’s approval. The issue was tabled, and Hull promised the president that he would broach the topic on an impending trip to the White House. Ever the personal strategist, Rhee was quick to turn his privileged information into a publicity ploy. By February 11\textsuperscript{th}, the story was leaked to US newspapers across the

eastern seaboard and on the 12th the ROK’s official press release appeared in major publications. “If we are not allowed to finish our own war,” the lengthy Korean statement offensively posited, “or to assist another country in distress, what hope is there for saving any of the free nations, including the United States...Our token army [will] help those in distress [and] will encourage all the anti-communist peoples of Southeast Asia and should persuade many of them to join with those of us who are now fighting the enemy.”\[39\] The statement painted a picture of responsibility, only making one request: “We want Gen[eral] Van Fleet to come and help us organize our own forces and at the same time train and organize the armies of Indochina.”\[40\] The antagonistic statements revealed, in part, there was more to Korea’s offer than just a generous offer of aid.

Despite his recent threats to unilaterally resume the Korean War, Rhee was not capable or willing to do so in February of 1954. With the 1954 Geneva Convention approaching—which many forget was also designed to address the state of Korea and Vietnam—the ROK government’s apprehension was boiling over. The day Korea’s offer went public, its Foreign Minister Pyun Yung Tai lamented to a reporter at the *St. Petersburg Times*, “Here is the tragedy...both our allies and our enemies have agreed upon the division of Korea.” From the government in Seoul’s perspective this meant that the United States was “cooperating in something that


means the death of Korea.”41 While the Eisenhower administration pulled back from Korea, it embraced oratorical brinksmanship, which called for thinly veiled threats of “massive retaliation” in the case of a communist offensive. The strategy was designed to appease an American public that wanted no further losses to Communist groups, but also wanted to prevent unpopular Korea-type scenarios.42 From Rhee’s standpoint, one of the only viable options to reverse the “death of Korea” (or more aptly, the “death of Rhee’s Korea”) was to incite a Chinese violation of the Korean Armistice or provoke a Chinese offensive action in Southeast Asia that would lead to direct United States involvement.43 Since American advisors were explicitly clear that they would not be duped by covert actions designed to incite an attack from China or North Korea, Rhee had little recourse. His best option was the one he elected to use—send ROK Army troops in Indochina, where China was actively supplying the Vietminh’s war effort while the US supplied France’s military mission. Indeed, Foreign Minister Pyun was surprisingly blunt when asked about the possibility of a Chinese retaliation to the deployment of Korean soldiers, telling a

43 When Eisenhower announced the withdrawal of troops in Korea, he proclaimed that the United States would prosecute the war “with even greater effect than heretofore” if Communist “aggression” occurred; in Dwight D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953 (Washington, DC; Government Printing Office, 1960), 860.
reporter “it was quite probable.” When several of his offers were deflected, Rhee dropped his guard and responded with a polarizing speech before Congress in which he presented his stratagem to beat Communism. Given the pulpit, the president laid bare his aims for the Far East, calling for the United States to use its Navy and Air Force to support the invasion of China’s mainland with 20 ROK divisions and 630,000 of Chiang’s Nationalist soldiers. In his estimation, a victory in China was the Far East’s panacea, capable of producing a “victorious end to the wars in Korea and Indochina.” Rhee allayed his audience’s fear of Soviet intervention, opining that such an event “would be excellent for the free world” since the United States could justifiably invoke the massive retaliation doctrine and use its nuclear power to obliterate “the Soviet centers of production.” The speech had the opposite effect Korea’s president had hoped for. Instead of ingratiating himself with the Cold War’s most ardent warriors, he set himself apart, further if possible, as an addled and unreliable ally.

Ironically, when Rhee offered up his soldiers, he hoped it would increase his political prestige and elevate his status from a lesser to a greater ally to the United States. And he had good reason to believe that his tactic could be successful. During Eisenhower’s successful presidential campaign, he decried the way America had been forced into “bearing the brunt” of the Cold War, and “constantly compelled to man those front lines” in Asia. “If there must be war there, let it be Asians against

---

45 Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, 12434-12436.
Asians with our support on the side of freedom.” Korean troops would, literally and metaphorically, also maintain congruency with the French jaunissement or “yellowing” approach, later resuscitated by President Nixon under the name “Vietnamization”. When pressed by reporters during his Washington visit, General Hull admitted that he saw an opportunity in the Korean offer, as it meant, “one Asiatic country would be going to the assistance of another.” Additionally, Rhee’s offer to Laos and proposal to invade Communist China were designed to eliminate the necessity of the US Army’s foot soldier. Similar in some respects to the massive retaliation doctrine, his proposals were designed to theoretically eliminate American casualties, which contributed to the souring of public opinion on Korea. If Rhee could manage to get ROK soldiers in Laos or China, it would place him at the forefront of United States’ Cold War. Indeed, Ambassador Briggs was convinced that Korea’s sanguine offer to Laos was driven by Syngman Rhee’s “burning desire to mobilize an anti-communist front in Asia under his leadership and to court U.S. public opinion.” But Rhee wisely adduced his ambitious goals with Ike’s own campaign promises, in the hope that it would leave the president little choice but to accept, or at the very least commend his tenacity.

Rhee also wanted to highlight the comparative worth of the Republic of Korea in relation to its neighbor Japan. Lindsay Parrott, a New York Times

47 “Use of Rhee Troops to Fight in Indo-China is Discussed,” NYT, 12 Dec. 1952.
correspondent, was quick to notice this gambit. “It is probably not without significance,” Mr. Parrott observed, “that the offer to send a division to Indo-China immediately followed a series of anti-Japanese declarations by the R.O.K. Executive.”49 Beginning in the late 1940’s, American policy in Japan gradually came to support the restoration of the business conglomerates or zaibatsu and a move towards rearmament, but after the Korean War broke the US wanted Japan to accelerate its development to counter Communist gains in East Asia. The pressure had little effect, garnered few results, and retarded American hopes for a defense bloc in the East that incorporated Japan. In the summer of 1953, Secretary Dulles continued to press Prime Minister Yoshida to increase Japan’s military beyond the National Security Forces created in 1952. Then, in an attempt to alter public opinion in Japan, Vice President Nixon lauded the former empire as a “key bastion for the defense of Asia,” and proclaimed the United States “made a mistake in 1946” when it encouraged disarmament.50 For a man like Rhee, who professed the Japanese were treacherous people—in fact worse than Communists—such signs and statements surely caused distress; especially given his longstanding suspicion that United States policy makers desired a resurgence of Japan’s imperium.51 In effect, Rhee’s

51 At this time, the Eisenhower administration and Army were strategically determined to resurrect Japan as a balance to the Soviet Union. General Hull believed that ”Korea must align itself with Japan or forever be a millstone around the neck of the United
offer to send troops to Indochina contrasted his small, war torn, and divided nation with the Japanese—who were, in Washington’s eyes, exceedingly reluctant to even raise an army sufficient for their self-defense. Mr. Parrott concluded his report to the Times with a contention that Rhee’s “neat propaganda maneuver” was likely designed to elicit the following sentiment in the White House and Pentagon: “Which then is the real ally against communism in Asia?”52

President Rhee’s offer of troops was proven to be a piece of clever subterfuge concealing ulterior motives, not an act of solidarity and assistance, when the request from Laos was revealed to be a “fabrication.” Many papers in the United States noted that France was unlikely to accept Rhee’s offer in fear of provoking a Chinese intervention similar to the Korean War. But it was only in Europe that reporters keyed in on the irregularities in the Korean story. The Times in London reported that Laotian diplomats denied making any request, “pointing out...as South Korea has never extended diplomatic recognition to Laos, any communications between the two countries would have to be made through France.”53 Out of respect for the United States and their ally, France kept their displeasure over the Korean chicanery limited to back-channel communication. The unlucky Foreign Service Officer in

States. Korea’s value to the US is only in the degree it protects Japan militarily and supports Japan economically...Unless Japan is far stronger militarily than Korea and unless Korea feels the need for...Japanese protection we are unlikely to be able to bring these two powers together.” Hull to Ridgeway, 5 July 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954, 15:1823-1824.

charge of French-Iberian affairs received a late phone call on the 11th from the agitated French Ambassador to the US, Henri Bonnet. Mr. Bonnet launched into a protest of the day’s reports and asserted that the Laotian Government “had certainly never in fact requested troops from President Rhee.” Further, the ambassador reckoned Rhee “was of course offering them [his soldiers] for his own political ends. Paris did not request a redaction of the stories because it would “do more harm than good,” but rather issued a firm statement that explained France would not be “disposed” to fight with South Korean troops due to “the critical danger” of “open large-scale Chinese intervention.”

The fabrication of Laos’ request is important because it alludes to the nature of Rhee’s offer. This was not a brash maneuver; it was a relatively thoughtful plan where the ROK executive took advantage of the Viet Minh’s siege on Luang Prabang and a blighted French war. By sending his offer first to General Hull he elevated his prestige and successfully interjected himself in the ever-inflating press coverage of the Indochina War. What occurred at this moment is most curious not because Rhee showed a surprisingly political acumen, but rather because no one in the United States Government took note that Rhee’s offer was derived from a ruse.

55 In particular, Ambassador Bonnet was angered over a Pentagon officer being quoted. Bonnet “thought having a Defense Department spokesman quote such a fabrication was going too far.” Mr. McBride reported back to the ambassador a day later and informed him that the responsible official at the Pentagon had been taken “to task for his error.”
No “Adventuring” in Indochina

Rejection of the Rhee Offer

President Rhee’s troops offer was received with caution and optimism during a mid-February National Security Council meeting. From a military perspective Korean troops appeared to be a viable alternative. General Ridgeway, Chief of Staff of the Army, and General Hull each believed “Rhee’s proposal had merit.” Admiral Radford noted that the United States, in keeping with its policies in Korea, would be obliged to transport the ROK soldiers and provide logistical support—neither of which would have presented a problem since the supplies were available in Korea and Indochina. The JCS also concluded Rhee should tender his offer to the French government event though Laos “had originally appeal for assistance.” President Eisenhower adopted a decidedly critical opinion and enunciated his belief that “Our most immediate concern has been to assist Korea to take care of itself.” It would be counter-productive to “let the South Koreas go ‘adventuring’ in foreign parts,” which, he believed, public opinion in America would not allow. Subsequently, the president questioned whether moving an ROK division to Indochina was not “sufficient notice that the United States was involving itself in” France’s war. Hull affirmed the president’s line of thought and opined, “The problem was more political than military.” All Hull really needed to establish was the US “Government’s

There is the only mention of a US governmental official acknowledging the falsity of Rhee’s claims.
reaction to Rhee’s proposal to make this offer.” The NSC held its judgment in abeyance while the Central Intelligence Agency, State Department, and Defense Department created separate studies of the issue.  

When the NSC met two weeks later, all members believed, in accordance with the three studies on the topic, Syngman Rhee should be informed that his offer, while commendable, was not desirable. The members were in “unanimous agreement” that the offer should be rejected, but they differed on the rationale for the decision. While the State Department believed the decision should be based on “military reasons,” Defense and the JCS believed the issue was not in “the best interests of the free world.”  

Among the disadvantages were:

f. It would provide Rhee with an opportunity to exploit the situation to his ulterior purposes. It might be his hope that the transfer of a ROKA division to Indochina would lead to a renewal of hostilities in Korea;

g. The burden of moving and providing logistic support...would impose additional responsibilities, commitments, and costs on the United States Government...

i. It would be difficult to explain and justify to the American public the transfer of a ROKA division to Indochina while still requiring the retention of United States ground forces in Korea. In all probability, serious criticism by the American public would ensue...  

In the end, it was point “i,” which proved most persuasive. Eisenhower elaborated on the points he made previously, voicing his opposition on the grounds that

---

“domestic public opinion in the United States would never stand for the removal of a Korean division to Indochina” while American soldiers were forced to guard the 38th parallel. The president illustrated his point “with great emphasis,” stating that he would "certainly hate" to explain to the mothers of American soldiers why Korean soldiers were allowed to undertake “adventures in other parts of the world” while their sons were obliged to guard the Republic of Korea. Eisenhower’s attitude appeared peculiar only when compared to his more favorable attitudes regarding Formosa and Chiang Kai-shek. Less than a week before Rhee’s offer was publicized, Ike remarked to Press Secretary James Hagerty, “I’d like to see Chiang’s troops used in Indochina.” Unlike Korean soldiers, his only objection was Chinese retaliation “would then be too great.” The president’s divergent opinions most likely reflected his belief that Korea was a clear dependent of the United States, one that demanded great care and support since its inception. Despite Chiang’s shortcomings, he still held greater prestige in the president’s mind as a World War II comrade and an ally closer to building an autarkic nation in East Asia. Furthermore, the Korean executive’s storied reputation of truculent defiance had cast him as a highly unreliable partner. If Korea were incorporated into the Indochina fiasco it would be tantamount to re-opening the hard fought armistice agreement. In light of recent past, Eisenhower was wary of Rhee’s motives and, thus, only saw his offer as an “adventure” in Southeast Asia.

60 Hagerty, The Diary of James C. Hagerty, 15.
Even if Syngman Rhee had been the consummate ally and American client, his proposed offered would still not have been actionable. When the battle at Dienbienphu escalated in early spring of 1954 and the situation aggregated a wealth of importance, in public opinion alone, the French adamantly refused to cede political or military control. In response to domestic pressure, French Prime Minister Joseph Laniel declared in Assembly he would “do everything to achieve victory...with matérielle aid which Franco-Vietnamese forces are receiving from US,” and to “take up under full liberty of action the negotiations at Geneva with the intention of arriving at a solution.” An expansion, or internationalization, of the war was not an acceptable position. Surely, la guerre sale would not have accumulated integrity by virtue of Rhee or Chiang’s soldiers openly entering the conflict.

The deteriorating situation in Vietnam dictated a coalition that went far beyond a division or two of ROK soldiers. France’s indecision, waning determination, and poor war prosecution worried President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles, each of whom firmly believed the 1954 Geneva Conference would serve only as a “face-saving device” for a French or Communist capitulation. Given the increasingly poor performance of General Navarre’s plan, they had strong reasons to believe that the French—and by virtue the free world—would concede

61 Anderson, Trapped By Success, 44; Spector, Advice and Support, 183-186.
62 Ambassador in France (Dillon) to Dept. of State, 9 April 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954, 13:1299 [my emphasis].
their position at Switzerland. In late March, Dulles gave a deliberately threatening speech at the Overseas Press Club of America in which he enunciated the global importance of the Indochina War. The Secretary warned, “Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted, but should be met by united action.” The speech, which Eisenhower approved, established America’s acceptable parameters: no Communist expansion “by whatever means,” including Geneva, and a US led anticommunist alliance for S.E. Asia.  

In order to amass anti-Communist ammunition, the Eisenhower administration began a whirlwind campaign designed to create a formidable alliance that would ensure “united action” in Southeast Asia. British support for the coalition would mitigate France’s colonial past, lend credibility to French promises of independence, and, according to Eisenhower, a “moral meaning to intervention.”

Using this framework, the president outlined his argument in a lengthy letter to Winston Churchill. Ike implored the Prime Minister to recognize their shared interests in Asia and to join an ad hoc group of nations; which he envisioned including the United States, Britain, and France with Asian regional allies Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines. If enacted, the alliance would preclude a

64 Billings-Yun, Decision Against War, 61-62.
65 Eisenhower, Mandate, 341.
French surrender and alleviate concerns in Congress that the military was headed toward a new Korean conflict, whereby the US would be supporting 90 percent of the materials and manpower.66

Intermixed with his call to unite, Eisenhower left some ambiguity in his political machinations. One short and disjointed paragraph stated: “I would contemplate no role for Formosa or the Republic of Korea in the political construction of this coalition.”67 While Eisenhower likely mentioned this in an effort to allay British fears of Chinese Communist intervention, (and possibly the not-so-desirable prospect of allying with American-cultivated autocrats like Rhee and Chiang) the statement only limited Korea's participation in the diplomatic sphere. The administration hoped a collation could deter China's support for the Viet Minh before and during the Geneva conference; however, even if “united action” eventually necessitated united military action Dulles believed America “could do better” providing naval and air support, training indigenous soldiers, and outfitting allies with money and supplies.68 After his speech, Dulles concentrated his efforts on securing Great Britain's support, but the English wanted the matter settled quickly and peaceably at Geneva. In the midst of a particularly contentious

66 Congressional leaders unanimously agreed: “We want no more Koreas with the United States furnishing 90% of the manpower.” Memcon, Eisenhower, Dulles, and Congressional leaders, 3 April 1954, FRUS, 1954-1952, 13:1224.
exchange with British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir Anthony Eden, Dulles openly lamented:

If the effort to develop a united position with reference to southeast Asia collapsed, we would be faced by the problem of going it alone. This would probably mean increasing the close relations with Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek, who, whatever their difficulties, were at least willing to stand strong against the Communists.69

The president and secretary likely did not rule out future use of ROK soldiers because they were aware—as the Korean War demonstrated so well—that most nations, even those willing to join the United States in consular solidarity, often declined to provide soldiers. The administration hedged its bets against “going it alone.” In fact, over the next four months the NSC reconsidered the ROK troop issue several times, eventually holding the offer in abeyance until circumstances dictated a reevaluation.70

69 Memcon, Dulles and Eden, 30 April 1954, Foreign Relations Series of the United States, Microfiche Supplement, Secretary of State’s Memorandum of Conversation, November 1952-1954, Document 440. [my emphasis]
70 Three days after Dulles’ meeting, as the French position at Dien Bien Phu deteriorated the National Security Council briefly discussed resurrecting the ROK, but President Eisenhower order the issue tabled. Even after the fortress fell and negotiations were well underway in Geneva, General Radford suggested the US Navy transport three ROK divisions to Indochina. This time Eisenhower unequivocally stated that the French must make a formal request before any ROK troops could be mobilized. 200th NSC Meeting, 3 June 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954, 13:1660-1661. Secretary Dulles reportedly could not believe that France would reject the offer yet again. Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, End of a War: Indochina, 1954 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 220n. The NSC referred the issue to the Secretary of Defense for further evaluation. Finally, at a late July NSC meeting it was decided that “U.S. policy with respect to the possible use of ROK forces in Indochina not be changed at this time, but be kept under
In late 1953, Syngman Rhee faced a crisis nearly equal to the outbreak of the Korean War. He had recently been forced into an armistice agreement that indefinitely suspended the war he hoped could reunify Korea under his control. Shortly thereafter, President Eisenhower announced a two-division troop withdrawal and reassured the ROK executive that the international community would work to bring about a peaceful unification of the country. Already late in his life, the Korean executive saw the opportunity to unite the Korean Peninsula under his leadership fade away. When, in the estimation of US policy makers, Indochina surpassed Korea in Cold War strategic significance, Rhee crafted a fictional Lao request for military assistance. Rhee hoped ROK armed intervention in the Cold War's newest “hot war” would reinsert South Korea into a position of importance in United States foreign policy estimations and create the circumstances necessary for the resumption of the Korean War. Even though the offer was a fabrication, the ROK received expanded attention in relation to the Indochina War. At the very least, Rhee successfully interjected the ROK into Eisenhower’s Indochina policy formations so much so that the National Security Council reevaluated Korea’s utility several times and never completely discarded the possibility. Rhee even desperately resurrected the troop
offer tactic five years later as he and his Liberal party became increasingly unpopular and his political life appeared threatened.\(^1\)

In contrast, President Eisenhower fulfilled his campaign promise and ended the Korean War. He and his administration, through great effort, acquired Korean President Syngman Rhee’s acquiescence in the matter. In concert with an overall shift in policy, Eisenhower announced the removal of two army divisions from the Korean Peninsula. American policy makers determined South Korea little strategic importance in comparison to the attention it had occupied for the past three years. If the small nation wanted to survive surrounded by Communist Russia, North Korea, and Communist China, it would need to align with its more powerful neighbor, Japan. Conversely, Indochina was an immediate threat. If this corner of Southeast Asia fell to the Communists, the administration declared, then the entire Asian landmass would fall as well.

While the Korean troops offer did not succeed in full, it was a fixture of policy discussions on Indochina and generated no less than four State, Defense, and CIA reports on the utility and feasibility of ROK combat soldiers in Vietnam. The Eisenhower administration was unable to flatly reject Rhee’s loaded proposal.

---

\(^1\) Rhee tried to avoid US complications and presented the offer directly to South Vietnamese President Diem’s government. South Vietnamese Charge “Dat, recalling ROK proposal made by ex-ROK-Ambassador Choi Duk-shin in 1959 offering military assistance from ROK...” Embtel, Seoul 1142, 11 March 1964, NACP, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1965, “POL 7 KOR S, Visits. Meetings 1/1/64”
because America’s traditional allies did not support US intervention and politicians feared “going it alone,” in a war similar to Korea. For this reason, Korea’s offer floated about in NSC meetings during the spring and summer of 1954 until the Geneva Convention concluded and Vietnam was divided; at which point there was no longer a possibility of overt intervention, lest America blatantly violate the accords. For the remainder of the Eisenhower years and the Kennedy years, US policy pulled back from the brink and maintained an advisory and training role. The Republic of Korea’s future efforts to form a military alliance with the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) were contingent upon Vietnamese support—which was not forthcoming.
2. THE THIRD REPUBLIC  
*Korea's Military Junta & The United States, 1961-1963*

More than anything else, [we] need money. Even though the US helps us, I can't expect that the US would double its aid and I can't trust the US...
- Chairman Park Chung Hee

For every government Korea has had, and I have seen four of them in my two years in Korea, economics has been a major problem.
- General Carter B. Magruder speaking in Seoul, 1961

The seven years following the Korean War saw little economic or social progress. Government suppression, abject poverty, pervasive unemployment, and a weak economy hampered the former Kingdom. Tensions mounted when Korean students led urban protests of Syngman Rhee and the Liberal Party's rigged 1961 elections. The police force of Syngman Rhee killed 200 demonstrators and injured another 6,000, while the government declared the protests the "work of Communists," and a "plot of the opposition party." Instead of consolidating support, the comments of the government galvanized further protest and increased public enmity between the executive and public. In desperation, Rhee tried to

---

divorce himself from the unpopular Liberal Party, but failed to sway the protesters. On the April 27th, 1961 Rhee accepted the gravity of the situation and submitted his resignation to the National Assembly.

Korea’s Second Republic was comprised of a new parliamentary government, which relegated the presidential office to a figurehead, and placed executive power in the hands of a prime minister. In July, the Democratic Party’s members ran on a conservative international platform of continued close relations with the United States and pledged a domestic policy devoted to ending government corruption, re-establishment of political freedoms, and punishment of former government abuses. They won a majority 176 parliamentary seats out of 233 while the crippled Liberal Party gathered only a handful of seats. Former Vice-President Chang Myong, who resigned in protest of the fraudulent elections, was successfully—though narrowly—nominated as Prime Minister. Certainly, Chang faced extensive problems. Students, emboldened by their grassroots success, demonstrated frequently, even interrupting parliamentary sessions. Korea’s weak economy also added to the Republic’s hardships. Finally, corruption remained a fixture in government and business. Eleven months after the April 19th Student Revolution, the Second Republic fell victim to a bloodless coup d’état. In 60 hours, fewer than 20 army officers and 3,600 soldiers (less than 0.05% of the armed forces) wrested control of the Republic of Korea from its elected officials, 600,000-man army, and

5 Chang Myong is also known by the name John M. Chang.
50,000 UN commanded advisors. In the coming weeks, Major-General Park Chung
Hee emerged as the leader of the military junta.

**Park Chung Hee**

In many ways, Park Chung Hee’s path to the presidency differed vastly from
the Republic of Korea’s first president. Syngman Rhee grew up in relative privilege,
engaged in anti-Japanese protests during his youth, and lived in the United States for
three decades while earning a PhD in international law and American history. In
contrast, following his birth into meager circumstances in rural Korea, Park
completed his studies in military academies, served in the Japanese Imperial Army,
and spent only one year living in the West.

In late 1917, Park was born into a large and rather ignoble family who settled
in a rural Korean village. He regularly attended a primary school which required he
learn Japanese language and culture. After graduation, Park continued his education
at a teaching academy in Taegu and continued his instruction in Japanese tradition.
After graduation he displayed little vocational aptitude, performing poorly in school,
and only remained a teacher for a short time. For largely mysterious reasons, Park
resigned his teaching post and entered the Manchurian Military Academy. In 1942, the regular Japanese Military Academy in Tokyo admitted Park.\(^6\)

Following his academy graduation, Second Lieutenant Park was assigned to the 8th Corps of the Japanese Kwangtung Army. His unit earned a reputation as an effective anti-guerilla squad, reputed to have squashed Chinese and Korean anti-Japanese resistance fighters. Far from a Korean patriot, Park was a “thoroughly colonized soldier.”\(^7\)

After the fall of Japan’s colonial empire in 1946, Park was recruited, along with many former Imperial soldiers, to join the newly formed Korean military. At nearly the same moment, police forces executed his brother following his participation in pro-Communist riots. The death of his brother was a radicalizing experience that engendered a disdain for rightist Korean police and their American military advisors, whom he blamed for his loss.\(^8\) For the next two years, while still an active military officer, Park participated in underground Communist activities, culminating with his arrest, trial, and death sentence in 1948. Park’s death sentence was commuted in part because he named hundreds of other subversives and, according to one researcher, “the key factor that enabled Park to obtain clemency was... the collective forces of [his] personal connections,” fostered in the


\(^7\) Kim, *Korea’s Development Under Park Chung Hee*, 21. I have drawn heavily from Kim’s work in this section due to her study’s abundance of interviews with former ROK military officers and excellent collection of pertinent Korean language sources.

\(^8\) Ibid., 23.
Manchurian Army and Japanese Military Academy. When the Korean War erupted in June 1950, the Army needed to mobilize all available soldiers and Park was reinstated as an officer. From that point on, he earned respect for his managerial aptitude, industriousness, honesty and, particularly, his anti-corruption efforts.

Park’s military experiences left him with an ambivalent view of the American military establishment in Korea and US aid to the Republic of Korea government. As mentioned, Park resented and blamed rightist elements in the National Police and the US occupational forces for his brother’s execution. Park’s enmity towards the overwhelming US presence became apparent during his first tour at the DMZ. In addition to reportedly calling a US advisor’s instructions “Yankee interference” and, when instructed to learn English, he remarked, “Is this the American or Korean Army?” His own arrest undoubtedly aggravated these sentiments. Furthermore, Park saw the United States as a party to the endemic corruption present in Republic’s army and political system. A former US advisor believed Park “sometimes blamed the US... for not doing something about the mess, or at least for seeming to condone it.”

As one of Park’s defining traits, incorruptibility played an integral role in his rise to power. The exigencies and turmoil of the Korean War dictated a sloppy military stratum in which officers were rapidly promoted. As a result, post-war

---

9 Ibid., 24.
10 Kim, Korea’s Development Under Park Chung Hee, 23.
professional mobility in the armed forces was inhibited. Because the early groups of officers were promoted quickly, they were actually under-trained and less experienced when compared to the younger rising officers who received better training in the US/UN Command. Younger professional officers grew to resent the graft and corruption practiced by many of the older officials at “the very time that frustrated ambition could combine with national sentiment.” Park exploited his position as a senior officer and his reputation for probity to command the group of discontented soldiers who launched the military coup in May of 1961.

According to the US Embassy in Seoul’s 1961 assessment, Park led the coup group and subsequently served as chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR) “through [the use of] his ability to balance and manipulate opposing factions” and an abundance “of initiative and drive.” Similarly, members of the coup faction gave testimony that corroborated the US profile. One co-collaborator summed up General Park when he stated: “Whatever President Park may be, he is not a man who waits for things to come to him.” Another former Korean military officer labeled Park’s negotiating acumen as his “trademark.” “He would go to no end of trouble—his or yours,” the officer contended, “to hammer into

you his angle on the matter under discussion or dispute. He made enemies or
friends, he never seemed to care which.”

At the time of the military coup, Park came to terms with the American
presence and understood its pivotal role in the defense of Korea and Korean politics.
The marked change was noted in a 1961 US Embassy memo that described Park as
“perceptibly friendlier and more cooperative with the United States.” Evidence of
this transformation is also found in the pre-coup planning, which showcased the
future president’s ability to combine his acuity with practicality. Acknowledging the
importance and power of General Carter Magruder, Commander of United Nations
and US soldiers in Korea, Park went to great lengths to ensure the coup would
succeed. Declassified US CIA and State Department documents make clear that CIA
Director Dulles was apprised of plans to overthrow the Chang Myong Government
but there has been no proof linking the US to active participation in the planning.

General Magruder recalled two separate conversations with Park:

[General] Park voiced concern that the United States, or that I, might
intervene in the revolution...when Park Chung Hee did emerge as the
strong man of the group and incident to our discussion as to the
operational control, he said he felt he had to have my agreement that I
would not use the Korean Armed Forces under my control to overthrow
the revolutionary government and I agreed to provide him such a


15 As cited in Keon, Korean Phoenix, 62-64.
16 Avery Dulles to JFK, several reports dated 21 April – 26 April 1961, FRUS, 1961-1963,
statement, feeling that my functionality was primarily to defend Korea against external threat.\textsuperscript{17}

Magruder’s statement lends credence a former ROKA officer, and coup participant, who asserted that “some time well before the actual revolution occurred, [General] Park had it mapped out, in his mind and in his contacts.” While it remains impossible to discern whether Magruder’s recollection conveys the entire story, which it almost certainly does not, it still demonstrates something remarkable: General Park succeeded in winning the US Army’s acquiescence in his plot to overthrow the democratically elected government of a US ally. Several months later, Park refined his demeanor to such a degree that the US Embassy penned a report stating he had “emerged” from his “ultranationalism, becoming perceptibly friendlier and more cooperative with the United States.”\textsuperscript{18} The coup d’état’s success

\textsuperscript{17} This statement was redacted at General Magruder’s request and does not appear in the final oral history produced by the AHEC. This statement was found in the original transcript of the oral interview, which General Magruder later crossed out during an editing session. Publication of said statement would have embarrassed Magruder because he issued a repudiation of the coup on the day it was carried out and instructed the Korean soldiers under his command “to support the duly recognized government of Korea headed by Prime Minister Chang Myung.” Oral History [Original Version], General Carter B. Magruder with Lt. Col. Charles E. Tucker, 1972, AHEC, Magruder Papers. Magruder recycled this logic when he sent a telegram to Washington 24 hours after the coup launched: “Basically my mission is to protect Korea from external aggression. To this end the Korean Forces appear steadfast. I feel that it is also a part of my mission to protect Korea from internal subversion by the Communists. The uprising does not appear to be Communist...Accordingly I do not propose to direct FROKA to suppress the uprising on my own authority only. Magruder to JCS, 17 May 1961, FRUS, 1961-1963, 22:459-460.

\textsuperscript{18} Profile of Pak Chong-hui, Nov. 1961, JFK, NSF, Korea, “Subjects, Park Briefing Book, 11/14/61-11/15/61, Part III.”
illustrates Park’s ability to carefully plan and implement his own policies while working within the confines of United States control.

In mid-November, shortly after General Park became chairman of the SCNR, the Kennedy administration welcomed him in Washington for an informal meeting with President Kennedy. On that occasion Park made his first unsolicited offer of military assistance, in the form of Korean troops, for the Republic of Vietnam.

**An Economic Mandate**

Chairman Park’s first offer of soldiers was inspired by a more concrete and simplistic rationale than his forerunner, Syngman Rhee. For Park, the first proposal was literally a matter of dollars and cents—those dollars being in the form of US aid to Korea. The military coup group was able to successfully seize power in part because bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption squandered US aid and in part due to the lack of economic progress. Upon wresting power of the country, the group had little in the way of popular support and their prospects for continued rule were dependent, in large part, on their ability to effect domestic economic reform. Park extended the troop offer to Kennedy as a bargaining maneuver intended to win more US aid. This applied to US aid across the board, from military aid to Supporting Assistance grants and loans.
Beginning with the division of the Korean peninsula, the Republic of Korea suffered from an economic disadvantage. Although the majority of the Korean populace lived in the ROK, the bulk of the peninsula’s mineral deposits and natural resources lay north of the 38th parallel, leaving many South Koreans unemployed and hungry. In addition, the ROK was burdened with a far larger military establishment than it was able to support, which increased the US-Korean tendency to divert a majority of aid to defense expenditures. Combined with Rhee’s US aid-oriented economy, little growth was achieved. The country’s plight was such that it prompted National Security Advisor Walt Rostow to inform President Kennedy “that all hands agree the situation in Korea is not good.” It also inspired this US policy paper’s overwhelmingly negative assessment of the Korean economy:

Economically, the Republic of Korea faces grave problems, many of which derive from social and political factors. The nation is not self-sufficient at present in food grains or fibers. Its forests are denuded; its minerals scanty; its fuel and power resources poor and insufficiently developed to meet demand. Capital and managerial talent are in short supply and inadequately utilized; credit institutions, and other institutions and social practices vital to a modern economy are inadequate or lacking. Communications are poor. Unemployment and underemployment are high, as are unrealistic popular expectations of rapid improvement in living standards...

---

21 Guidelines for U.S. Policy and Operations in Korea (Draft), Undated, National Archives College Park, Record Group 59, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Korea, “K-POL-1.” (hereafter cited as “NACP, RG 59, Bureau of EA Affairs”)
Writing a year after the coup, Chairman Park expressed his belief—which concurred with the sentiments in Rostow’s evaluations—that American aid to Korean was “frittered away” by his forerunners. “I felt,” Park wrote, “as if I had taken over a robbed ruined house. It was, in all reality, empty.” According to an ROK general and acquaintance of Park, the chairman planned to “eliminate incompetence within the Government in order to proceed with economic development.”

Economic reform and increased modernization was the key theme of the May 16th military revolution. Immediately after assuming control of the radio waves, the coup group cited among their six pledges, “The condition of national life which is on the brink of despair and starvation will be quickly ameliorated and all out efforts will be made for the reconstruction of a self-reliant national economy.” Above that, when Park personally described what he believed the revolution would accomplish, it was economically centered. “Socially, [the revolution] is to modernize our society. Economically, it is to industrialize our nation. It is to revive our people, reconstruct our nation and reform us. This is a revolution of national reform.” After Park’s ascension to chairman of the SCNR he publicized his intent to increase Korea’s economic potency, leading the US Bureau of E. Asian Affairs to conclude the Park

---


regime's "political future depends largely on [the] domestic record it makes."  A study conducted by a contemporary Korean researcher found a marked difference between the public speeches of Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee. Analyzing major symbols and themes of different speeches, the researcher found the pre-1960 speeches dwelled on security and unification, which contrasted with the post-coup speech that focused on national economic advancement. Furthermore, he found Park and the military leaders' speeches were more achievement, change, and future oriented. Thus, given the dismal state of the Korean economy and Park's usurpation of the democratic government primarily on the grounds that Prime Minister Myong failed to implement economic modernization, it is a reasonable deduction that the SCNR created an "economic mandate" for itself, one that tied its existence to real economic progress.

November 1961

Chairman Park and President Kennedy

We shall repay the United States and our other free world allies for their support and assistance by reconstructing our nation, to make it a better place for our people to live in. Doing this, I feel, will enable us to fulfill our responsibilities more effectively as a member of the free world. We shall make every effort to promote better understanding and close ties with all our allies.

-Chairman Park Chung Hee’s Arrival Statement, Washington 1961

For political reasons, Chairman Park needed to utilize his informal Washington visit to the utmost. If Park returned to Northeast Asia after a successful visit, the consequential elevation in his prestige would help bolster his regime, which according to US Embassy observations had “little positive support” in October 1961. From the Ambassador’s vantage, many Koreans appeared ambivalent to the governmental flux, which left them with a “non-committal” or “wait and see” attitude. The State Department recognized the resulting importance of Park’s trip to the US as a means to elevate his own “prestige and that of his government, both domestically and internationally.” However, the Department’s analysts did not speculate what measures, beyond his appointment with Kennedy, would be necessary for Park to achieve his aimed bump in prestige.

1 Press Release, Chairman Park’s Arrival Statement in Washington, Undated, National Archives College Park, Record Group 59, 1961 Subject Files, Subject Personal Name and Country Files 1960-63, “Pak Visit.”
3 As cited in Kwak, The Anvil of War, 77.
When Park spoke with President Kennedy during an afternoon meeting at the White House on November 14, he requested a new economic aid package—a total of $178 million in combined loans and assistance—for his inchoate military government. Park’s request was the vehicle missing from the State Department’s analysis; economic aid was Park’s path to prestige. Given Korea’s recent history during President Syngman Rhee’s rule, this was not a surprise. The Rhee regime employed a litany of economic tactics to create an economy conducive to absorption of outside aid at the detriment of real, sustainable financial progress. This was done to increase the amount of claimable foreign aid, overwhelmingly American, which was cited by the Rhee government, and accepted by many Koreans, as a marker of domestic success. As SCNR chairman, Park needed new aid to kick start his newly created Five Year Economic Development Plan and thereby accumulate the people’s support and erase their “non-committal” disposition.

The second component of Park’s plan sought the maintenance of Korea’s current armed force levels so as to prevent, what NSC staff member Robert Komer referred to as, “robbing military Peter to pay civilian Paul.” The chairman was not particularly worried about a reduction in and of itself because the US appeared opposed to such a measure. A year prior, when Chang Myong campaigned on a promise to cut 100,000 soldiers and reduce Korea’s budgetary burden, Washington refused to comply. Komer noted this was the “first time an ally ever proposed this

sort of thing” and it was the Pentagon “who objected most.”5 In addition, just a week before Park’s Presidential meeting, Secretary Rusk met with the chairman and informed him the United States felt it was paramount that Korea maintains its current military strength.6 Therefore, the request for a continued 600,000-man military was included as a preemptive measure. Park sought new sources of financial assistance, not a reshuffling of funds from the Military Assistance Program (MAP) to the economic sector.

It is equally important to note what Chairman Park did not seek in 1961. One American historian argues the Republic’s “gesture” to send combat troops to Vietnam in 1965 was “an effort to keep U.S. troops on the Korean peninsula” to deter any possible DPRK aggression and ensure the postbellum status quo.7 However, this is not the case in 1961. In three high-level meetings, the Chairman never asked for a commitment or promise in regards to the stationing of US soldiers in Korea. In fact, the subject was only tangentially addressed when Secretary Rusk took it upon

5 Memo, Bob Komer (NSC Staff Member) to Walter Rostow (National Security Advisor), 9 March 1961, JFK, NSC, Korea, "Korea General, 1/61-3/61." [emphasis in original]
7 See Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, “In the Service of Pharaoh? The United States and the Deployment of Korean Troops to Vietnam, 1965-1968,” Pacific Historical Review 68:3 (August 1999), 425-449. As the title alludes, Dr. Sarantakes focuses his article on dispelling the notion that Korea was a subservient client state blindly following the White House’s orders. He asserts Korea sent soldiers to Vietnam “because it was in South Korea’s national interest…” Much of his article is spent arguing that Korea’s decision to fight in SE Asia kept US soldiers stationed in South Korea and ensured the country’s security. Whether by choice or not, he does not evaluate Park’s 1961 troop offer.
himself to assure Park that Korea “could rely completely on the presence of American armed forces in Korea as tangible and... convincing evidence of the United States commitment in Korea.”

When the Chairman did have an audience with the president, he chose to focus on domestic economic and military aid, and not on the continued presence of US ground troops at the 38th parallel. If US troop levels were important to the ROK in 1961, Park would have addressed it during his visit.

To ensure the success of their mission, Park prepared himself and his staff to connect ideologically and personally with America’s policy makers during their Washington visit. Washington’s Korean interpreter, Dr. Paul S. Crane, felt that one particular statement Chairman Park made was incredibly telling. “He wished to say things,” Dr. Crane recalled four years later, “which would, as he said, ‘pierce the hearts of Americans’ – something that would get next to them.”

The interpreter expounded upon his point at length, citing specific examples of Park’s premeditated diplomatic approach:

I think his whole presentation was aimed to be psychologically palatable to the American officials. Examples of this were shown when the entertainment was set up at the reception at the Korean dinner for Secretary [of State Dean] Rusk. Knowing the Secretary to be from the southern part of the United States, the musicians played “Dixie” first...

He kept bringing up personal things with different generals, such as General Lemnitzer, to which General Lemnitzer responded very warmly, so that my feeling was that Chairman Park had studied the people with whom he talked very carefully and presented himself in a way...

---

9 Memorandum of Dr. Paul S. Crane’s Personal Observations of the Visit to the United States November 13-17, 1961, Undated, NACP, RG 59, Bureau of EA Affairs, “POL-7 Park Chung Hee, Korea 1965.” [my emphasis]
that would appeal to them. He was more interested in giving them what he thought they wanted to hear than what he really felt, believed, or intended to do. This was shown in almost every exchange throughout the meeting.

One got the feeling this was put on strictly for their benefit and that this was carefully worked out. Every time he made a statement, his interpreter had a copy of it in his pocket, so that there was no extemporaneous exchange...I think on the Korean side every word of every statement had been carefully gone over... This was my distinct impression.10

In addition to his carefully manicured statements and personal niceties, Park also made a noticeable endeavor to resolve the long-pending treaty to normalization of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan. En route to Washington, Park met with Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda. This trip signaled a marked change from President Rhee's venomous denunciations of Japan and his obduracy with respect to a normalization of relations. It was also a domestic gamble. But the SCNR accepted the risk of resuming negotiations despite persistent public fear of a second Japanese colonization. Chairman Park pursued the treaty because it harbored the potential to benefit Korea in several aspects. First, Japan's grants/loans would provide Korea with much needed funds to develop their economy. (Under the guise of aid, as Japan did not agree with the any terminology mentioning reparations or an indemnity from World War II or colonization) Second, if Korea genuinely endeavored to ameliorate the historic discord, it would play well in Washington. After all, the US was literally demanding a perceptible

10 Ibid. [my emphasis]
change in the traditional Korean reluctance to cooperate with Japan. In late July 1961, the US State Department instructed the Embassy in Seoul to stress the settlement's overall significance in the Korean government's economic wellbeing and physical welfare. Ambassador Berger reiterated the message and went further, threatening Park and the ROK Foreign Minister Lee that the “willingness of Korea to avail itself of Japanese assistance will be major determinant of our future attitude toward further US project assistance.” Finally, If Park desired to enjoy any degree of autonomy or rein in the region, he needed to resolve the Japanese issues or otherwise remain perpetually dependent upon the United States and isolated in its own region. The ROK-Japan issue illuminates the broader aims of the Korean delegation. While the SCNR and Park were not slavish clients of the US, they were still highly susceptible to Washington’s diplomatic pressure in 1961. However, the chairman tried to coalesce his plan for Korea with US strategy in the Far East.

The final aspect of Park’s attempt to “pierce the hearts of Americans” was his unsolicited offer of Korean soldiers for service in Vietnam. The chairman saved this measure for his face-to-face conversation with the President and his immediate advisors at the White House on November 14th. Kennedy began the afternoon meeting speaking on the topic of Communist advances in Southeast Asia. Before he asked Park for his appraisal of the situation, he opined, “Viet-Nam was a common problem, not just a U.S. one, and he wondered whether the Chairman might have

11 Embtel 189, Seoul to Secretary of State, 30 July 1961, JFK, NSC, Korea, “Korea General, 7/61-2/62.”
some ideas on this source.” Without hesitation, Park suggested that “Korea had a million men well trained in this type of warfare [guerilla warfare]...With U.S. approval and support, Korea could send to Viet Nam its own troops or could recruit volunteers if regular troops were not desired.” Park then assured Kennedy that “he had discussed this question with his senior ROK officers” prior to departing, and “all were enthusiastic.” Kennedy expressed appreciation for the offer and assured his guest that he would discuss the offer with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Shortly thereafter, Park mentioned his hope that Korea could receive specific exemptions in the Buy American\textsuperscript{12} policy. Park expanded his argument, expressing his belief that Korea's plight was analogous to divided Germany, wherein each side needed to maintain economic strength at least equal to the other, or face falling “far behind in many respects.” Park then segued into crux of his discourse, declaring his “primary objective...was to seek the President’s positive support for the maintenance of the Korean armed forces at their present strength and also for the implementation of economic reforms and regeneration.” The chairman pressed whether the US-Korean avowed alliance and friendship would “mean support would be forthcoming” soon. For the second time that meeting, Kennedy deflected questions of aid on the grounds that SE Asia—Vietnam and Laos in particular—was presenting great difficulties during Congressional aid appropriations and he could

\textsuperscript{12} The “Buy American” policy was implemented to halt the flight of US gold. Under its terms, aid materials sent to Vietnam had to have upwards of 90% of their product originated in the US. This policy virtually forbade Korea from selling its most profitable materials to the US.
not “do as much as [he] would like.” Moments later, as he bid the President goodbye, Park bluntly asked if he could have, before leaving, a “refreshing answer” to his request for support. Yet again, Kennedy deflected the Chairman’s request.\(^\text{13}\)

The next day, during his farewell call with the US president, Park relayed in more detail the hardships Korea would be face in the next year, and expanded upon his previous aid request. Park asked the President for “special assistance” for the first year of the SCNR’s Five Year Development Plan and Kennedy was forced to tell Park again that he could not make a commitment. At this point, Park revived his prior offer of troops for Vietnam, but added his “Government was willing, whenever the President desired it or gave his consent to support forces in Viet-Nam or other countries with guerilla-type troops.” Park added, “these guerilla forces should be derived from several different countries as an international group signifying willingness to fight for freedom in a Free World.” Kennedy addressed the second offer by stating his belief that aid to South Vietnam “should be in economic support, equipment, communications and other support activities,” not combat troops. Although, if these types of aid proved impotent, “it would be necessary,” the president believed, “to decide on the need for this type of guerilla help from Korea.”\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Memcon, SCNR Delegation and President Kennedy, 14 Nov. 1961, JFK, NSC, Korea, “Korea, Subjects, Park Visit 11/61-12/61.”

Park sat in a car with his colleagues following the meeting. As the delegation left the White House, he became “quite morose,” having failed to accomplish his goals. He was going to return home empty-handed. The dejected chairman mused aloud, “If we don’t get help, our Government is going to die.”

With regard to the Vietnam issue, this meeting revealed what exactly Park had in mind when he proffered his soldiers. If the trip was as well orchestrated as Dr. Crane believed, then the Vietnam offer was certainly the visit’s planned crescendo; it was the overture he felt could “pierce the hearts of Americans,” and bring him closer to expanded economic aid. In one respect, this says a great deal about the foreign perception of America’s involvement in former Indochina. After all, the US had supported the French with billions of dollars until their defeat and then, almost instantaneously, grasped the reins away from the dying empire. Since 1954, Washington had triumphed its “miracle man” in the Republic of Vietnam, (South Vietnam) President Ngo Dinh Diem and supported his country with US aid and hundreds of military advisors/trainers. To the Korean military officer, like Park, the American determination to support Diem, in the midst of increasing internal dissent and warfare, indicated the US’s global interests. When Kennedy asserted the geostrategic importance of South Vietnam, Park immediately parroted the same rhetoric and offered his soldiers or, in his zeal to gain approval for the

15 Memo, Dr. Paul S. Crane’s Personal Observations, Undated, NACP, RG 59, Bureau of EA Affairs, “POL-7 Park Chung Hee, Korea 1965.”
plan, the use of volunteers. Not surprisingly, the offer was raised early into the meeting, before Park made his pitch for new US aid.

The second troop offer further illuminates Park's intent, to establish a relationship in which the US relied on Korea for something it needed and wanted. And, as Park said, South Korea was home to an abundant population—with 600,000 active soldiers—and endemic underemployment and unemployment. This was one of a limited number of gestures that the ROK could afford to make. The implication is threefold. For one, Park did *not* reiterate his troop offer at the second meeting. He created an entirely new offer that eliminated South Vietnam from its terms. Each of his offers preempted a request for economic assistance, in which the troops were meant to serve as a facilitating or ingratiating action—or an underhand *quid pro quo*—for more aid to Korea. In short, the offer was malleable because it was a means to an end: US assistance. Second, Park's alteration of the offer points to hollowness of the chairman's Cold War rhetorical justification for the proposal. The second and more desperate offer did not mention South Vietnam or Korea's desire to halt Communism in Asia, rather Park made clear that ROK soldiers or volunteers were available for any conflict if the president ever so desired.

Nonetheless, in the months following Park's Washington visit, the SCNR continued undeterred in exploring the feasibility of sending Korean troops to South Vietnam. In January 1962, Pacific Commander Admiral Harry Felt informed Washington that the Korea military attempted on several occasions to solicit a troops request from him. Secretary Rusk saw little merit in inserting ROK soldiers
into the counterinsurgency effort since the US “would have to pay for this” in the form of transportation, logistical services, and military advisors. Practically and strategically, it made more sense to “pay the Vietnamese to do the job themselves.” However, Rusk made an important distinction between Korea’s assistance and those of other interested third counties.* According to the secretary, the US would accept Australia’s offer of military trainers if the Kennedy administration deemed the action “politically wise,” and if the Australians agreed to serve under the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).16

Secretary Rusk’s statements allude to the genesis of the United States incorporation of third countries into their counterinsurgency efforts. In late 1961, as President Kennedy informed Park, material assistance for Diem’s Vietnam was preferred. Any offer of military assistance coordinated with the US needed to improve the public perception—domestic and international—of the conflict. The Eisenhower administration in fact sought Australia’s assistance during their pre-Dien Bien Phu scramble to assemble a unified coalition, but owing to Britain’s intransigence on the issue and Australia’s close ties with the United Kingdom, no such alliance materialized. In 1961 Australia was a desirable ally in Vietnam because it—along with France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the

* “Third countries” or “Third country nationals (TCNs)” were terms used in the State and Defense Departments to denote armed forces, countries, or civilians from allies other than Vietnam or the United States. Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and the Republic of China, in addition to others, fell under this category.

United Kingdom, and the US—was a signatory of the 1954 Manila Pact, which created the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower engineered SEATO in the wake of the Geneva Accords as a bulwark in Asia similar to NATO that could serve as a collective deterrent to Communist aggression. South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were unable to sign the treaty due to restrictions implemented at the Accords, but were added as protocol nations, under the SEATO umbrella. As a result of the alliance, the premise behind Australia’s commitment was strong and it provided an example of united action fighting Communist subversion. Consequently, in May 1962 when Australia agreed to send some thirty jungle warfare specialists to the GVN, in part a response to Secretary Rusk’s public plea for a “helping hand” in South Vietnam, all parties billed it as a fulfillment of “obligations under the SEATO treaty.”

From an American standpoint, South Korea was a less favorable ally in Vietnam because it was not a member of SEATO or the United Nations and remained a peripheral country that lacked international credibility. The previous section outlined the United States’ role, in many regards, as Korea’s hegemonic parent state. American influence was blatantly pervasive in the Korean military, which Syngman Rhee placed under the control of an American and United Nations Command. The ROK could only send its troops to Vietnam if the UN Commander authorized their deployment. Further, Korea was dependent upon the US military for transportation.

and logistical support. Thus, if Korean soldiers served in Vietnam it would do little in the way of presenting the case that there was legitimate international support behind President Diem's government; it would only prove America's continued interest in the region. The record shows Park was aware Korea's shortcomings in this respect and explains why he suggested to Kennedy during their second meeting that ROK soldiers enter Vietnam as members of a confederation of regional allies. Park added this language to his second offer because it offered an opportunity to somewhat legitimize an ROK mission in Vietnam. Secondly, while South Korea was heralded as an anti-Communist bastion, it was not an admirable democracy. The United States had supported a through and through dictator in Rhee and the Kennedy administration was quick to give their support to Park after his military coup. At the time of his offer, Park ruled the country as an unelected military general. A professor at the University of Minnesota and consultant for the International Cooperation Administration expressed his dismay over the state, or lack thereof, of democracy and civil rights under what he termed the “military-police dictatorship” in South Korea. “Freedom is gone in the Republic of Korea... unless constitutional democracy is promptly restored in Korea, the United States ought to withdraw completely its economic and military support. Because of our strong identification with Korea, a totalitarian dictatorship of the right is just as
damaging to America’s international position as a totalitarian dictatorship of the left.”\textsuperscript{18}

Korea’s very public shortcomings in international prestige forced the State Department to keep the ROK government disconnected from South Vietnam even when they believed collaboration between their two of their preeminent Asian allies was beneficial. US policy makers in the 1960’s often tried to draw parallels between the Korean War and the insurgency in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{19} So in May 1962 when the US learned through intelligence channels that Korea would dispatch a military mission to Saigon, the news was received rather optimistically by American military sources. Admiral Worth H. Bagley, an aid to General Taylor, believed the Korean group “appear[ed] to be useful, can probably be absorbed without military complications, and will achieve the political objectives.” The idea gained headway in the Pentagon, where Admiral Ulysses S. Sharp, future Pacific Commander, quietly approached the ROK Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and requested he prepare in “great

\textsuperscript{19} Diplomats saw parallels between the two countries because each was a divided country with a Communist neighbor to the North, but their histories and modes of conception were very different. From a military-strategic standpoint, the parallel was entirely erroneous. Korea’s climate is milder and its mountains are covered in deciduous forests. During the winter, snowfalls and the trees are bare, allowing for easy tracking and identification of enemies. The greatest disparity was the war’s overall nature. Korea faced a frontal assault from a conventional army, with scattered resistance within its borders. An internal insurgency comprised of Southerners threatened Diem’s government.
secrecy” a contingency plan for the deployment of a Korean combat unit.\textsuperscript{20} Under Secretary of State George Ball agreed with the military rationale behind an ROK mission and believed that the Korea’s “intelligence management matériel and anti aircraft” might aid the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) and Military Advisory Command Vietnam (MACV). But, forced by political considerations, Ball instructed the Embassy in Saigon to refrain from endorsing the Korean mission openly, and only to not “discourage” it. As a matter of public image, the ROK survey team needed to be “quiet” and “covert.”\textsuperscript{21}

Aside from military aid, Korea had very little to offer in the way of assistance. Park and the SCNR were powerless to make the critical economic contributions that Washington emphasized as paramount in the summer of 1962. During the Sixth Secretary of Defense Conference in Honolulu, Secretary McNamara operated under the assumption that victory was achievable in under three years and accordingly he implemented an agenda to reduce the US and foreign role in South Vietnam and empower the ARVN. Before the anticipated withdrawal of US assisting forces in 1965, the ARVN needed to acquire the expertise and logistical skill the US MACV

\textsuperscript{20} Memcon, General Kim Chong-oh (former Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, ROK) and Winthrop Brown, 8 October 1962, NACP, RG 59, Bureau of EA Affairs, Country Director, “Korean Domestic Situation- Student Demonstrations.”

currently provided them. But a pre-condition of the army’s health was the overall welfare of the country. To this end, the State Department’s Vietnam Working Group declared the GVN needed to “take appropriate economic and fiscal measures to mobilize the full resources of the nation is the struggle with the Viet Cong.” Part of the Working Group’s plan included coordinating economic assistance from third countries, with a particular emphasis placed on commodity imports formerly financed by the US aid program. But Korea was itself trying to win assistance from the United States and could not contribute economically with its inchoate and pilfered economy. The amalgamation of these hindrances eliminated the ROK from involving itself in the war.

**Conclusion**

Since the Republic of Korea’s inception, inefficient, corrupt, and desultory government and economic practices had arrested the country’s potential for progress. Chairman Park Chung Hee took advantage of the Korean people’s discontent and the military’s disillusionment when he diligently and carefully crafted the May 16 military coup. The SCNR legitimized their revolution under a banner of nationalism and economic reform, thus the Five Year Development Plan

---


was designed, in fine, to kick start Korea’s economy and build a nation stronger than it northern brother. Washington, and Vietnam for that matter, was an incidental stop on this path. While Park was not a party to President Rhee’s 1954 Indochina troop offers, he resurrected the tactic with a brand of tenacity similar to his predecessor and essentially issued President Kennedy a blank check for ROK combat soldiers. Desperate to return home with precious aid and a token of US support, Park may have even appeared obsequious to some Americans, but his meticulous preparation was to build his government’s strength and support.

From the American standpoint, Korea was an important ally in the Far East, and one that needed to begin walking on its own two feet so that care could shift to Southeast Asia. For over a decade, Korea consumed more military and economic aid than any other American ally, but was still dependent upon its parent state. The Kennedy administration greeted the military coup as a \textit{fait accompli} and continued assisting the nation under a “general policy toward Korea and not from [a] commitment to any individual or group.”\textsuperscript{24} US Military advisors greeted Korea’s generous offers of military assistance with optimism, and even designed a contingency plan that included Korean combat units. While the prospect of extra soldiers was palatable to some, the concept was implausible from a public policy standpoint. Korea lacked the international credentials and accolades that made

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item memo, Rusk to Winthrop Brown, 5 August 1961, JFK, NSF, Korea, “Korea Cables, 7/21/62-8/3/62.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
countries like Australia valuable allies in a very public posturing battle with the
Soviet Union and Communist China. As long as the Kennedy administration
remained theoretically detached from Vietnam and hesitant to commit its own
soldiers, there was no possibility of Korean involvement. The ROK was an avenue of
last resort, one that was only employed when President Lyndon Johnson had
exhausted other, more preferable, alliances.
3. ARMED INTERVENTION

Korea & The United States, A Symbiotic Alliance

The Americanization of the Republic of Vietnam’s civil war escalated in August 1964 after it was reported that two naval skirmishes occurred in Vietnam’s Gulf of Tonkin. Congress responded with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, thereby extending the president a constitutional license to “take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force,” to aid member and protocol states of SEATO. Newly elected President Park Chung Hee and the ROK privately reiterated their Kennedy-era troop offers for Vietnam to the Johnson administration. In spite of the rapid escalation, Korea’s combat troop proposals were rejected in favor of non-combat engineer and medical support units. However, American force level moderation quickly evaporated and within a year massive Korean troop commitments became part and parcel of President Lyndon Johnson’s plan of action in South Vietnam, albeit after the United States sent large numbers of its own soldiers.¹ One month after the Tonkin Resolution, the ROK sent a 130-man ROK Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) and ten Taekwondo instructors to South Vietnam, this small contingent was the only force of its own the Republic fully funded. Beginning in December of the same year, Korea augmented their commitment to include an engineer and construction support group, dubiously

named the “Dove Unit”, tasked with rebuilding war damaged infrastructure. This contingent raised the total number of ROK soldiers in Vietnam to 2,556 and signaled an era of US concessions and payments for Korean soldiers. By summer’s end, Park initiated the transfer of the ROK Army’s Capital or “Tiger” Division and the 2nd Marine Corp or “Blue Dragon” Brigade, totaling over 18,000 soldiers. In between the winter of ’65 and summer of ’66, LBJ secured the deployment of the 9th Infantry Division (“White Horse”) and another marine brigade with supporting logistical forces. The White Horse division owns an ignominious distinction as the most expensive US concession for allied assistance during the Vietnam War—two months of financial and political negotiations were necessary to win the services of those 23,865 Korean soldiers. The US abided by the terms of this agreement, established in a memorandum authored by Ambassador Winthrop Brown (hereafter referred to as the “Brown Memorandum”) until the White Horse Division was demobilized in 1973.

---

Lyndon Johnson's Quest for Consensus
1964 and the More Flags Program

In December 1963, just a month after he took the presidential oath of office, Johnson penned a concerned memorandum to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor and CIA Director John McCone that voiced his alarm over recent developments in Southeast Asia. “The more I look at South Vietnam, the more I think we must be very quick and firm in getting the best possible men on the job...it is clear to me that South Vietnam is our most critical military area right now.”

Although Johnson’s Congressional track record and patented “treatment” gave him renown as a through and through Washington politician, he was involved, to an extent, in US-Asian foreign policy before Kennedy’s assassination pressed him into the executive office. Recall April 3, 1954 when Secretary Dulles consulted then Senator Johnson and other select Congressional leaders in regards to the enflamed Indochina situation. In addition, as Vice-President, Johnson sat in on policy meetings and traveled to South Vietnam in 1961 as Kennedy’s eyes and ears—although Johnson was not present during Chairman Park’s visit to the White House.

When the reigns of United States foreign policy were dropped in Johnson’s lap, there was no fundamental reevaluation of Washington’s approach to the

---

1 Memo, Johnson to McCone, 2 December 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, 4:651; Memo, Johnson to Taylor, 2 December 1963, ibid.
insurgency in South Vietnam. Historian Fredrik Logevall contends, “Determination was thus the watchword of the new administration from its first days,” there was “no examination of whether such an objective was vital to U.S. security, or whether such an objective was attainable, no serious investigation of possible alternative solutions to the conflict.”

One alternative LBJ pursued was further internationalization of aid to Vietnam. American trainers and advisors, along with clandestine special forces, were already in place during the Kennedy administration, but as their presence continued to drag on, Johnson expanded his predecessor’s insipient policy to generate outside sources of financial assistance and third country support from SEATO nations for the embattled Saigon government. Assistance from allies was about to take on exponential importance in mid 1964 when US material assistance and enemy efforts began to outstrip the capabilities of the ARVN and GVN. LBJ needed to locate avenues of support for his policies and keep abreast of the surging National Liberation Front counterinsurgency in South Vietnam while ensuring US foreign policy was prudent and realistic.

Historically, LBJ was often unclear with his opinions and designs for US policy in SE Asia. He had a habit of expressing viewpoints that, at their root, conflicted with each other. Dating back to France’s Indochina War, Johnson and seven of his fellow Congressional leaders told President Eisenhower that he must “obtain commitments of a political and material nature from our allies,” before they

would consider authorizing military action. Johnson, among the others, expressed his fear that US involvement in Indochina could lead to a Korean War scenario where the United States supplied the vast majority of combat soldiers.\(^3\) Seven years later, in a summary report of his 1961 fact-finding mission to the GVN, LBJ warned Kennedy he had “better be sure we are prepared to become bogged down chasing...guerillas over the rice fields and jungles” of Vietnam before he took the “plunge” into SE Asia. In the very same document he concluded the political and military circumstances “ultimately” may necessitate US “direct involvement” to “hold the situation.” He concluded roughly, questioning the utility of State and Department of Defense policies that restricted US officer travel for safety reasons. “There will be perhaps some casualties” if the restriction were lifted “but if we are not prepared to take them in small numbers now, how will we take them in the great numbers which will be involved if we become directly involved?” Perhaps the greatest disparity in his convictions occurred in the immediate aftermath of his inauguration. During his first Vietnam planning meeting, Johnson reflected on recent Congressional and broader criticism of US Vietnam policy, the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem, and the feeling that he had “never been happy with [US] policy in Vietnam.” LBJ ordered the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, to get the situation “cleaned up” and under control in short order. The president was “anxious to get along” and “win the war” through conventional

means, not “social reforms.” Within several days the president seemed to create his
own foreign policy maxim: “Lyndon Johnson is not going down as the president who
lost Vietnam. Don’t you forget that.”

In the spring of 1964 LBJ and Secretary Rusk created a new program to
solicit foreign aid for Vietnam from America’s allies, loosely named the “More Flags”
policy. Johnson first mentioned the program in response to a reporter’s question on
Vietnam, when he declared:

I anticipate that [the US] will have stepped up activity [in Vietnam] that
will cost more money ... I would hope that we would see some other flags
in there, other nations as a result of the SEATO meeting, and other
conferences we have had, and that we could all unite in an attempt to
stop the spread of communism in that area of the world, and the attempt
to destroy freedom.

The More Flags program was implemented to alleviated some of LBJ’s domestic and
international political fears. If successful, commitments from large western nations
and US regional allies would bolster the United States’ stance in South Vietnam and
aid the formation of a global consensus for the imperiled region, protecting the US
from a “going it alone” scenario. With allies would come reassurances and support
for pacification programs and training, and the formalized commitments of More
Flags could serve as the basis of a military alliance, should the insurgency erupt
beyond the GVN’s control. According to the *New York Times*, one of the program’s

---

4 Report by the Vice-President, Undated, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, 4:635-637; Logevall,
*Choosing War*, 77.

5 *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964*
(Washington, DC: Office of the Federal Registrar, National Archives and Records Service,
primary objectives was to “quiet domestic concern over American casualties” which amounted to somewhere near 230 reported deaths since December 1961. The program was also a response to political criticism leveled at the president since he took office. Former Vice-President Richard Nixon lambasted Johnson at a Republican fundraising dinner, telling his audience that Eisenhower’s “grand alliance” in Europe was “coming apart at the seams under Johnson and our allies are following policies... diametrically opposed to our interests.” Fellow Republican, Senator Barry Goldwater was likewise critical of the president, opining in a letter to the Times that LBJ was responsible for a “drift and deterioration of United States leadership in the world today.” The senator concluded with his belief that to put out “the fires” in Vietnam, the United States needed to work “through our allies, through our friends.”

One week after Johnson’s speech, Secretary Rusk cabled America’s embassies with the program’s guidelines. The telegram called “upon other nations of the Free World to express their support for the Vietnamese Government and provide evidence of that support in the form of practical and material contributions to the” GVN. If the program went according to plan, the State Department would secure various forms of civic aid from as many donor nations as possible. According to the document, “The nature and amount of the contributions” the US sought was not “as

---

6 “Need for Morale in Saigon is Cited,” NYT, 8 May 1961.
7 “Nixon Assails Johnson as Unable to Lead World,” NYT, 11 February 1961;
significant as the fact of their being made. The basic objective is to have Free World Governments display their flags in Viet Nam and indicate their recognition of the fundamental nature of the struggle there.”

At this juncture, the policy was, as stated, primarily designed to amass publicity and a veneer of support for US foreign policy in the Republic of Vietnam. Twice in May 1964, Johnson and Rusk cabled lists of current aid provided to South Vietnam under the More Flags program to numerous US embassies around the world. The administration took the liberty of including any country that provided any aid to South Vietnam, regardless of its origins or motivations. Despite France and Pakistan’s opposition to US foreign policy in SE Asia, their non-political flood relief aid was included in the list; even Switzerland’s donation of microscopes was publicized. Unabashed, Rusk forwarded the More Flags report and list to all possible donor countries, dubiously claiming that 38 countries were connected to the effort. It was later revealed in a congressional hearing that “more than half” of the countries listed as More Flags donors were “contributing less than $25,000 a year.”

At the same moment Secretary Rusk was approving the More Flags cables for distribution, the Times reported that their correspondents uncovered a general “lack of enthusiasm” for any extension of the war among government officials and

---


civilians in NATO countries. Not surprisingly, when the More Flags program initially debuted, it fell flat. In three weeks, LBJ’s twenty-five requests garnered no new assistance. A foreign service officer and More Flags program coordinator for the Office of Regional Affairs, Far East admitted, “I would be less than frank if I did not say that the responses on the part of most countries have been by and large disappointing.” A frustrated LBJ authorized Rusk to inform prospective donors that “on a case by case basis” the US would consider “financing” the expenses of donor countries “if necessary to prevent [the] aid offer from being withdrawn.”

Johnson evidently felt that covert funding, which eliminated any true merit to the program, was necessary given the overall pessimistic international opinion on South Vietnam at a time when the counterinsurgency was escalating. The administration was eager to include countries like France and Pakistan under the More Flags donor umbrella and entice new assistance with US dollars because the plan’s greatest value lay in its size and length on paper. Washington’s policy makers believed that, if cultivated, assistance to the GVN would “snowball” among western countries, gaining more momentum as the program expanded and thereby broadening the conflict’s credibility domestically and internationally.

13 “Of the 29 nations, the aid from at least ten, and possibly as many as 14, nations constituted humanitarian relief assistance. These nations sent their aid to South Vietnam as a compassionate response to the devastating monsoon flooding of the previous winter and spring and not as a reaction to any More Flags request.” Ibid., 13-28.
The State Department’s offer to finance donor countries’ aid was a harbinger of the exorbitant payments conceded to some governments in exchange for the service of their military. Once the More Flags program failed to win genuine additional support, the administration wasted no time offering to compensate donors. One year later, after no major ally of the United States agreed to commit substantial numbers of combat troops to the Vietnam, LBJ adopted a similar policy that paid several countries—most prominently the Republic of Korea—for the services of its soldiers. In sum, the More Flags program operated as little more than an aggrandized fraud that failed to engineer even an illusory sense of consensus between the United States and its western allies. Instead of creating a new policy for SE Asia that merited broader international recognition and support, the Johnson administration created a (failed) program that aimed to generate token support for the same unpopular foreign policy.

In March 1965, American intervention in South Vietnam escalated precipitously when President Johnson sent US Marines to land on the beaches of Da Nang. LBJ’s decision to expand the visible US combat role engendered a change in the More Flags program. Token material assistance was no longer the preferred commitment. In order to avoid the manpower drain of the Korean War, the US needed to fight in conjunction with allied nations whose willingness to send their soldiers into battle, so the logic went, buttressed Washington’s international clout. When the State Department and Pentagon concluded more Korean troops were required in South Vietnam, they informed the ROK government in a joint State
Defense cable, “the degree of assistance we obtain from our Free World allies assists in maintaining credibility U.S. military posture and lessens likelihood [of] ill-considered actions by the Communist bloc.” Naturally, three quarters of the cable was comprised of descriptions of the aid and forces other Free World allies provided. Once American ground forces officially landed on the ground in a combat role, More Flags focused on attaining third country troop/advisor commitments, becoming a “More Bodies” program in reality. When word of US concessions began to leak in the US, ROK troops in Vietnam were derided as the United States’ “mercenary” force in Vietnam.15


15 Koreans were not the only soldiers that were branded “mercenary”. Troops from the Philippines, Thailand, and the Republic of China were derided as well for their nation’s acceptance of US aid and concession is exchange for troop commitments. See Blackburn, Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s ‘More Flags’, 31-66.
4,198. Remarkably, this is the number of days that elapsed between President Syngman Rhee’s first offer to send Korean troops to Indochina and the actual date that the Republic of Korea’s combat soldiers stepped foot in Vietnam. In eleven and a half years the ROK submitted tens of official and unofficial troop deployment proposals to the US government. The fact that Koreans operated in such a large capacity in South Vietnam is even more astounding in light of their tumultuous post 1946 history. Throughout the 1950’s and early 1960’s American diplomats bemoaned Korea’s economic, bureaucratic, and governmental shortcomings. Furthermore, between 1960 and 1964, four different governments controlled the Republic. And yet, less than two decades after the nation’s inception, the lowly Republic of Korea entered the next major Asian war abreast with the United States as the largest third country military contingent.

When Park Chung Hee, as chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, failed to win President Kennedy’s approval for his 1961 troop offer, the ROK military initiated several short lived and unfruitful military missions to South Vietnam. After President Johnson’s inauguration and the intensification of the NLF counterinsurgency, Korean military offers reappeared as the newly elected President Park Chung Hee once again sought to win economic concessions and establish a degree of Korean autonomy in Asia. In 1964 Park directed his close
friends and advisors to present informal proposals to US diplomats, usually while speaking on an incidental topic. (ROK Ambassador to the US, fellow veteran of the Japanese Kwangtun Army, Kim Chung Yul was entrusted to make offers in Washington, D.C.) US Ambassador Samuel Berger was randomly approached by one of Park advisors during a March 1964 dinner party. The aid, former Prime Minister Kim Hyong-chol, informed Berger if the US was agreeable, the Korean government was prepared to “offer three to four thousand troops from ROK army to assist” the US and South Vietnam “in carrying war to North Vietnam.” Kim believed that the ROK could avoid any political problems if they employed “volunteers or veterans from reserves.”

The State Department and LBJ were still reluctant to endorse any ROK combat offer. Ambassador Berger responded with angered frustration to Kim Hyong-chol’s offer and a rumor that Kim Chong-pil, Chairman of the ruling Democratic-Republican Party, might offer Korean volunteers to Vietnam during his upcoming trip to Saigon. The ambassador rebuked the DRP Chairman, instructing him that his “gestures may embarrass not only our current efforts in Vietnam, but also current ROK-Japan [diplomatic normalization] negotiations.” Two days later the State Department sent a warning to the embassy in Saigon warning them that any

\[16\] Embtel 1128, Berger to State, 7 March 1964, NACP, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1965, “POL 7 KOR S, Visits. Meetings 1/1/64.”
troop offer Kim issued was not authorized.\textsuperscript{17} Despite their concurrence with Berger, only six days later the State Department drafted a joint State-Defense telegram assessing the utility of ROK soldiers in Vietnam. Symptomatic of the early date, the cable failed to see any “significant military contribution ROK could advisably make.” But, hinting at a change in policy, “ROK forces might have both practical and political impact in support of special capacities in civic action field.”\textsuperscript{18} Korea was becoming, at least in the eyes of American policy makers, a possible ally in the war despite lacking any desirable military assets. It is likely, given the proximity of Rusk and LBJ’s April initiation of the More Flags policy and this specific case in March, that the positive attributes of the ROK military offer were an inspiration behind the More Flags program.

Berger’s diplomatic scuffle helped set the unofficial boundaries that dictated the triangular US-ROK-GVN aid coordination protocol. The incident and diplomatic rebuff informed South Korea of the need to present their ideas and offers directly to the United States first, not the South Vietnamese government. It would then be up to the State Department, Defense Department, and US Embassy to appraise the political and military substance of the proposal. When the dust from this incident had settled and Kim’s trip concluded without incident, the ROK Vice Foreign Minister cabled the American Embassy and assured Berger if the ROK had any

\textsuperscript{17} Embtel 1142, Berger to State 11 March 1964, NACP, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1965, “POL 7 KOR S, Visits. Meetings 1/1/64.”

\textsuperscript{18} Deptel 09117, State to Seoul, 18 March 1964, NACP, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1965, “POL 7 KOR S, Visits. Meetings 1/1/64.”
further thought on military contributions, their “first act would be to consult U[ntited] S[tates] G[overnment].”¹⁹ In 1964 Vietnam was already marginalized from the third country assistance dialogue. All future ROK negotiations bypassed Saigon, traveling exclusively between Seoul and Washington. The GVN was not notified of third country decisions until the US Embassy instructed the government to accept an offer. Before the first Korean combat troops deployed, Washington ordered the US Ambassador to South Vietnam Maxwell Taylor to “discuss with GVN introduction of ROK regimental combat teams and suggest GVN request such a force ASAP.” Taylor appeared as disconnected from US policy as the Vietnamese, informing the State Department that he “badly needed clarification on our purposes and objectives...it is not going to be easy to get ready concurrence for the large scale introduction of foreign troops.”²⁰ After the US Ambassador to Korea, Winthrop Brown had completed extensive negotiations with the ROK government for their first combat division (the “Tiger” division totaling over 18,000 soldiers) he and Park waited weeks to receive the formal request Ambassador Taylor had been told to acquire. When the message arrived the text was crafted in the style of a thank-you note.²¹ The exasperated Ambassador, required by US policy to obtain a formal GVN request, was forced to request another cable, but the delay was long enough to miss

---

¹⁹ Embtel 1276, Berger to State, 9 April 1964, NACP, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1965, “POL 7 KOR S, Visits. Meetings 1/1/64.”
the closing of Korea’s National Assembly and the issue was postponed until the end of August.

Whether this was an instance of South Vietnamese agency—successfully delaying an unpopular foreign military mission—or a symptom of logistical and bureaucratic division between the GVN and US Embassy, it highlights the disconnect between South Vietnamese officials and US foreign policy and explains why later requests for "allied aid resulted from U.S. initiatives," while the "government of South Vietnam seems to have acted merely as the agent transmitting the formal requests" between other nations. A January 15, 1965 cable from Secretary of Defense McNamara’s office delineated the “mechanics and policy” associated with the imminent arrival of Korea’s DOVE unit:

Legal Aspects: It is essential in order to assure effectiveness of third country participation and US contribution to the participation that appropriate permissions and exemptions are obtained from GVN. Each third country must have rights and exemptions from GVN in areas of currency controls, taxes, criminal jurisdiction, etc. to permit it to operate effectively and to receive the entire benefits of US assistance. US must also secure from GVN the rights to grant those benefits to each third country in VN.

One month prior to McNamara’s cable, President Johnson officially requested more troops from the Republic of Korea. Ambassador Brown was “to urge at this time that Korean Govt... send additional units as soon as possible, hopefully to arrive in Vietnam in next thirty days.” Knowing Park’s desire to send combat troops, which the ROK Chief of Staff recently reiterated to the Ambassador, Brown informed Park that “foreign combat units would not be desirable, it is not that type of war.”

Park immediately agreed to send a non-combat unit, but noted that he was willing to send two full ROK divisions at anytime. This troop commitment—called the DOVE unit because it was officially non-combat—was a more substantial force, consisting of 2,400 men trained in construction and engineering. In order to see that the troop deployment occurred, Ambassador Brown and UN Commander General Howze agreed to avoid the “problem” that would arise if they asked Park to defray a substantial part of the DOVE unit’s cost. There was “no point making demands we will have to go back on to get the contribution we want.”

Based on their recommendation, LBJ conceded four new rights to the ROK government. One, Washington would consult the ROK before it considered lowering US troop levels in South Korea. Two, the 1965 Military Assistance Program (MAP) transfer was suspended. Three, the US government would pay full per diem allowances to the soldiers in the unit. And fourth, Korea would receive extra monetary assistance.

---


through the PL-480 “Food for Peace” program. From Korea’s standpoint, this was an excellent step forward. The MAP was a constant source of agitation in the government because an enormous percentage of the ROK budget went towards maintaining the ROK army. In order to wean the ROK off of US assistance, Congress implemented the MAP transfer program. Each year some items in the ROK defense budget were shifted out of US aid coverage and cycled into the ROK budget. Essentially, the program gradually decreased the amount of aid South Korea received each year. After President Park succeeded in exchanging the DOVE unit for a suspension of the MAP transfer program, he actually increased US aid to the ROK by $100 million. On December 30th the agreement was finalized, and the government prepared to release a statement announcing their contribution, but not before Ambassador Brown instructed the Koreans to remove a paragraph attributing the decision to a United States request. The Ambassador also needed to remind ROK officials that the overseas per diems paid to soldiers were confidential.

The DOVE unit negotiations served as a catalyst in Korea and the United States. One the one hand, some Americans saw great potential in an expanded Korea role. Ambassador Lodge believed “the contribution of truly significant value” was ROK military personnel “who would share in the really dangerous work...the

type of work where our men are getting killed and wounded. Why not use a few of them here?”

Ambassador Brown noted that ROK troops, instead of additional American soldiers, could alleviate the need for trained manpower in South Vietnam and do it while saving the US government a “great deal in blood and treasure.”

Even with the US paying the per diem allowance to ROK soldiers, by the numbers, they cost far less. The Department of Defense spent approximately $13,000 a year to support an American infantryman in Vietnam, while a Korean soldier cost half as much, between $5,000 and $7,800.

From President Park’s perspective, the war in Vietnam was an opportunity to elevate his country’s financial bargaining power. In 1965, the parallel between the Vietnam and Korean Wars did not escape many Koreans. America’s 1950 war mobilization and overseas purchases fueled Japan’s post-World War II re-industrialization and brought the war-ravaged country back to life. Kim Yong-sung, the ROK Chief of Trade Promotion, cautioned the State Department that the “Japanese had made some two billion dollars out of the Korea War...and the Koreans did not want that to happen again” in Vietnam. Kim informed the US official that the Korean people “would never understand” it if their “generous support” of the US

28 Embtel 2162, Lodge to State and Embassy Seoul, 9 May 1964, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Douglas Pike Collection, Allied Participants, Box 33.
30 A private in the ROK army earned $1.20 per month serving at home, but in Vietnam the US government paid him $1.00 per day, increasing his salary 25-times. Blackburn, Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s More Flags, 65.
position in Vietnam was not rewarded “by the diversion of substantial amounts of U.S. dollar aid to Vietnam to procurement in Korea.” Mr. Kim’s primary concern, he said, was “that Korea should be given every possible break in all aspects of U.S. aid,” because otherwise popular support for the ROK role in Vietnam would die.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, Chon Sang-chin (Director Economic Affairs Bureau ROK), Kim Yong-sung (Chief, Trade promotion Section), Chong Soon-kun (Economic Cooperation Section), W.N. Turpin (Office of East Asian Affairs), July 13, 1965, NACP, RG 59, Bureau of EA Affairs, Records Relating to Korea, 1952-1966, “AGR-12-3 Surplus & Shortages 1965, Korea.”}

President Johnson’s decision to accept ROK combat troops was not difficult in most respects. Since Korea’s non-combat troops had entered South Vietnam, Park and his deputies had only intensified their offers to fight. Just after the DOVE unit landed in Vietnam, Korea’s CIA Director confided to National Security Advisor Chester Cooper, that Park placed great emphasis on Vietnam and was “willing to do almost anything that President Johnson requested.” Unfortunately for Johnson, his other allies did not share the same sentiments as the Korean executive. Britain in particular was his most troubling case. LBJ was finding it harder to commit US prestige and soldiers to Vietnam when America’s closest ally refused to do the same. In 1965 Johnson expressed his frustration with Britain’s neutrality, as evidenced when he yelled at British Labour party leader Harold Wilson “If you want to help us some in Vietnam send us some men and send us some folks to deal with these guerillas. \textit{And announce to the press you are going to help us.}” And by July 1965, McGeorge Bundy had told a British diplomat that LBJ wanted British troops in South
Vietnam right then, so much so that “such a contribution would be worth several hundred million dollars.”

While this enticement did not elicit a response in Britain, it did in third world Northeast Asia. Once the Johnson administration realized that no substantial number of troops would be forthcoming from its allies, he looked to Korea. Negotiations for combat soldiers picked up where they had left off in the DOVE unit negotiation, but, knowing of their leverage, Park and the ROK drove a very hard bargain. The second round of deliberations took several months and was particularly controversial because the United States conceded a wide variety of financial and military objects. Ambassador Brown withheld his full opinion of the process and its outcome, but still informed the State Department “the manner in which [the negotiation] was handled, particularly with regard to financing the dispatch, has left a sour after-taste that will dissipate slowly.” He also complained that the ROK officials were becoming overly “fascinated” with the prospect of financial gain in Vietnam. Brown thought someone needed to remind President Park and other ROK leaders, “Vietnam had not changed the laws of economics.”

True, Vietnam did not alter the fundamental laws of economics, but it did alter the fundamental nature of the US-Korean relationship. The text below of the two


agreements highlights the degree to which Korea exploited its leverage over the American policy makers. One historian’s recent work estimates the total dollar sum directly attributable to Korea’s Vietnam War era agreements with the US is $4.624 billion. All three agreements (DOVE unit 1964, Tiger Division 1965, and White Horse Division 1966) were exponential increases from the prior agreement and brought new concessions to the impoverished nation.

Negotiated Terms for First ROK Division (Tiger), 1965

1. No U.S. or ROK force reductions in Korea without prior consultation.
2. FY 66 MAP Korea level not to be affected by deployment of Korean forces to SVN.
3. FY 66 MAP Korea to include $7 million add-on to $150 million level to provide fill-out TE (100%) for three ready reserve divisions.
4. FY 66 MAP Transfer Program to be suspended for FY 66 and transfer items in program (construction materials, raw blanket material, POL) will be OSP from Korea ($5.1 million). Ambassador Brown was given authority to suspend subsequent year’s Transfer Programs at his discretion, as long as ROK maintains at least one division in South Viet-Nam.
5. ROK forces in Korea to be modernized in firepower, communications and mobility. (FY 66 MAP Korea provided for a large buy of tanks, artillery, communication equipment, vehicles, and an improved anti-infiltration system. However, many of these items are carried over from FY 65 MAP Korea which has been cut sharply from previously planned program level. FY 67-71 MAP Korea programs are at about $160 million per year, which is improvement over earlier plans.)
6. For Korean forces deployed to South Viet-Nam, the US will provide: equipment, logistical support, construction, training, transportation, subsistence, overseas allowances, funds for any legitimate non-

combat claim which may be brought against ROKFV in SVN, and restitution of ROKFV cash losses not as result ROKFV negligence.35

Brown Memorandum, Term for Second ROK Division (Capital), 1966

Military Assistance

1. To provide over the next few years substantial items of equipment for the modernization of Republic of Korea forces in Korea.
2. To equip as necessary, and finance all additional won costs of, the additional forces deployed to the Republic of Vietnam.
3. To equip, provide for the training and finance complete replacement of additional forces deployed to the Republic of Vietnam.
4. To contribute to filling the requirements determined by our two Governments to be necessary, following completion of a joint United States-Republic of Korea study, for the improvement of the Republic of Korea anti-infiltration capability.
5. To provide equipment to expand, the Republic of Korea arsenal for increased ammunition production in Korea.
6. To provide communications facilities for the exclusive Republic of Korea use, the character of which is to be agreed between United States and the Republic of Korea officials in Seoul and Saigon. These facilities will meet requirements for communication with your forces in the Republic of Vietnam.
7. To provide four C-54 aircraft to the Republic Korea Air Force for support of Republic of Korea forces in the Republic of Vietnam.
8. To provide for the improvement of military barracks and bachelor officers quarters and related facilities for troop welfare such as cooking, messing, sanitation and recreational facilities from proceeds of the Military Assistance Program (MAP) excess sales.
9. To assume the costs of overseas allowances to these forces at the scale agreed between General Beach and the Minister of Defense Kim Sung Eun on March 4, 1966.
10. To provide death and disability gratuities resulting from casualties in Vietnam at double the rates recently agreed to by the Joint United States-Republic of Korea Military Committee.

Economic Assistance

1. To release additional won to the Korean budget equal to all of the net additional costs of the deployment of these extra forces and of mobilizing and maintaining in Korea the activated reserve division and brigade and support elements.

2. To suspend the MAP transfer program for as long as there are substantial Republic of Korea forces, i.e., at least two divisions, in the Republic of Vietnam, with offshore procurement in Korea in United States fiscal year 1967 of items suspended in fiscal year 1966 plus those on the fiscal year 1967 list.

3. a.) To procure in Korea insofar as practicable requirements for supplies, services and equipment for Republic of Korea forces in the Republic of Vietnam and to direct to Korea selected types of procurement for United States and Republic of Vietnam forces in the Republic of Vietnam in cases in which:
   1. Korea has the production capability,
   2. Korea can meet specifications and delivery schedules,
   3. It may be reasonably determined that Korean prices are fully competitive with other possible sources in the Far East, and
   4. The procurement conforms in other respects to the regulations and procedures of the United States Department of Defense.
   Supplies, services and equipment which meet this definition will be listed on a “natural source” list from which procurement will be made exclusively from Korean sources without soliciting bids from non-Korean producers.
   b.) To procure in Korea, in competition only with United States suppliers, as much as Korea can provide in time and at a reasonable price of a substantial amount of goods being purchased by the Agency for International Development (AID) for use in its project programs for rural construction, pacification, relief, logistics, and so forth, in the Republic of Vietnam.
   c.) To the extent permitted by the Republic of Vietnam, to provide Korean contractors expanded opportunities to participate in construction projects undertaken by the United States Government and by American contractors in the Republic of Vietnam and to provide other services, including employment of skilled Korean civilians in the Republic of Vietnam.

4. To increase its technical assistance to the Republic of Korea in the general field of export promotion.

5. To provide, in addition to the $150 million AID loans already committed to the Republic of Korea in May, 1965, additional AID loans to support the economic development of the Republic of Korea as suitable projects are developed under the same spirit and considerations which apply to the $150 million commitment.
6. If justified by performance under the 1966 Stabilization Program, to provide $15 million of Program Loans in 1968, which can be used for the support of exports to the Republic of Vietnam and for other development needs.36

Korea’s entry into the Vietnam War provides a uniquely valuable timeline of both the Republic of Korea’s development and the United States’ Cold War foreign policy in Asia. Korea surmounted a variety of hurdles to exist in a volatile region prone to war in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee were both successful in their negotiations with the United States and kept large quantities of US aid, necessary for the ROK’s survival, flowing into the country. Rhee developed his own brand of brinksmanship and it certainly did not endear him to US diplomats, but he used it effectively to maintain a place of importance in American foreign policy. His offer of troops for Indochina was primarily a ploy to resume the Korean War and unite the peninsula under his leadership. Rhee exploited the widening disconnect between the Eisenhower administration and France to interject his proposal…and it nearly worked. Korean soldiers were deemed unacceptable, in fine, because the United States could not achieve Britain’s support for an international anti-Communist coalition. Without an international organization backing US action, the deployment of ROK soldiers (carried to the

theater of war on US ships) would have been a publicity nightmare, drawing charges of imperial dominance and the employment of mercenaries.

Park Chung Hee wasted no time upon assuming power of the country through a military coup to offer the services of his soldiers to President Kennedy. The military general was well aware of the amount of money transferred and spent in the United States military, and he was also well aware of the economic windfall that swept Japan during the Korean War. Driven by the desire to modernize and empower his small nation, Park continued to offer his soldiers for US plans while trying to acquire more aid for his Five Year Development Plan. Park seemed destined to fail in the same manner as Rhee, but Lyndon Johnson’s presidency changed all that. Park did not have to change his offer of troops, adopt a new political policy, or increase human rights to win the US approval of his requests for increased aid and trade. Really, Park was in the right place at the right time just as LBJ set about to manufacture support for the war in South Vietnam. After several months passed, and LBJ had committed his own soldiers to the war, Korea was again back in demand, but this time for combat troops that would establish an aura of international sacrifice in the GVN. LBJ received 50,000 Korean soldiers that no one else would provide and an ally in his unpopular war and Park finally won the funds, and economic opportunities he needed to transform South Korea. (what the former ROK Minister of Foreign Affair described as “Digging for Gold in the Jungles of Vietnam”) The largest problem with their alliance though, and the More Flag program in whole, was pointed out by Senator Stuart Symington in that “The fact of
the matter is that the people of the United States were deceived as to the degree of the desire to participate in the South Vietnamese venture.”

Conclusion

The story of Korea’s involvement in the Vietnam War has many facets that illustrate the Cold War’s ability to transform nations and politics across the world. In Northeast Asia, these events portray the evolution of the Republic of Korea where Syngman Rhee, despite his attempts to adopt a more assertive policy, was mired in a state of dependency. Part of the predicament was his own making, but his policies were largely a derivative and symptom of the United States own Cold War actions. However, Park Chung Hee was able to carve himself a place in Korea’s history as a president capable of leveraging the United States. What this thesis identifies as exceedingly important is the way both of these leaders identified Southeast Asia as an arena where South Korea could manipulate the United States foreign policy machine over successive administrations.

Rhee was the first leader to recognize that America’s record of harmful and ill-guided intervention in Asia’s politics had earned it few friends. Korea’s first president tried to stand by the US government when its traditional allies kept away.

---

Until Rhee could level the playing field between his country and the United States, he was hopelessly doomed to serve as a weak dependent. But two things kept the plan from working. One, Rhee's mercurial demeanor and desultory politics helped make him an "unsuitable ally" and two, the United States was simply not ready to fully intervene. The real defining characteristic that led to the rapid acceptance of Park's carbon copied offers of assistance to Vietnam was the US attitude. Park did not alter the offers in any way, his administration simply continued to doggedly offer their troops for service under the American cause. In fact he made his offers less appetizing, demanding exorbitant concessions from a US State Department that was used to dictating the US-ROK relationship. President Park's real success was recognizing when US policy was prone to exploitation and extracting the full amount of concession he could, helping build his country into an industrial and regional power superior to its northern brother.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archives and Oral Histories

Magruder, Carter J. Papers. The Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.
National Security Files, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.
National Security Files, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX.
Pike, Douglas. Papers, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.
Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration. College Park, MD.

Government Publications

Congressional Record. Washington, D.C.: GPO.
Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower.
Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson. Washington,
Subcommittee on United States Agreements and Commitments Abroad. United
States Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Hearings. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., vol.
2, pt. 6, February 24-26, 1970. Committee Print. [Cited as “Symington
Subcommittee Hearings.”]
The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States
U.S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The British
U.S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, East Asia and
U.S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954,


**Newspapers**

*New York Times*

*St. Petersburg Times*

*Miami Daily News*

*The Times (London)*

**Periodicals**

*Life*

*Time*

**Secondary Sources and Published Memoirs**


