

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNITED STATES-REPUBLIC OF KOREA MILITARY ALLIANCE: IMPACTS ON  
US-ROK RELATIONS AND SOUTH KOREAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT, 1960-69

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A/S FE	Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
CGEUSA	Commanding General, Eighth United States Army
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command
CINCUNC	Commander in Chief, United Nations Command
CINCUSARPAC	Commander in Chief, United States Army Pacific
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMUSFK	Commander, United States Forces Korea
CSA	Chief of Staff, Army
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
EUSA	Eighth United States Army
FOMIN	Foreign Minister
FROKA	First Republic of Korea Army
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KCIA	Korean Central Intelligence Agency
KMAG	Korean Military Advisory Group
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MDT	Mutual Defense Treaty
MINDEF	Minister of Defense
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MRC	Military Revolutionary Council
NSC	National Security Council
OPCON	Operational Control
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army
ROKAF	Republic of Korea Air Force
ROKMC	Republic of Korea Marine Corps
ROKN	Republic of Korea Navy
SCNR	Supreme Council for National Reconstruction
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SROKA	Second Republic of Korea Army
UNC	United Nations Command

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Truth be told, my original love for history focused on Europe. As a cadet at the United States Military Academy, the histories of Ancient Greece, the Roman Republic, the Hundred Years War, and the British Empire barely satiated my thirst for historical knowledge. While my future as an Army officer was set, I had always hoped that a chance to continue my historical studies would present itself in the future. I was fortunate enough to receive such an opportunity after the History Department at West Point invited me back to become rotating faculty member. I still vividly remember receiving the offer letter in Iraq while I was commanding a company of over one-hundred and fifty fine Americans in northern Baghdad during the Surge. The only downside was that to my disappointment, the Department did not require any additional European historians.

While I briefly contemplated refocusing my scholarly pursuits on the Middle East, I ultimately decided to explore the history of my ethnic heritage as a Korean-American. My father was especially pleased to hear that I chose to study East Asian history. I recalled his love for books, often seeing him reading historical fiction set in Ancient China. I believe that he was especially fond of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* period. As a gift, he bought me a book on Korean history while I was still deployed so I could get a head start on my studies. The book that he sent me was none other than Professor Bruce Cumings' *Korea's Place in the Sun*. Little did I realize while opening that dusty Amazon box was that within a year, I would find myself at the University of Chicago taking a seminar on Korean history taught by Professor Cumings.

The list of people to thank is long but I would be remiss if I did not start with Professor Cumings. I could not have asked for a better teacher, advisor, and mentor as a young Army officer pushed to expand my thinking into the realm of academia. To say that I learned much

from him is nothing less than a gross understatement. I will always remember the respect that Professor Cumings held for my profession, even being kind enough to conduct a special lecture on North Korea while I was teaching at West Point. Our discussions over numerous books in preparation for my field examination and the constructive feedback received as I inched towards dissertation completion were not only helpful, but also challenged me to expand the limits of knowledge and understanding.

I was also fortunate to have two other exceptional scholars and teachers, Professor Mark Bradley and Professor Michael Geyer, as committee members. The courses I took in International History taught by Professor Bradley provided me a firm foundation on the Cold War and Vietnam, which served me well as I attempted to place my Korea-specific topic into a regional context. Professor Geyer's questions always pushed me to refine my arguments while also illuminating areas that I had not even remotely considered. I am also thankful to the wonderful staff within the University of Chicago's History Department. David Goodwine and Sonja Rusnak were a tremendous help throughout the process, always responsive and willing to assist when asked.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my amazing wife, Day. The number of children went from zero to two in the period between my dissertation proposal and dissertation defense. While definitely unwise in retrospect, I remember well dragging her and our beautiful daughter Adelyn, barely one-month old at the time, on research trips to Boston, DC, and College Park. I would not have been able to finish my dissertation within the last year without her ably holding down the proverbial fort as we both experienced the joys (and challenges) of a second child as our son Ethan entered our lives. My wife was always there to encourage me during the

weariest of days while also nudging me to stay on course when I was ready to temporarily throw in the towel. This dissertation is as much Day's as my own.

Finally, I only hope that one day, Adelyn and Ethan will read this dissertation and realize that there is a rich history that is an innate part of their lives as Korean-Americans. The odds of them both becoming historians may be a long shot. Having them develop an interest and perhaps even a love for history, however, will more than suffice.

## **ABSTRACT**

The overall objective of this project is to investigate the US-ROK military alliance's influence on the political development of South Korea and the course of bilateral relations during the 1960s. This decade is of special interest due to its turbulent nature. The forceful changes of Korean governments in 1960 and 1961 ushered in a period of deep political uncertainty. Despite the ease of the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 coup led by Major General Park Chung Hee, his military government experienced multiple shocks early on that threatened its existence. It was not until 1965 that Park could rule with relative confidence, which also initiated a honeymoon period of US-ROK relations under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. The US, even before the military coup, sought to reevaluate its policy towards the ROK under the newly elected John F. Kennedy administration. The new administration pushed for increased self-reliance of its allies, which for the ROK, translated into potential cuts in military and economic assistance. Following the coup, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations also contended with the rising nationalistic tendencies of the military regime. It was in this confluence of new leaders, new priorities, and new threats that the US and the ROK relied on the military alliance as the bedrock of stability.

## INTRODUCTION

Caught off guard by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) sudden invasion of its southern neighbor on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950, the United States found itself once again hastily landing combat divisions on the peninsula in a frantic attempt to slow the Communist offensive. Three years later, the July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953 Armistice Agreement ended the Korean War and ushered in a period of relative peace, that despite numerous heated exchanges over the years, has yet to be broken. As news articles concerning tensions on the Korean peninsula continue to emphasize even today, the two Koreas remain frozen in a state of war since only an armistice, and not a peace treaty, ended the conflict nearly sixty-five years ago. Though American troop strength has steadily declined since the war, the US still maintains a robust military presence on the peninsula with the mission of honoring a mutual defense treaty and preserving an alliance often described as one "forged in blood."<sup>1</sup> The treaty in itself is not exclusive to the Republic of Korea (ROK) but rather one of many offered by the US to other allies during the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> What is completely unique to the Korean situation, however, is the institutionalized military command structure that has a sovereign nation, the ROK, willingly ceding operational control of its armed forces to a foreign power, the US. This arrangement, along with the mutual defense treaty, serve as the pillars of the US-ROK military alliance.

Though the extent of US-ROK affairs covers a broad range of mutual interests in addition to security matters today, the military alliance has historically served as the locus of

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<sup>1</sup> US troop levels ranged from an estimated peak of 326,000 during the Korean War and hovered in the 60,000 range during the 1960s. At present, an estimated 28,500 troops remain. Blood Alliance, or *hyulmeng* (혈맹) in Hangul, is a term still widely used today by both countries. It symbolizes the ROK's recognition of the 36,574 American servicemen killed in action during the Korean War.

<sup>2</sup> In Asia alone, the US inked bilateral treaties with the Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Singapore while NATO represented the US security commitment in Europe.

bilateral relations since the Korean War. An American General officer presently retains wartime operational control (OPCON) of all military forces in Korea. Up until 1994, this Commanding General also held peacetime OPCON of Korean forces dedicated to external defense of the nation. With the increasing effectiveness of the ROK military and the changing security dynamics in the region, plans have been set in motion to eventually transfer wartime OPCON to the South Korean government, which for the first time in its history, will have full responsibility over its national defense.<sup>3</sup> As both parties prepare for this momentous event, the necessity of exploring the historical implications of the US-ROK military alliance becomes even more apparent today.

The immense level of power afforded to the top ranking American military officer in South Korea, historically known as the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command (CINCUNC), is unprecedented in modern American military history.<sup>4</sup> One former CINCUNC, General Richard Stillwell, called the arrangement “the most remarkable concession of sovereignty in the entire world.”<sup>5</sup> Though primarily a tactical commander charged with South Korea’s external defense, the CINCUNC’s direct command of ROK armed forces and pivotal role in executing the Military Assistance Program (MAP) naturally expanded his already strong influence into areas beyond the military sphere. The CINCUNC unsurprisingly maintained

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<sup>3</sup> The original agreement concluded in 2007 under the George W. Bush and Roh Moo Hyun administrations called for an OPCON transfer date of 2012. In 2010, the two allies agreed to postpone the transfer to 2015 due to the increased severity of DPRK provocations that included additional nuclear weapon tests and the sinking of the ROK Navy ship, Cheonan. In 2014, the governments again delayed the move calling for a “conditions based” transfer rather than one tied to a specific date. Current projections aim for the transfer to occur by the mid-2020s.

<sup>4</sup> The Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced in 2012 that the title of Commander-in-Chief (CINC) would only be used by the President of the United States. The CINC title reverted to simply Commander, i.e., Commander, United Nations Command.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Stillwell served as the CINCUNC from 1973-76. Gregory Henderson, “American Command in Korea: The Political Dangers” (Paper presented at the Korean Association of Political Science Academic Forum, Seoul, Korea, July 27-29, 1987,) 2. Copy available in the Gregory Henderson Papers on Korea, Special Collections, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

primacy on military matters, but his influence over Korean political affairs and the execution of US policy in the ROK was arguably on par with the Ambassador through at least the 1960s. The strong bonds developed between the American and Korean armed forces as a result of the military alliance turned out to be an invaluable connection as each government sought to redefine the relationship during the 1960s, a decade characterized by both turbulence and bliss.

The US was not the only nation undergoing dynamic social and political change during the 1960s. The ROK inaugurated the new decade by ousting its best known modern political leader in April 1960 when a series of mass student demonstrations caused Syngman Rhee to terminate his presidency, an office he had held since 1948. Not to be outdone by the students, a small group composed mostly of younger officers led by Major General Park Chung Hee executed a military coup on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 against the democratically elected Chang Myon government. This successful uprising ushered in a thirty-two-year period of direct and indirect military rule.<sup>6</sup> The initial relations between the US government (USG) and Park's military junta was at best, synonymous to an uncomfortable arranged marriage where both participants had no choice but to be committed to the union, though each had vastly different expectations on the desired outcome of the relationship. Relations under the Rhee regime were many times quite turbulent and painful for the US, but for all his perceived faults, the reportedly senile octogenarian had become a known quantity after ruling nearly twelve years. Park and his associates were, however, new players in the political scene whose questionable backgrounds,

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<sup>6</sup> Chang Myon (John Chang) assumed power as the Prime Minister roughly four months following Rhee's ouster via free, democratic elections. After years where the power centered around the Presidency, the ROK government chose to implement a form of parliamentary democracy. Park Chung Hee retired from military service in 1963 to run for President and remained in power until he was assassinated in 1979. Choi Kyu-ha became the acting President but was quickly replaced by Chun Doo-hwan via a military coup. Chun ruled until 1988 until his chosen successor and former General Officer Roh Tae Woo assumed the Presidency in 1988. The election of Kim Young-sam in 1993 marked the first civilian to be elected President since Syngman Rhee, the ROK's first President.

relative anonymity, and tenuous hold on power all colored the initial interactions with the US.<sup>7</sup> During this period of uncertainty, the familiarities that were byproducts of the military alliance allowed for a mutually beneficial recalibration of US-ROK relations in the 1960s.

## **I. HISTORICAL PROBLEM**

The overall objective of this project is to investigate the US-ROK military alliance's influence on the political development of South Korea and the course of bilateral relations during the 1960s. This decade is of special interest due to its turbulent nature. The forceful changes of Korean governments in 1960 and 1961 ushered in a period of deep political uncertainty. Despite the ease of the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup, Park's military government experienced multiple shocks early on that threatened its existence. It was not until 1965 that Park could rule with relative confidence, which also initiated a honeymoon period of US-ROK relations under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration.<sup>8</sup> The US, even before the military coup, sought to reevaluate its policy towards the ROK under the newly elected John F. Kennedy administration. The new administration pushed for increased self-reliance of its allies, which for the ROK, translated into potential cuts to military and economic assistance.<sup>9</sup> Following the coup, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations also contended with the rising nationalistic tendencies of the military regime. It was in this confluence of new leaders, new priorities, and new threats that the US and the ROK relied on the military alliance as the bedrock of stability.

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<sup>7</sup> Park had been expelled from the ROK army early in his career prior to the Korean War due to suspected Communist ties. Though he did attend military training in the US, he was not widely known by senior American military officials. Many of the younger officers (Lieutenant Colonels) also carried suspicions as Communist sympathizers.

<sup>8</sup> Student and opposition party-led protests threatened the Park government's survival as late as 1964. The twin "victories" of a Normalization Treaty with Japan and deployment of ROK military to Vietnam in 1965 provided both the political and financial capital needed for government stability.

<sup>9</sup> NSC 6018, the last directive under the Eisenhower administration, emphasized a free and more responsive ROK less dependent on the US and moving towards a self-supporting economy. Kennedy ordered the formation of a Task Force on Korea to relook US policies in the ROK early on in his administration as well. The original report, completed the day before the May 1961 Coup, also prioritized economic development.

To meet my project's objective, I will focus on the overall question of why the US-ROK military alliance remained the focal point of bilateral relations in the 1960s as the threat of renewed conflict on the Korean peninsula diminished. Less than a decade removed from the cessation of hostilities, there was a growing consensus among relevant USG agencies that the likelihood of open conflict with North Korea was improbable and no longer the ROK's greatest threat.<sup>10</sup> The US started signaling its diminished concern over a potential resumption of hostilities during that latter years of Eisenhower administration. As an unabashed consumer of American aid since the Korean War, the specter of reduced foreign assistance funds along with cuts to both American and Korean military forces on the peninsula remained a constant threat to the ROK throughout the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

While maintaining a strong defensive posture in the ROK was still critical for the American military's regional defense strategy, the attention increasingly shifted towards economic growth as the new battlefield. National intelligence estimates by late 1961 assessed that the DPRK preferred subversion and propaganda as the primary weapons of choice to tout their economic successes. Armed action against the ROK only invited American intervention and threatened any internal progress made since the armistice. Ironically, the CIA assessed the greatest threat to the ROK was not its traditional foe to the north, but rather its own dire economic condition and tenuous political situation.<sup>11</sup> Despite this changing current, the military alliance still managed to remain strong during the 1960s.

How does a military pact even remain relevant when the conditions that led to its

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<sup>10</sup> For example, CIA estimates pointed to internal subversion by the DPRK, primarily due to prolonged economic dissatisfaction within the ROK, as being a greater threat than an actual invasion by a combined North Korean, Communist Chinese army.

<sup>11</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 14.2/42-61, "The Outlook for Korea," September 7, 1961, 1. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79R01012A018200010005-6.pdf>.

initial creation have significantly changed? I argue that rather than turning into an anachronistic arrangement stubbornly focused on meeting only the conventional threat in the north, the alliance evolved from its original military form to a broader security arrangement that both governments effectively used to address each nation's multi-layered needs. Though military considerations remained the alliance's focal point, matters pertaining to political stability and regional strategy now fell under its umbrella as well. This evolution symbolized the maturing relationship between the two nations, which during the previous decade, represented a pure Patron-Client arrangement. Though the power balance between the US and the ROK remained vastly unequal in the 1960s, the alliance was for the first time since its inception, becoming a partnership of tangible, mutual benefits.

From the American perspective, preservation of its OPCON over the ROK military was the driving force behind its major decisions regarding the Park's regime during the 1960s. Given the smaller ally's track record of intransigence and instability coming into this decade, the US sought to preserve its most effective lever of influence over its client state. The alliance provided the best mechanism to quickly assess Park's military regime, normalize relations, and ensure its survival. The US military had forged uniquely strong bonds with its Korean counterpart due to the alliance's OPCON arrangement and shared wartime experience. These relationships were crucial as the US attempted to shape the young and inexperienced military government, which had the very real potential of taking a radical turn. These traditional connections proved to be a valuable conduit for American influence on Korean political affairs in a manner that was neither open nor direct.

Though supporting the military government had its inherent risks, the regime's unexpected success later in the decade rewarded the American gamble. By the mid-1960s, the

US-ROK alliance clearly demonstrated its utility beyond the peninsula as it became a symbol of validation for major USG policies related to its Asia-Pacific strategy. Most American officials comprehended the changing nature of bilateral relations as the smaller client began to make its mark on the international level. The US understood the rising sensitivity of direct involvement in internal ROKG affairs, especially when it pushed for increased self-reliance and contended with the rising influence of Korean nationalism. Promoting self-reliance while engaging in political meddling was clearly not a recipe for success. A recalibration of the relationship was necessary and made possible through discussions in the one area where both side spoke a common language, security. Since its existence, the ROK's survival depended on the American security blanket. During this decade, the ROK was for the first time able to reciprocate, which marked a major step towards achieving a mutually beneficial bilateral alliance.

As with most channels, signals have the ability to flow both ways. The ROK had become experts in leveraging its alliance with the US as a means to gain unparalleled access into the USG. Syngman Rhee had cultivated strong ties with senior American military leaders during the 1950s and was never hesitant to use these connections when necessary. Throughout his twelve-year run, the wizened leader developed a robust support network, though not strong enough to forestall his ouster in 1960. Park's military regime assumed power with dynamism and hope, but lacked experience in international affairs and strong ties to the US. Understanding these shortcomings, a highly nationalistic Park allayed American fears by committing to the US-ROK military alliance, to include American OPCON over the Korean military, shortly after seizing power. This decision proved to be a wise one as the military-to-military channel played a significant role in the American acceptance and support for the junta. It also served as a conduit

that allowed a highly dependent client state to exercise a disproportionate level of influence over its unquestionably dominant patron.

## **II. Historiography and Sources**

This project seeks to address a significant gap in scholarship pertaining to the history of US-ROK relations. The post-war 1950s and the 1960s are relatively untouched periods in modern Korea history quietly tucked away between the Korean War years and the decade of “miraculous” economic growth that occurred in the 1970s. The extent of American military influence in the ROK reached its apex during the 1960s. The supremacy of military leaders during wartime is self-explanatory but senior American officers also retained a large measure of sway following the Korean War. Wartime relationships made between Korean and American leaders endured as did many of the non-combat responsibilities given to the military during the conflict. The South Korean economy was also greatly dependent on foreign aid during this time, with the Military Assistance Program (MAP) having both a direct and indirect impact. Any scholarly examination on US-ROK relations and American influence on the ROK’s political development during the 1960s would simply be incomplete without considering the impacts of the military alliance. With no systematic study yet done in this regard, this project attempts to fill the void.

Post-Korean War scholarship on Korea tends to focus on two major themes. The first area concentrates on the political economy of the ROK. The nation has become the posterchild of a successful developmental state due to its rapid economic growth primarily during the late 1960s and 1970s. Several scholars have offered their conclusions as to why the ROK was able to experience this impressive economic development while the country still faced the threat of

instability.<sup>12</sup> Adding to the rich literature on the ROK's economic development are the works that explore the movements and events that laid the foundation for the vibrant democracy that South Koreans enjoy today.<sup>13</sup> Arguably as impressive, if not more so than the ROK's rapid economic growth, was the ability of its citizens to inspire democratic reforms in spite of authoritarian rule and harsh suppression that lingered for decades. The successful birth of a democratic movement under what can be considered the direst of circumstances certainly warrants a high level of interest.

An area in modern Korean history that is not as richly developed, however, is the political development that occurred following the Korean War during the first decade of Park Chung Hee's rule in the 1960s. With the numerous lessons to be learned from the ROK's impressive economic development and the controversial actions taken to impede democratic development during the latter years of the Park regime, it is not surprising that the earlier half of his rule garners less attention. Also lacking are studies on US-ROK relations during this period, especially ones that relate the key decisions made in Korea to the broader Cold War strategies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.<sup>14</sup> When taken as a whole, however, the scholarship

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<sup>12</sup> See Mark Clifford's *Troubled Tiger: Businessmen, Bureaucrats, and Generals in South Korea*, Fred Deyo's *The Political Economy of New Asian Industrialism*, Hyung-A Kim's *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization 1961-1979*, Martin Hart-Landsberg's *The Rush to Development*, Eui Gak Hwang's *The Korean Economies*, Paul Kuznet's *Economic Growth and Structure in the Republic of Korea*, Edward Mason's *The Economics and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea*, and Meredith Woo's *The Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization* and her edited volume titled *The Developmental State* as examples of key scholarship on this topic.

<sup>13</sup> See Donald Clark's *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows Over the Regime in South Korea*, Namhee Lee's *Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, George Ogle's *South Korea: Dissent within the Economic Miracle*, Kenneth Wells *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* as examples of key works on this topic.

<sup>14</sup> Some relevant scholarship that cover overall Cold War policies in the 1960s include Robert Bowie's *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped and Enduring Cold War Strategy*, Robert Divine's *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, Lawrence Freedman's *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*, Michael Latham's *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*, Thomas G. Paterson's edited work *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, Kathryn Statler's edited work *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*, Richard J. Walton's *Cold War and Counter-revolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy*, Warren Cohen's edited work *Lyndon B. Johnson*

that addresses these topics tangentially or in part do provide an existing foundation for scholars desiring to explore the political-military history of this period, as well as the state of US-ROK relations.

The May 1961 coup proved to be a seminal event in Korean political history that ushered in an era of rule by military leaders that lasted until 1993. Understanding the political significance of this coup calls for an appraisal of the reasons why the military attempted such a bold seizure of power. Se-Jin Kim's *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea* addresses this topic by examining the Korean military's role in nation building. The major objectives of his book are to analyze the socioeconomic and political causes of the 1961 coup, which he refers to as a military revolution, examine the background of the coup leaders in an effort to understand their motivations for staging the revolt, and to evaluate the impact of the military as a modernizing force.

Kim argues that the coup leaders not only targeted the government's civilian leadership, but also their senior military leaders as well.<sup>15</sup> He effectively distinguishes the new generation of reform oriented officers against the older military elite by explaining the varying backgrounds in terms of their military training. Kim makes it clear that this younger officer corps mastered different skills that allowed them to value efficiency and the use of scientific rationale for problem solving.<sup>16</sup> According to Kim, this technically minded officer corps lost faith in the civilian government and the senior military leadership that in their eyes, had become a part of the country's sickness rather than the cure.

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*Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968*, Francis J. Gavin's edited work *Beyond the Cold War: Lyndon Johnson and the New Global Challenges of the 1960s*,

<sup>15</sup> Se-jin Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

Written ten years after the event, Kim nonetheless does well in providing a human dimension of the revolution by identifying the grievances of the coup participants and explaining why they considered themselves the only remaining solution to their nation's problems. His work is also useful in that it attempts to place the May 1961 revolution in context of a popular theory that viewed the military as an effective modernizing force in developing nations, an idea that also gained acceptance by several USG policymakers during the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> What Kim's work does not address in great detail is the role that the US played during the revolution and on the military regime's path toward political stability. Simply put, the revolution's ultimate success depended on American acceptance and any study on the subject requires dedicated treatment of this dimension.

While Kim's work focuses primarily on the Korean actors, Gregg Brazinsky's *Nation Building in South Korea* addresses the topic of nation building by discussing both the Korean and American efforts in the venture. Brazinsky aims to answer how the ROK transformed from a poor nation ruled by dictators to a wealthy one with an enduring democracy outside a purely economic lens. He argues that Korea's political evolution was a result of American nation building and Korean agency.<sup>18</sup> Brazinsky builds upon Kim's work by placing American support

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<sup>17</sup> Morris Janowitz's *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations* represented a popular theoretical trend in the early 1960s that identified the military as a potential modernizing force in Third World countries. Janowitz's work provided answers to what characteristics of new nations cause the involvement of the military in domestic affairs and what attributes that militaries in developing nations have that make them effective modernizing forces. Janowitz explains that the military's organizational format, skill structure, social recruitment and education, ideology, and cohesion provides the characteristics necessary to become involved in domestic affairs and push a developing country towards modernization. See Robert E. Ward's *Political Development in Modern Japan*, John J. Johnson's "The Latin American Military as a Politically Competing Group in Transitional Society in *The Role of Militaries in Underdeveloped Countries*, and Sydney Fisher's *The Military in the Middle East: Problems in Society and Government*. See Lucian Pye's "Armies in the Process of Political Modernization" in *The Role of Militaries in Underdeveloped Countries* and Samuel Huntington's *Changing Pattern of Military Politics* for a generally supportive view of Janowitz's theory. See also Edward Shil's "Political Development of the New States" in *The Role of Militaries in Underdeveloped Countries* and S.E. Finer's *Man on Horseback: The Rise of the Military in Politics*.

<sup>18</sup> George Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5.

for Korean development in the context of the Cold War and US objectives in the region. He also devotes a chapter on the Korean military and like Kim, believes that the main reason that the ROK army became a political force was due to its modern training and skills that distinguished it from other groups at the time.<sup>19</sup> He contributes to this argument by providing a detailed overview of the American sponsored military training that many of the younger Korean officers experienced which produced a distinct set of ideologies unique to this group.

Brazinsky also introduces the idea that popular ideologies on nation building and modernization did affect the Kennedy administration's reaction to the 1961 coup and the subsequent acceptance of the Park regime. Though a stable democratic government may have been preferable, Brazinsky asserts that security was given primacy due to Kennedy's belief that Park's military background, youth, and will were ideal characteristics of a leader that could push South Korea's modernization.<sup>20</sup> Supporting Kennedy were key advisors such as Walt Whitman Rostow that viewed the Korean military as a catalyst for social and economic progress.

Brazinsky also briefly introduces the idea of that the respect and understanding that Korean military leaders received from their American counterparts may have contributed to the USG's decision to accept the Park regime. The influence of ideology on key American policymakers and the importance of military considerations on the acceptance of Park's regime are two key concepts that this dissertation aims to expand upon and address in detail.

Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra Vogel's edited volume titled *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* represents a major step in approaching the ROK's developmental era from another methodological approach. The work covers a wide range of topics in politics, economy, society, and international relations with a focus on political history. The editor cites

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<sup>19</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

three primary reasons for choosing political history as the analytical method. He first argues that the ROK's rapid modernization was far from stable and faced critical junctures where wrong decisions could have easily derailed the positive economic growth trajectory. The choices made at these points, however, were shaped heavily by political considerations. Secondly, the ROK's success in state building, military security improvements, and market formation also depended on frequent resolutions of major problems, which only top political authorities could solve. Lastly, economic theories and developmental state scholarship can explain outcomes, but are less effective in explaining the motives behind Park's policy decisions.<sup>21</sup> The volume does not seek to reject efforts at theory building, but rather recognize that "many of the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties in South Korea's historical trajectory of modernization have been lost in efforts at theory building."<sup>22</sup>

The common thread among the numerous authors in this work is Park Chung Hee himself. His strategies and intentions toward political consolidation, economic revitalization, and national security place him at the center of analysis. The chapters provide detailed overviews of the most significant events and topics that arose during Park's nineteen-year rule. The segments that overlap with this project and address the May 16<sup>th</sup> military coup along with US-ROK relations arguably provide some of the best information to date, but have similar limitations to other works that have covered these topics previously. Park was unquestionably the key figure, but he did not wield absolute power early on in his regime. Both domestic considerations and limitations imposed by international obligations constrained his freedom of action. Though the work acknowledges the USG's multi-faceted role in Korean affairs, it does

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<sup>21</sup> Byung Kook Kim and Ezra Vogel, eds, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

not clearly address an overarching idea as to how the US, particularly through the military alliance, was able to effectively exert influence over a ruler with as much centralized power like Park.

The most comprehensive work on US-ROK relations during the two decades following World War II is Donald Stone MacDonald's *U.S.-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance: The Twenty-Year Record, an Interpretative Summary of the Archives of the U.S. Department of State for the Period 1945 to 1965*. Written by a Foreign Service Officer who witnessed first-hand many of the major events, Macdonald utilizes US State Department records and publications that were still mostly classified and unavailable to the general public during the book's release in 1992. As the impressively lengthy title indicates, MacDonald emphasizes the political aspects of the relationship as he provides a broad summary of events that had the greatest impact on US policy in Korea from 1945 to 1965.

MacDonald does attempt to offer an overarching argument that ties together his work. He asserts that rather than accepting theories on US neocolonialism and imperialism in regards to Korea, American policies made during this twenty-year period purposely sought to achieve long-term benefits for both countries. Unfortunately, these long-term objectives were often quickly subsumed by short-term calculations.<sup>23</sup> MacDonald's study is crucial in that it addresses three key areas directly relevant to this project. He gives an overview of the political-military and security issues from the aftermath of World War II to the Korea government's decision to send troops to Vietnam in 1965. He also offers his interpretations on the major policy documents, such as National Security Council (NSC) reports that drove US decisions in Korea. Lastly, MacDonald discusses American involvement in major Korean political crises to include the 1961

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<sup>23</sup> Donald Stone MacDonald, *U.S.-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), xi.

coup.

MacDonald's work is a good foundation but has room to build upon. He states in his preface that the book is limited due to the singular source of his records. He believes that it is not a comprehensive study since the work does not incorporate a variety of sources outside the Department of State (DOS).<sup>24</sup> The classified sources used at the time are now mostly available for academic research given the twenty-five years that have elapsed since the book's publication. The State Department's archival records are usually the most prolific and easily accessible, which explains why historians often gravitate to these sources when researching international relations. In a country like the ROK, where the US military held an undeniably large stake, the DOS represented only one piece of the puzzle even when it came to foreign policy decisions. It was not uncommon for various USG agencies to have different priorities and views, though a consensus was usually reached once the debates ended. The Department of Defense (DOD), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and the National Security Council (NSC) all carried significant weight when it came to US-ROK relations. Integrating sources originating from these organizations and understanding their concerns provides a more holistic understanding of why the US made the decisions it did in Korea during this time period.

This project draws mostly upon three categories of primary sources in an attempt to provide well-rounded answers to the major historical questions investigated. The first, and largest, category encompass the official records of USG agencies involved in Korean affairs. With over fifty years now separating many of the major events that occurred in the ROK in the 1960s to the present day, many of these government sources are now open for public research. The general records of the State Department and US Embassy-Seoul (Record Groups 59 and 84)

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<sup>24</sup> MacDonald, *U.S.-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, xiii.

provide a wealth of detailed information on major issues pertaining to US-ROK relations. Due to their accessibility and subsequent publication of some major documents in the *Foreign Relations of the US* series, most scholars tend to rely heavily on these records for their research.

The national security files located in the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Papers are also critical resources. In addition to documents originating from each President's National Security Council staff, these files usually consolidate relevant correspondence from all the major government agencies when covering key issues. While charged to coordinate the positions of different USG elements, the NSC staff also held their own distinct views that were sometimes aligned, but also at times contrary, to officials from the major departments. The NSC staff's greatest advantage was its proximity and access to the President, which they often yielded to shape key decisions relating to bilateral affairs.

Lastly, this project integrates archival documents from the Department of Defense and its subordinate elements, most notably the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the Commander-in-Chief of UN forces in Korea (CINCUNC). DOD and military records are usually the least user-friendly due to their stringent declassification requirements. Unclassified material is also often mixed in with classified documents which precludes access to most general researchers. When utilized, however, these records allow for a comprehensive understanding of major issues as DOD perspectives did not always align with the DOS or other relevant agencies. Divergent views also existed internally between DOD, JCS, and the field command which were representative of the different priorities among civilian and uniformed military leadership.

The second category consists of an oft underutilized set of primary source materials, the personal papers and correspondence of American military commanders in Korea. Given their stature, many of the general officers who served as the CINCUNC have personal files that

pertain to US-ROK affairs at the US Army Military History Institute (USAMHI) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.<sup>25</sup> In addition to official correspondence and topical records, most also have oral history interviews that preserve their memories of major events. As the CINCUNC, these senior officers had a reporting chain straight to the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), who then delegated the responsibility to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the military's highest-ranking officer and President's principal military advisor. The absence of a buffer between the CINCUNC and CJCS allowed for incredible direct access to the highest levels of the USG, where the field commander could transmit unvarnished assessments in real time. The best example of this largely untapped resource is the collection of weekly letters that cover nearly a two-year span sent from General Guy S. Meloy, CINCUNC from 1961-1963, to the Chairman for his eyes only. These documents provide unfiltered views of one of the most influential US officials in Korea on several events that occurred during this highly turbulent period. They also give the reader access to an additional layer of vital information regarding USG decisions vis-à-vis the ROK's new military regime.

The last category, and also the most limited, are documents from the ROK government. Unfortunately, it does not appear as if preserving detailed records on major decisions was a high priority, or even a low priority, for the military junta in the 1960s. Most debates and decisions were likely held behind closed doors involving only a small circle of attendees. One exception to the rule are the records located at the Diplomatic Archives of the Korean National Diplomatic Academy. Accessible and well-organized by country, this archive holds some documents pertaining to US-ROK relations along with intragovernmental communications between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ROK Embassy in Washington, DC. Though these files also

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<sup>25</sup> A General Officer from the US Army has always been the senior military commander in the ROK to date.

consist of duplicates of documents produced by the USG, the official correspondence provides an added vantage point that offers ROKG views on some major issues. Detailed memorandums of conversation between US and ROK officials preserved in DOS and DOD records also provide valuable information that complement these limited resources.

### **III. Analytical Framework**

When viewed from an international relations theory standpoint, the ROK met many of the criteria that defined a small or weak state in the international system for most of its modern history. Following the Korean War, it was a nation that recognized its inability to meet its own security needs without external aid.<sup>26</sup> Despite the presence of a formal alliance, scholars and policymakers alike have often considered the ROK's relationship with the US as one akin to a Patron-Client arrangement. The relationship demonstrated key Patron-Client characteristics which included relations of mutual value between actors of unequal power based on reciprocity, greater bargaining power by the patron, and a moral or contractual obligation of the client to the patron.<sup>27</sup> A client state behaves like a politically penetrated system and in extreme cases, a weak state is militarily or politically breached to the extent that the patron participates in its decision-making process.<sup>28</sup> It would be hard to argue against the idea that bilateral relations did not represent this type of relationship early on, especially when political leaders required US support for survival, US foreign aid guaranteed economic viability, and an American general retained operational control of the Korean military. Even theories on weak states, however, acknowledge that such nations are not completely helpless. They can in fact, learn how to manipulate great

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<sup>26</sup> Definition drawn from Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (Cornwall, Great Britain: T.J. Press), 1981, 36-37. With a GDP ranked in the top fifteen and increasing global presence, the ROK is often considered a "middle power" today.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 137.

powers once they identify a source of strength and leverage it to their advantage.<sup>29</sup>

Despite its perceived weakness, the ROK has a long history of “punching above its weight” that can be traced before it became an economically relevant entity on a global scale. Robert Keohane’s well-known article, “The Big Influence of Small Allies,” provided a framework of how weaker states influenced US policy decisions. His opening paragraph states that “Apart from our alliance with five major industrial power – Japan, Germany, Britain, France, and Italy – almost forty countries have mutual defense pacts or close political ties with the US. These are the badgers, mice, and pigeons – if not the doves – of international politics, and in many cases they have been able to lead the elephant.”<sup>30</sup> Less so with mice, pigeons, or doves, the badger is a fitting description of the ROK’s standing vis-à-vis the US. The casual observer will likely dismiss a badger as an inconsequential animal without realizing that it is actually a ferocious carnivore with steel-like claws capable of defending against even a mountain lion. The ROK, with its strong military connection to the US, was from early on an example of a weak state that leveraged its alliance to influence a far greater power. Keohane’s statement that the “perception of communist challenge shared by most postwar leaders have given small allies a degree of influential access to American decision making and decision makers far out of proportion of their size,” accurately encapsulates the US-ROK relationship during the Cold War.<sup>31</sup>

Keohane regards the presence of a shared anti-Communist ideology as a prerequisite to small power influence and briefly mentions the ROK, South Vietnam, and Thailand in the 1960s as examples.<sup>32</sup> He also adds that this shared stance against Communism was not enough, but

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Robert O. Keohane, “The Big Influence of Small Allies,” *Foreign Policy* 2 (Spring, 1971), 161.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

needed to be accompanied by close cooperative ties between the small state and elements of American society. Weaker nations had three primary methods to influence the US: utilizing formal diplomatic channels, bypassing diplomatic channels and instead developing close working relationships with USG subunits to include the military, intelligence, or aid communities, or having organized group support such as congressional lobbyists.<sup>33</sup> The smaller power's influence also depended on the presence of four conditions: a high degree of maneuverability in domestic politics with the ally's government not seen as hostile to the US, a strongly anti-Communist and activist US foreign policy, strong working relationships with important USG agencies often within the military characterized by mutual dependence, and close ties with American organized groups.<sup>34</sup> Though Keohane did not focus on the ROK in his article, had he done so, he would have had a good example of a small state that had already begun to follow his blueprint quite closely in the 1960s.

Of the four conditions mentioned above, the ROK clearly met the first three during the earlier half of Park's rule. Though tenuous at first, Park was eventually able to consolidate his power by securing a popular mandate and employing means to firmly handle opposition politics.<sup>35</sup> His standing with the US steadily improved throughout the 1960s to the point where the USG accounted for potential deleterious effects on Park's regime when considering the timing of major policy decisions. Lyndon B. Johnson also came to consider Park as one of America's staunchest allies due to the ROK's commitment in Vietnam. On the US side, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations adopted fierce anti-Communist and activist foreign

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<sup>33</sup> Robert O. Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies, 164-166.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>35</sup> Park won the 1963 Presidential election by a such a slim margin that radical elements within his inner circle nervously contemplated securing victory by force on election day. Park rebounded in 1967 and soundly defeated his opponent by over one-million votes. Though Park attempted to work within a legitimate democratic system that condoned an active opposition, he grew increasingly authoritarian in nature as his rule progressed.

policies. Kennedy's criticism of the Eisenhower administration's low defense spending and emphasis on the "missile gap" with the Soviet Union during the 1960 election signaled a planned aggressive approach to the Communist threat. His adopted grand strategy of Flexible Response, which carried over into the Johnson administration, was also a strong indication that US would increase its global engagement.

Keohane's third condition is arguably the most applicable to the US-ROK case. He emphasized that small states were most influential in situations where a group, such as the US military, depended on the ally to perform its mission and maintained large bases in the partner country.<sup>36</sup> The presence of an average sixty-thousand American troops and nearly one-hundred bases dotted across a country the size of Indiana gives an indication of how tied the US military was to the ROK in the 1960s. While the physical presence was telling, the unified nature of both militaries as a result of American OPCON over all forces on the peninsula further solidified this mutual dependence. There was, and still is, no other arrangement between the US and a foreign ally as closely integrated as the combined military forces in the ROK.

The Korean government's lack of close relations to organized US groups, as stated in Keohane's fourth condition, only increased the growing importance of the military alliance during this decade. The military junta had few, if any, direct connections with the US Congress since the ROK had not established a strong lobbying presence in Washington like Taiwan or Israel.<sup>37</sup> Adding to the difficulties were the strained relations between the US Embassy in Seoul and the Park government during the earliest period of his rule. The ROK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as the traditional counterpart to the Embassy but with the locus of power now

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<sup>36</sup> Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," 165.

<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the country's best-known attempt to establish an influential lobby is still the 1976 Koreagate scandal where the ROK was caught bribing American Congressmen to induce favorable outcomes on major US policy decisions.

residing within a small military subgroup, such ministries became far less influential. Both sides needed time to gain confidence in utilizing formal diplomatic channels again for the benefit of the alliance. With the absence of strong Congressional connections and a tenuous relationship with the State Department early on, Park's government viewed the military alliance as a formidable means to guarantee American backing and recognition. Though it had first advocated for the withdrawal of troops on the peninsula a year prior to the Korean War, the Pentagon had since maintained a strong history of support for the ROK following the 1950 invasion.

If the US-ROK military alliance was solely meant to defend the South Koreans from renewed Communist aggression, then the ROK would actually have had limited bargaining power. The reality was that though the American contribution to the alliance was unquestionable, the ROK did not have a natural place in the great power's global vision as did its neighbor to the east, Japan.<sup>38</sup> Senior Kennedy administration officials, to include the President himself, along with major policy documents clearly stated that one of the key reasons behind the ROK's continued defense was for Japan's security.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately for the ROK, USG policymakers began to see the wider utility of the alliance in withstanding political upheaval as Korean domestic stability became an increasingly important priority during the 1960s. The alliance also began to pay dividends beyond the peninsula as American commitments in Vietnam steadily rose and the domino theory became the mantra of the Johnson administration.

Under Park's rule, the weaker ally began to better understand where its small space to exercise leverage existed. The military-security arena was the only sphere where the ROK could

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<sup>38</sup> Victor Cha offers the argument that the US initially viewed the mutual defense treaty primarily as a restraining measure to prevent ROK adventurism against its northern rival (see *Powerplay*). The realization that a greater power entered into the alliance to prevent you from causing additional trouble could have a sobering effect when evaluating one's standing on the US' list of friends.

<sup>39</sup> Japan, along with West Germany, were considered by the US as the "twin pillars" of the European and Asian regional economies. In spite of being the two primary belligerents during World War II, the US looked to these countries to assist in its efforts to establish a liberal democratic order, which started with global economic recovery.

assert any level of independence and approach the US on a semi-equal footing. Without economic benefits to offer, the ROK's long-standing anti-Communist stance and proven track record in combat were avenues to leverage its nascent strength as long as it remained unquestionably committed to the military alliance. The aim of this project is to delve deeply into the alliance and explore the outcomes of the close military relationship on the ROK's political development and US-ROK relations writ large during the 1960s. This closer investigation will highlight the fact that both countries increasingly valued the *mutual benefit* of the alliance as it evolved to meet a wider range of needs. To do so, the dissertation approaches the historical inquiry through four main chapters.

Chapter one focuses on the foundation of the military-to-military relationship developed between the US and the ROK since the Korean War by examining two key questions. The first area addresses why the military alliance was the cornerstone to overall bilateral relations. The alliance can best be analyzed by delineating it into three pillars: The Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the OPCON command arrangement, and the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command position (CINCUNC). Rather than dwell on the MDT, a topic that several scholars have already addressed in detail, the main focus will instead be on the unique nature of American OPCON over the Korean military.<sup>40</sup> Along with the arrangement's historical roots, I will examine the CINCUNC's role and argue that the position expanded well-beyond the military realm and impacted all major spheres of US-ROK relations. The CINCUNC played a critical part in ensuring stability during a decade of initial turbulence fomented by Korean political uncertainty and changing American priorities.

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<sup>40</sup> See Victor Cha's *Powerplay*, Bruce Cumings' *Child of Conflict*, Gerald Curtis' *The US-South Korean Alliance: Evolving Patterns in Security Relations*, Rosemary Foot's, *Substitute for Victory*, Seung-hi Paik's *US-Korean Security Relations since 1945*, and William Steuck's *Rethinking the Korean War* for works that address the Armistice Agreement and the Mutual Defense Treaty.

The second question addressed is how the ROK was able to leverage its close ties with the American military for its own benefit. I argue that since 1950, the Korean military remained the entity with the closest ties to the US through a series of shared connections to include the Korean War, US-based military training, and the OPCON command relationship. The strongest bond that existed, however, was the one between senior ROK and US military leaders. These officers forged their relationship through war and leveraged them a decade later when the Korean military became a major political actor in domestic affairs. The ROK relied on a strong network of both active and retired military officers in the US to advocate on their behalf, especially with the absence of robust ties to Congress and the State Department. The US, in turn, increasingly viewed the ROK military as the best source of stability and credibility especially as it maintained unfettered access through the OPCON relationship.

Chapter two concentrates on the rise of the ROK military as a political power at the beginning of the decade. The primary question that I seek to answer is why did the Korean armed forces become such an influential organization in the ROK's political affairs. While the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 may represent the military's seizure of power, I trace back the roots of political power to a year earlier. By doing so, I argue that the ROKA's involvement in the April 1960 Student Revolution was the pivotal event that sent the military on a trajectory towards political dominance. The significance of this event was that the direct repercussions of the revolution created an environment conducive for an accepted military takeover of the government a year later. As a result of the ROKA's conduct in protecting the general population during this uprising, it gained an unprecedented level of prestige and trust. The election irregularities that spurred the student uprising and eventually led to the resignation of the ROK's first President also resulted in the removal of several senior ROKA military officers, the very ones that

espoused non-involvement of the army in political affairs, and possessed the power to stop Park Chung Hee.

The links between the two revolutions are numerous and are absolutely relevant to understanding the May 1961 coup. Examining the 1960 Student Revolution from a military lens is critical to identifying these links. In doing so, it becomes evident that the experiences of 1960 also directly influenced the actions of the senior American military commander in the ROK as well. General Carter Magruder, CINCUNC during both revolutions, played a critical part in each event, though his role in the first uprising has yet to be explained in detail. This chapter also attempts to highlight the importance of the CINCUNC's actions as he leveraged his OPCON over the ROK military to positively influence the revolution's course. Understanding Magruder's actions during the April 1960 Revolution provides a deeper appreciation on the key decisions he made during the coup, some of which were criticized during the time.

Chapter three revisits what is arguably the second most important critical event in the ROK's modern history, the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 military coup led by Park Chung Hee.<sup>41</sup> This section concentrates on answering the questions of why the coup succeeded and why the US decided to accept Park's actions. Most scholarship that addresses this event generally states that the US took a "wait and see" approach before determining that accepting the military regime was more favorable than trying to rollback its seizure of power. What is often not communicated in great detail is what the US was actually waiting to see. Some posit that the US needed to first be reassured that the coup was not linked to Communism, especially given Park's background. The US was actually able to confirm the non-Communist nature of the coup quite quickly. I argue instead that the military alliance actually played a vital role during the early days of the power

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<sup>41</sup> The Korean War is likely a consensus choice for number one.

transition. The USG's first priority was to evaluate whether the new military regime would again honor the OPCON agreement after it had been broken during the coup's execution. Once the US was reasonably assured that the command relationship would remain intact, the government soon transitioned to a position of support for Park's military junta.

Some works also argue that the USG accepted Park's seizure of power once they realized it was essentially a *fait accompli*. This line of thinking supports the belief that even had the USG strongly opposed the coup, it would not have been able to reverse the course of events. It is in this regard that General Carter B. Magruder, the senior American military official in the ROK at the time, received a high-volume of criticism that called into question the CINCUNC's inability to predict the coup, prevent the coup, or even immediately support the coup once it occurred. This chapter attempts to demonstrate that in actuality, the uprising served as a testament to the CINCUNC's power. Further examination of the CINCUNC's actions reveals that Magruder was actually able to leverage his command authority to place the existing government in a position to crush the uprising. Understanding that his primary mission was the ROK's defense against external aggression, Magruder avoided taking action without first gaining support of Korean civilian leadership. When he received no such assurances from the ROKG, Magruder instead refocused his efforts on reestablishing OPCON over the Korean military and gaining Park's assurances that he would honor the arrangement.<sup>42</sup>

The fourth chapter focuses on the 1961-1965 timeframe which despite some early successes, was a tenuous period for the Park regime. Shouldered with the expectation to produce instant results in spite of a dismal economic situation, Park's rule consistently faced the threat of

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<sup>42</sup> General Carter Magruder witnessed both the April 1960 revolution that resulted in Syngman Rhee's ouster and the May 1961 military coup which brought Park Chung Hee to power. He relinquished command and left the ROK in June 1961 after successfully negotiating an agreement with Park to reestablish and reaffirm the CINCUNC's OPCON over the ROK military.

counterrevolution and countercoups. Opposition by civilian politicians and students coupled with internal factional strife within the military ensured a constant churning of political upheaval. This chapter attempts to answer how the military alliance affected ROK political development during these critical years of turmoil. Contrary to some opinions, the ROK military was not a monolithic entity that simply fell in line with the junta's decisions. The armed forces actually experienced deep divisions based on faction, commissioning source, age, and service.

I argue that despite his iniquities, USG officials across all relevant agencies from the DOS, DOD, and up to the White House concluded that Park was the best hope for stability in the ROK. Since the US could not become openly involved in ROK political affairs without risking strong, negative repercussions, USG policymakers recognized the advantage of using the existing ties with the Korean military to influence political affairs. The ROK armed forces, and the Service Chiefs that answered to the CINCUNC due to the OPCON arrangement in particular, represented a moderating force that could be leveraged to keep Park's regime afloat and on course.<sup>43</sup> Backing moderate military elements would in turn ensure that Park did not succumb to the radical and unpredictable influences of the core group of younger officers that had been critical cogs of the military revolution since day one.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Modelled after the US military, the ROK armed forces have four Service Chiefs: Chief of Staff of the ROK Army, Chief of Staff of the ROK Air Force, Chief of Naval Operations, and Commandant of the Marine Corps. The ROK Army Chief of Staff historically exercised the most influence since the Army was by far the largest service. He also worked directly for the CINCUNC on matters pertaining to the ROK's external defense.

<sup>44</sup> Kim Jong-pil led this group of field grade officers primarily from the Korean Military Academy 's Eighth Class referred to as the "Young Tigers." They developed a reputation of being overly nationalistic and at times anti-American, while also seeking to prolong military rule.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **A Relationship Forged in Blood: A History of Access and Integration**

For over sixty years, the United States-Republic of Korea military alliance has served as a stabilizing force in a region where the interests of four Great Powers intersect on a peninsula roughly the size of Idaho. Even today, senior US government officials hail the alliance as a lynchpin of regional security in Northeast Asia as the potentially destabilizing threat from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea still exists. Though the origins of the alliance stem from the Korean War, it has displayed remarkable longevity as the two nations navigated the height and conclusion of the Cold War, responded to an evolving threat from the north, and adapted to the security environment of the Twenty-First Century. While the character of US-ROK relations has changed over its roughly one-hundred thirty-year history, the military alliance since its inception has consistently served as the relationship's foundation. An understanding of the deep military-to-military ties of both nations allows for a better comprehension of the critical political-military decisions made throughout the alliance's history, and especially during the earlier decades prior to the ROK's emergence as a middle power.

The USG's decision to formalize a security pact with the ROK in the 1950s was not unusual. It certainly was not considered the most critical military alliance (see NATO), while the US entered into similar arrangements with five other countries in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>1</sup> One can even make the counterfactual argument that if not for the Korean War, the likelihood of the US tying itself to a weak nation of questionable strategic importance was relatively low, as some

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<sup>1</sup> The US signed similar mutual defense pacts with Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines (1951), Australia and New Zealand (1951). Japan first signed a security treaty with the US in 1951 following its occupation and upgraded it to a mutual defense treaty in 1960. Only Taiwan's mutual defense treaty (1955) with the US came into the effect after the ROK's.

have interpreted Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous 1950 National Press Club comments.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the US chose to grant the ROK a Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953, which has since become a critical component of the alliance's foundation.

This chapter seeks to address the question of why a military alliance seemingly unremarkable on the surface was the single most important aspect of US-ROK relations in the 1960s. The answer does not lie in the MDT, but rather an older agreement with origins in the Korean War that placed the ROK's armed forces under the operational control (OPCON) of an American General officer serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command (CINCUNC). This command relationship, formalized by both countries in 1954, is a truly one-of-a-kind arrangement where a sovereign country willingly places its military into the hands of foreign entity. Since its inception, the OPCON agreement gave the US unprecedented entree and influence into ROK military affairs. This authority became exponentially more important when the country entered a prolonged period of military ruled ushered in by Major General Park Chung Hee's coup on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961. Park's decision to honor the OPCON agreement ensured the continuation of American access into the ROK's new locus of political and military power. In exchange, the ROK solidified the US military's place as a combat-tested patron that supported the smaller ally on critical issues pertaining to the new regime's survival.

By 1960, the US understood that it needed to find another approach to influencing political affairs with the delayed emergence of Korean nationalistic sentiment. The military

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<sup>2</sup> Dean Acheson, Secretary of State under President Harry Truman, received much criticism for inviting the North Korean invasion that sparked the Korean War in June 1950. His (in)famous speech at the National Press Club in January 1950 excluded the ROK from the US defense perimeter in Asia which ran from the Aleutians to Japan to the Ryukyus to the Philippines. Whether the statement itself emboldened the DPRK, however, remains debatable. During an interview held with students at Harvard University, Acheson defended his statement by asserting that he was specifically mentioning countries with US military bases at the time, pointing out that MacArthur used the same words a year earlier. Countries outside this defense perimeter had the responsibility to request assistance through the UN in the case of aggression, which Acheson pointed out was the case with the ROK in 1950. The full transcript of the interview available in the Averell Harriman Papers, Box 429, Folder 2, Library of Congress.

alliance's singular importance lay in the relationships that resulted from the OPCON arrangement, which served as the best conduit for American influence over the ROK's new volatile military regime. As other areas such as Southeast Asia moved steadily up the list of American priorities, it became increasingly critical that Northeast Asia, with the ROK in particular, remained relatively stable and free of conflict. Moderation was the buzzword when it came to the USG's desires for Park's regime. The USG sought to exercise low-key influence over the new government by working with trusted groups within the apparatus that supported policies based on moderation. The ROK military's senior officers, with the Service Chiefs in particular, became a key target group given their usual pro-US leanings and direct linkage to the CINCUNC.

This chapter will also present a framework of how the ROK leveraged its relationship with the US military to their own benefit. Utilizing Robert Keohane's paradigm introduced in his well-known article "The Big Influence of Small States," I will lay out the first part of the argument that explains why Korea was a perfect example of this model especially during the 1960s due to the unique military-to-military relationship that existed between the armed forces of the US and the ROK. Prior to understanding how the ROK effectively used this available channel, however, a detailed analysis on why the American military became such an influential heavyweight in matters pertaining to US-ROK relations must first occur.

### **I. Pillars of the US-ROK Military Alliance**

The main components of the US-ROK military alliance, highly influenced by the exigencies of war, are characteristically mundane while simultaneously unique. In an attempt to unravel this description, I separate the alliance into three primary pillars: The Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the Operational Control (OPCON) command arrangement, and the Commander

in Chief, UN Command (CINCUNC) position. Taken as a whole, these three components represent one ally's unprecedented access into the political-military affairs of another. The ROK military throughout its modern-day existence has not known a situation where it did not maintain some degree of dependence on its American counterpart. This chapter establishes a framework of American influence in the ROK by analyzing the available levers of power that were byproducts of the alliance. Not to be outdone by their American allies, the ROK over time developed a greater understanding and proficiency in utilizing these same channels for their own benefit. The subsequent chapters will further show how both the US and ROK employed these levers during critical events in the 1960s.

### **The US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty: Locking in the Next Spoke**

While significant levels of American involvement in Korea did not occur until 1945 following Japan's surrender in World War II, the origin of US-ROK relations lies in 1882 with the Joseon-US Treaty of Peace, Commerce, and Navigation. This treaty, signed on the deck of the U.S.S. Ticonderoga on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1882, was the Joseon Dynasty's first treaty with a Western nation. As other world powers increasingly encroached on its interests, the Joseon Dynasty hoped that the US would serve as a force for arbitration and aid.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, American interest in Korean affairs proved to be short-lived as the Taft-Katsura Agreement signed in 1905 essentially traded Japanese domination over Joseon for American supremacy in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup> Forty-five years later, the US displayed unquestionable commitment to Korea following the invasion of North Korean forces into the south on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950. After three years of fighting with an estimated 142,901 casualties including 33,629 American servicemen killed in action, the

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<sup>3</sup> *The History of the ROK-US Alliance: 1953-2013* (Seoul: Institute of Military History: 2014), 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

US and ROK forged what is still today referred to as a “Blood Alliance.”<sup>5</sup>

The US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) is the most unremarkable pillar of the military alliance. It lacks any unique characteristics that distinguishes it from like-agreements offered by the US to other allies. The treaty’s most interesting aspect may have been how it came into fruition. Despite mutual recognition of the sacrifices made during the war, the US and the ROK did not see eye to eye when determining how to end it. President Dwight D. Eisenhower entered office in 1953 after running on a platform that called for concluding the long-stalemated Korean War. One of his top priorities was to establish an agreement that essentially ended combat operations on the peninsula. The US sensed a willingness by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the DPRK to explore the possibility of a cease-fire agreement. Eisenhower’s objective, however, ran directly counter to that of Syngman Rhee, the South Korean President. Rhee openly opposed a cease-fire and actively called for continued operations until the country had been forcefully reunified. Central to Rhee’s plan was ensuring that the US, as the leader of all UN forces fighting in the war, would remain at the ROK’s side should it unilaterally push north. Rhee believed that the mechanism that could bind the two countries together was a Mutual Defense Treaty.

Rhee was an ardent anti-Communist who believed that the ROK could serve as a stalwart partner to the US as it waged its Cold War. In Rhee’s mind, a MDT not only guaranteed the ROK’s security, it also had the potential of serving as one cog in a broader Pacific alliance that included the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan. Anti-Communism and the US would be the binding forces of this broad alliance.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, Eisenhower’s earliest views on a MDT

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<sup>5</sup> James P. Finley, *The U.S. Experience in Korea, 1871-1982: In the Vanguard of ROK-US Relations* (San Francisco: USFK Command Historian’s Office, 1983), 150.

<sup>6</sup> *The History of the ROK-US Alliance: 1953-2013*, 60.

greatly differed from Rhee's vision. The American President initially displayed reluctance to enter into a pact that would involuntarily commit the US to renewed combat against the PRC and the DPRK. As a nation with a volatile political situation and unstable government, the ROK did not immediately inspire confidence as a necessary treaty partner. Eisenhower also expressed concerns that any agreement between the two countries would undermine the existing UN efforts on the peninsula and weaken the UN's mandate.<sup>7</sup> Eisenhower gradually warmed to the idea of a US-ROK MDT and also began to see its potential as a part of a Pacific-wide collective security system in the spirit of NATO, something that Rhee had advocated since he took office in 1948.<sup>8</sup>

The US-ROK MDT did not come to fruition as a result of orderly discussions and agreements, but was rather used by both sides as a bargaining chip. Despite Rhee's open hostility towards a cease-fire, the US successfully came to terms with the PRC and DPRK on an armistice agreement that could effectively end the war in 1953. In an attempt to disrupt this arrangement, Rhee ordered the release of anti-Communist, North Korean prisoners of war on June 18, 1953, the same day that North Korean, Chinese, and UN forces planned to sign the armistice.<sup>9</sup> The US responded by offering Rhee MDT negotiations in exchange for assurances that he would no longer disturb cease-fire talks. It took two years of arduous negotiations between the US, PRC, and DPRK to effectively end the Korean War with a military armistice agreement on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953. The American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, arrived in Seoul less than two weeks later to commence treaty talks.<sup>10</sup> After a period of negotiation, the US and the ROK signed a MDT on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953, which for over sixty years, has succeeded in

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<sup>7</sup> Seung-gi Paik, *US-Korean Security Relations since 1945* (Seoul: Seoul Press, 1990), 94-95.

<sup>8</sup> Tae-gyun Park, "What Happened Sixty Years Ago," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 21 (2014), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *The History of the ROK-US Alliance: 1953-2013*, 62-63.

meeting its original purpose of deterring another Korean War.

Why did the US decide to make such a strong commitment to a weak country with questionable strategic importance and an unpredictable leader who preached “marching north?” One convincing answer to this question is Victor Cha’s “Powerplay” argument which places the US-ROK alliance in the context of broader American grand strategy. Unlike the intermeshed multilateral alliance system in Europe best characterized by NATO, the US deliberately chose to implement a series of bilateral agreements in the Pacific with the US serving as the “hub” and its Asian allies as the “spokes.” This construct maximized American control over political, economic, and military affairs of its Asian allies. Cha argues that the American powerplay advantage over its allies resulted in virtual US domination over foreign and domestic affairs, which precluded any attempts by the weaker states to counterbalance against the great power.<sup>11</sup> With regards to Taiwan (ROC) and the ROK, the bilateral relations strengthened the anti-Communist regimes against Soviet influence, while also constraining their actions in order to prevent US entrapment in unwanted conflicts. In short, the MDT provided what Cha cleverly coins “Rhee-strait” from an unwanted resumption of hostilities on the Korean peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

The likelihood of Rhee actually reigniting the war still remains somewhat debatable. Korean scholar Hong Yong-pyo asserts that Rhee’s “march north” rhetoric and diplomatic efforts to gain US backing for renewed military attacks on the DPRK were actually political calculations aimed at increasing domestic popularity for his regime. Rhee’s tactic of rallying support around the ever-present Communist threat was especially effective towards the earlier part of his rule, but lost steam as the decade progressed without major improvements to the ROK’s dismal

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<sup>11</sup> Victor Cha, *Powerplay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

economic situation.<sup>13</sup> Though not completely original, the argument that a leader with a tenuous hold on power could divert the country's attention externally while consolidating his internal control holds water in this Korean context. Chinese scholar Chen Jian used a similar explanation to explain why Mao Zedong entered the Korean War only a few months after winning a contentious civil war.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps one of the more illuminating explanations on Rhee's northern aspirations came from his last Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General (retired) Song Yo-chan (or "Tiger" as he was affectionately known as by his American supporters). Also forced to leave the ROK not long after Rhee's ouster, Song met with State Department officials prior to his return to Seoul following the May 1961 coup. In response to Mr. Leonard Bacon, Acting Director of the Northeast Asia office in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, who advised that an announcement by Park's new regime of its intention to not march north would be helpful, Song offered the opinion that Rhee never intended to reengage hostilities. The former President was actually fully aware that victory was impossible without American logistical support. Song went on to describe an instance when Rhee directed his Minister of Defense (MINDEF) Kim Chung-yul ("Mike") to make preparations for a northern march, an order that Kim demurred. After hearing about his boss' reluctance, Song went to see Rhee the next day to inform him that the Army was ready and he would just need the President's order. The elderly leader advised the ROKA to stand down since Song knew all too well that such a move was not going to happen without American support.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Yong-pyo Hong, *President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea, 1953-1960* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> See Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum of conversation (MOC) between Song Yo-chan and Leonard L. Bacon, 13 June 1961, Box 44, File 350: Korea-May 1961, Record Group (RG) 84: Records of the Foreign Posts of the Department of State, US Embassy Seoul, Classified General Records 1961, National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP).

Regardless of whether Rhee really believed that he could reunify the peninsula by force, the MDT gave both countries what they had initially desired. For the ROK, it was an explicit statement of US commitment to the small country as communicated in the following excerpt from the treaty's preamble:

Desiring to declare publicly and formally their common determination to defend themselves against external armed attack so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either of them stands alone in the Pacific area.

Article IV in turn further entrenched the US by permitting the basing of American military forces in the ROK:

The Republic of Korea grants, and the United States of America accepts, the right to dispose United States land, air and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea as determined by mutual agreement.<sup>16</sup>

Even if the original intent of the MDT was to prevent Korean adventurism, the restraint portion of the powerplay argument weakened as US-ROK relations moved further away from the 1953 armistice. The war between the two Koreas became less about conflict and more about superior ideology judged by economic revitalization. Though unification remained a priority under the Park regime in the 1960s, the belief that it could be achieved militarily greatly diminished. The US did, however, continue to utilize the alliance as a restraining measure at critical times, particularly in 1968 during the height of what has sometimes been called the "Second Korean War."<sup>17</sup> But even Park realized early in his rule that if the alliance was to stay relevant, the concept of mutual defense needed to expand beyond the Korean peninsula. As

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<sup>16</sup> Full text of the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty signed on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953 available online at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp#b3](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp#b3).

<sup>17</sup> The US and the ROK periodically engaged in low-intensity engagements against North Korean guerrillas primarily within the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from 1966-1969. The dividing fence that is a recognizable part of the DMZ today was a byproduct of this conflict, which not coincidentally, occurred during the height of ROK military deployments to Vietnam. Tensions peaked in January 1968 when North Korean commandoes ordered to assassinate Park Chung Hee reached the grounds of the Presidential Compound (Blue House) before being killed. A few days later, the North Korean navy seized an American spy ship, the USS Pueblo, along with all its sailors. Park's emphatically called for retaliation and had to be skillfully assuaged by US officials who had no interest in risking another open conflict given the situation in Vietnam.

Rhee had done multiple times during his Presidency, Park also offered Korean support to American efforts in Vietnam during his first meeting with President Kennedy. Though originally refused, the US eventually accepted the proposal with open arms (and checkbook), a decision that ultimately redefined the military alliance throughout the 1960s.

### **Operational Control: A One of a Kind Command Arrangement**

While the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty may register relatively low ratings when it comes to uniqueness, the Operational Control (OPCON) agreement that binds the two militaries together deservedly holds a place on the opposite end of the spectrum. A nation's ability to command its own armed forces for its external defense is arguably one of the basic tenets of sovereignty. To voluntarily turn over that right to a foreign power during war, and not yet have it completely back over sixty-five years later, is unprecedented. The situation does have some tangential similarities to Japan where the US still provides a nuclear umbrella and maintains the presence of an estimated fifty-thousand troops, but nowhere in the Japanese military chain of command, let alone at the top, is a foreign officer.

Even today, an American General officer still maintains the status as the commander of all military forces on the peninsula during wartime. Noted Korea scholar and former Foreign Service Officer Gregory Henderson called the Korean military the "chief umbilical cord between the ROK and the US."<sup>18</sup> The uncharacteristically strong military-to-military relationship formed between the two allies, however, was influential beyond just the security sphere, as evidenced by its impact on Korean political development and overall bilateral relations in the 1960s. The effects of this one-of-a-kind arrangement have been largely overlooked and as the strongest pillar of the military alliance, warrants a deeper historical study.

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<sup>18</sup> Gregory Henderson, "The United States and the Militarization of Korea," *Korea Scope* 3 (1983), 5.

The origin of American command over Korean military forces extends back to the earliest days of the Korean War when President Syngman Rhee transferred OPCON authority to General Douglas MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of the UN Command (CINCUNC). Viewed as a military necessity, Rhee handed over control to MacArthur on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1950 via the succinct Pusan Letter that read:

In view of the common military effort of the United Nations on behalf of the Republic of Korea, in which all military forces, land, sea and air, of all the United Nations fighting in or near Korea have been placed under your operational command, and in which you have been designated Supreme Commander United Nations Forces, I am happy to assign to you command authority over all land, sea, and air forces of the Republic of Korea during the period of the continuation of the present state of hostilities, such command to be exercised either by you personally or by such military commander or commanders to whom you may delegate the exercise of this authority within Korea or in adjacent seas.<sup>19</sup>

The decision in itself was a necessary one to ensure unity of command of all allied forces fighting on the peninsula.<sup>20</sup> Given the dismal state of the fledgling Korean military following the initial Communist invasion, it was also a smart move when viewed as being synonymous to giving the keys to a 1986 Ford Taurus to a professional NASCAR pit crew in preparation for the big race. The ROK armed forces experienced an admirable turnaround throughout the course of the war as American dollars and efforts focused on the training and equipping of the Korean military. More importantly, the OPCON arrangement sealed the ROK military's dependence on their American counterparts not just in the aforementioned areas, but also in other spheres that included command and control, logistics, and military intelligence. The modern Korean military has yet to experience a day without some level of support from their American partners. The US military served as the symbolic backbone that the Korean armed forces developed around

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<sup>19</sup> Chung Kyung Young, "An Analysis of ROK-US Military Command Relationship from the Korean War to the Present" (Master's Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1989), 33.

<sup>20</sup> At its height, the UN Command consisted of armed forces from a total of sixteen nations.

resulting in both a close partnership and a guaranteed level of dependence.<sup>21</sup>

Considering the magnitude of the OPCON agreement on a nation's sovereignty, it is also interesting to note that the transfer did not require any additional review or approval by either country's legislative bodies or diplomatic corps. The extent of US Embassy involvement on the matter in 1950 consisted of receiving the Pusan Letter and forwarding its contents to MacArthur, who sat firmly entrenched in Tokyo. Given the exigencies of war, it is somewhat understandable that this original authorization bypassed any civilian or political channels. It would also be hard to imagine the Truman administration seeking Congressional approval for the OPCON agreement since it had not even done so for American involvement in the war itself.<sup>22</sup> Since this unofficial war also unofficially ended only with an armistice and not a peace treaty, "the period of the continuation of the present state of hostilities" specified in the Pusan Letter still remained applicable after the conflict's cessation in July 1953.

As a follow-up to the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, the November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1954 Agreed Minutes replaced the Pusan Letter as the formal declaration of the ROK's intent to keep its military under American operational control. The Agreed Minutes were significant in that it solidified this command relationship through the second bullet that specified the ROK's intent to "retain Republic of Korea forces under the operational control of the United Nations command while the Command has responsibilities for the defense of the Republic of Korea, unless after consultation it is agreed that our mutual and individual interest would be best served by

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<sup>21</sup> Though the ROK military is one of the most well-equipped forces today, it still heavily relies on the US, especially during wartime scenarios. For example, the US provides advanced air and naval capabilities while the ROK, with its conscription-based military, provides the bulk of land forces.

<sup>22</sup> President Truman did not seek a declaration of war from Congress instead choosing to call the conflict a "Police Action." The "Police Action," however, had all the characteristics, and costs, of a conventional war. The ROK National Assembly, largely marginalized during Rhee's rule, was also not in any position to deliberate on international agreements given the hasty retreat from Seoul.

change.”<sup>23</sup> It also set the size of a 720,000 strong Korean armed forces and the parameters of a robust Military Assistance Program (MAP) to support it. In essence, this agreement codified the US military commander’s power on the peninsula. In addition to his command of the permanent American forces in the country, the Agreed Minutes legitimized the CINCUNC’s operational control over the ROK military and ensured his control over billions in MAP dollars that would flow through his office.

The CINCUNC’s operational control of all forces in the ROK primarily served as a deterrent against renewed aggression by the DRPK and PRC. Though the sixteen-nation membership of the UN Command looked formidable on paper, it was undoubtedly the American presence that really made a significant impact. General Lyman Lemnitzer, CINCUNC from 1955 to 1957, clearly communicated the OPCON arrangement’s importance through the following assessment of the military situation on the Korean peninsula.<sup>24</sup> Regarding the balances of forces, Lemnitzer asserted that “the North Koreans have forces that are matched or superior to the South Koreans alone.” He added that “there is no peace in Korea.... but fortunately, you have a line. You don’t have a sieve like in Vietnam. You have a line, and it’s pretty stable as long as there is some strength there and as long as that UN command flag remains there.”<sup>25</sup> Perhaps for the first, and only, time in its history, the UN flag symbolized military strength. More importantly, as long as an American general was the CINCUNC, a new war would trigger American involvement along with its advanced nuclear arsenal. The DPRK likely understood the limits of its actions as all former belligerents on both sides came to generally desire the

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<sup>23</sup> Digital copy of the agreement available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v15p2/d942>.

<sup>24</sup> Lemnitzer also served as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1960 to 1962. He maintained a keen interest on Korean affairs throughout his career and would be a pivotal player during the early 1960s.

<sup>25</sup> Lyman L. Lemnitzer Oral History Interview, Lyman L. Lemnitzer Papers (LLP), Senior Officer Oral History Program (SOOHP), US Army Military History Institute (USAMHI), Carlisle Barracks, PA, 5.

armistice's longevity as opposed to a resumption of hostilities.<sup>26</sup>

The OPCON relationship did not escape the effects of a changing global security environment in the 1960s. With American attention increasingly falling on Southeast Asia as the decade progressed, the US-ROK alliance unexpectedly experienced a growth, rather than a reduction in importance. American OPCON still remained a deterrent but the alliance's symbolic value to the US increased exponentially during this troubled decade as well. With the Domino Theory tenets driving American foreign policy and coloring global strategic considerations, the symbolic prestige of the US as a strong, reliable partner took on an added importance.<sup>27</sup> The tight-knit US-ROK OPCON arrangement provided the perfect public relations mechanism that represented America's resolve towards protecting an Asian ally against the Communist threat.

An interagency document titled "Outlines of US Policy and Operations towards Korea" drafted in January 1963 stated that "The UNC and the Korean Armed Forces under operational control, proven in combat, well-organized, trained, and combat ready today, are a source of reassurance and strength to Korea and the western Pacific area." It also added that the number one priority in the military field was to maintain the security arrangements provided in the MDT and the Agreed Minutes to preserve the present level of the CINCUNC's operational control over the ROK military.<sup>28</sup> The OPCON relationship reached an unprecedented level of importance in the 1960s when its broader symbolic value superseded its role as a deterrent in major US policy

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<sup>26</sup> The DPRK was fully engaged in economic recovery by the 1960s. The PRC removed its last remaining troops from the DPRK in 1958.

<sup>27</sup> The Domino Theory's basic argument was that if one country fell under Communist influence, i.e., Vietnam, then it could start a chain of events where weak or neutral countries also became Communist one by one as they fell like dominoes. Eisenhower first used the argument when justifying US involvement in Southeast Asia.

<sup>28</sup> Memorandum from the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, W. Averell Harriman, Subject: Guideline Paper on Korea - Final Draft, 28 January 1963, Box 21, File POL-1: General Policy and Plans, RG59: General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of FE Affairs, Assistant Secretary for FE Affairs, 1963 Subject Files, NACP.

documents. This change, however, did not minimize the arrangement's importance in military affairs, but rather illustrated its increasing strategic value to the US.

The assessment that the OPCON arrangement was in actuality a political agreement disguised under a military mask is both accurate and critical to understanding its far-reaching influence.<sup>29</sup> Rhee's initial wartime decision in 1950 ensured the survival of both his military and his country. Reiterating the commitment in 1954 through the Agreed Minutes, however, exposed the political nature of the move. In addition to the MDT, continuation of the OPCON arrangement guaranteed American commitment of its military and money to the ROK, even with the decreasing chances of renewed hostilities. During the 1950s, the benefits of such a commitment clearly favored the ROK. It would not be until after two forceful changes in government in the next decade that the US began to fully see the unintended benefits of this unique OPCON relationship beyond the military sphere.

## **II. Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command: The Confluence of Military and Political Power**

The trend towards US military dominance in East Asian affairs after World War II also applied to the Korean Peninsula. Though never emanating the ostentatious displays of power favored by MacArthur during the American postwar occupation of Japan, the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command was the senior US military official in the ROK whose influence was on par, if not at times exceeding, that of the American Ambassador. To consider the CINCUNC as purely an actor in the military sphere is a significant oversight that does not represent the realities of American involvement in Korean affairs. The CINCUNC could not solely focus on the military since it was simply impossible to neatly delineate military affairs

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<sup>29</sup> Gregory Henderson, "American Command in Korea: The Political Dangers," 9.

from political and economic ones in Korea during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

The reality was that the CINCUNC maintained both direct and indirect influence in critical non-military matters to include ROK political and economic development by the relationships afforded to him through his unique command responsibilities. No other American official came close to having the CINCUNC's level of access as a result of his direct command over the ROK's largest government entity, the armed forces. His ability to directly engage the most senior levels of both the USG and ROKG, along with his oversight on a multi-million-dollar Military Assistance Program, guaranteed the CINCUNC's dominant position in bilateral affairs.

## **Foundations of Power**

### ***Command Organization***

The command organization in the Korea during the 1960s was both convoluted and complicated to the casual observer, and likely to many informed observers as well. The CINCUNC was in actuality just one of three concurrent titles held by the General Officer occupying the position. While the CINCUNC was the most prestigious and powerful title, he also wore two other hats as the Commander of US Forces in Korea (COMUSFK) and the Commanding General of the Eighth US Army (CGEUSA). Though the triple-hatted nature of the position undoubtedly caused additional headaches to the large military staff that also held multiple responsibilities for each of these command, they also provided the CINCUNC diverse

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the MAP ultimately determined the economic assistance package to the ROK since yearly authorizations were for total amounts. The CINCUNC worked closely with the Ambassador to determine the right balance. In addition, MAP cuts had significant political repercussions to the ROKG, which were also taken into serious consideration.

channels into the highest levels of civilian and military leadership.<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly, the most influential ones were those made accessible only to the Commander of UN forces.

Orders of battle admittedly rarely elicit overwhelming excitement but a brief description of the Korean situation is valuable in understanding the depths of the CINCUNC's influence. With the ROK's defense oriented primarily towards the north, the bulk of the military presence remained around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the vicinity of the thirty-eighth parallel. Charged with the external defense of the ROK, the CINCUNC exercised direct OPCON of the two primary organizations defending the DMZ, the First Republic of Korea Army (FROKA) that occupied the western sector and the First US Corps (Group) in the east. While FROKA only oversaw subordinate Korean units, the First US Corps (Group) commanded two American divisions and the Sixth ROK Corps consisting of three Korean Divisions. The CINCUNC exercised command over all other Korean army organizations outside of FROKA through the ROK Army Chief of Staff (ROK CSA).<sup>32</sup>

Having a basic understanding of this order of battle is important for three reasons. First, it illustrates the intertwined nature of the US and ROK militaries. Korean commanders did not only recognize the CINCUNC's primacy in the chain of command, but also worked for or with other American Commanders at the Corps and Division levels. Secondly, the CINCUNC's operational control of FROKA provided him direct command over the bulk of the ROKA since DMZ defense was the top priority.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, even the highest-ranking ROKA officer, the Chief

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<sup>31</sup> The COMUSFK reported to the CINC of Pacific Command (CINCPAC) in Hawaii on matters primarily pertaining to all the US military services on the ROK. The CINCPAC was traditionally a US Navy Admiral and reported directly to the SECDEF and CJCS. The CGEUSA reported to the CINC, US Army Pacific (CINCUSARPAC) also in Hawaii on matters only relevant to the US Army. The CINCUSARPAC held direct channels back to the Department of the Army (DA) and the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA).

<sup>32</sup> Carter B. Magruder, "The Eighth US Army," Carter B. Magruder Papers (CBMP), Box 8, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>33</sup> The CINCUNC's direct command over FROKA was critical as the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup unfolded. It gave the US commander the ability to stop the revolution if desired (see Chapter 3). The Second ROK Army (SROKA) oversaw

of Staff, understood his subordinate status to the CINCUNC. Though the Chiefs of the other services were also important, none were more influential in military and political affairs than the ROK CSA, who maintained oversight of over ninety percent of the Korean armed forces.<sup>34</sup> Many of the Korean military leaders, with the ROK CSA in particular, were extremely capable of working with and under American leadership partly due to their shared experiences that originated in the Korean War.<sup>35</sup> These relationships were crucial as the ROK military assumed broader influence outside the military sphere with the emergence of Park's military junta.

### ***Personnel Authority***

In addition to the CINCUNC's vast command authority across the peninsula, he also held extensive sway on ROK military personnel matters. As the senior commander for both countries, the CINCUNC retained the ability to approve the promotions and assignments for senior Korean military officers at the General and Flag officer ranks. The CINCUNC received promotion and assignment lists from the Service Chiefs for review and approval. Since he did not personally know all the officers considered, the Commander relied on the vast American military advisor network that worked daily with Korean military units at various levels.<sup>36</sup> The CINCUNC's involvement in personnel decisions and deep access into the ROK military through his American advisors allowed him to maintain an accurate and up-to-date picture of this key Korean organization.

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the rear area of South Korea. Considered a less-prestigious assignment, Park Chung Hee's last position in the Army was as the SROKA Deputy Commander (DCDR). The fact that Park was able to organize and execute a coup while the DCDR highlights the amount of attention given to the position.

<sup>34</sup> Though actual numbers would hover around 600,000 during the 1960s, the 1954 Agreed Minutes authorized a ROK military size of 720,000. The ROK Army accounted for 661,000, or 92% of the total.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory Henderson, "US Command and Presence in Korea: Tension, Problems, and Resolutions," Gregory Henderson Papers, Box 8, Folder: American Command in Korea, Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge, MA, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum from Choi Kyung-nok to Carter B. Magruder: "Major Issues Handled between November 17<sup>th</sup>-December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1960," James A. Van Fleet Papers (JVFP), Box 34, File 1, George C. Marshall Library (GCML), Lexington, VA.

The CINCUNC fully leveraged his authority to affect key military assignments. Though he did not personally pick the Service Chiefs, the Commander's opinion influenced who the ROKG ultimately chose for these critical positions, with the ROK CSA being of particular importance. The ability to work with senior American military officials was a prerequisite as it was in the ROKG's interest to maintain favorable military-to-military relations. One telling example of the CINCUNC's role in this regard came shortly after the April 1960 Revolution that led to Syngman Rhee's resignation. Faced with building a caretaker government, interim President Huh Chung requested four ROK CSA candidates from the CINCUNC, General Carter B. Magruder.<sup>37</sup> The General's recommendations did not meet Huh's expectations as he targeted younger, "untainted" officers without questionable ties to the Rhee regime. Huh specifically asked Magruder for his thoughts on Major General Choi Kyung-nok, Commandant of the ROK National Defense College. After receiving a favorable endorsement from Major General Hamilton Howze, the Chief of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), for having an "outstanding reputation for ability, integrity, and to not engage in political activities," Choi received the CINCUNC's endorsement and the job.<sup>38</sup>

With the pro-American sentiment running high following the 1960 Student Revolution, it is understandable that any post-Rhee government, especially an interim one, would seek maximum cooperation with the US on matters such as key military positions. This cooperation, however, was not unique to Huh's interim government but also continued on into Park's rule, despite the highly nationalistic nature of the junta. Park quickly sought to continue this process

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<sup>37</sup> President Huh led the interim government until democratic elections in July 1960 ushered in the Chang Myon government.

<sup>38</sup> Message KA 61326, Carter Magruder to I.D. White, 23 May 1960, Box 293, EUSA G2 Intelligence Administration File 1960, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP. Choi Kyung-nok was an early source of vociferous opposition to Park, mainly by accusing him of having Communist ties. Choi was also the SROKA CG when Park served as his Deputy, while plotting and executing a military coup under his boss's nose.

less than a month after the coup with his first ROK CSA selection, Lieutenant General Kim Chong-oh. Magruder considered Kim's appointment as a positive development towards the reestablishment of the CINCUNC's OPCON authority which had been broken during the military uprising. The back-and-forth that occurred with Huh and the preauthorization sought by Park for their respective ROK CSA candidates represented the mutual respect required to maintain positive relations. Despite his unquestionable authority, a CINCUNC that exercised this power based on collaboration and respect for Korean sovereignty was able to maintain harmony even in the most sensitive of areas.

The aftermath of the May 16<sup>th</sup> revolution illuminated the degree of importance that the CINCUNC considered his oversight on personnel matters. The new regime understood that restoring American confidence in its OPCON authority was a necessary step towards the reestablishment of normal bilateral relations.<sup>39</sup> In a letter to Magruder less than ten days after the coup, the ROK CSA Chang Do-young acknowledged that in the past, personnel assignments of high-ranking general officers had been conducted with prior consultations with the CINCUNC as recognition of his command authority.<sup>40</sup> Chang commented that due to the unique conditions of the military revolution, it was "deeply regrettable that we had to temporarily stop this cooperation on personnel matters, thus breaking the friendly procedure that existed prior to revolution." He went on to offer an olive branch with the following statement:

"This ministry would like to make it clear that in the future full cooperation and prior consultations will be made with your office to seek your understanding so as to support your operational control authority. Under this, senior officers who we define as division commanders or higher, including Navy, Marine, and Air Force officers of comparable

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<sup>39</sup> Chapter 3's main argument is that the restoration of US OPCON authority was the most crucial factor that determined American acceptance of the coup.

<sup>40</sup> Chang was the ROK CSA when the coup occurred. Following the event, he also assumed the Minister of Defense role and Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council positions. Though it is likely that Chang was aware of Park's coup plan, available evidence suggests that he too was surprised by the timing. Chang became the face of the coup since he was well-known in both US and ROK circles, though observers recognized early on that Park was really the power behind the revolution.

responsibilities, will not be relieved or assigned without your prior concurrence."<sup>41</sup>

Chang's offer showed that the Service Chief billets were not the only ones of keen interest to the CINCUNC. Ensuring that capable officers assumed command of FROKA along with the Corps and Division commands defending the DMZ was critical to the Commander's ability to execute his mission.

In what can be considered a certain twist of irony, Park Chung Hee's military career offered a revealing glimpse of the CINCUNC's authority over the professional trajectory of senior Korean officers. Park was unique in that though he did attend military training in the US as a captain, he never developed much proficiency in English or maintained close relations with his American counterparts as he rose through the ranks. The time he spent at Fort Sill, Oklahoma attending the US Army artillery school in 1954 did not result in a love for the American way of life as was the case for many of his peers. Feelings of homesickness and frustrations towards the redundancies in the training highlighted his American experience instead.<sup>42</sup> Park, for the most part, managed to avoid leaving lasting impressions on the American military commanders and advisors that he encountered throughout his service.

The few exceptions included the praise Park received from Lieutenant General Arthur Trudeau, Seventh Infantry Division Commander during the Korean War and long-time First US Corps (Group) Commander in Korea. Trudeau held Park in high regard describing the ROK leader as pro-American, anti-Communist, and possessing exemplary integrity.<sup>43</sup> A letter written by Park in 1962 to Major General T.W. Parker, Special Assistant to the CJCS, provides the other

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<sup>41</sup> Message K-309, CINCUNC to JCS, 26 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UNC 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records 1961, NACP.

<sup>42</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 96.

<sup>43</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 23 July 1961, Guy S. Meloy, Jr Papers (GSMP), Box 1, Folder: Weekly Roundup to CJCS, USAMHI. LTG Trudeau was best known as the 7ID commander during the Battle of Pork Chop Hill in the Korean War.

reference of a positive relationship with an American officer made early in his career. Park specifically ordered Chung Il-kwon, the ROK Ambassador to the US and well-known retired General officer, to locate Parker on his behalf. Parker described the note as cordial which also included references to their association in 1953 when he was the Tenth Corps Artillery Commander while Park was forming the First ROK Corps Artillery under his “tutelage.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps it was a bond formed as a result of surname similarities since overall, Park’s view on US military authority, especially regarding ROK personnel matters, was not a positive one.

Park’s grievances against the CINCUNC’s authority did not surface until the later in his career. According to CIA estimates produced soon after the May 16th coup, Park developed personal reasons to dislike the CINCUNC’s role in Korean military affairs.<sup>45</sup> One byproduct of the April 1960 Student Revolution was an attempt to purge military leaders accused of corruption. This attack on senior officers came both from top civilian officials and within the military itself. The new government leadership, especially during the Chang Myon administration, sought to force senior military leaders with ties to the Rhee regime into early retirement. Ironically, the one General Officer considered the hero of the student uprisings was one of them. ROK CSA Song Yo-chan could not escape his role in delivering the ROKA’s vote to Rhee during the widely-criticized March 1960 election and left for the US shortly following the President’s resignation.<sup>46</sup>

Internally, sixteen junior officers to include Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jong-pil, a key

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<sup>44</sup> T.W. Parker to Guy Meloy, 7 February 1962, Box 6, Folder 091: Korea, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>45</sup> SNIE 42-2-61: Short-term Prospects in South Korea, 31 May 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Papers (JFKP), National Security Files (NSF), Box 127, Folder: Task Force on Korea, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (JFKL), Boston, MA.

<sup>46</sup> As the Martial Law Commander, Song played a critical role in the April Revolution. His decision to not interfere in the protests resulted in the revolution’s success and earned him universal praise among the Korean public. Ironically, Song was also allegedly responsible for delivering the ROKA vote for Rhee in a series of corrupt elections.

architect of the May 16th coup and relative by marriage to Park, initiated a purification campaign in 1960 against corrupt senior military leaders, especially those involved in election fraud. Though Kim and the group eventually faced court-martial for their insubordinate actions, most would be either acquitted, reprimanded, or voluntarily resign from service. They did, however, manage to cause significant collateral damage along the way with the resignation of Lieutenant General Choi Young-hee, Chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, representing the highest-ranking casualty of the purification movement. Even the Chairman could not escape the cloud of suspicion surrounding his financial irregularities that made Choi a prime target for these young officers.<sup>47</sup> This movement, which came to be known as the Ha Kuk Sang incident (“the challenge of the seniors by the junior”) would not have lasted long if not for the support of the two civilians that served as the Minister of Defense (MINDEF) throughout the course of events.

The most vociferous opponent against the culling of these senior military officers was the CINCUNC, General Carter Magruder. Though he recognized that some of the charges against these individuals were legitimate, Magruder lamented at the forced retirement of combat-tested commanders due to political reasons. He also harshly criticized the actions of junior officer groups against their seniors describing their activities as “mob rule in the military.”<sup>48</sup> Charged with the defense of the ROK, Magruder cautioned against the destabilizing effect on combat readiness that would result from a wholesale removal of senior officers. The CINCUNC’s ability to influence even internal matters through his position likely did not go unnoticed by Park, who was considered a patron of the junior officers in the purification movement.

The CINCUNC’s personnel authority also directly affected Park as he attributed the

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<sup>47</sup> Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea*, 80-2.

<sup>48</sup> Carter B. Magruder, “CINCUNC’s Remarks” (address, ROKA Senior Commander’s Conference, Seoul, Korea, December 14, 1960) available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

course of his career to decisions made by Magruder. Park believed that the CINCUNC directly influenced ROKA leaders twice, which first resulted in his departure as the Commander of the ROKA Logistics Command in July 1960 and then his removal as the ROKA G-3 (Operations) in December 1960.<sup>49</sup> His last military assignment was as the Deputy Commander of the Second ROK Army (SROKA), a position equivalent to a retirement holding area. Though it remains unknown if Magruder specifically orchestrated the first two moves, evidence does exist showing that he was supportive of Park's SROKA assignment.<sup>50</sup> Magruder's feeling about Park became evident through his denials of the SROKA Commander's requests to visit the US. Considering Park's active role in the agitation against the senior officers, the CINCUNC did not favor any situation that would leave the Deputy in command.<sup>51</sup> Whatever suspicions that the Magruder had of Park were not shared, however, by either the ROK CSA or the Prime Minister, which ultimately resulted in the untimely end to both their careers.

The CINCUNC's involvement in ROK military promotions and assignments was made possible by the network of military advisors that worked daily with units across all services. The military advisory mission had a long history in the ROK starting with Brigadier General William M. Dye, a West Point graduate and Civil War veteran who was invited to Korea in 1888 by its last king, Kojong. Dye's mission to train the Korean military lasted over a decade but was eventually replaced by a Russian contingent. The next American advisory effort began during the US military occupation of Korea in 1945 with the Department of Internal Security, which

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<sup>49</sup> SNIE 42-2-6, 31 May 1961, JFKP.

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum from Choi Kyung-nok to Carter B. Magruder: "Major Issues Handled between November 17<sup>th</sup>-December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1960, JFVP. Portion referencing Park reads: "Reassignment of Major General Pak Chung Hi has been delayed due to the Court-martial. However, his reassignment problem has been discussed with KMAG and his next assignment is being considered. Possible next assignment is Deputy CG SROKA and order will be issued in a day or so."

<sup>51</sup> Carter B. Magruder Oral History Interview, transcript of oral history conducted in 1972 by Charles E. Tucker, SOOHP, CBMP, Box 4, USAMHI, 17.

was succeeded by the Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG) in 1948. As the American occupation troops exited the peninsula in 1949, the Korean Military Advisory Group, or KMAG, stayed in country and played a crucial role in training the ROK armed forces throughout the Korean War.<sup>52</sup> KMAG was still a key organization in the 1960s with American officers advising their ROKA counterparts at the highest levels of command. While KMAG concentrated on the Army, the Provisional Military Assistance Advisory Group-Korea (PROVMAAG-K) worked directly with the ROK Ministry of Defense on integral matters that included the Defense Budget and MAP execution.

These advisory elements were simply an unrivalled source of information for the CINCUNC. General George H. Decker, CINCUNC from 1957 to 1959, specifically recalled KMAG's ability to provide him timely insight on what was on the minds of the ROK military.<sup>53</sup> The KMAG Chief, a two-star American General, not only led the robust mission, but also served as the personal military advisor to the ROK CSA. Given the broad importance of the CSA in both military and political affairs, his close link to the KMAG Chief produced a steady flow of valuable information. General Hamilton Howze, KMAG Chief during the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup, leveraged this relationship fully and met with the ROK CSA, Chang Do-young, five times during that day alone. Howze was in fact the first American official to meet Park Chung Hee after unexpectedly seeing him at the ROKA Headquarters during the early hours of the coup. The CINCUNC had sent Howze to ascertain the situation from Chang, identify where his sympathies lay, and determine what he was doing about the uprising. After a silent and awkward sit-down where Howze found himself across from the coup leader, one of the Korean general officers

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<sup>52</sup> See Bryan R. Gibby's *The Will to Win: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1946-1953* and Robert K. Sawyer's *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* for detailed histories on KMAG.

<sup>53</sup> George H. Decker Oral History Interview, transcript of interview conducted in 1972 by Dan H. Ralls, SOOHP, George H. Decker Papers, Box 1, USAMHI, 80.

politely asked him to leave since they could not carry out their internal discussions with Park in his presence.<sup>54</sup>

It was also tempting to consider the use of military advisors for intelligence collection purposes given their unparalleled access. Magruder broached the idea to Howze, who felt strongly that nothing would weaken the advisory efforts more than the Koreans knowing that their actions and words would be reported back via intelligence channels.<sup>55</sup> The CINCUNC's concurrence to Howze's assessment highlighted the importance of maintaining an unencumbered military-to-military relationship based on a common mission. These military advisors clearly displayed their worth during and after the coup nonetheless providing real-time updates on the status of key units and their commanders, which was critical in determining FROKA's loyalty to the CINCUNC and by extension, the ROKG on that fateful day. It was also through these advisors, and not the CIA, that biographical information on the members of the expanding military junta became readily available for usage and analysis.

The CINCUNC's deep links into the ROK military allowed for American commanders to develop strong and lasting relationships with their Korean counterparts. Even if he preferred the MacArthur model of overseeing affairs from the safety of a Daichi Building-like perch, the intertwined nature of the two militaries and the breadth of the CINCUNC's responsibilities to the ROK armed forces would simply not allow it. Many of the American officers that served as the senior commander during this period retained enduring ties to the ROK. Some of them became "grandfather-like" figures to the Korean officers that they had worked with and led.<sup>56</sup> These

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<sup>54</sup> Hamilton Howze Oral History Interviews, transcript of interview conducted in 1973 by Robert T. Reed, SOOHP, Hamilton Howze Papers, Box 1, USAMHI, 34. Howze also commented that the thought of reaching across the table, grabbing Park, and ending the Coup immediately had crossed his mind.

<sup>55</sup> Magruder Oral History, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Generals Lemnitzer and General Magruder both used this specific term to describe their enduring relationships with Korean officers. General James Van Fleet did as well, though he never served as the CINCUNC, but was the Eighth US Army Commander during the Korean War and also credited as being the "Father of the Korean Military."

strong relationships were clearly necessary considering the unified mission of defending the country from a very real Communist threat. The CINCUNC's oversight on personnel matters, in turn, ensured that the Commander was less an omnipotent, detached foreign commander and more of a personal, involved leader whose success depended on the skillful utilization of his authority and professional relationships in tandem.

### ***Military Assistance Program***

Perhaps the only other tool at the CINCUNC's disposal that rivalled his military command authority was the billion-dollar foreign assistance program in Korea. The ROK was consistently a top-five recipient in aid through the 1950s and 1960s. By 1960, the ROK had received nearly three billion dollars in economic assistance since 1945. Two billion dollars of that amount had flowed in since the signing of the armistice in 1953.<sup>57</sup> By 1962, over \$1.5 billion in aid went directly toward supporting a ROK military that was exponentially larger in size than what its anemic economy could shoulder on its own.<sup>58</sup> MAP not only equipped the Korean forces, but covered pay, maintenance, and a large portions of the country's defense budget. Unlike in other countries where the US Ambassador controlled foreign aid, the CINCUNC retained his authority of all assistance programs, both economic and military, until 1959. This setup originated during the Korean War where the military commander was the unquestioned authority in the theater. The justification behind the CINCUNC's control of the aid program was that most of the funds went towards sustaining the Korean military.<sup>59</sup>

Much to the chagrin of the US military, the State Department proposed a transfer of

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It is also interesting to note that there was a fifteen to twenty-year age gap between CINCUNCs and the most-senior Korean officers.

<sup>57</sup> "US Economic Aid to the ROK, PFE B-5/4," Box 3, Folder: President's Far East Trip June 1960, RG 59:1960 Subject Files, NACP.

<sup>58</sup> Finley, *The U.S. Experience in Korea, 1871-1982*, 112.

<sup>59</sup> Decker Oral History, 73.

economic assistance programs from the CINCUNC to the Embassy in 1957. This change would align Embassy-Seoul operations with that of other American Embassies around the world.<sup>60</sup> One of the most vociferous critics against this proposal was General Lyman Lemnitzer who at the time, served as the Army Chief of Staff after completing his tour as the CINCUNC. His argument against the move was that decisions that should be handled by one man in the ROK, the CINCUNC, would ultimately be transferred to DC with such a change. Since the military threat to the north was still very real and because the military received a large portion of the aid, it still made sense for the CINCUNC to retain full control. Lemnitzer, and the DOD writ large, lost the battle resulting in the establishment of a normal country team led by the Ambassador in 1959. Though the CINCUNC maintained control of military programs and their funding, all others fell into the economic assistance category under the Ambassador's direction.<sup>61</sup>

The CINCUNC's loss of complete control did not diminish his importance on economic assistance matters. MAP still encompassed the majority of American aid that went towards the ROK in the 1960s. MAP levels directly influenced amounts allocated for economic development requiring the CINCUNC and the Ambassador to work side-by-side in securing necessary aid levels from Washington. Even when the Park government began to understand the need for capital in the form of economic aid to execute its five-year economic development plans, it still worried most about potential MAP cuts. MAP transfer, simply defined as the shifting of items paid under MAP to the ROK defense budget, was consistently a concern brought up by the Koreans to the highest levels of the USG. The ROKG viewed any additional responsibility to

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<sup>60</sup> The Ambassador was also responsible for military aid programs in most countries. Embassies with such programs would have foreign service officers dedicated to its execution along with military assistance advisory groups (MAAGs) that reported to the Ambassador. See more at Robert H. Connery and Paul T. David, "The Mutual Defense Assistance Program," *The American Political Science Review* 45: 2 (June 1951): 332. The ROK was unique in that the CINCUNC had his own staff for foreign assistance programs while the MAAGs also reported to him as well.

<sup>61</sup> Henderson, *Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 277.

cover its own Defense Budget as catastrophic blows to its attempts to raise enough funds for much needed economic development.

Not one to shy away from utilizing his American connections, Song Yo-chan, the former ROK CSA who returned to Seoul following the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup to serve as Park's Prime Minister, was the first of many active and retired ROK General officers who tenaciously fought to prevent aid cuts. Utilizing the following line of argument that became common place during the 1960s, Song wrote to the CJCS, General Lemnitzer, in September 1961 arguing that "excessive defense budget responsibility will jeopardize the policy of the Korean government to maximize investment of available resources in economic reconstruction and solution of unemployment problem."<sup>62</sup> Simply put, the US needed to continue to foot the defense bill so the ROK could pour more funds into developing the economy. Fortunately for these Korean officers, most of their old acquaintances in the Pentagon shared their views. Congress on the other hand, was never as cooperative.

The ROK's Military Assistance Program in the ROK never simply considered only military matters. The program's impact expanded well beyond funding the "beans and bullets" of the Korean armed forces and had significant repercussions on broader economic development plans. Most importantly, military assistance directly affected regime stability throughout the first decade of Park's rule. While the 1950s witnessed the height of global MAP funding, many in Congress sought to severely curtail this spending in the 1960s. More than one US Senator questioned what billions of dollars in aid had accomplished in the ROK.<sup>63</sup> Despite strong efforts

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<sup>62</sup> Song Yo-chan to Lyman Lemnitzer, 25 September 1961, LLP, Box 27, Folder S, USAMHI.

<sup>63</sup> Senator J.W. Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was not particularly supportive of military assistance efforts in the ROK. Senator Al Gore Sr. of Arkansas echoed this sentiment, especially after the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup, making clear his displeasure that vast US expenditures had only produced a military dictatorship. See United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series), Vol. XIII, Part 2, Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on

by Congress to severely reduce MAP funds in Korea during the 1960s, the country fared surprisingly well. Arguing for sustained MAP levels using military justifications that relied on fading Korean War memories, however, was not enough in the new fiscal environment. Directly linking MAP funds to the Park regime's ability to remain a stable and moderate government provided a better justification as to why the American check book should remain open.

## **Direct Channels to Senior Government Leaders**

### ***Collect Calls to Washington***

As the US military entered the post-World War II era, it underwent significant organizational changes to match the sustained global presence required for the first time in American history. Though initial moves had been made immediately after the war, the codification of National Security Council Report 68 as a result of the Korean War cemented the military's global obligations. To meet this new challenge, the DOD established Unified Commands that essentially carved out the world into areas of military responsibility.<sup>64</sup> The Asia-Pacific arguably posed the most complicated region not only because of its sheer size, but also due to its history of multiple high-level commands that covered key areas such as Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and the Philippines. The dissolution of the Far Eastern Command (FEC) in 1957 represented the last cut from World War II era ties. This year was also significant in that the UN Command, which had been located in Tokyo since 1950, moved to Seoul in conjunction with an overall reorganization of command structures in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>65</sup> While the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Command (CINCPAC) assumed responsibility for the entire

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Foreign Relations, Eighty-Seventh Congress, First Session, Washington: US GPO, 1961, 114. Available through *Proquest Congressional*.

<sup>64</sup> See Ronald H. Cole, *The History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946-1953* (Washington: Office of Joint History, 1995). Available at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/history/ucp.pdf> for additional information.

<sup>65</sup> Finley, *The U.S. Experience in Korea, 1871-1982*, 108.

region, the one area outside of his direct control was Korea, which fell under the CINCUNC.

The UN Command in Korea represented a sub-unified command, which denoted the delegation of a specific geographic region to a higher headquarters. Though perhaps just doctrinal minutiae on the surface, this distinction was critical in that it significantly raised the prestige and stature of the CINCUNC. Most importantly, it earned him a direct line to Washington since all unified and sub-unified commands received direction from the Secretary of Defense. Without the UN presence, the senior American military officer in Korea would have retained his role as the Commander of US Forces Korea (COMUSFK) and the Commanding General of the Eighth US Army (CGEUSA). Both those positions, however, reported directly to Hawaii, and not back to the nation's capital. The direct line to senior government leaders in Washington via the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) proved crucial on multiple occasions in the 1960s, but none more so than during the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup.<sup>66</sup> The real-time information transmitted by the CINCUNC was invaluable as Washington leaders decided how to react to a very fluid and rapidly developing situation.

A general understanding of the Joint Chiefs of Staff helps put into context the importance of the CINCUNC's direct link to the Chairman. Established during World War II to advise the President on the military's direction, the Joint Chiefs were key advisors and planners that played a critical role in creating national security policy.<sup>67</sup> The Chairman's position originated in 1949 with the passage of the National Security Law Amendments, which codified the JCS as the principal military advisors of President and Secretary of Defense. The Chairman served as the JCS's single voice to the civilian leaders, though in practice, usually offered his own views on

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Volume VI: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1955-1956* (Washington: Office of Joint History, 1998), introduction page.

critical matters as well.<sup>68</sup>

The DOD Reorganization Act of 1958 further designated the JCS as the entity that assisted the SECDEF in exercising his control over all Unified Commands. This act also assigned all operational forces to the Unified Commands and established a chain where orders flowed directly from the President to the SECDEF to the CINCs of these commands. The Service Headquarters (Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force) were in turn, removed from the chain of command.<sup>69</sup> Through these measures, the JCS became a key entity in a broad range of matters that included national security policy formulation, military strategy development, and MAP fund allocation. The JCS's role in MAP affairs was especially important to the ROK, as these funds served as a lifeline to its defense and economy. The JCS maintained two primary responsibilities in preparing annual MAP requests. The first was to provide guidance from a military standpoint to the civilian DOD officials that oversaw the program. The second, and more important role, was reviewing each country's military requirements in order to prioritize funding on a global scale.<sup>70</sup>

The value of the Chairman's ability to directly engage the President and the SECDEF on behalf of the CINCUNC was immeasurable as USG attention on the ROK tended to jump from one crisis to the next in the 1960s. The CINCUNC's opportunities to discuss MAP concerns with the JCS was also valuable as the ROKG never failed to press upon their point to their American counterparts that every dollar, or won, mattered. What was especially unique about the JCS in the 1960s was the background of the men that served as Chairman. As the ROK experienced two revolutions within a span of a year and struggled to establish a stable

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<sup>68</sup> *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949-2012* (Washington DC: Office of Joint History, 2012), 8.

<sup>69</sup> Bryon R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Volume VII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1957-60* (Washington: Office of Joint History Office of Joint History, 2000), 5-6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

government, the country needed senior officials in the USG that truly understood their plight. The ROK was fortunate to have General Officers with extensive knowledge and experience in Korea serving as the CJCS sequentially from 1960 to 1964.

Given the status of Korea as a combat theater and the associated challenges with dealing with Syngman Rhee, the DOD recommended only its most talented officers for the CINCUNC position. This fact was not lost on other USG entities in the ROK as evidenced by a post-tour report made by Hugh Fairley, a senior International Cooperation Administration (ICA) official who returned to the US in 1961. The report's main intent was to provide a damning assessment of the foreign aid (non-military) program in Korea. As a means to highlight ICA's failure, he favorably described the American military presence in the ROK by stating that "the US has met its military obligation in Korea, our single largest foreign commitment, with a caliber of personnel commensurate with the responsibility. The Taylor, Lemnitzers, and Deckers, former US Commanders in Korea, have returned to become Chiefs of Staff for the Army and their staffs have been equally comparable."<sup>71</sup> One can infer from Farley's comments that unlike the military, perhaps the ICA had not been sending its best to the ROK. These three individuals who were CINCUNCs from 1955 to 1959 all left Seoul to become the highest-ranking officer in their service. Two of the three, Lemnitzer and Taylor, became the most senior officers in the US military while serving as the CJCS during a highly critical period in US-ROK relations.<sup>72</sup>

President Eisenhower appointed Lemnitzer as the fourth CJSC in 1960 after he had completed successful stints as the Vice Chief of Staff and Chief of Staff of the US Army. Lemnitzer's ties to Korea were especially deep, starting with his command of the Seventh Infantry Division during the Korean War, most notably during the Battles of Heartbreak Ridge

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<sup>71</sup> "Farley Report" by Hugh D. Farley, 15 March 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 27, Folder: General 1/61-3/61, JFKL.

<sup>72</sup> See *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949-2012* for additional information.

and the Punch Bowl. He returned to the Far East from 1955 to 1957 to serve as the CINCUNC. Noted for his deep political-military acumen, Lemnitzer was an ardent supporter of the ROK who had developed lasting relationships with his Korean counterparts.<sup>73</sup> The Chairman's greatest utility to Korea, however, was his expertise on MAP issues. Lemnitzer was a founding father of MAP after serving as DOD's first Director of the Office of Military Assistance.<sup>74</sup> His command experience in Korea gave the General first-hand knowledge of the ROK military's needs and deficiencies that only MAP could address. His time in Washington also provided him crucial experience in navigating a more perilous battleground, the Congressional appropriations process. As the Chairman, Lemnitzer consistently fought against significant cuts to MAP and force levels in the ROK with considerable success.

Whereas Lemnitzer was more in line with the Eisenhower-era generals favored by the seasoned Commander-in-Chief, General Maxwell Taylor deftly transitioned into a new period brought upon by the Kennedy administration. After Lemnitzer, and the JCS in general, reportedly fell out of favor with the young President following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy recalled Taylor to active duty in 1961 to serve as the Military Assistant to the President, a position uncomfortably similar to the CJCS.<sup>75</sup> Kennedy appointed Taylor to succeed Lemnitzer as the fifth CJCS a year later in October 1962. Rather than retiring, Lemnitzer went on to serve with distinction as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) until 1969.<sup>76</sup>

Taylor was well-versed in Korean affairs after serving as the CDREUSA during the last year of the war in 1953 and the CINCUNC until 1955. He was also considered a MAP pioneer

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<sup>73</sup> *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Volume VII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1957-60*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> See Lyman L. Lemnitzer, "The Foreign Military Aid Program," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 23: 4, (January 1950): 92-98.

<sup>75</sup> *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Volume VII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1957-60*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> Lemnitzer's experience in dealing with Syngman Rhee likely prepared him to contend with Charles de Gaulle, who withdrew France from the NATO military command structure in 1966.

as one of the first officers sent to Latin America in 1940 to evaluate how the US could address indigenous military needs for hemispheric defense.<sup>77</sup> Taylor's greatest value to the CINCUNC and the ROK, however, was his access to the President. He held Kennedy's confidence and was close to the President's inner circle. This proximity led the Service Chiefs to believe that he was often representing the civilian leadership to them rather than vice-versa.<sup>78</sup> Taylor's book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, influenced Kennedy to adopt the Flexible Response strategy. The Chairman was also very close to the President's brother, Robert, who named his ninth child Matthew Maxwell Taylor Kennedy.

Lemnitzer and Taylor represented the pinnacle of a ready-made Washington "lobbyist" network available to both the CINCUNC and the ROK. They both established lasting relationships with senior Korean military leaders, understood the importance of MAP to the country, and generally agreed on the necessity of maintaining a strong US commitment to the alliance. Park's military regime in turn developed a keen understanding of the importance in maintaining its ties with senior American military officials in both the US and Seoul. There was never any hesitation on the ROKG's part to correspond directly with them to request assistance, with Lemnitzer, Taylor, and retired General James Van Fleet being the primary recipients. All in fact received similar letters from the ROK CSA, Chang Do-young, immediately following the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup that justified the action.<sup>79</sup> This occasion was one of multiple instances that the military government looked to these senior General Officers for assistance during uncertain times.

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<sup>77</sup> Maxwell D. Taylor Oral History Interview, transcript of oral history conducted in 1973 by Richard A. Manion, SOOHP, Maxwell Taylor Papers, USAMHI, 17.

<sup>78</sup> Fairchild, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Volume VII*, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Other than the addressee, the letters sent by General Chang Do-young to Lyman Lemnitzer, Maxwell Taylor, and James Van Fleet on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1961 are virtually identical.

The channel also worked both ways as Lemnitzer and Taylor corresponded directly with key ROK military officials, retired and active, to influence their actions when needed. Both also did not hesitate to contact Park himself if the situation required. In actuality, such direct communication became somewhat common place in the early 1960s when Korean officers with strong ties to the US that included Chang Do-young and Song Yo-chan found themselves arrested by the Park regime after falling out of favor.<sup>80</sup> In Song's case, Taylor became visibly upset over the situation and contacted Park directly to secure his release.<sup>81</sup> Lemnitzer was particularly active in encouraging the release of Korean Commanders who had been arrested for remaining responsive to the CINCUNC's orders rather than joining the military coup in May 1961. Though it was never immediate, if you were an imprisoned Korean officer with American Generals Officers writing on your behalf, the chances of obtaining freedom was quite high. Lemnitzer and Taylor similarly recognized the necessity of maintaining a moderate regime under Park's leadership in order to realize US objectives for the region. As subsequent chapters will highlight, both leveraged their relationships to the fullest extent for this purpose.

### *All the President's (US Military) Men*

The CINCUNC's direct access to the highest levels of government also applied to the ROK. It only made sense that the individual responsible for the nation's defense also had unfettered access to the head of government, whether President, Prime Minister, or military junta leader. Though the origins of this relationship lay with Syngman Rhee's OPCON transfer decision, relations between senior American military leaders in the ROK and its President

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<sup>80</sup> Chang's arrest occurred in July 1961 after being accused of plotting a counter coup against Park. Though originally sentenced to death, Chang avoided any lasting penalty and immigrated to the US. Song's arrest occurred in 1963 after becoming vocal critic of the Park regime, though he previously served as Park's PM.

<sup>81</sup> MOC between Kim Chung-yul and Roger Hilsman, 12 August 1963, Box 21, Folder: Defense Affairs, July-September 1963, RG59: 1963 Subject Files, NACP.

remained consistently strong throughout the duration of his regime. His reputation across the USG, however, was not nearly as positive to those outside the DOD. Rhee's antagonistic relationship with the State Department is well documented as are his insults hurled towards successive Secretaries of States. Dismayed by the Eisenhower administration's insistence on negotiating an end to the Korean War, he freely and frequently referred to John Foster Dulles as a "fool" and a "coward."<sup>82</sup> The Korean President considered Christian Herter, Dulles' successor who served during Rhee's ouster in 1960, as a neophyte when it came to Asian affairs with pro-Japanese tendencies. Comments painting the State Department as having no real understanding of the Far Eastern situation and maintaining the propensity to trust the Japanese more than the Koreans accompanied the unfavorable assessment of the Secretary as well.<sup>83</sup>

Why did Rhee have such a poor view of the Department that was supposed to serve as Korea's key interlocutor for matters pertaining to US-ROK relations? One simple, but likely accurate explanation was that Rhee was not beholden to the US Embassy or the DOS since he had other influential channels at his disposal as well. Walter McConaughy, who was the US Ambassador to Korea during the April 1960 Student Revolution and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs during the May 1961 coup, recognized this very point just prior to Rhee's ouster in 1960. In an Embassy telegram to the Department sent on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, the Ambassador emphasized the need for the USG writ large to speak with one unified voice concerning the growing demonstrations against the Rhee regime. He also specifically addressed the concern that the ROK tended not to view DOS pronouncements as USG positions, having

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<sup>82</sup> L. James Binder, *Lemnitzer: A Soldier for His Time* (Washington: Brassey's Inc, 1997), 209.

<sup>83</sup> Embassy Telegram (EMBTTEL) 848, 21 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP. Initial MTG w/ Rhee. No comments immediately located on Rhee's view of the remaining Secretary State that crossed his path, Dean Acheson. Given Acheson's reputation in the ROK as a result of his Press Club speech, it is likely that Rhee had some colorful words to describe him as well.

developed “elaborate and effective ways for circumventing the Department of State and playing one branch of the US government of another.”<sup>84</sup> Though not mentioned specifically, the other branch was likely a reference to the US military.

Marshall Green, McConaughy’s Deputy and Chargé d'affaires of US Embassy-Seoul during the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup also recognized that Rhee had friends in high places, specifically referring to retired General James Van Fleet and his military colleagues. He also recalled that while serving under Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far Eastern Affairs from 1953-1959, the only time that he had incurred his boss’s displeasure was when he outspokenly criticized Rhee.<sup>85</sup> For all his faults, the ardent anti-Communist leader managed to maintain a powerful circle of supporters in Washington. What was equally impressive was the good relations and lasting personal connections that Rhee cultivated with most of the CINCUNCs throughout the duration of his tenure as President.<sup>86</sup> While the State Department beat the steady drum of democratization and economic reform, the US military focused on strengthening Rhee’s military and defending the small country from renewed Communist aggression. When viewed in this context, it is not surprising that Rhee developed strong relationships with the entity that provided security along with abundant aid, and not the one that sought to check his power.

Though never assuming the CINCUNC position, General James Van Fleet was a revered

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<sup>84</sup> EMBTEL 794, 1 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>85</sup> Marshall Green Oral History Interview, transcript of oral history interview conducted on December 12, 1988 by Charles Stuart Kennedy, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 40. Available at <http://adst.org/oral-history/>.

<sup>86</sup> General Mark W. Clark, CINCUNC from 1952-1953, was the exception in that he did not develop a fondness for the Korean President. Clearly frustrated with Rhee’s sabotage of armistice talks, Clark was the architect of Operation Ever Ready, a contingency plan to forcibly remove Rhee from power if he took unilateral action against Communist forces. See *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952–1954*, Volume XV, Part 1, Korea 1952-1953, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1984), Document 559.

figure in the ROK for his time as the CGEUSA from 1951-1953. Regarded as the “Father of the Korean Military” for his fervent support for rebuilding the armed forces during the war, Van Fleet remained a vocal advocate for the ROK even after his retirement. His support for Rhee was unwavering, as was his backing of Park’s military regime. The Rhee-Van Fleet friendship, initiated for professional reasons and transformed into a deeply personal one, best represented one of many lasting relationships developed between American military leaders and their Korean counterparts. Not long after leaving the war, Van Fleet wrote a series of articles aimed at better informing the American public on the Korean situation. The General credited Rhee for the strength of the Korean Army, calling the President “a much misunderstood and unappreciated man” who stood out as “one of the greatest thinking, scholars, statesmen, and patriots of our times.”<sup>87</sup>

Even President Eisenhower recognized the strong bond between Rhee and Van Fleet, offering the recently retired General the Ambassadorship to the ROK in 1953 in order to gain the Korean President’s acceptance of the armistice agreement. Van Fleet declined by telling his West Point classmate that he had had too much respect and admiration for Rhee that prevented him from pushing a policy that he personally did not support.<sup>88</sup> The General’s concern and affection did not wane as a result of Rhee’s ouster. He expressed his concern for the old President in a telegram sent a few months after the revolution that read “Our hearts bleed when you are criticized for we know you are not to blame, because we love you so much, we cannot remain silent.”<sup>89</sup> The greatest testament to their friendship, however, came at Van Fleet’s

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<sup>87</sup> James Van Fleet, "The Truth About Korea," *The Reader's Digest*, July 1953 available in the JVFP, Box 34, Folder 23: Writings by Van Fleet, GCML.

<sup>88</sup> Paul F. Braim, *The Will to Win: The Life of General James A. Van Fleet* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 326.

<sup>89</sup> James Van Fleet to Syngman Rhee, 23 April 1960, JVFP, Box 75, Folder 8: Correspondence-Korean Embassy 1960-62, GCML. “We” referred to Van Fleet and retired General John B. Coulter, who was the deputy Commander of the Eighth Army during the Korean War.

funeral. With a life that spanned one-hundred years and numerous accomplishments throughout its duration, his relationship with Rhee did not go unnoticed. The funeral's presiding officer described the Rhee-Van Fleet relations as being akin to a father and a son. During the remainder of his life, the former President, who lived to be ninety-years old himself, though passing nearly thirty years earlier, always made sure that the ROK Ambassador to the US called Van Fleet on his birthday to greet the General on the behalf of Rhee and the Korean people.<sup>90</sup>

General Lyman Lemnitzer's friendship with Syngman Rhee showed that lasting relationships were possible even after dealing with difficult situations that were part of the job. Lemnitzer served as the CINCUNC from 1955-1957, a period when the resumption of hostilities was less of a concern. His tenure was not, however, void of difficult issues caused by Rhee. Less than a month after assuming command, Rhee threatened to expel inspectors belonging to the UN's Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) charged with monitoring the truce between the two Koreas.<sup>91</sup> This issue paled in comparison to Rhee's unilateral declaration of the "Peace Line" in late 1955 aimed at keeping Japanese fishing boats out of Korean waters. The President intended to safeguard this line, much further out than the US recognized international limit, with ROK Navy forces under the CINCUNC's authority.<sup>92</sup> Both crises eventually abated over time. As frustrating as Rhee could be, Lemnitzer admired his toughness and uncompromising nature, believing that "it took that kind of individual to run Korea."<sup>93</sup> The CINCUNC's affinity for Rhee was mutual. Writing to the General at the end of his tour, Rhee acknowledged that Lemnitzer's "deep-seated" love for Korea did not go unnoticed.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Braim, *The Will to Win*, 371.

<sup>91</sup> Rhee regarded the Polish and Czech members of these inspections teams as spies, which Lemnitzer also believed to be the case. Lemnitzer had to impress on Rhee, however, that even though the President was correct, he did not have the authority to expel teams operating under the auspices of the UN. See Binder, 205.

<sup>92</sup> Binder, *Lemnitzer: A Soldier for His Time*, 209.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

Lemnitzer was in Washington serving as the US Army's Chief of Staff when Rhee resigned his Presidency in 1960. He still, however, followed events in the ROK closely and expressed concern over the course of events. Lemnitzer conveyed his dismay in a personal letter to his daughter that stated that "they (unclear if he was referring to the Korean people or the USG) made a serious mistake in forcing President Rhee out of office and I am concerned lest the government fall apart without his strong leadership."<sup>95</sup> He not only sent a letter of encouragement to Rhee following the ouster, but also maintained a strong concern for his well-being. Rhee wrote to Lemnitzer a few months afterwards expressing his gratitude for arranging medical treatment on his behalf at Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu, HI, where Rhee resided for the remainder of his life. The former President also expressed his approval that General George Decker, who relieved Lemnitzer as the CINCUNC, would now be succeeding him as the Army Chief of Staff. Having worked closely with both military officers, Rhee was hopeful that due to their crucial role in developing American military policy, the US-ROK alliance would not weaken. According to Rhee, both men "understood too well the situation in Korea to agree to any weakening of the defenses there."<sup>96</sup>

Lemnitzer continued to concern himself with Rhee's well-being even after assuming the highest position in the US military, the CJCS. By 1962, Rhee had begun exploring ways to return to the ROK to live out the remainder of his days.<sup>97</sup> Rhee's wife, Francesca Donner, contacted the Chairman early in 1962 to solicit his support for their return. Lemnitzer more than obliged in a response letter to Donner by stating that her husband would not meet any resistance from the US military authorities in the ROK. He even offered to contact the current CINCUNC,

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<sup>95</sup> Binder, *Lemnitzer: A Soldier for His Time* 210.

<sup>96</sup> Syngman Rhee to Lyman Lemnitzer, 31 October 1960, LLP, Box 27, Folder: P and R, USAMHI.

<sup>97</sup> Though Rhee left his country involuntarily, he still retained high stature among many Koreans.

General Guy Meloy, on a “very confidential basis” to ascertain whether it was a favorable time for the Rhee’s to return. Lemnitzer also added that “confidentially,” he would make a special effort to meet with Rhee while he was in Honolulu later in the month to discuss the matter further.<sup>98</sup> Due to continued unrest in the ROK, Rhee did not return to his country until 1965 after his passing. Had he been able to return while living, the President would have received full support from the US military.

As a testament to Rhee’s longstanding positive relations with American military commanders, the last CINCUNC to serve the President, General Carter B. Magruder, turned out to be one of his closest supporters. Magruder had the distinction of being the CINCUNC for both the 1960 Student Revolution and the May 1961 coup. Unlike the coup, where he spearheaded the US response, Magruder remained generally quiet during Rhee’s ouster. While he did play a significant role behind the scenes to prevent further bloodshed, Rhee’s resignation was largely considered an US Embassy endeavor.<sup>99</sup> There are multiple reasons as to why the CINCUNC was not in the forefront but one of the more influential ones was that Magruder simply did not support Rhee’s departure. He himself could not, however, counter the tide emanating from the Embassy and Washington that supported the President’s removal. Magruder made it clear to the CJCS following the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup that he was never an admirer of the Chang Myon government that came to power largely due to State Department influence. His reason for this lack of admiration was simply his devotion to Rhee.<sup>100</sup>

Magruder’s commitment did not go unnoticed by William H. Ewing, visiting journalist

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<sup>98</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer to Francesca Rhee, 1 February 1962, LLP, Box 27, Folder: P and R, USAMHI.

<sup>99</sup> McConaughy met directly with Rhee multiple times during the period that led to the President’s resignation. The Ambassador received much credit from both countries for his ability to convince Rhee to resign and leave peacefully. See Green Oral History Interview, pages 45-51, for a detailed account.

<sup>100</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UN Command, 1961, RG84: Classified General Records, 1961.

from Honolulu that interviewed the CINCUNC two months following Rhee's resignation. Ewing commented that he had not seen any pictures of the first President anywhere else in Seoul except the one that was hung on the wall in Magruder's office. When asked about the picture, the General replied that "He (Rhee) did a great deal for his country...He loved Korea, he held the country together, he played our side. That's why the picture is up there, and why it's going to stay there."<sup>101</sup> Reflecting on President's ouster a decade later, Magruder believed that the USG's undermining of Rhee was a key factor in the 1960 Student Revolution. Unaware of the growing negative sentiment against the President, he was the only USG official that had sent Rhee a congratulatory letter following the 1960 Presidential election.<sup>102</sup> As with Lemnitzer, Magruder's relationship with the Rhee last well-beyond the Revolution. The General even managed to visit Rhee in Hawaii where he described the President's life as one dependent on charity.<sup>103</sup> This description stood in stark contrast to the rumors circulating in Korea that he withdrawn large amounts of money prior to his departure.

Magruder also praised Rhee for his leadership during the Korean War, strong anti-Communist stance, and overall performance in governing the ROK. It was also his personal feeling that "If they (allied countries such as the ROK) are on our side, the basic requirement is met, even if they aren't democratic in our image and don't govern themselves just the way we think they ought."<sup>104</sup> While this view did not resonate with the broader USG during the 1960 Student Revolution, it was a good description as to how the US would come to view, and accept, Park's regime. Despite the praise earned by the ROK for its democratically elected government

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<sup>101</sup> William H. Ewing, "Making Progress, Magruder Says: Red-Hating Korea Would Fight Again," *The Honolulu Star Bulletin*, June 23, 1960.

<sup>102</sup> Magruder Oral History, 27.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 29.

under Chang Myon, its overall weakness and perceived ineffectiveness caused many US officials to reconsider how democratic the ROK actually needed to be at the time.

### **American Centers of Powers in the ROK**

Despite being a country roughly the size of Indiana, the American presence in the ROK was quite extraordinary in the 1960s. According to Deputy Chief of Mission Marshall Green, when he reported to the American Embassy in 1960, the US maintained the preponderance of global economic and military power. It was at decade in which the US could seemingly solve its international problems by flooding military aid and economic resources to its targeted countries. In his judgement, there was no other place in the world that the US held greater weight or had a more crucial role in running a country than in Korea, partly due to the war's legacy, and partly due to the small country's complete dependence on American economic and military support.<sup>105</sup> With seventy-thousand American troops in country accompanied by a six-hundred thousand Korean military under the OPCON of the senior US Commander, the American military commitment to the ROK was clear. What was not as broadly advertised was that at the time, the American Embassy in Seoul was also the largest in the world, overseeing the US' largest foreign aid and public diplomacy missions.<sup>106</sup>

The presence of the largest American diplomatic outpost in the world should alone symbolize the primacy of the US Ambassador in a given country. That was, however, not the case in the Korean context where the Ambassador and the CINCUNC represented two seemingly equal centers of influence. The CINCUNC's power was no surprise since throughout most of the 1950s, the ROK was still considered as a military theater where the senior military commander,

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<sup>105</sup> Green Oral History, 41.

<sup>106</sup> The International Cooperation Agency (ICA) oversaw the non-military foreign aid program. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) succeeded ICA following its creation in 1961 as a result of the Foreign Assistance Act. The US Information Agency (USIA) led public diplomacy efforts in the ROK.

and not the Ambassador, maintained the lead. The OPCON agreement and the preponderance of military aid further cemented his strength. In terms of resources, there simply was no comparison as to what was available to the CINCUNC vis-à-vis the Ambassador.

Gregory Henderson, the Korea scholar who also worked at Embassy Seoul during the 1960s, called the CINCUNC's staff the "only institutional continuity and only persistent expertise" for the US in the ROK which was also "a power difficult for the Ambassador to rival in daily operations."<sup>107</sup> Perhaps the most significant factor that guaranteed the CINCUNC's involvement in a broad range of affairs was that it was nearly impossible to clearly delineate the political sphere from the military sphere, especially when the foundation for bilateral relations was a military alliance. These factors led to a unique condition in which the official in charge of the America's largest diplomatic mission needed to work hand-in-hand with the Commander leading one of the largest American military missions in the world as equals.<sup>108</sup>

The US military in general values unity of command, which refers to the unmistakable designation of one person in charge. The US presence in the ROK may have benefitted from such a clarification as it was certainly in the American President's authority to make such a decision. Interestingly enough, Kennedy chose not to do so in his May 1961 appointment letter to Ambassador Samuel D. Berger, a key US official during the tenuous, early years of the Park regime. Instead, he reminded his appointee that though the Embassy had military elements attached to it that included service attaches and military assistance advisory personnel, the line of authority to the CINCUNC ran from the President and through the JCS. Further elaborating that

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<sup>107</sup> Henderson, "The US and the Militarization of Korea," 5.

<sup>108</sup> The US occupation of Japan following World War II provided some parallels but there were also key distinctions. The military's authority, particularly under MacArthur, was never in question and the US did not appoint an Ambassador to Japan until 1952 following the implementation of the Peace Treaty of San Francisco. Despite having more US military troops in Japan than Korea, the senior American military commander's authority was significantly less than the CINCUNC's in Korea. The Ambassador's position as the senior US official in Japan was never in question.

the Ambassador as the Chief of Mission was not in the chain of command, Kennedy advised Berger to work closely with the CINCUNC in order to “assure full exchange of info.” Furthermore, if US military activities in the ROK became detrimental to overall bilateral relations, the Ambassador should discuss the matter immediately with the CINCUNC and if necessary, request a decision from Washington.<sup>109</sup> This letter essentially epitomized the antithesis of unity of command, leaving the two heavyweights to work out issues between themselves and only contact the mothership when in need of a referee.

The unspecified nature of who was the lead US official in the ROK led to substantial debates during the early 1960s. Ironically, much, if not all of the arguments, occurred in Washington and not in Seoul. It was a topic of continued interest especially among Kennedy’s NSC staff. Robert W. Komer, who served as a NSC assistant under Kennedy prior to earning his “Blowtorch Bob” moniker, was a staunch advocate of drastically reducing Korean military assistance and diverting its funds toward economic development. In doing so, he also favored “sharply reducing the political role of the US military and its spokesman (the CINCUNC)” by making “the US Ambassador undisputed spokesman of US policy in Korea.”<sup>110</sup> Dr. Carl Kaysen, who served as Kennedy’s Deputy National Security Advisor from late 1961, held the opposite view calling the CINCUNC the real head of the country team. This declaration of support came in early 1962 when the viability of Park’s regime was highly in question due to potential military countercoups. The view existed that the US military, and not the Embassy, was best informed after the CINCUNC at the time, General Guy S. Meloy, rather than the Ambassador appeared to be providing the “most meaty and urgent messages” relating to

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<sup>109</sup> John F. Kennedy to Samuel D. Berger, 22 May 1961, Samuel Berger Papers (SBP), The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>110</sup> Memorandum from Walter W. Rostow to Robert W. Komer, 15 March 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea General 1/61-3/62, JFKL.

regime's political future.<sup>111</sup>

The State Department and Department of Defense positions on who should be the lead US official do not require further explanation. The JCS's position was also very clear, especially under General Lemnitzer, who as a former CINCUNC fought hard to prevent the transfer of non-military aid programs to the Ambassador in 1959. His special assistant, Major General T.W. Parker, often found himself quietly assuaging the State Department when concerns of the US military's overreach in international political affairs surfaced on occasion. Parker understood full well his boss' "strong feeling regarding the position of UN commander vis-à-vis the Ambassador."<sup>112</sup> Though the potential of a destabilizing rivalry certainly existed, especially with interdepartmental competition projected from Washington to Seoul, the evidence suggests that most, if not all, CINCUNCs and Ambassadors during this time period forged an effective and mutually respectful working relationship.

Marshall Green, who was at Embassy-Seoul during the two most chaotic events in Korea during the 1960s, described the relationship between the Ambassador, CINCUNC, and the USAID head as very good, with the American official community having excellent relations with each other.<sup>113</sup> Though the Ambassador and CINCUNC certainly held independent meetings, many of the key encounters between Park were done in tandem. These officials performed their duties with eyes wide open, understanding that their ROK counterparts were experts in resorting to alternate channels when not receiving a desired outcome. There were also instances where the Embassy and the military command held very different views on certain issues, many times related to the appropriation of MAP funds. Each would use their Washington channels to push

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<sup>111</sup> *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, eds. Edward C. Keefer, David W. Mabon, and Harriett Dashiell Schwar (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 296.

<sup>112</sup> T.W. Parker to Guy S. Meloy, 7 February 1962, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>113</sup> Green Oral History, 44.

their views but when proposals needed to be made, the Embassy and military staffs understood the benefits of approaching Washington with a unified front.

The intent of the subsequent chapters is not to ascertain who was the more influential official but rather to show the depth of US military involvement in non-military affairs in Korea, especially on the political front. During the first half of the 1960s, the CINCUNCs were in a position to exert a maximum level of influence with powerful patrons in the JCS who understood Korean affairs, the emergence of the Korean military as the prominent political force, and the ROK's increasing role in supporting American regional strategy beyond the peninsula. A clear transition also occurred in this decade that slowly shifted the attention from solely military affairs to economic ones as well. The ROK's expanding importance became evident in the 1960s through the caliber of individuals appointed as both the Ambassador and the CINCUNC.

Though certainly not an exact scientific formula, one can discern the ROK's standing in the eyes of the USG by briefly examining the pedigree of individuals who became the Ambassador and the CINCUNC in the 1950s in comparison to the 1960s. Of the six post-MacArthur officers that became the CINCUNC during the 1950s, four went on to serve as the US Army Chief of Staff afterwards with two reaching the pinnacle as the CJCS. Though only one of the six officers that served as the CINCUNC during the 1960s did not retire immediately afterwards, the Korea assignment represented the apex of their highly successful military careers, which involved previous stints in the country during critical periods for all individuals.<sup>114</sup>

The US Ambassadors during this same two-decade period communicate a completely

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<sup>114</sup> Five of the six CINCUNCs were Korean War veterans. Though General Hamilton Howze did not fight in the Korean War, he was the KMAG Chief during the 1961 military coup. General Dwight E. Beach was the only officer to hold another command after Korea when he became the CINC of US Army Pacific during the height of the Vietnam War. General Charles H. Bonesteel maintained the distinction of being one of the two officers, along with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, that chose the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as the dividing line for the US and Soviet occupations of Korea following World War II. Bonesteel may have immortalized his association with this imaginary line after making the decision to build a physical fence along the length of the DMZ as the CINCUNC.

different trajectory. None of the US Ambassadors to the ROK in the 1950s returned to work in Asia, or went on to hold senior positions within the State Department. In contrast, all five Ambassadors during the 1960s left the ROK to hold other key appointments throughout the Asia Pacific.<sup>115</sup> More impressively, every single one of them also assumed senior State Department positions. Walter McConaughy left the ROK shortly after the 1960 Student Revolution and was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs during the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup. Marshall Green also held the same position later in the decade. Both Samuel Berger and Winthrop Brown became Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. William Porter, the last US Ambassador to the ROK during the 1960s, eventually became the Department's number three official as the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. These individuals relied on their Ambassadorial knowledge as they provided oversight on US-ROK issues from Washington. The Department also increasingly sought to leverage their Korean experiences as potential solutions to complicated Vietnam matters.<sup>116</sup>

During the 1960s, the State Department altered its view of the ROK as a US military fiefdom where the Ambassador played second fiddle to a powerful Commander. There was not much consolation to the fact that any Ambassador would also be the frequent target of an increasingly ornery anti-State Department Korean president. Instead, the caliber of officials that assumed the Ambassadorship in the 1960s was one that allowed them to stand toe-to-toe with the

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<sup>115</sup> Counted among the five is Marshall Green, Charges de Affairs in 1961, who though never appointed as Ambassador, was the senior non-military US official in country during the May 1961 coup. Other key Ambassadorships in the Asia-Pacific include Pakistan, Republic of China, Australia, Indonesia, and the head of the US delegation to the Paris Peace Accords.

<sup>116</sup> Samuel Berger produced a report in 1965 titled "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965." The purpose of this document was to tie certain problems in the Republic of Vietnam to those successfully addressed in the ROK during the first half of the 1960s. A copy of the report is available in the SBP, Box 1, Folder 9, AJA. President Lyndon B. Johnson often touted Winthrop Brown's expertise in Southeast Asia to President Park. Brown had previously served as the US Ambassador to Laos. The Ambassador's regional experience proved useful during negotiations over ROK involvement in the Vietnam War, the key issue during his tenure.

CINCUNC and more importantly, work in cooperation to execute US policy during a turbulent decade. While still recognizing the CINCUNC's tremendous influence over the military regime, these Ambassadors worked towards maintaining a balance of power while also incrementally reasserting Embassy authority as economic development efforts moved to the forefront. This change also reflected the evolving nature of US-ROK relations as well. Whereas the alliance was mainly military during the 1950s with much of the attention still focused on the DMZ, it started its transition into a broader security alliance also focused on regional matters and economic considerations during the 1960s.

### **III. The General's Lobby: The Big Influence of a Small Ally**

The bulk of this chapter focused on the answering why the US military was able to develop such strong ties with their Korean counterparts and the senior levels of the ROKG. The explanation primarily lies with the structural connections that resulted from American OPCON of the ROK armed forces. This formidable bond was the catalyst behind lasting relationships that could be leveraged by both sides when required. Understanding this link also explains why the ROK, in the summarized words of Robert Keohane, was able to maintain a degree of influential access to American decision making and decision makers far out of proportion of their size. Keohane explained that in order for small allies to achieve a formidable bargaining position, its officials must develop close cooperative ties with elements of American society.<sup>117</sup> Of the three possible elements, formal diplomatic channels, USG sub-units with common interests, and organized group support, the ROK was the poster child of a smaller ally that fully leveraged the second option.

How exactly does the ROK fit into Keohane's framework? The answer lies with a

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<sup>117</sup> Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," 162-164.

concept I have coined the “General’s Lobby.” The term is self-explanatory but for the sake of elaboration, it is worth briefly mentioning why the other two options listed above did not make as great of an impact during this time period. In terms of formal diplomatic channels, Rhee’s less than complimentary feelings towards the State Department in the 1950s has already been mentioned. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the new military regime also had a rough initial relationship with the US Embassy during the early 1960s, largely due to its inexperience in utilizing diplomatic channels. The regime did, however, become adept at working with the State Department as the decade progressed, as did Park who unlike Rhee, developed positive relationships with the Embassy in addition to the American military command. As for the third option, the ROK was simply not at a point where it could invest largely into Congressional lobbyists. Rhee was known to have strong supporters in Congress to include Senator William F. Knowland and Representative Walter Judd of California.<sup>118</sup> Park on the other hand, had absolutely no links to the American legislative body, and had difficulties figuring out how to work with his own National Assembly.

In contrast, the US military provided a combat-tested advocate who in comparison to the rest of the USG, had the most invested in the ROK. The General’s lobby started with the CINUNC himself, who we have already seen had significant influence in the ROK and a direct line to senior USG leadership. The lobby also reached the highest ranks of the US military, especially during the 1960s, when the ROK was particularly fortunate to have experienced Korea hands in the JCS. Lastly, the lobby consisted of retired American Generals, most of whom were Korean War veterans that maintained personal ties with their Korean compatriots, and were more than willing to use any lingering connections to the USG on the ROK’s behalf. It is also worth

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<sup>118</sup> Green Oral History, 41.

noting that this concept is not referred to as the “General’s and Admiral’s” lobby for a reason. The reality was that of all the military services, it was the US Army and its senior leaders that had the deepest connections to the ROK. Though the US Air Force and US Navy played an important role during the Korean War and the subsequent defense of the Peninsula, their investments paled in comparison to that of the US Army.

Keohane posits that effective influence of a small ally depends on a close working relationship characterized by *mutual dependence* with a USG agency.<sup>119</sup> The OPCON arrangement guaranteed the cooperative nature of the two militaries but for the concept of mutual dependence stands out as the crucial element. The benefits gained by the ROK were easy to see from the beginning of the relationship. All one needed to do was point to the scores of US military personnel stationed in the country and the American equipment courtesy of a billion-dollar Military Assistance Program utilized by the ROK military. The harder question to address was how the US military benefitted from this arrangement? The 1960s proved to be a momentous period in the alliance’s history. With events that included the deployment of Korean troops to Vietnam, the ROK was for the first time in its history in a position to hold up its end of the bargain.<sup>120</sup> US officials also recognized the alliance’s value in selling the Domino Theory and executing the American military strategy of forward containment.

Though recognizing the mutual benefit of the relationship became much easier during the 1960s, there were legitimate reasons during the previous decade that explained why the US military, with the Army in particular, valued the alliance. The Korean War was the last conflict fought under the Executive Agent System, where the JCS designated one service headquarters to

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<sup>119</sup> Keohane, “The Big Influence of Small Allies,” 167.

<sup>120</sup> The ROK provided the second largest foreign contingent to South Vietnam, second only to the US.

support and oversee efforts in theater.<sup>121</sup> The US Army served as the Executive Agent as the war was primarily a land conflict. Since the war, the Army maintained a considerable commitment to the ROK, a point emphasized in a letter from General Lemnitzer, serving as the Army Chief of Staff, to incoming US Ambassador to the ROK, Walter McConaughy in 1959. Lemnitzer wrote to the newly appointed Ambassador and explained that “the ROK has particular significance to the US Army in that a very substantial portion of our total active army strength is stationed in Korea as an important part of the UNC.” Lemnitzer added that his time as a Division Commander during the Korean War and the CINCUNC contributed first-hand to his understanding of “the importance of our policies and military activities in the ROK, not only to the US, but to the entire Free World.”<sup>122</sup> The letter was cordial in nature with an unmistakable message, the Ambassador needed to understand that the US Army had a large stake in the ROK. The US Army’s large presence not only provided it the preponderance of power in the small country, but also reserved for the service one of the most influential four-star military commands available.<sup>123</sup>

### **The Lobby in Action**

Understanding the significance of the General’s lobby in the 1960s first requires a delineation of its exact utility to the ROK. For the lobby to truly be valued, it must provide something that was otherwise unavailable by other means, or be exponentially more beneficial than other alternatives. My framework breaks down the lobby into three specific areas: Access, Advice, and Advocacy. Through the assistance of the US military, the ROK was able to gain

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<sup>121</sup> Bruce Palmer, Jr, *The 25 Year War: America’s Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 18.

<sup>122</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer to Walter McConaughy, 3 November 1959, LLP, Box 27, Folder M, USAMHI.

<sup>123</sup> The low numbers of unified and sub-unified four-star commands made them extremely valuable to the military services. Though not codified, most of these commands were designated for a specific service. For instance, the CINC of Pacific Command has always been a naval officer. In contrast, the CINCUNC until this day, has been reserved for the Army.

regular *access* to the highest levels of the USG, to include the office of the President. This access was largely as a result of the CINCUNC's position, but also supported by influential retired officers. The lobby also provided Park and his government invaluable *advice* on the inner workings of the USG and the execution of international relations. This knowledge was especially critical in the early 1960s when the regime struggled to gain full recognition and needed to understand the intricacies of US foreign aid appropriations. Lastly, the lobby provided unmatched *advocacy* for the ROK during critical periods of the decade. Whether it was the acceptance of the military coup or the sustainment of military force levels, the US military usually sided with positions that favored the ROK. Equally important was the fact that the military regime suffered from a woefully poor public image given the manner it assumed power. Park's government required all the assistance possible to boost its standing within the USG and the American general public.

A significant portion of this project analyzes the impact of the General's lobby throughout key events in US-ROK relations during the 1960s. Most of the focus will lie on the active US military officials who served as the CINCUNC and CJCS during specific critical events. The efforts of the retired General Officers, however, should not be overlooked. While not as impactful as a whole, select individuals proved to be influential heavyweights, but none more so than General James Van Fleet. Van Fleet in many ways was the prototype of the retired senior military business development executive that is prevalent in the ROK today. His distinguished career, knowledge of the Korean armed forces, and unabashed support of the military regime earned Van Fleet open door access to both Heads of State. A brief overview of his involvement during this critical period provides a good picture of the General's lobby in action.

Van Fleet earned his near-legendary status in the ROK by virtue of serving as the Commanding General of the Eighth Army during the Korean War from 1951-53. During the war, he emphasized the retraining of the Korean army and supported the establishment of a professional military schooling system that mirrored that of the US Army. Van Fleet was largely critical of the war's defensive nature under General Matthew Ridgeway and disappointed with Eisenhower's decision to seek an armistice in lieu of total victory. He retired shortly after leaving the ROK in 1953 but continued to serve both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations in different capacities.<sup>124</sup> Van Fleet maintained his relationship with the ROK by leading the effort to establish the Korea Society in 1958, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering positive US-ROK relations. Retired General Dave Odgen, who worked with Van Fleet, best described the organization's purpose at the time by stating that "the Korea Society is indeed doing a good job to preserve that love born on the battlefield between the Koreans and ourselves."<sup>125</sup>

Van Fleet's greatest utility to the Park regime was his impressive access to the top levels of the USG, to include the President himself. Though not considered a member of Kennedy's inner circle like Maxwell Taylor (who succeeded Van Fleet as the Eighth Army Commander back in 1953), the retired General displayed a remarkable ability in gaining direct Presidential access to discuss urgent ROK related matters. The first of such meetings occurred less than two months following the May 1961 military coup after Van Fleet had returned from the ROK on a fact-finding mission. The General wrote to Park, ROK Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA)

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<sup>124</sup> Van Fleet conducted survey missions of the Far East in 1954 travelling at the rank of Ambassador while serving as Special Representative to President Eisenhower. He also returned to active duty twice under Kennedy to conduct surveys on the National Guard and Special Forces. Van Fleet was also twice considered for the US Ambassadorship to the ROK. He turned down President Eisenhower's offer. Though his name may have been actively considered by President Kennedy, an official offer was never made.

<sup>125</sup> Dave Odgen to James Van Fleet, 25 September 1961, JVFP, Box 75, Folder 22: Correspondence-Korean Military Junta, 1961, GCML.

Director Kim Jong-pil, and Prime Minister Song Yo-chan to inform them about his meeting with the President.<sup>126</sup> Van Fleet's intent was clear, to assure the President that Park's military government was sincere in their dedication to enacting reforms, providing an honest government, and spurring economic progress. He did so by emphasizing four main characteristics of the new government: stability, good government, progress, and eventual return to representative government.<sup>127</sup>

Van Fleet's correspondence indicates that he was able to provide the ROKG exactly what they desired, endorsement, albeit behind closed doors, from the leader of the free world. He assured Park that "President Kennedy was most happy to hear all the good things I said about the new government, its accomplishments to date, and its plans for the future."<sup>128</sup> Van Fleet offered Song a further vote of confidence by stating that "I assure you that he (Kennedy) is pleased and will support the new Korea."<sup>129</sup> He also addressed one of the regime's primary concerns in his letter to Kim by providing assurance that "he (Kennedy) is a friend of Korea and will always have sympathetic interest supporting your program for economic and military assistance."<sup>130</sup> As the subsequent chapters covering the coup will further illuminate, this promise of American presidential support was critical during a period where the regime's hold on power was still remarkably tenuous.

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<sup>126</sup> Though his official title was the Director of the ROK CIA, Kim Jong-pil was Park's number two man with broad authorities that extended to every corner of the government. Song Yo-chan, considered a hero during the Student Revolution, resided in the US until recalled by Park to serve as his Prime Minister. Song commanded the ROK Army's Capital Division under Van Fleet, who described him as "a powerful man and one of the best generals of the war."

<sup>127</sup> James Van Fleet to Kim Jong-pil, 30 August 1961, JVFP, Box 103, Folder 21: 1961 Trip to Korea Correspondence August – September 1961, GCML.

<sup>128</sup> James Van Fleet to Park Chung Hee, 15 August 1961, JVFP, Box 103, Folder 21: 1961 Trip to Korea Correspondence August – September 1961, GCML.

<sup>129</sup> James Van Fleet to Song Yo-chan, 15 August 1961, JVFP, Box 103, Folder 21: 1961 Trip to Korea Correspondence August – September 1961, GCML.

<sup>130</sup> James Van Fleet to Kim Jong-pil, 30 August 1961, JVFP.

Though it would be an exaggeration to assert that Van Fleet's meeting with the President single-handedly shaped Kennedy's view on Park's regime, it certainly did not hurt. The General after all was a respected leader whose perceived expertise on Korea was unrivalled. For the ROK, Van Fleet vicariously provided the government something that was impossible to obtain on its own, access to the President. Park recognized this exact point in his reply letter to Van Fleet that stated "since your return to the United States, you have been able to tell the real truth about Korea to the American people and *higher echelons of the American government*. As a result, former misunderstandings about the purpose and intentions of the present government have been dispelled, and relations between our two countries have greatly improved." Park closed his letter in a manner similar to most letters from Van Fleet's Korean associates by writing "I am honored to have had the privilege of serving under your command during the Korean War."<sup>131</sup>

This instance would be one of multiple cases where Van Fleet met the President directly to discuss matters pertaining to the ROK. These discussions were not, however, just focused on political-military topics but also expanded into other areas that Van Fleet operated in, most notably American business investment in Korea. The General's access was also not limited to the President. Van Fleet made a special effort to keep Averell Harriman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, informed of his trips to the ROK and frequently stopped by Foggy Bottom to share his observations. He offered the same courtesy to Harriman's replacement Roger Hilsman Jr., who had asked for Van Fleet's advice and who the General in return coined

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<sup>131</sup> Park Chung Hee to James Van Fleet, 24 August 1961, JVFP, Box 103, Folder 21: 1961 Trip to Korea Correspondence August-September 1961, GCML.

as “a friend of Korea.”<sup>132</sup> It was difficult to find anyone who could match Van Fleet’s level of access to the White House, Pentagon, and State Department when it came to Korean affairs. It was even more difficult to find an individual who so readily lobbied for the Koreans regardless of the circumstances. His work on behalf of Park’s regime epitomized the unrivalled access that the General’s lobby could provide the ROK at crucial times.

Often referring to the military junta as “his boys,” Van Fleet also recognized the limits of their governmental experience, especially in the field of international relations. The value of his advice to the ROK was especially evident prior to Park’s first meeting with Kennedy in November 1961. Understanding that the visit could make, or break, Park’s tenuous hold on power, the regime fully leveraged Van Fleet’s expertise. The General provided counsel on a myriad of issues, some small, some quite large. One such example was the Korean Minister of Defense (MINDEF), retired General Baek Byeong-kwon, sending Van Fleet the ROK’s proposed talking points pertaining to MAP for edit and comment.<sup>133</sup> The MINDEF understood that Park’s return from the US without an explicit statement of MAP support could prove fatal to his regime. Van Fleet obliged and like a good staff officer, provided Baek with key points that Park needed to emphasize during the visit. The General also recommended that Park make an offer to send troops to support American efforts in Vietnam, as Rhee had done multiple times.<sup>134</sup> Park actually did make the offer directly to the President, which was positively received by

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<sup>132</sup> James Van Fleet to Park Chung Hee, 6 May 1963, JVFP, Box 76, Folder 37: Correspondence-Select Park Chung Hee 1963-65, GCML. Van Fleet was already acquainted with Hilsman and his father, who were both US Army officers

<sup>133</sup> Baek served as the Ninth Division Commander, a unit with rich military history, under Van Fleet during the Korean War. This unit was also known as the White Horse Division and would later be deployed to Vietnam. President Roh Tae-woo also commanded the division while in service and marched the unit into Seoul in 1970 to support Chun Doo-hwan’s military coup.

<sup>134</sup> Baek Byeong-kwon to James Van Fleet, 1 November 1961, JVFP, Box 76, Folder 2: Correspondence-Korean Officials July to September 1961, GCML.

Kennedy, though ultimately declined.<sup>135</sup>

Van Fleet's assistance went far behind shaping Park's message for this critical visit. He corresponded regularly with Kim Jong-pil and provided the strategic framework for the entire trip. He advised Kim in September 1961 that it was important for a comprehensive program to be developed early on for visit. The Washington portion needed to be fully outlined and a full staff should accompany Park to cover economic development. Van Fleet also impressed on Kim that for the New York visit, Park needed to meet influential figures in the banking, media, and business sectors. The General understood that aside from USG acceptance, Park's regime depended on the ability to obtain capital, new foreign investments, and a favorable opinion among the American public. He added that Park should be getting big headlines at all his stops and leaving a lasting impression that would yield positive results in the future. The desired outcomes for this visit were simple, "good world opinion, a pleasant relationship with DC and with the press, and, last but not least, adequate dollar investment in Korea."<sup>136</sup> The only way to meet this goal was to emphasize that the ROK had a stable government, was still a staunch ally to the US, and possessed an economic climate conducive for American investment.

While Van Fleet's eased the way for a successful official visit to Washington, the reality was that this portion of Park's visit would have occurred with or without his involvement. The ROK Ambassador to the US, retired General Chung Il-kwon, was quite capable and well-known to USG officials especially within the Pentagon due to his position as the ROK CSA during the Korean War. It is unlikely, however, that the New York portion of the visit that was so critical to the ROK's future economic development could have been orchestrated without Van Fleet. The

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<sup>135</sup> MOC between John F. Kennedy and Park Chung Hee, 14 November 1961, Box 9, Folder: MOC Korea, 1961, RG 59: 1961 Subject Files, NACP.

<sup>136</sup> James Van Fleet to Kim Jong-pil, 17 September 1961, JVFP, Box 70, Folder 8: Correspondence Alphabetical, Kim Jong Pil, GCML.

former Commander personally leveraged his widespread connections to maximize Park's exposure to New York City's elite, going as far as arranging private dinners and meetings on his behalf. The most notable event was a private gathering with several of the city's most prominent financiers and publishers. The attendees proved to be quite impressive and included David Rockefeller of Chase Manhattan Bank, Henry R. Luce of Time, William R. Hearst Jr. of Hearst Publications, Roy W. Howard of Allied Newspapers, Bernard F. Gimbel of Gimbel Brothers, Orville Dreyfoos of the NY Times, and executives from several New York City banks.<sup>137</sup>

The final area where Van Fleet acted on behalf of the ROK was his direct advocacy for the regime. The junta's key leaders to include Park and Kim Jong-pil were simply unknown on the global stage. To the American public, the military coup represented a treasonous act by a small group of military officers who ousted a legitimate, democratically elected regime. Only professing support for Communism would have resulted in even worse public opinion. Van Fleet was no stranger to utilizing widely read publications such as the *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, and *Time* to spread his views on the ROK.<sup>138</sup> He had written a series of articles pertaining to Korean affairs since his retirement in 1953. The General quickly realized that positive press and advocacy from a recognized authority on Korea was sorely needed if the military regime hoped to gain general acceptance.

Van Fleet went to work engaging the American press on the ROK's behalf immediately after the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup. While still unaware of all the details of the event, the General became a widely-quoted source for support throughout a variety of newspaper outlets. The message he

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<sup>137</sup> Telegram from James Van Fleet to William Zeckendorf, 15 November 1961, JVFP, Box 76, Folder 9: Correspondence-Select Park Chung Hee 1961, GCML.

<sup>138</sup> Van Fleet was especially vocal about the decision to pursue an armistice in Korea. The title of his May 1953 article in *Life*, "The Truth about Korea: Part I From a Man Now Free to Speak," gives a clear indication on the direction that Van Fleet usually took.

delivered then, and through most of his articles concerning the military regime, followed a similar pattern: he knew these men, they were anti-Communist, and they were the ROK's best hope. One newspaper headline read "Chang is a Dedicated Patriot says General James Van Fleet." He went on record stating that "I know this group of young Korean officers well and I know Chang intimately. All they want is what is best for Korea. They are 100% anti-Communist and they are one-hundred percent pro-American." He further added that Chang, who served as the Sixth Division's commander under Van Fleet during the Korean War, was the best hope for a democratic government in the ROK.<sup>139</sup>

Van Fleet's comments supported the military writ large and its titular head, General Chang Do-young, the ROK CSA. He did not, however, go into detail about the real leader of the coup, Park Chung-hee. The likely explanation is that Van Fleet did not know enough about Park to make a strong public endorsement. This reasoning is in line with Magruder and Green lamenting early on that many within the US military establishment were wrongly assuming that the coup involved the senior Korean officers that they had known best, when in actuality, Park's group was a younger, more radical group all together.<sup>140</sup>

Van Fleet did in time address this omission by penning a short article for the *Reader's Digest* a few months after the coup for the "The Most Unforgettable Character I have Ever Met" column. Perhaps engaging in some revisionist history, Van Fleet traced his relationship with Park to the Korean War, where the junta leader was Field Grade Officer for most of the conflict. Despite the disparity in rank and unlikelihood that their paths would cross in any significant

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<sup>139</sup> Jim Doyle, "Korea's New Strong Man: Chang is a dedicated patriot says General James Van Fleet," *North American Newspaper Alliance*, May 17, 1961. Van Fleet did in fact have a close relationship with Chang. Chang assumed command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division after a year in the US where he completed the US Army Command General Staff College. He corresponded with Van Fleet while a student and his assignment as a Division Commander was actually a demotion for Chang, who had previously served at a higher level. Van Fleet believed that Chang needed combat experience as a Division Commander to further prepare him for senior positions in the ROK Army.

<sup>140</sup> Message K-303, 24 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

capacity, Van Fleet penned a glowing endorsement of Park, writing that “he was first attracted by General Park's steadiness in difficult times, and his quiet and efficient performance of his military duties. I was also intrigued by the man, about whom there were conflicting stories.”<sup>141</sup> The remainder of the article followed a familiar pattern and carefully disabused Park’s past Communist allegations and endorsed him as the ROK’s best hope for democracy.

Van Fleet’s direct involvement in ROK affairs diminished as the decade progressed, but his impact during the earlier years of the Park regime cannot be overlooked. His efforts during the Korean War earned the General a life-sized bronze statue at the Korean Military Academy.<sup>142</sup> His early support for Park’s military government guaranteed him a hero’s welcome each time the old General returned to Korea. Van Fleet is the best singular representation of the General’s lobby. The basis of his relationship with the ROK traced back to the OPCON arrangement that since 1950, opened the possibility of sustained and personal relationships between the leaders of both militaries.

While serving as the Eighth Army Commander, Van Fleet led all allied forces on the peninsula during the Korean War. As a result, not only was he familiar with the Korean military’s senior officers, he maintained close ties with many of them over the years, often exchanging congratulatory letters as they progressed through the ranks. Chang Do-young, Song Yo-chan, and Chung Il-kwon were three of the more prominent names, but certainly not the only military officers that Van Fleet knew well that went on to play key roles in Park’s regime. The most important relationship he established, however, was a newer one with Kim Jong-pil. While

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<sup>141</sup> James Van Fleet, “The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met,” copy available in JVFP, Box 34, Folder 9: Speeches, Statements, and Interviews, GCML.

<sup>142</sup> Van Fleet is one of three American General officers that have statues in the ROK. The other two are Walton H. Walker, first Eighth Army Commanding General during the Korean War and Douglas MacArthur. Van Fleet’s son, Captain James A. Van Fleet Jr., also has a monument at Osan Air Base. His statue commemorates all the Airmen killed in action during the Korean War. The younger Van Fleet lost his life over North Korea in 1952 while his father commanded the Eighth Army.

Kim represented a new generation of Korean officer that lacked strong ties with the US military graybeards, Van Fleet forged a strong, personal bond with the man that aside from Park, became the most important figure in ROK politics for decades to come.

There is a popular American adage from the early twentieth century that states “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” This statement fits perfectly in the case of US-ROK relations where the two organizations that knew each other best, the American and Korean militaries, utilized their deep-rooted connection to push their respective agendas. By virtue of American OPCON over all forces in the ROK, the CINCUNC rested at the top of both entities. As a result, he enjoyed unmatched access into the ROKG and direct channels to the highest levels of both governments. Throughout the 1960s, the individuals that held the position time and time again utilized this influence in areas beyond the military sphere, sometimes for the benefit of the US and other times on behalf of the ROK. The OPCON arrangement was nothing less than indispensable to both countries. While the ROK eventually learned how to adeptly utilize it to their advantage, the US worked to preserve the command structure at all costs.

## CHAPTER II

### The ROK Military's New Battlefield: Entering the Political Fray

Korea's long association with Confucianism traces its origins back to the Joseon Dynasty, whose five-hundred-year history came to an end at the hands of the Japanese in 1905.<sup>1</sup> Much of the Korean traditions that still exist today have its roots during this period, but none more so than the ingrained elements of Confucian ideology. The Korean language itself serves as a manifestation of a Confucian value system that emphasizes hierarchy. The Korean obsession with education also demonstrates its dominant influence. Scholars have noted that for the ROK, the Confucian tendency to value letters over swords existed into the modern era.<sup>2</sup> In fact, when looking back at the martial tradition of Korea, there are relatively few bright spots in the country's long history. The Hwarang warriors, an elite force whose traditions still inspire Korean Military Academy Cadets today, last existed in the Tenth Century during the Silla period. Admiral Yi Sun-shin, whose famed turtle ships defeated an invading Japanese force during the Imjin Wars, lived in the Sixteenth Century. The Joseon Dynasty's military ultimately failed to modernize and as a result, could not prevent the country's annexation by Japan at the dawn of the Twentieth Century.

The common thread that exists in Korea's modern military history is its dependence on foreign powers as guarantors of its security. The Joseon Dynasty looked to its traditional relationship with China to maintain its independence, but this strategy ended in the late Nineteenth Century with Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War.<sup>3</sup> Korea belatedly

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<sup>1</sup> The dynasty technically ended in 1897 when its last ruler, King Gojong declared himself Emperor of the Korean Empire. Other than the title, little changed with the transition. Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905 and an official part of the Japanese Empire in 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Kim, *The Politics of the Military Revolution*, 66.

<sup>3</sup> The First Sino-Japanese War ended China's influence over Korea and ushered in an era of Japanese dominance. The Japanese victory resulted in the Treaty of Shimonoseki signed on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1895. The treaty resulted in

attempted to attract Western powers as an alternative but they were either uninterested (US) or also suffered defeat in the hands of the Japanese (Russia). Even following the country's independence in 1945, the two rival states that emerged both depended on superpower support. When the US helped establish the ROK's fledgling constabulary force in 1945, no one at the time could imagine that the military would become the country's most influential entity within fifteen years.

This chapter attempts to address the question of why the Korean military became the most powerful *political* entity in the ROK by 1961.<sup>4</sup> On a superficial level, the answer may appear quite simple, it is because it seized power via a military coup. Seizing power and retaining power, however, are actions of varying difficulty. The coup was not the only pivotal event that signified the military's emergence into the political sphere. This development actually occurred a year earlier during the April 1960 Student Revolution that ended the ROK's First Republic. The Korean military became its government's most influential organization not simply by direct actions alone, but rather through the power of perception. During this chaotic period, the ROK military emerged as the most credible and trusted government entity with the broadest range of support from both the Korean populace and the USG. The military's action, or rather inaction, during the student uprising further solidified its positive standing. In the eyes of the Korean public, it became the one organization composed of the people that acted for the good of the people. To the USG, the ROKA's actions in 1960 validated the assumption already held by American military leaders at the time, that the Korean military was the most reliable source of

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China's recognition of Korea's total independence and the ceding of key territory that included Taiwan and Liaodong Peninsula.

<sup>4</sup> While four distinct services composed the Korean Armed Forces, its Army was unquestionably the most influential organization due to its sheer size in comparison to the Navy, Air Force, and Marines. Further mention of the Korean military should be considered synonymous with the Korean Army (ROKA), unless otherwise specified.

stability and the guarantor of political moderation in the ROK.

Analyzing the April 1960 Student Revolution primarily from the military lens reveals two key conclusions. The first is that that American OPCON of the ROK military played a pivotal role during this event as well. While much of previous scholarship emphasized the influence that the American Ambassador exercised over the ROKG during the uprisings, further examination reveals that the CINCPAC played an equally decisive role. Not only did the American Commander authorize the release of the troops that secured Seoul during the height of the revolution, he was also in constant contact with the ROKA's Martial Law commander, advising and influencing the one man given the most credit for the revolution's success. The open channels that existed between the two militaries as a result of the OPCON arrangement were in full use during this pivotal event.

The second main conclusion is that the ROKA's actions during the event inadvertently set the conditions for the military coup that occurred nearly a year later. The ROKA emerged as a respected and loved organization in the eyes of the Korean people, a feeling that lasted well into the following year. The military also endured significant turmoil following the revolution as a result of questionable political actions taken by its senior leaders during the same time period. The outcome was an internal culling that ended the careers of several influential General Officers, many of whom that had the power to prevent Park Chung Hee's coup. By May 1961, the conditions were ripe for a military seizure of power. Most of the ROKA's "heroes" that earned their fame through exemplary leadership during the Korean War were both retired and out of the country. While the military's prestige in the eyes of the general public remained at an all-time high, opinions of the latest civilian government were simply dismal as many people lost hope in the ability of politicians to improve the situation at home.

The first section of this chapter will provide a brief history of the ROK armed forces. The purpose of this portion is to explain how the Korean military became the country's symbol of modernity. The bulk of this chapter, however, will focus on the events surrounding the April 1960 Student Revolution. Though the general details of this event have been covered in other works, I will focus mainly on the ROK military's actions and the CINCPAC's pivotal role in influencing the outcomes. I will also analyze the revolution's impact on the ROK military itself, paying particular attention to its newfound political standing along and the subsequent internal turmoil it experienced. The events that transpired within a year's times set the stage for the May 1961 military coup, a generally unexpected but explosive event that altered the course of US-ROK relations.

## **I. The Republic of Korea's Armed Forces**

The three-year Korean War left the country in a devastated state, one that necessitated a dependence on American foreign aid for its future survival. Since the war, no other group in the ROKG maintained as close of a relationship to the US as the Korean military. In contrast to the rest of the poverty-stricken nation, its military was a symbol of modernity with readily available access to American military equipment, training, and education. The key to the ROK military's political emergence was this unrivalled connection to the US. These ties strengthened over the years as ROK military leaders developed strong relationships with their American counterparts through shared combat experiences, the perpetuation of the OPCON command relationship, and exposure to American military training and professional education programs.

### **A Brief History**

The humble origins of the ROK armed forces can be traced to late 1945, when Lieutenant General John Hodges, Military Governor and head of the US Army Military Government in

Korea (USAMGIK), made the decision to build an army capable of defending the thirty-eighth parallel. Historically speaking, Hodges was a relatively unheralded figure in the ROK's early history who also achieved the rank of four-star General following his tour in Korea. Though subordinate to MacArthur, Hodges ran a virtually independent operation as his boss showed little interest towards the peninsula until 1950.

Hodges' desire to reduce the burden placed on American troops in defending southern Korea resulted in a plan to build an indigenous army. He also recognized that USAMGIK's existence was finite and the Koreans needed to prepare incrementally for the eventuality of running their own national government. His efforts to build a Korean military, however, met significant resistance at the higher levels of the American government since there was a general consensus that the US had no such mandate. Rather than succumb to the opposition emanating from Washington, Hodges chose to circumvent it by creating a "constabulary" rather than an "army." This constabulary force became the foundation of the ROKA that with a simple stroke of a pen, became the country's primary military force in 1948.<sup>5</sup>

The first step in establishing a credible military was the creation of a training regimen that familiarized Korean officers with the American way of war. The first institution created to meet this intent was the Military English Language School established in 1945. Its initial students primarily came from three groups, former members of the Korean Provisional Government's Restoration Army located in China, the Japanese Kwangtung Army that served in Manchuria, and the Japanese Imperial Army.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this school was to teach English to the constabulary's first generation of officers in order to assist the efforts of American military advisors in Korea. In actuality, the school ended up producing a coterie of leaders that

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 200.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

dominated the military scene for nearly two decades. Thirteen of the first fifteen ROKA Chiefs of Staff were graduates of this course.<sup>7</sup> The official “birth” of the ROKA coincided with the election of Syngman Rhee as the ROK’s first President in 1948. The start of a new nation also resulted in the creation of its new military, a six-division force which replaced the constabulary as the ROK’s defense establishment.<sup>8</sup>

## **Links with the US Military**

### ***Credibility through Combat***

The credibility of the ROK military rested largely with its close association to the American forces in Korea. This distinction, however, was not simply given but rather developed over time. Many Korean War scholars will point out that the initial success of the DPRK’s invasion resulted from the dismal state of the ROK armed forces in 1950. This criticism also extends to the American military who was both caught off guard and suffered multiple defeats in the early stages of the war. Despite its early set back, the Korean military experienced a remarkable turnaround during the war. Though General James Van Fleet, the widely accepted “Father of the ROK Army,” received the most credit for revamping the force, many individuals throughout the constabulary period and the war worked vigorously towards the same goal. The ROKA’s ability to rebound and perform admirably throughout the remainder of the conflict cemented its positive reputation in the eyes of the American military.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Syngman Rhee’s standing among most American military leaders was quite high, especially to those who worked directly with him in Korea. While his relationships with American Ambassadors ranged from cordial to combative,

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<sup>7</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 212.

many American military leaders praised Rhee for his full support, especially during the war.<sup>9</sup> The links between the US military and the ROK existed at multiple levels starting at the very top with Rhee and senior American military officers. The war also resulted in strong ties between military units at various levels of command, with ROKA units fighting under and side-by-side American ones. These contacts even existed at the Soldier level through the Korean Augmentees to the US Army (KATUSA) program. Recognizing the significant shortfalls in manpower with incoming American units, Rhee offered and MacArthur authorized the integration of Korean “Soldiers” to fill these gaps.<sup>10</sup> Though different commanders had varied opinions on the program’s success, most American units during the war included military-aged Korean males in their formations.

The ROKA’s credibility earned in combat had a lasting impact on the American military. The two organizations had fought together against the Communist forces during the coldest of winters. For many American officers, this fact alone made any other shortcomings forgivable. No other military leader better espoused this belief than Van Fleet, who clearly expressed his views in an article he wrote during the war titled “Who Says our Allies Won’t Fight?” The General asserted that “the ROK Army isn’t perfect, but it is the largest, most loyal, most modern anti-Communist army of any Asiatic nation. And it is a model of what we can build throughout the world.”<sup>11</sup> The idea that the ROK military was a proven anti-Communist force was a point reiterated time and time again. Having commanded the Seventh Division during the war, Lyman

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<sup>9</sup> The nine-month tenure of William Lacy who served as US ambassador to the ROK in 1955 represents an extreme case. His inability to work with Rhee resulted in Lacy requesting a recall to Washington due to a “diplomatic illness,” which the State Department supported. See Richard Pearson, “Ex-Ambassador Lacy Dies,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Depending on the account, both MacArthur and John J. Muccio, US Ambassador to the ROK during the war, have been given credit for proposing the KATUSA program. See Harold Joyce Noble, *Embassy at War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 286-289.

<sup>11</sup> James Van Fleet, “Who Say's Our Allies Won't Fight?" *Readers Digest*, November 23, 1952, 25.

Lemnitzer expressed his support for the Korean military in 1959 to the incoming American Ambassador, Walter McConaughy, by declaring his “tremendous admiration and respect for their courage, determination, and dedication to Free World Principles.”<sup>12</sup> Carter Magruder, also a Korean War veteran prior to serving as CINCUNC, offered his assessment to a class of American officers at the National War College that if the US ever waged war with the Soviet Union, only two nations would stand with them at the frontlines, the ROK and Turkey.<sup>13</sup>

The American military’s devoted support for the ROKA also influenced the opinions of other US entities operating in the ROK, most notably the US Embassy. Responding to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee sponsored report on the Far East conducted in 1959, the Embassy criticized the lack of ROKA recognition in the portion covering Korea. Referring to the military as an “outstanding feature of the Korean scene,” the Embassy praised the ROKA’s role in deterring the Communist threat in Korea and the rest of East Asia. As a battle-tested entity trained and equipped by the US, the ROKA was a major asset to the Free World defense position throughout the region.<sup>14</sup> Though the US military did not realistically consider the utility of the Korean forces outside of the peninsula until the height of the Vietnam War, both Rhee and Park expressed early on that there were no limits to employing the ROK military against the Communist threat outside the country.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Training and Education***

The previous chapter addressed the OPCON agreement in great detail but it is worth reemphasizing its impact on the ROK military’s development. As long as the command

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<sup>12</sup> Lemnitzer to McConaughy, 3 November 1959, LLP.

<sup>13</sup> Carter Magruder, “The Republic of Korea” (Briefing, National War College, Washington, DC, 5 April 1960), available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>14</sup> Embassy Dispatch G-62, 26 January 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: International Political Relations, General US Policy, RG84: Classified General Record, 1960, NACP.

<sup>15</sup> Rhee offered to send Korean troops to Southeast Asia as early as 1954. Park did the same during his first meeting with Kennedy in November 1961.

arrangement existed, the fates of both militaries remained intertwined. Neither entity could complete its mission without the other. In addition, this agreement also codified the American military command's responsibility in training and to some extent, equipping the Korean forces.<sup>16</sup> Though it would eventually develop its own unique characteristics over time, the ROK military was originally the offspring of its American counterpart; organized, trained, equipped, and operated in a manner similar to the US military. When asked about the state of the ROKA in 1959, General Hamilton Howze, former KMAG Chief and CINCUNC answered that "the Korean Army showed very plainly the influence of the US Army. They had adapted all of our bad habits and polished them to a high degree of perfection."<sup>17</sup> Though stated partly in jest, this statement provided a good indication of the level of American influence on their Korean counterparts. The Korean military tradition at this time was at best, incomplete. Though its officers drew upon their varied experiences as resistance fighters or members of the Japanese army, the common foundation going forward was the modern military tradition of the US.

The ROK military was the only Korean group that the US successfully provided sufficient funds, training, advice, and attention to over an extended period of time that resulted in an effective level of influence.<sup>18</sup> Many senior American military leaders shared this basic opinion and often looked back positively at their time working with the ROKA. Reflecting on his service in Korea, General Howze remarked that one of his greatest satisfactions came from seeing the ROKA's development. He added that in many ways, working with the ROKA was more satisfying than dealing with American forces in Korea, since he could visibly observe the

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<sup>16</sup> Carter Magruder, CINCUNC from 1959-1961, described the basic mission of Eighth Army as assisting the ground defense of Korea from Communist aggression. He also considered the training of the ROKA, defense of the ROK from internal subversion, and assisting economic development as the other key areas of his command. From Carter Magruder, "The Eighth US Army," CBMP, USAMHI.

<sup>17</sup> Howze Oral History, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Henderson *Politics of the Vortex*, 334.

progress being made.<sup>19</sup> The close working relationship with the US was not commonplace across the entire ROKG, a point emphasized by General John Hull, CINCUNC from 1953-1955. Hull asserted that the US military “took care of the (ROK) Army and General Van Fleet did a very good job in training their officers and their NCOs, but they had nothing comparable to that for the other departments of the country.”<sup>20</sup> This tight relationship opened numerous doors to the members of the ROK military, one of which was direct access to state-of-the-art military training and education programs.

The professionalization of the ROK military was a two-track effort. The first avenue addressed an immediate need during the Korean War, ensuring that officers were proficient in the tactics required during combat operations. The background of the ROKA officer corps was diverse with some serving as resistance fighters in China, others conducting Japanese counterinsurgency operations in Manchuria, and a select few individuals serving in the Japanese Imperial Army. All needed to understand the American way of warfare since it was the US military that fought at their sides and equipped their forces. The daily efforts of KMAG advisors were critical in this regard, but so was the establishment of Branch Schools during the war that focused on specific specialties to include infantry, field artillery, and logistics among others. Hundreds of Korean officers were also sent to the US to participate in international programs run at the American military’s equivalent of these schools.

The second track represented a longer-term effort aimed at building a professional officer corps, a prerequisite for any effective modern military force. American commanders recognized the necessity of developing an elite officer corps early in the Korean War. General Matthew

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<sup>19</sup> Howze Oral History, 76.

<sup>20</sup> John E. Hull Oral History Interview, transcript of interview conducting in 1974 by James W. Wurman, SOOHP, John E. Hull Papers, Box 1, USAMHI.

Ridgeway, CINCUNC from 1951-52, addressed this exact need in a 1951 letter to the US Department of the Army that stressed the necessity for a Korean officer corps with “adequate professional confidence, thoroughly imbued with the will to fight, capable of aggressive leadership and inspired of those essential spiritual qualities in which are included love of country, honor, integrity, devotion to country, and professional pride.”<sup>21</sup> This path required the establishment of a Professional Military Education (PME) program that mirrored the US Army’s system. PME was not a one and done deal, but rather a long-term process that lasted the duration of an officer’s career.

The intent behind PME was not only to produce technically proficient officers, but also globally aware, professional ones that were committed to their nation’s well-being and capable of working with their American counterparts. The first step in the process occurred in an individual’s years at a commissioning institution like West Point for the US Army. The ROK established its own Korean Military Academy (KMA) in 1952, modelled after West Point and staffed by multiple American officers from the historic institution.<sup>22</sup> Gregory Henderson described the KMA as an “island off of Korea’s moral coast, governed by standards different from the surrounding societies.”<sup>23</sup> The KMA’s influence continued to grow after every graduating class, especially when it transitioned into a four-year officer development program. The newer generations of Korean officers identified less with geography driven factions and more so with the deep-seated ties to their graduating KMA class.

The creation of a Korean Command and General Staff College (CGSC) that mirrored the US Army’s esteemed institution located at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas was the next significant step

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<sup>21</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Henderson, *Politics of the Vortex*, 353.

in creating a modern, professionalized officer corps. CGSC represented the gateway to the senior officer ranks, with officers who were usually Majors competing to attend this milestone course. Established in 1951 on the southern coast of the ROK in Chinhae, CGSC emphasized modern management procedures, patriotism, service, and an avoidance of politics in addition to the military specific topics pertaining to working on a higher echelon staff.<sup>24</sup> The US Army also consistently sponsored the attendance of high-performing ROKA officers at its Ft. Leavenworth CGSC course. This opportunity was truly distinct as of the eight ROK General Officers that served as the Army Chief of Staff during the 1960s, only one did not attend CGSC in the US.

The last rung on the PME ladder and prerequisite for the General Officer rank was the War College. Modelled after the Army War College in Carlisle, PA and the National War College in Washington, DC, the ROK opened its own National Defense College in October 1956. The intent behind this institution was to broaden an officer's knowledge in a diverse range of areas critical to national security. Common topics of interest included political science, economics, domestic development, along with the Army's role in global strategy and national defense.<sup>25</sup> Using the similar metric above, it is worth noting again that of the eight ROKA CSAs in the 1960s, six were National Defense College graduates with one attending a Master's level course at George Washington University instead. Students of this institution played an especially important role during the early days of the Park military regime, where they were utilized as advisors to government ministries and leaders of task forces created to tackle key issues that included government reorganization and constitutional amendment.<sup>26</sup> With this exclusive access to a modern, Western education, the ROKA officer corps evolved into a highly

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<sup>24</sup> Henderson, *Politics of the Vortex*, 354.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 354.

<sup>26</sup> Dispatch 551, 31 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, May 20-31, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

skillful, specialized, and managerially talented pool of professionals without equal within the Korean government apparatus.

While the officers developed “white collar” skills courtesy of the US, the military’s broader segment of enlisted personnel developed “blue collar” ones that arguably had a greater impact on the daily course of the Korean economy. During the country’s early years where steady employment was uncommon, the ROKA served as the government’s largest employer. At its peak, the ROK military’s authorized cap rested at 720,000, though the actual number of individuals employed by the 1960s hovered around 600,000. Low pay and general discomfort accompanied the life of a Korean soldier, but there at least existed a nominal guarantee of food, shelter, and the development of skills useful in the civilian sector. The ROKA also represented the broadest segment of Korean society where young males from every region came together for a singular purpose. General Carter Magruder recognized this important link between the military and society early on in his tenure as the CINCPAC. He also understood how the actions of an institution committed to the nation’s defense also concurrently contributed to sustainment of the country’s weak economy.

Even the governments of the most affluent countries today look to large infrastructure projects to kick-start a national economy. In the case of the ROK, the country needed to heavily invest in its rudimentary infrastructure that existed since the Japanese occupation, but had been adversely affected by the war. The one entity ready tackle the challenge was the ROKA. By 1959, the military maintained the country’s highway system, improved nearly 2,700 miles of roads, constructed 1,670 bridges/culverts/retaining walls, and even built the foundation for a new National Assembly meeting.<sup>27</sup> Magruder credited the ROKA Commander, Lieutenant General

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<sup>27</sup> Carter B. Magruder, “Free Press and the Status of the ROK Military” (Address, Seoul Correspondents’ Club, Seoul, Korea, December 28, 1959). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

Lee Han-lim, for being responsible for aggressively taking charge of many of these projects and constructing the ROK's high-speed highway system<sup>28</sup>

These numbers are symbolic of two main conclusions concerning the ROKA's contributions to the nation. The first point is that while many other government entities gained notoriety for fiscal irregularities and corruption, the Korean military was one of the few organizations that could *visibly* show its positive impact to the general populace. The second conclusion is that the Korean Soldiers developed skills that were transferrable to the civilian sector. Magruder viewed construction skills taught to Soldiers as one area with long-range value to the Korean economy. Each year, almost two-hundred thousand military personnel returned to civilian life and brought with them skills as mechanics, electricians, and medical technicians that were essential to expanding the economy.<sup>29</sup> These individuals had the potential of immediately contributing to national development by virtue of the knowledge and experience gained from their time in the service.

With unmatched access to modern skills and strong connections to the US, the ROK military seemed poised to make a significant impact on the future course of the young nation. Renowned University of Chicago Sociologist Morris Janowitz's work *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations* championed a popular theoretical trend in the early 1960s that identified the military as a potential modernizing force in Third World countries. Janowitz explained that the military's organizational format, skill structure, social recruitment and education, ideology, and cohesion provided the characteristics necessary for a non-political entity to become involved in domestic affairs and push a developing country towards

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<sup>28</sup> Magruder Oral History, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Magruder, "CINCUNC's Remarks" (Address, Seoul Correspondents' Club, Seoul, Korea, December 28, 1959). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

modernization. In terms of military education, Janowitz asserted that in most new states, officer education reinforced tendencies for their involvement in domestic affairs.<sup>30</sup>

Greg Brazinsky's scholarship on the impact of American military training and education on the ROK military supports Janowitz's statement. Brazinsky strongly argues that the ROKA's emerged as a political force not due to its power of coercion, but because of American training programs that inculcated officers with views and expertise that distinguished them from the rest of Korean society.<sup>31</sup> He further adds that "American assistance and training programs built the South Korean military into a powerful force that was destined to govern the country."<sup>32</sup> Despite Janowitz's theoretical assertions supported by Brazinsky's argument, American training and could not alone catalyze Korean military involvement into domestic affairs. Unlike the militaries of the developing nations applicable to Janowitz's theory, the ROK armed forces were not completely independent. They still answered to an American General Officer at the top and stood side-by-side with a robust US military presence throughout the country.

Brazinsky's assertion is correct in that access to American military programs developed the ROK military into a modern entity with unmatched technical expertise and organizational knowledge. His belief that this distinction "destined" the ROKA to govern the country is, however, questionable for two reasons. The first is that if the ROK military naturally desired political power as a result of the modern training and education, then it would have seized it in April 1960 after Rhee's ouster. As we will see later in this chapter, the ROKA unmistakably had the opportunity, but chose not to act upon it. Secondly, though the ROK military as a whole can be categorized as an elite institution, its view on political involvement was simply not

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<sup>30</sup> Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*, 137.

<sup>31</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

monolithic. While a minority element of the ROKA that played a key role during the coup did push for military rule (radicals), other groups supported the army's political neutrality and disengagement from politics (moderates). One of Park's greatest challenges was balancing the desires of these two distinct groups while maintaining a cohesiveness within his military junta.

## **II. The April 1960 Revolution**

The rule of Syngman Rhee, the ROK's first President, ended on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1960 in a manner reminiscent of other autocrats who did not adapt to the changing tide of their countries. After witnessing the largest anti-government demonstrations in the ROK's history, the octogenarian resigned from the Presidency and departed his country on a plane bound for Hawaii a few weeks later. Rhee lived out the remaining five years of his life in exile, just as he had been for over thirty-years when he first fled Korea in 1912 to fight for his country's independence from abroad. By 1960, Rhee was eighty-five years old and though considered senile by more than one USG official, still maintained enough clarity to continue a process he initiated twelve years earlier, the perpetuation of his rule. Rhee, and his compatriot to the south Chiang Kai-shek, represented the old guard, deeply anti-Communist leaders who believed that defending the ideological survival of their countries justified even the most repressive of measures. Unfortunately for Rhee, the young students that mobilized en masse against him and the ROKA who did not defend him developed a shared view that the President's anachronistic rule was no longer the best course for the country.

The April 1960 Revolution was an event of unquestionable importance to the ROK as it heralded a period of extreme turbulence. Within just over a year's time, the country experienced four different governments: the final days of Rhee's regime, the subsequent interim government led by Huh Chung, the democratically elected Chang Myon government, and Park Chung Hee's

military regime. The overall events surrounding this critical incident have been covered in detail from the viewpoint of the ROK's general political history. What has not been as fully investigated, however, is the link between this "Student" Revolution and the "Military" Revolution that occurred a year later. The connection between these two historic events lies with the status of the ROKA.

The efforts of the Korean students should not be minimized as many gave their lives in hopes of inspiring positive change in their country. The revolution's ultimate success, however, was due to the ROKA's actions, or rather inaction. The ROKA had the means to brutally suppress anti-government demonstrations, but chose not to act. The April 1960 Revolution also represented the military's arrival on the political scene. The actions of the ROKA during these tense weeks resulted in its emergence as the most trusted government institution in the eyes of the Korean public. From the USG perspective, the ROKA's positive conduct reaffirmed what its American counterparts had argued for years, that the military represented the ROK's best guarantee for stability. By the May 1961 coup, the ROKA had already experienced much internal pain as a result of its new political role. Though the coup itself was generally a surprise, the relative ease that Park experienced in gaining initial acceptance by the Korean public was largely due to the ROKA's existing status as a trusted, political entity.

## **The ROK Government on the Eve of Revolution**

### ***Setting the Stage***

While the events of April 1960 were the most pronounced with the recurring mass demonstrations in Seoul and across the country, dissatisfaction against Rhee's government had been fomenting for some time. Much of the public grievances against the government focused on two specific areas, the dire economic conditions still present in the ROK and the growing

assault on civil liberties by Rhee's government as it attempted to extend its rule. Rhee had experienced a steady decline in popularity as evidenced by the percentage of votes he received during the Presidential elections. In 1952, Rhee won seventy-two percent of the vote, which is not surprising given his role as a wartime President. Four years later, he won only fifty-six percent. By 1958, the opposition Democratic Party won one-third of total National Assembly seats, enough to block attempts by the ruling Liberal Party to keep Rhee in power through Constitutional amendments.<sup>33</sup> Never one to let the democratic process stand in his way, Rhee enacted several measures aimed at clamping down political opposition to prolong his rule.

One such action involved Rhee's Liberal Party successfully amending the country's National Security Act, a law passed in 1948 that justified ROKG actions against threats to state security. The Act already gave the government broad powers to deal with perceived leftists and North Korean sympathizers, but in Rhee's eyes, was not enough to handle the free press and political opposition, inconvenient byproducts of a democracy. This latest amendment allowed for the imprisonment of a broad category of individuals who knowingly spread false information or distorted facts to the enemy's benefit. Passed during a three-minute National Assembly session without the presence of any opposition party members, this law gave Rhee sweeping powers to target anyone who stood against him.<sup>34</sup>

The results of the 1956 Presidential election also revealed a growing geographical divide between the ROK's rural and urban populations. The Liberal Party received thirty-nine percent of the rural vote whereas the opposition Democratic Party gained thirty percent of its vote mainly from urban areas. These cities both served as the opposition's power base and the centers of

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<sup>33</sup> Quee-young Kim, "From Protest to Change of Regime: the 4-19 Revolt and the Fall of the Rhee Regime in South Korea," *Social Forces*, 74:4 (June 1996): 1186.

<sup>34</sup> Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 348.

education where students, along with other intellectual groups, grew increasingly frustrated at the weakening democracy.<sup>35</sup> The 1960 Presidential election, where Rhee allegedly received ninety-percent of the vote, proved to be the tipping point as students all across the country rose up against the blatant election irregularities that extended Rhee's and the Liberal Party's rule once again. Student demonstrations started a month earlier in February after the President refused to postpone the election even following the death of the main opposition candidate, Cho Pyong-ok, who succumbed to cancer in the US. The protests soon took a violent turn a month later.

Demonstrations grew exponentially in frequency and in number following the March election, especially in the southwestern city of Masan, where police killed several student protestors. Demonstrators were again in direct conflict with the police in April after Masan residents extricated the body of middle-school student missing since election day from its harbor. Found with four wooden pegs driven through his eyes, the police had previously feigned ignorance of the boy's whereabouts.<sup>36</sup> In response, crowds swelled to nearly ten-thousand in number, reportedly chanting "death to Lee Ki-poong" and "down with the Syngman Rhee regime." Rioters also broke into a police station, stole weapons, and commenced attacks on the police, Liberal Party headquarters, along with the houses of the Mayor and Chief of Police.<sup>37</sup> The situation soon spread to the nation's capital in Seoul where the National Police was unable to handle protestors that numbered in the hundreds of thousands, other than by shooting at them. By April, the US Embassy already judged that the situation had likely reached a point of no return and informed Washington that "political stability will deteriorate further and reversal of

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<sup>35</sup> Kim, "From Protest to Change of Regime," 1186.

<sup>36</sup> MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 203.

<sup>37</sup> Message CX-10, Army Attaché Embassy Seoul to the Department of the Army, 12 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

trends will be difficult.”<sup>38</sup>

Why did the situation deteriorate so quickly within a short period of time between February and April? According to General Carter Magruder, CINCUNC at the time, “the riots were a long time coming.” Speaking at a conference for the Chiefs of all Military Assistance Advisory Groups in the Pacific while the revolution progressed, the General pointed to the ROKG’s moves to suppress the political opposition’s main newspaper and the Liberal Party’s intent in securing both the Vice-Presidency along with the Presidency as the key causes.<sup>39</sup> The ROK’s electoral system at the time designated the candidate with the second most votes as the Vice President, regardless of his party. This rule led to an awkward situation in 1956 where Rhee won the Presidency, but his main opponent from the opposition party, Chang Myon, became the Vice President after garnering the next most votes. Given the personal apathy Rhee carried for Chang, they rarely even spoke to each other. By 1960, the ruling party realized that Rhee, who was eighty-five years old, was well into the twilight of his years. Rather than hope for his survival until the next election, the party needed to ensure that National Assembly Speaker Lee Ki-poong, Rhee’s approved Vice President, received the second most votes at all costs.

The second most decisive factor in the CINCUNC’s view was Rhee’s increasing reach in ROK provincial affairs. Described as a move that did not garner much attention, Magruder pointed to a law that made all provincial governors appointed positions rather than elected ones. Adding to the national government’s span of control was the fact the provinces lacked local police and were instead manned by units from the centralized National Police Agency.

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<sup>38</sup> EMBTEL 794, 1 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>39</sup> Message NR 232352Z, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, USAMHI.

Supporting a system created to prolong the ruling party's dominance, both the Provincial Governors and the National Police received instructions from the Liberal Party regarding election execution.<sup>40</sup> It was no surprise that reports of ballot stuffing and ballot box disappearances were prevalent in 1960, especially in areas that supported the opposition. Based on the US Embassy's observations, the opposition party's main candidate, Chang Myon, amazingly did not carry a single district, even in the urban areas that were the base of his support. Rather than using words such as "open" and "fair," to describe the preparation leading up to the election, the Embassy instead chose "intimidation, violence, and irregularities" for good reason.<sup>41</sup>

### ***The ROKA's Political Dalliances***

By the 1960 Student Revolution's conclusion, the ROKA had experienced for the first time the feeling of being in the political driver's seat. Though its involvement in domestic politics would increase exponentially within a year, the military had already experienced superficial forays into the political sphere before 1960. The main difference was that prior to the revolution, the ROKA waded into political waters at the behest of its civilian masters. After 1960, the military was no longer beholden to any political party or individual, and as a result, realized its power to conduct independent action. By 1956, the US Army had recognized its Korean counterpart's increasing involvement in political affairs. Of the top six troubling ROKA trends identified as immediate urgencies by the US military, number two was its first-time involvement in national politics while number three was increased political influence on Army

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<sup>40</sup> Message UK 80250, COMUSKOREA to JCS, 20 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>41</sup> Embassy Seoul Dispatch G-80, "Election Summary," 28 March 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Korean Elections, USAMHI.

internal affairs.<sup>42</sup>

Rhee's stranglehold on the Korean military was well-known. While managing to maintain positive relationships with successive CINCUNCs, he also demanded unquestionable loyalty from his own senior military officers. Rhee was exceptionally adept at ruling by division. He skillfully stoked the flames of factionalism that had engulfed the ROKA from its earliest days as a means to guarantee his personal control over the military, precluding the potential of a single officer uniting all the disparate groups.<sup>43</sup> General Hamilton Howze, who arrived in the ROK for the first time in 1959 to serve as KMAG Chief, was like many of his American military peers, complementary of Rhee. He assessed the President as having "many attributes of greatness" who did much for the ROK, chiefly by his "courage in consistently opposing Communism and keeping Korea free from Communism."<sup>44</sup> The General also did, however, recognize his rule by division which had a very unsettling effect on the military forces. Howze recollected that Rhee as a habit, engaged senior General Officers in private conversations that often lasted over three hours. Prior to concluding, he would have them swear secrecy and promise not to report the contents to their chain-of-command or the ROK CSA.<sup>45</sup> Imagination and hearsay proved to be effective tools for Rhee in exercising his control over his military.

Though generally staying clear of politics as modelled by their American military mentors, the ROKA's senior leaders found themselves under great pressure to deliver Soldier votes for Rhee and Lee Ki-pong during the 1956 Presidential elections. Even the military's most decorated war heroes to include Paik Sun-yup, the ROKA's first four-star General, succumbed to

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<sup>42</sup> I.D. White, "The Significance of Trends Apparent in the ROKA during 1956," 20 December 1956, Box 12, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Arthur Radford, NACP.

<sup>43</sup> Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea*, 60.

<sup>44</sup> Howze Oral History, 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

the President's demands and instructed subordinate leaders that it was the duty of good soldiers to vote for Rhee. He may have lost some military followers for his actions but those senior leaders that did not answer the President's call, to include Chung Il-kwon, the ROKA's first three-star general, received positions of reduced authority in return.<sup>46</sup> Rhee did not miss the fact that the military accounted for over six-hundred thousand votes and when elections were not blatantly rigged, they could make a significant impact. Recognizing the ROKA's increased political involvement, Rhee also appointed politicians without military backgrounds as the Minister of Defense during this period. These positions served as a reward for their ability to leverage their political connections and deliver the military vote.<sup>47</sup>

Lieutenant General Song Yo-chan, Rhee's last ROKA Chief of Staff, best represented the contradictory position that many senior military leaders found themselves in during the final years of the First Republic. Song was one of the most respected Korean General Officers who many senior American military officials affectionately referred to as "Tiger." His background was unique in that he served as a non-commissioned officer in the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. He gained the distinction as being a hard-nosed combat leader during the Korean War where he commanded the elite Capital Division. James Van Fleet considered Song one of his best Generals and purposely spotlighted his division to President-elect Eisenhower when he visited the ROK in 1953.<sup>48</sup> Song allegedly gave the former Supreme Allied Commander the shortest brief he had ever received, stating only "we are ready to attack the enemy – who is over there" while pointing north.<sup>49</sup> At the ripe age of forty-one, the average age of Lieutenant Colonels in the US Army, Song reached the pinnacle of his military career and

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<sup>46</sup> I.D. White, "The Significance of Trends Apparent in the ROKA during 1956," RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> James Van Fleet, "Lest We Forget Korea," *The Reader's Digest*, September 1958.

<sup>49</sup> "The Custodians," *Time*, May 9, 1960, 27.

became the ROKA Chief of Staff.<sup>50</sup>

Song quickly earned the support of the CINCUNC, Carter Magruder, through his decision to tackle an endemic problem that had plagued the ROKA for years, the illicit handling of military items, most of which came from MAP. It was a poorly guarded secret that these supplies paid by American taxpayers ranging from gasoline to socks usually ended up on the black market, much to the displeasure of the DOD. The CINCUNC considered Song's integrity campaign the finest action he had taken as the ROK CSA and commended its forceful execution.<sup>51</sup> Song's efforts even earned him a short article in Time Magazine that highlighted his crackdown. His investigation resulted in the arrest of officers from all ranks, General to Lieutenant, that had profited from black market dealings. Some commanders had even pocketed the pay of their subordinates. Within nine months, Song expelled six Major Generals, nine Brigadiers and 1,683 other officers of Field and Company grade, including sixty-one Colonels.<sup>52</sup> The highest-ranking casualty came in April 1960 with the arrest of Lieutenant General Yang Guk-shin, former Third ROK Corps Commander, for ordering Soldiers under his command to embezzle gasoline.<sup>53</sup> The reach of Song's integrity program indicated that he at the minimum, had the nominal support of the President.

Song realized by 1960, however, that even integrity had its limits in Rhee's government. There was a general understanding that ROKA officers often partnered with influential Liberal Party politicians to barter Soldier votes for promotions. Many senior officers believed that the ROK military existed to defend against the north and not to engage in internal government power

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<sup>50</sup> By 1960, the average age of the ROKA's four-star Generals was 36 and three-star Generals was 34.5. From Kim's *Politics of the Military Revolution in Korea*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP, Box 5, Folder: UN Command Korea, USAMHI.

<sup>52</sup> "Army for Sale," *Time*, November 23, 1959, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Message KA 60618, CGEUSA to CGUSARPAC, 11 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

struggles. They rightly feared for Army unity once it became involved in politics. Song was no different but his commitment to the military also intersected with his loyalty to Rhee. When asked to deliver the military vote for Rhee during the March 1960 Presidential election, Song acquiesced despite his strong anti-corruption stance.<sup>54</sup>

Song's collusion did not go unnoticed by politicians of both parties. In reaction to the ROKA's blatant disregard for political neutrality, opposition Democratic Party leaders sent an official letter to the MINDEF, Kim Chung-yul, demanding that the military cease its illegal political interference. The letter gave three examples of military sponsored anti-opposition activities. The first described a unit commander confining enlisted men to the base in order to prevent them from hearing anti-Liberal Party speeches. The second instance was the Eleventh Fighter Wing Base Commander in Daegu granting leave to enlisted personnel during the election so they would not be present to cast their vote, which allowed for the illegal usage of their ballots. The last example accused officers in every unit forcing their men to write letters to their families to encourage Liberal Party support.<sup>55</sup>

Fully aware of these allegations, the Eighth Army G2's (Intelligence) assessment was that "while all these charges are probably true, it is highly unlikely that the Defense Minister will do anything to call off the military's long-range plans to aid the Liberal Party in the election at this late date."<sup>56</sup> This opinion is in line with the fact that Song's decision to interfere in the election did not result in any immediate negative repercussions, though he eventually paid for his actions later in the year. Magruder fully understood that Song had used his command influence to provide the ROKA vote to the Liberal Party. Rather than chastise Song, the CINCUNC

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<sup>54</sup> Quee-young Kim, *The Fall of Syngman Rhee* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1983), 138.

<sup>55</sup> Message KA 60421, CGEUSA to CINCUSARPAC, 10 March 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Korean Elections, USAMHI.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

communicated that he had no issue with the decision since “refusal in this manner would have resulted in the loss to Korea of you as Chief of Staff and your integrity program.”<sup>57</sup> In Magruder’s mind, the long-term benefits of a successful campaign against internal ROKA corruption was more important than Song’s political transgression. He also believed that as the ROK CSA had thrust the military into politics, he would also have the opportunity to get the army out.

Magruder’s confidence in Song reflected the American military’s generally open-ended support of the ROKA. Plans for a post-Rhee Korea had been in existence for years, tracing all the way back to 1953 when the US contemplated a forceful regime change. Though Rhee had proven his skill at surviving, his age was bound to catch up with him eventually. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the possibility of life after Rhee as late as 1959, where a J2 (Joint Intelligence) report assessed that the President’s death would have no adverse effect on US military interests as long as subsequent governments agreed to honor the Mutual Defense Treaty. The assessment also offered the evaluation that though Rhee’s death would follow a period of instability, the ROKA would be the stabilizing influence, intervening only to restore order and to ensure an orderly transfer of authority. The major reason for this evaluation was that the “Republic of Korea military leadership recognized the need for US support and would not support an unconstitutional succession to the Presidency.”<sup>58</sup> This prediction proved relatively accurate in 1960, though less so a year later.

### **The Revolution Commences**

The Liberal Party’s blatant disregard for the democratic process unleashed a wave of

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<sup>57</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP.

<sup>58</sup> “Evaluation of the impact of Rhee's demise on Korean and US military interests in Korea,” JCS J2 to CINCPAC, 7 August 1959, Box 134, JCS Central Decimal File 1959 Korea, RG 218.2.1, General Records, NACP.

anti-government revulsion and resentment on a level unseen in the ROK's short history. US Embassy post-election assessments reported that even public confidence of American efforts to assist the ROK had been questioned. Some Korean officials commented in private to Embassy officers that the US should bear some responsibility for the assault against basic democratic institutions. In the Embassy's opinion, the March Presidential elections brought the ROK to a "political watershed," just not a positive one. The event surfaced a "long smoldering sense of popular disillusionment with (the) operation (of) democratic institutions and frustration and resentment against (the) Liberal Party administration."<sup>59</sup> While the demonstrations could somewhat be ignored as long as they stayed out of sight in Masan, once they reached Seoul, Rhee's government had no choice but to react. As tensions reached a climax in April, the senior American officials in the ROK became heavily involved in shaping the course of events. The US Ambassador, Walter McConaughy, played a very visible role, while the CINCUNC asserted his influence primarily behind the scenes.

### ***The State Department in Action***

The State Department followed the 1960 Presidential election closely and chose a more direct approach in dealing with its irregularities from the very beginning. The day after the election, Secretary of State Christian Herter summoned the Korean Ambassador to the US, Yang Yoo-chang, to express his concerns over the alleged election fraud. He specifically linked a potential decrease of the ROK foreign aid program to Congressional and public reaction to the fraudulent election. The Ambassador denied any wrong-doing and blamed the misinformed American press, perhaps considering it fake news.<sup>60</sup> There was, however, already a recognition by Herter and President Eisenhower that the US was interfering with the internal affairs of

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<sup>59</sup> Embassy Seoul Dispatch G-80, 28 March 1960, LLP.

<sup>60</sup> MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 202.

Korea, but both agreed that there were “special justifications in this case.” The President directed that the US “get tough with Rhee,” and the State Department complied.<sup>61</sup> Both Herter and McConaughy, while espousing non-interference in Korean domestic affairs, proved to have very direct and well-publicized roles throughout the next few weeks. They would not allow any room for imagination in the minds of the ROKG of where the US stood during these troubling times.

Following a short-period of peace, student demonstrations flared up once again in mid-April. The military command reported on April 18<sup>th</sup> that seven-thousand students held rallies against the March elections in Seoul, Busan, and Chungju. This number included three-thousand students of the elite Korea University that staged a sit-down at the National Assembly. It quickly became apparent that the demonstrations had spread from the relatively out of site location of Masan to most of the ROK’s major urban centers. The EUSA G2 assessed that the ROKG did not know how to effectively act against these student demonstrations. The social prestige of these students and their influential family connections made it initially difficult to respond with a heavy hand.<sup>62</sup> It soon became evident that these protests were on track to quickly grow into a nation-wide phenomenon.

Within twenty-four hours, US Army Intelligence reports estimated that the protestors in Seoul had swelled to over one-hundred thousand in number by April 19<sup>th</sup>. The primary targets of these demonstrators were Rhee’s Presidential Residence and the house of Lee Ki-poong, the Vice President elect. Whereas a day earlier, the government was unable to act decisively, the Rhee regime resorted to a tried and true agent for control. The National Police upon receiving

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<sup>61</sup> *FRUS, 1958-1960*, Volume XVIII, Japan; Korea, 1958-1960, eds. Madeline Chi and Louis J. Smith (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1994), Document 301.

<sup>62</sup> Message KA 60680, CGEUSA to CGUSARPAC, 19 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, USAMHI.

orders immediately sprang into action, though not in a positive way. As demonstrators closed in on the Presidential compound, the nervous policeman resorted to using tear gas, firetrucks, and gunfire to halt their advance with a reported fifteen people dying in the initial melee.<sup>63</sup> The National Police were clearly outmatched and exacerbating, rather than defusing, the situation. Realizing the severity of the circumstances, Rhee authorized Martial Law on April 19<sup>th</sup>. The President designated the ROK CSA, Song Yo-chan, as the Martial Law Commander and though no one could foresee it at the time, placed the General in a position to determine the 1960 Student Revolution's outcome.

Following the declaration of Martial Law, both the US Embassy and the State Department actively engaged ROK senior officials in an attempt to shape the outcome of the massive demonstrations. What is clear by analyzing these interactions was that Rhee suffered from the same problem that seems to plague all Korean leaders ousted from power, a lack of understanding of the true situation outside the palace gates. Access to Rhee was limited and monitored given his advanced age, with his wife allegedly serving as the gatekeeper.<sup>64</sup> Ambassador McConaughy met with the aged leader on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> and described Rhee as "tired, somewhat nervous, and shocked, but functioning well as usual." The Ambassador also quickly realized from the President's remarks that he was "very out of touch with the realities and has wrong assessments on (the) uprising's causes, nature." Rhee had assured the Ambassador that the "troubles fomented by a small group masterminded by subversives and disorder had now been thoroughly scotched by firm measures taken this afternoon with no likely recurrence." McConaughy attempted, without success, to impress upon

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<sup>63</sup> Message US 80265, COMUSFK to CGUSARPAC, 19 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Chung, *Korea and the United States through War and Peace: 1943-1960* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000), 295.

Rhee that the protests were authentic, widespread, not Communist inspired (Rhee's go-to justification), and brought upon by the March election fraud. Rhee in turn expressed complete ignorance of any potential election irregularities.<sup>65</sup>

Whether legitimately ignorant of the situation back home, or simply holding firm to Rhee's line, the ROK Ambassador to the US, You Chan-yang, displayed a similar lack of understanding when called upon by Secretary of State Herter on April 19<sup>th</sup> (Washington time) to discuss the Seoul riots. Ambassador Yang approached the situation in a predictable manner by trying to minimize the extent of the demonstrations and utilizing the Communist card. He expressed regret over the rioting but opined that the majority of rioters were "beatnik type of students" with some possibility of Communist instigation and participation. Yang also stressed that the ROKG had already taken appropriate measures to quell the violence by replacing the Minister of Home Affairs, Director of National Police, and the Seoul City Mayor. The Ambassador asked that the Secretary remember that they were combating Communism and North Korean Communists were actively broadcasting the encouragement of riots while even promising assistance to the rioters.<sup>66</sup> Despite his forceful plea, Yang later admitted after the fact that he had been instructed by his government to highlight the Communist link, despite the absence of one.<sup>67</sup> The CINCUNC also confirmed after Rhee's departure that there was no evidence of Communist influence throughout the entire period.<sup>68</sup>

As for the March 15th election fraud, the Ambassador stated that no concrete evidence of improper conduct existed. The Secretary responded that election fraud had been planned for

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<sup>65</sup> EMBTEL 890, 19 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>66</sup> Yang You-chan Yang to Syngman Rhee, 21 April 1960, Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 711.1960\_471, 4/19/1960 Documents, Korean National Diplomatic Academy Archives, Seoul, Korea.

<sup>67</sup> Hong, *State Security and Regime Security*, 140.

<sup>68</sup> Message UJ 80301, CINCUNC to CJCS, 28 April 1960, Box 75, JCS Central Decimal File 1960 Korea, RG 218.2.1, General Records, NACP.

some time with the National Security Law change in December 1958 that authorized the appointment of local officials by the national government, a move designed to control votes. Yang attempted to argue that there was no reason for Rhee to manipulate votes when no one, including his opponents, believed that the President would not be reelected.<sup>69</sup> This line of argument conveniently left out a crucial fact already known to American officials. The key to the Liberal Party's perpetuation of power was not Rhee's reelection, but rather the guarantee that Lee Ki-poong won the Vice Presidency, a tall order given the opposition's growing popularity. Regardless of whether it was out of ignorance or purposely overlooked, the Ambassador's comments did little to convince the State Department that the ROKG had the situation under control. The meeting ended with Yang receiving an official aide memoire from the Secretary communicating the USG's concerns over the election irregularities and the recent repressive measures taken against the Korean people.

McConaughy met with Rhee again for ninety-minutes on April 21<sup>st</sup> (Seoul time) to deliver the same aide memoire. The American Ambassador again realized how out-of-touch the Korean President truly was to the ongoing crisis. McConaughy pressed Rhee to recognize that there had been significant abuses which created general popular anger and that the demonstrations were a "bona fide expression of people's outrage." Rather than acknowledging the legitimate grievances of the protestors over the rigged elections, the President used the time to criticize the State Department for being misinformed and too pro-Japanese, while blaming the entire incident on a Catholic conspiracy spearheaded by his Vice President, Chang Myon, and the Bishop of Seoul. In response, McConaughy emphatically stated that the US did not believe

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from First Secretary Chyun Sang-jin Chyun to Ambassador Yang You-chan, 21 April 1960, Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 711.1960\_471, 4/19/1960 Documents, Korean National Diplomatic Academy Archives, Seoul, Korea.

for one-minute that Chang was the cause of the unrest, adding that he was not the type of man who could “fire action up this way.”<sup>70</sup> The Ambassador’s assessment on the Vice President was accurate, as multiple reports described Chang as well-intentioned, but a poor leader.

The State Department’s response to McConaughy’s summary of the meeting was one of disappointment. In response, the Department instructed the Embassy to keep a “firm line with Rhee” and noted that it could not accept his reaction. Showing a keen understanding by this time of Rhee’s playbook, the message also expressed confidence that the US military would be able to continue exercising a restraining influence on the ROK military establishment if the President attempted to divert attention from the current crisis by renewing a call to march north or to seize Dokdo.<sup>71</sup> The Department also recognized the need to start planning for a post-Rhee government as well, even advocating support for “a potential coup or military takeover as a caretaker government.”<sup>72</sup> As protestors continued to grow in number throughout the nation’s capital, it became evident to American officials that voluntary action by Rhee to resolve the situation was unlikely. An external force was necessary to force the President’s hand before the situation became completely untenable.

### ***The ROKA Takes a Stance***

When Lieutenant General Song Yo-chan assumed duties as the Martial Law Commander on April 19<sup>th</sup>, he found himself once again with the responsibility of protecting the nation’s capital. While he defended Seoul against Communist attacks as the Capital Division Commander during the war, he now needed to prevent the city’s implosion at the hands of its

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<sup>70</sup> EMBTEL 848, 21 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP. Perhaps representing the farthest reaches of the Catholic-Protestant conflict, Rhee was Protestant and considered a strong supporter of missionaries in the ROK. Chang was well-known as being a devout Catholic.

<sup>71</sup> Dokto, or Takeshima to the Japanese, is a small island in the East Sea/Sea of Japan that both nations claim as their territory. The issue still remains unresolved today and is a continued source of negative ROK-Japan relations.

<sup>72</sup> DEPTTEL 878, 23 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Record, 1960, NACP.

own residents. The situation was at a tipping point by the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> when National Police fired directly into the massive crowds surging towards Rhee's Presidential residence. Figures tallied two days later by the ROKA estimated that 115 people had already been killed and 783 people injured as a result of the clashes between the demonstrators and the National Police across the country, though mostly in Seoul. Of the 115, four were policemen.<sup>73</sup> Not only were the police visibly overwhelmed, they were also a major source of the problem. Despite multiple instances in Masan, Pusan, and finally Seoul of the National Police killing protestors, no punitive actions had yet to be taken against an agency long synonymous with Rhee's stranglehold on power.

The ROKA entered the fray with a full division, specifically the Fifteenth Division, an element of First US Corps. Song and the MINDEF, calling from the Presidential Palace, requested CINCUNC permission for these troops citing that the National Police were completely incapable of the handling the worsening situation.<sup>74</sup> The CINCUNC, with the Ambassador's concurrence, authorized the release of the entire division and a tank company. The residents of Seoul woke up the next morning to find the ROKA stationed at key points around the city. Song, with his newly arrived combat power, now had the means to crush the protestors. Instead, his actions proved unexpected. Rather than defend the President that he had shown great loyalty to during his tenure as ROKA CSA, Song opted to diffuse the situation peacefully by commiserating with the protestors. As expected by American military observers, the ROKA proved to be a stabilizing force during a powder keg of a situation. Song's restraint was due to his perceptive understanding of Rhee's future and the quiet influence exercised by the

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<sup>73</sup> Message KA 60701, CGEUSA to CGUSARPAC, 22 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>74</sup> EMBTEL 878, 19 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

CINCUNC behind the scenes.

An early conversation between Song and the US Army Attaché on April 20<sup>th</sup> in Seoul revealed the CSA's two main assessments on the situation. The first was that all the ROK Service Chiefs of Staff, including himself, deplored the use of Martial Law but acknowledged that the government had no choice since otherwise the "city would go up in flames."<sup>75</sup> Song's statement was likely plausible given the fact that unlike the Park regime, where Martial Law declarations were common, Rhee had only resorted to such an action once in 1952 to support his political machinations. The ROKA CSA at the time, General Yi Chong-chan, protested the President's actions and in return earned an immediate exile to the US.<sup>76</sup> The ROKA simply did not have experience in wielding power over the outcome of domestic events. With the memories of the Korean War still fresh throughout the 1950s, and President's Rhee's hold on political power all but guaranteed, the ROK military had maintained a singular focus on fulfilling its role as the guarantors of the nation's external defense.

Song's second point was that the ineptitude of the police was the central cause of the disturbances. The General expressed his deep dissatisfaction stating that after being informed about their unwarranted reprisals against the students, he immediately contacted the Directors of the National Police and Seoul Metropolitan police to halt such actions. Song also called for the relief of these two officials, though he admitted that he lacked the necessary power to exercise influence over them.<sup>77</sup> He used a meeting with Rhee on the April 20<sup>th</sup> to forcefully communicate his views on the police. When asked by the President to pinpoint the cause of the unrest, Song attributed the disorders to "weak police leadership, cabinet indecision, some Communist

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<sup>75</sup> EMBTEL 908, 20 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>76</sup> Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea*, 51.

<sup>77</sup> EMBTEL 908, 20 April 1960, LLP.

agitation, and popular anger at election irregularities." He emphasized the corruption and ineffectiveness of the National Police adding that the riots would continue if the police did not change their tactics. They had already shown a penchant for firing on demonstrators out of fear. In recollecting the meeting, Song described Rhee as an active listener who seemed content with the General's frank assessment, only displaying extreme anger when vowing to kill all the Democratic Party leaders.<sup>78</sup>

The demonstrations against Rhee did not cease with the implementation of Martial Law, though the government response did change significantly. Recognizing the National Police's tendency to provoke the student protestors, Song issued strict orders to his Soldiers early on that emphasized shooting only when absolutely necessary for their own protection.<sup>79</sup> He also stressed the need to maintain amicable relations with the students despite the tense situation.<sup>80</sup> As protestors continued to surge around key locations that included the Presidential residence and the National Assembly building, the ROKA soon had the opportunity to demonstrate that they intended to respond much differently than the police.

The first organized demonstration against the government since the imposition of Martial Law occurred on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Demonstrators led by approximately two-hundred faculty members representing all Seoul universities marched to the National Assembly building, gathering enthusiastic crowds along the way. By the time they reached their destination, the size of the group numbered in the thousands. This body of professors overwhelmingly passed a sixteen-point declaration that among other points, called for new elections and the resignation of Rhee's entire government. The procession marched without police or ROKA interference and dispersed

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<sup>78</sup> CIA Report Number TDCS-3/434,878, 21 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>79</sup> CIA Report Number TDCS-3/435,334, 25 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>80</sup> EMBTEL 908, 20 April 1960, LLP.

without incident after the rally's conclusion. Prior to their dispersal, ROKA vehicles bearing loudspeakers approached the crowd to broadcast a message that expressed the Army's unity with the nation, calling for calm, and promising that no one would be hurt.<sup>81</sup> This experience was noticeably different than the last mass demonstration that occurred outside the Presidential residence where nervous policemen fired indiscriminately into the crowd, necessitating the declaration of Martial Law.

The ROKA quickly made a positive impression to observers at all levels from the protesting students to the senior American officials in the country. McConaughy sent a telegram back to the Secretary following the aforementioned April 25th demonstration praising the Korean military's conduct. He described a situation where the "Army has evidently retained (the) good will of people who seem to regard them as their protectors against police who did the shooting on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Opposition, independent, and pro-government press have praised (the) manner in which martial law executed thus far."<sup>82</sup> The Army attaché provided additional supporting details to the Embassy's telegram stating that "much local amazement (over) ROKA troops' ability (to) hold composure and exercise complete restraint (in the) face of pressing demonstrators surging through various parts of Seoul." American news correspondents roaming the city echoed this sentiment by noting the ROKA's exemplary behavior with some reports describing the protestors showing their support for the Soldiers by openly embracing them.<sup>83</sup>

While the bar had been set extremely low by the police, the ROKA certainly appeared to be passing the test, much to the relief of both the ROKG and USG. By the 26<sup>th</sup>, it was evident that not only had the military shown restraint, it was actually sympathetic to the protestors'

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<sup>81</sup> EMBTEL 968, 15 April 60, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>82</sup> EMBTEL 962, 25 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>83</sup> Message CX-23, US Army Attaché to CINCUSARPAC/CGEUSA, 29 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

cause. The Embassy described a situation where the military had first proven to be friendly with the demonstrators by not shooting at them. As the day progressed, the ROKA had “allowed their ranks to be breached without resorting to force and by mid-morning, students were swarming atop some tanks without injury.”<sup>84</sup> Correspondents described the scene where these protestors, wearing the helmets of the Soldiers, shouted “long live our Soldiers” while the young tank crewmen joined the crowd in singing Korean war songs as tribute to the students that had given their lives during the protests.<sup>85</sup>

Song was also directly involved with the protestors, personally escorting a fourteen-man delegation to see the President to present their demands. By then, the President had realized his fate and quickly acceded to their list of stipulations that included the resignations of the President and Vice President elect, new elections, and a constitutional amendment for a parliamentary system. Within the course of a few hours during a busy morning, the man sometimes called the George Washington of Korea, effectively ended his near twelve-year run as President. The news spread like wildfire with thousands of protestors hearing it directly from the Fifteenth Division Commander stationed at the National Assembly building. The Embassy described the resulting protestors’ attitude toward the ROKA as “one of deep gratitude that they did not fire on (the) population, and (the) feeling of unity of army and people is pervasive.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the ROKA, the US Embassy received its fair share of commendation as well. As a true testament to the ingenuity of Korean teachers, a large group of elementary school students quickly assembled at the Embassy and zealously shouted “Thank you American Ambassador, thank you American uncles, the corrupt government has collapsed, a new

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<sup>84</sup> EMBTEL 979, 26 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>85</sup> “Quick to Wrath,” *Time*, May 9, 1960, 26.

<sup>86</sup> EMBTEL 979, 26 April 1960, LLP.

government will be established, please continue to help us, we will work harder to build a better country.”<sup>87</sup> While the State Department received much praise for its actions, the undeniable direct involvement in ROK domestic affairs also earned some criticism as well. Regardless of the level of perceived interference by the Ambassador and Secretary, their efforts would have been for naught if Song had not decided from the very beginning of Martial Law that the ROKA would take a conciliatory stance.

### *The CINCUNC’s Invisible Hand*

General Carter Magruder received much public attention regarding his role during the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 military coup but his actions during the 1960 Student Revolution remain largely overlooked. While Ambassador McConaughy met with Rhee multiple times during the course of events, Magruder only participated in one such meeting, the last one that occurred on April 26<sup>th</sup> after which Rhee announced his intention to resign. Yet, the CINCUNC had quite an influential role as well during this critical period. Unlike the Ambassador and Secretary of State who assumed very public stances, Magruder worked behind the scenes to leverage his military-to-military connections in hopes of preventing an uncontrollable situation that adversely affected his ability to defend the ROK. Examining Magruder’s involvement reveals two key conclusions. The first is that the CINCUNC had everything to lose and nothing to gain if the ROKA descended on the protestors with a heavy hand. As Magruder had released ROKA units from *his* operational command to support the ROKG’s efforts, he was inextricably linked to any action taken by the Korean military. Secondly, the CINCUNC effectively utilized his military connections as a means to influence ROKA actions and to encourage the Martial Law Commander to take a restrained approach.

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<sup>87</sup> EMBTEL 979, 26 April 1960, LLP.

The US military command in the ROK also followed the post-election events carefully due the inseparable link between internal instability and external defense. The CINCUNC directly interjected himself into a politically charged situation three separate times during March and April by releasing troops under his OPCON to the ROKG. The first instance occurred following the initial Masan riots on March 15<sup>th</sup> in response to the rigged Presidential election. As the situation turned for the worse, ROK CSA Song sent a message to the CINCUNC that stated “after-election situation is critical, request authorization of troops, especially Masan area.” Magruder responded less than twenty minutes later by verbally instructing Song that “there is no tactical requirement for ROK troops in Pusan for my mission. They are released to you for any local mission directed by your government.”<sup>88</sup> When demonstrations erupted again in Masan a month later on April 12<sup>th</sup>, the military again contacted the CINCUNC via the ROKA’s Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, who requested permission to utilize military guards for the Masan hydroelectric power plant, which was under potential threat from the demonstrators.<sup>89</sup> Magruder once again approved the request and reiterated that his March authorization was still in effect.

Magruder justified his decision to the CJCS, Lyman Lemnitzer, by asserting that the Korean government’s authority must be maintained regardless of the rigged election, though he strongly advised the MINDEF to avoid using the released troops if possible.<sup>90</sup> In the end, the government did not employ the ROKA to quell the disturbances during both the March and April Masan incidents. In retrospect, Magruder and the USG were extremely lucky. Briefly considering the “what if” scenario of the ROKA violently suppressing protestors reveals the fact

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<sup>88</sup> Message KA 60473, CGEUSA to CINCUSARPAC, 17 March 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Korean Elections, USAMHI.

<sup>89</sup> Message KA 60633, CGEUSA to CINCUSARPAC, 13 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>90</sup> Message NR 232352Z, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 April 1960, LLP.

that though the CINCUNC's authorization may have been a *military* decision, it had the potential of having very adverse *political* ramifications. The general populace understood that any Korean government's survival depended on support from the US. The facts also clearly stated that the Korean military only entered Masan with the American Commander's permission, so he too was ultimately responsible for their actions. It is not a stretch to believe that had the ROKA reacted violently in Masan, American standing would have suffered as well.

Heavy-handed ROKA actions likely would have generated headlines the next day that read "Army kills civilians, American military authorizes actions, US government supports undemocratic elections." Though not directly responsible, the US would have nonetheless been held accountable. A situation with many similarities, but different outcomes, actually occurred in another southern Korean city twenty-years later during an event known as the Kwangju Massacre.<sup>91</sup> The ROKG had suffered another military coup at the hands of General Chun Doo-hwan, who in turn declared Martial Law. In response, the citizens of Kwangju rose up to protest in May 1980 and were met by elite Army paratroopers who indiscriminately shot anyone in their sights. As the situation worsened, the ROKA requested and received authorization from the CINCUNC, General John Wickham, to pull the Twentieth Division from DMZ duty and deploy them to restore order in Kwangju.

American opinion among Koreans suffered greatly as a result of US actions during this crisis. By authorizing the release, whether justified or not, the CINCUNC assumed responsibility for the ROKA's conduct, which actually led to many more civilian deaths in the ensuing days.<sup>92</sup> Wickham's decision was tied to a broader political issue of the USG supporting

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<sup>91</sup> Exact death totals are unknown but higher estimates assert that up to two-thousand people died during the event.

<sup>92</sup> See General Wickham moved on to become the US CSA following his tenure as the CINCUNC. His memoir *Korea on the Brink: A Memoir of Political Intrigue and Military Crisis* offers his interpretations of key events that occurred during his command that included Park's assassination, Chun's coup and the Kwangju Massacre.

a military dictator (yet again), despite his deplorable actions. Anti-American sentiment only worsened when the newly-elected President, Ronald Reagan, made Chun the first visiting head of state of his administration.<sup>93</sup> With the level of direct influence in the CINCUNC's hands, perception, regardless of facts, often dictated the realities. Military decisions could rarely be considered in a vacuum, especially when the defense of the ROK also tangentially included internal stability.

The American military command was once again in a position to influence the course of domestic events when the student uprisings reached the nation's capital on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Initial reports described the presence of forty-thousand protestors involved in major civil disturbances across the city. With the Presidential Palace and National Assembly building as the primary targets for the demonstrators, the ROKG decided to declare Martial Law. The MINDEF, Kim Chung-yul, quickly contacted the CINCUNC and requested the release of the Fifteenth Division to the ROK CSA for missions directed by the Korean government.<sup>94</sup> Kim received permission to utilize the unit for quelling riots and enforcing Martial Law.

The CINCUNC justified the decision to release troops as his recognition of the urgent necessity to restore domestic order following a complete breakdown of civil authority. The ROK could not endure a perpetual state of disorder since the rioting could also have had a "profound effect on the military defense of the Republic of Korea."<sup>95</sup> American military commanders realized that the situation in Seoul was especially precarious with crowd sizes dwarfing similar protests across the country. Adding fuel to already blazing fire was the ill-advised conduct of the Korean National Police. While the CINCUNC's decision and justification were essentially the

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<sup>93</sup> See Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 382-3 for additional details.

<sup>94</sup> Message UK 80230, COMUSFK to CJCS, 19 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>95</sup> EMBTEL 962, 25 April 1960, LLP.

same ones for the authorization of troops at Masan, he needed to fully exercise his influence to ensure the ROKA's restraint or risk having a bloody situation in the capital.

Magruder's hands during the first days of the Seoul protest were truly invisible as he was actually in Hawaii to attend a pre-planned conference. Despite his geographic location, the General maintained constant communications with both Seoul and Washington given the flurry of telegrams that originated from US Army Pacific in Hawaii. Prior to leaving the peninsula, Magruder issued strict guidance on Martial Law measures to the Eighth Army Deputy Commanding General, General Emerson L. Cummings, who served as the acting commander in his absence. The first directive was that if the ROKG desired to impose Martial Law through the employment of the Korean military, units must be first released by the UN Command. Precedence had already been set with the Masan incidents and in the Magruder's eyes, the preservation of the CINCPAC's overall authority was paramount, even if he would be tied to the ROKA's actions during Martial Law. The second directive was that as advisors to the Korean military during the execution of Martial Law, the UN Command should absolutely exercise its influence "against unduly repressive measures."<sup>96</sup>

Cummings took Magruder's guidance to heart when he, along with the Ambassador, urged the MINDEF to exercise the minimum force necessary and "avoid at all acceptable costs any firing of civilians" in response to the request for the Fifteenth Division.<sup>97</sup> The message reached Song who as the Martial Law Commander, emphatically instructed his Soldiers to avoid shooting at the protestors at all costs. Magruder also reiterated the importance of avoiding severe repressive measures to Ambassador McConaughy after the declaration of Martial Law. He reasoned that since both the party in power (Liberal Party) and opposition power (Democratic

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<sup>96</sup> Message NR 192137, CINCPAC to CJCS, 20 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>97</sup> EMBTEL 962, 25 April 1960, LLP.

Party) were pro-American, the political outcome was not the primary concern. What was most important in the CINCUNC's assessment was that the Rhee regime "does not establish an absolute autocracy by repressive measures" as it would prove nearly impossible to recover any of the government's democratic character.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps of the mind that repression begets further repression, the CINCUNC understood the risks of Martial Law, but believed that the US was in a position to manage its execution through its ties to the ROK military.

Magruder returned to the ROK by April 25<sup>th</sup>, just in time to witness the next series of mass demonstrations in Seoul and the final days of Rhee's presidency. Not surprisingly, one of his first orders of business was to meet directly with General Song. Though official minutes of the conference were not taken, Magruder's handwritten notes in preparation for the meeting clearly reveal the key points of emphases that he planned to make. Magruder described the situation as being at a critical point, where "as long as (the) prestige and strength of (the) Army made it unnecessary to fire to control mobs, the government was secure and could act on (its) own initiative."<sup>99</sup> Had the ROKA taken the National Police's approach to crowd control, Rhee's government would have been solely on the defense, likely reacting unsuccessfully to an increasingly angry mob as the civilian body count rose. Instead, the ROKA's discretion placed it in a position where it could actually dictate events, despite the chaotic situation.

The CINCUNC's next set of notes were of special interest, especially given Magruder's background as a non-political General that had maintained a close personal relationship with Rhee. Rather than toting the conservative line that called for the ROKA's unwavering support to the current government, Magruder actually offered a scenario where Song himself could essentially determine the future course of the government. He wrote that "it is now a question of

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<sup>98</sup> Message NR 232353, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee's Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>99</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP.

how long will the Soldiers of the army side with the government against their friends and families. You must evaluate this and make your evaluation crystal clear to the government."<sup>100</sup> This statement revealed Magruder's understanding that the uprising was truly a popular one in nature, which as a legitimate expression for political freedom, likely had the support of the common Soldier. The government on the other hand, with Rhee in particular, was not a position to accurately understand the events, choosing either to dismiss the public's grievances or blame the ever-present Communist bogeyman.

Magruder also added that "at times of stress, men are confused. . . . confused men are not able to evaluate the wisdom of your actions but if they are confident that you are doing what you believe is best, not for yourself, not for a political party, but for your own people as a whole, they will follow you."<sup>101</sup> The CINCUNC placed both the future of the Korean government and its military in Song's hand. The ROK CSA's effective leadership could guide the country through this current crisis, but the implication was that any solution involved Song standing up to Rhee. The ROK CSA needed to convince the aging President that his assessment of the situation was wrong. If unsuccessful, he needed to prioritize the best interests of his country over his President by handling the protestors in a manner that could lead to Rhee's demise. Judging from the Song's actions during the critical days leading up to Rhee's resignation, he took Magruder's words to heart.

Song had determined by April 25<sup>th</sup> that the political situation was no longer in the hands of students, but under the direction of a more mature and sophisticated element of the Korean populace. He also doubted whether Rhee was even aware of the situation, let alone had any feel

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<sup>100</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

for the pulse of his people.<sup>102</sup> Song also already made very public efforts to assure the protestors that he was supportive of their aims since the implementation of Martial Law. Described as both genial yet firm by American correspondents, Song allegedly told the students to call on him anytime while bluntly warning the police that anyone “found beating, torturing, or abusing anyone will be dealt with under Martial Law.”<sup>103</sup>

The General adjusted quickly to his role as public savior, stating after the fact that he believed in the legitimacy of the student demands. Song also asserted that he quickly became convinced that “unless Rhee gave way, the only way the Korean army could save Rhee’s government would be by shooting down students in droves.”<sup>104</sup> He allegedly tried to convince the President on three separate occasions that if the students rioted again, the Army would refuse to shoot or even attempt to stop the demonstrations. Song emphasized that any violent actions in support of the ROKG would be an invitation for Communist action from the north.<sup>105</sup> Though his legend likely grew over the course of events, Song undoubtedly responded to the CINCUNC’s challenge and provided strong leadership during a period of ambiguity. In the process, the General chose to make a tough stand against his own President that others in his shoes may have avoided.

### **III. The Fall of the First Republic**

Rhee’s twelve-year rule effectively ended on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Having met the protestor representatives along with the American Ambassador and CINCUNC in the morning, the President issued a four-point statement that addressed his decision to resign, hold new elections, amend the constitution for a parliamentary system, and order the resignation of Lee Ki-poong

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<sup>102</sup> CIA Report Number TDCS-3/435334, 25 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, USAMHI.

<sup>103</sup> “Old Men Forget,” *Time*, May 2, 1960, 20.

<sup>104</sup> “Quick to Wrath,” *Time*, May 9, 1960, 26.

<sup>105</sup> Keyes Beech, “The Downfall of Syngman Rhee,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, July 9, 1960, 29.

from all his posts. A fifth condition not publicly announced but agreed to in private with Ambassador McConaughy was police reform. Amazingly, it was not Rhee or any senior member of his government that held a press conference afterwards, but the American Ambassador. Within the next two days, Rhee resigned as President and Lee Ki-poong suffered a tragic end when his entire family committed suicide together. Huh Chung assumed the Presidency and formed an interim government charged with paving the way for new elections later in the year.<sup>106</sup>

## **The Revolution Succeeds**

### ***Understanding Song's Decision***

Various individuals with different motives played key roles in influencing Rhee's decision to ultimately resign. The State Department representatives at home and abroad best channeled the USG frustrations with Rhee that had already been simmering for some time. Despite being a top recipient of American foreign aid for years, the ROK's economy still struggled while misappropriation of funds ran rampant. The rigged elections proved to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. President Eisenhower himself expressed his frustration stating that the US had fought for the ROK's freedom and unless Rhee permitted free elections, there was no sense in remaining in Korea.<sup>107</sup> From the American military's standpoint, although senior officials like Lemnitzer and Magruder still supported Rhee himself, they realized that prolonged public unrest adversely affected the external security of the ROK on a level that could not be ignored.

Unlike the distinct reasons of the American officials, the motives behind General Song Yo-chan's decision to stand against Rhee were less clear. He had, after all, willingly become an

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<sup>106</sup> MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 206-7.

<sup>107</sup> *FRUS, 1958-1960*, Volume XVIII, Japan; Korea, 1958-1960, Document 301.

accomplice of the fraudulent March elections. Why did he change his mind a month later? The answer likely lies with Song's early realization that Rhee simply did not have the means to diffuse the situation *and* stay in power. The General was never considered an educated man, having served as a non-commissioned officer in the Japanese Army and earning his stars through his sheer ability to lead in combat. He was, however, very perceptive, as evidenced by his actions during the earliest days of the revolution. In contrast to Rhee, who was cloistered within the palace walls and withheld information explaining the severity of the protests, Song stood at the front lines from day one, allowing him to make an accurate assessment of the revolution's strength. Though all the anger was not directed at Rhee, it was evident that the level of vitriol for Lee Ki-poong and the Liberal Party as a whole precluded any chance that the President could survive the revolution intact.

Song had open access to the two groups that most determined Rhee's fate, the USG and the protesters. As ROK CSA, he was in direct contact with the CINCUNC and his representatives, who also advised Song during Martial Law.<sup>108</sup> He clearly understood where Magruder and the broader USG stood in regards to Rhee's future. The General was also speaking to American intelligence officials as well, as much of his assessments on the situation came from CIA reports. Song also maintained contact with the MINDEF, Kim Chung-yul, who had an open channel with McConaughy throughout the event. The information received from these multiple contacts painted a picture that communicated an American unwillingness to blindly buttress Rhee given the severity of the election fraud. The State Department had already decided to consider post-Rhee options days before his eventual resignation.<sup>109</sup>

Song's access to the general public during the revolution was absolutely crucial as he

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<sup>108</sup> Carter Magruder to Lyman Lemnitzer, 2 July 1960, Box 301, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

<sup>109</sup> DEPTTEL 878, 23 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

formulated an unbiased assessment of the situation. He was able to gain a better understanding of the grievances behind the uprising not just through his direct interactions with the protestors, but also through the Soldiers under his command. Many of his troops in Seoul likely had friends and family participating in the demonstrations, causing Song to evaluate whether his men truly would engage the crowd if ordered. The choices in front of him were simply not favorable. He could direct his Soldiers to suppress the demonstrations and hope that they actually followed the order, a highly risky proposition at best. If his Soldiers did follow his orders, and ended up killing hundreds of students in the process, then Song would earn a place in Korean history as a butcher and not a hero. The General's best option, already having good knowledge of the American stance, was to let the protestors voice their frustrations and become the one government official that actually sympathized with their cause.

One of Song's military aides later commented that the dominant motive that shaped the General's actions was a desire to vindicate his improper actions during the election by supporting the will of the people.<sup>110</sup> Song did previously make his name through an anti-corruption campaign that espoused integrity. Though it is difficult to know for sure if vindication was his true motivation, it is likely that Song realized that once the new government was in power, the future was bleak for anyone tied to the old regime, let alone contributed to election fraud. The protests did not diminish after Masan, but rather grew in intensity especially after more civilian deaths in Seoul. The anti-Rhee wave surged ahead and Song had a first-hand view of its strength. He could either violently suppress the protests and cement his name in history for the wrong reasons. As an alternate option, Song could also support the demonstrators and come out as a hero, which may not save his job but would preserve his legacy. When put into this

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<sup>110</sup> Kim Quee-young, *The Fall of Syngman Rhee*, 138.

perspective, the reasoning behind the General's decision to condone the revolution seemed very obvious.

## **Assessing the “Winners”**

### ***The ROK***

Despite the harrowing events during the last days of April, the manner in which the 1960 Student Revolution concluded caused a deep sigh of relief from both the ROK and the US. An event that mixed tens of thousands of protesting students, an overwhelmed police force, and a division's worth of Soldiers within a confined area should not have ended well. Fortunately for the country, the revolution resulted in a relatively peaceful transfer of authority accompanied by a renewed commitment towards establishing a healthy democracy in the ROK. From the American perspective, the event earned universal praise from its key participants to include the CINCUNC, Embassy Seoul, and the State Department. Though they recognized that the hard work had just begun, all parties carried an optimistic vision of the ROK's future.

For Carter Magruder, the successful revolution represented the ROK's true desire for democracy and a willingness of its citizens to take responsibility for their country's future. In a message to the Lyman Lemnitzer containing the CINCUNC's key observations following Rhee's resignation, Magruder summarized his views by stating “we now have real evidence that the Korean people are determined to have a democracy.”<sup>111</sup> This statement implied that such a desire was not present beforehand. Magruder argued that in the past, given its great level of dependence, the ROK had developed the habit of looking to the US to fix its major problems. The fact that the Korean populace rose up and sought to address the election fraud on their own terms gave Magruder hope that an American presence in the ROK would not be an indefinite

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<sup>111</sup> Message UJ 80301, 28 April 1960, RG 218.2.1, NACP.

one. The CINCUNC expressed his pride to the CJCS, who also had a deep understanding of the ROK's recent history, by stating that "they (Korean populace) took action on their own responsibility instead of just crying to the US for help. This is evidence of a brave determination to establish a real and strong democracy."<sup>112</sup>

While his praise for the uprising was evident, so was the Magruder's continued support for Rhee. Not only did CINCUNC avoid faulting Rhee for any of his past transgressions, he even credited the President on several occasions for the revolution's success. In Magruder's eyes, "the uprising was successful largely because of the restraint exercised by President Rhee.... I honor President Rhee for recognizing the justification of the uprising, even though it was directed against him."<sup>113</sup> This statement reflected the views of a man who had served multiple assignments in Korea, first commanding a Division during the last days of the war, a Corps during the early years of armistice, and finally all military forces on the peninsula during a time of maximum political turbulence. Magruder had developed only respect and admiration for President Rhee throughout his many years of service in the country.

Given Ambassador McConaughy's overt role throughout the revolution, it was no surprise that the US Embassy viewed the event in a positive light. McConaughy's actions also earned him praise at the highest levels of government where the Director of Central Intelligence, Allen Dulles, credited the Ambassador's direct meetings with Rhee as the turning point of the revolution during a NSC meeting.<sup>114</sup> As the American spokesman, McConaughy advertised his thoughts very widely starting with a press conference on the morning of April 26<sup>th</sup>, where he emphasized the broader significance of the date by stating that "this is a day that will long be

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<sup>112</sup> Message UJ 80301, 28 April 1960, RG 218.2.1, NACP.

<sup>113</sup> Carter Magruder, "Post Revolution Observations" (Address, First ROK Corps Commander's Conference, Korea, May 17, 1960), available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>114</sup> *FRUS, 1958-1960*, Volume XVIII, Japan; Korea, 1958-1960, Document 313.

remembered by the Republic of Korea and its many friends abroad.” While the revolution in itself was momentous, the Embassy and the State Department viewed the events as a stepping stone to even greater achievements in the future. In the eyes of the Department, the preservation and possible enlargement of the political gains was key, a point stressed in a telegram to the Embassy which advised that “we should be prepared to go considerable lengths to maintain momentum achieved and forestall any retrogression.”<sup>115</sup>

What were the exact gains? For one, the State Department believed that the revolution created the conditions conducive for a “broadly based Korean administration dedicated to a Free World political system capable of achieving and maintaining popular support.”<sup>116</sup> Though the ROKG had displayed some democratic characteristics to include elections, a constitution, and even an opposition party, the increasingly authoritarian nature of Rhee’s rule made it difficult to consider it a shining example of democratic governance. This new situation, however, was not just important for the ROK, but for the USG’s broader Cold War efforts. The Department assessed that recent events “have raised stakes for US not only in Korea but in the whole free world context. (The) local situation cannot be allowed to deteriorate not only because of Korea’s importance but also because of bonus gains made *regionally* and *globally* in (the) principles for which we stand.”<sup>117</sup> In the Department’s eyes, the ROK finally had the potential to become a beacon of democracy surviving on the front lines of Communist aggression.

The State Department communicated its intent to press for a democratic government early on, offering immediate guidance to Embassy-Seoul following Rhee’s resignation. It instructed the Embassy to initiate contact with newly appointed interim President, Huh Chung, as

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<sup>115</sup> DEPTTEL 949, 5 MAY 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>116</sup> DEPTTEL 897, 27 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>117</sup> DEPTTEL 949, 5 MAY 1960, RG 84, NACP.

soon as possible. When meeting Huh, officials were to “assure him (of) our desire (to) cooperate and work closely with him in maintaining and furthering close Korean-American relations” and “emphasize (that the) US government intends to ensure survival of the ROK as a democratic member of the free world.”<sup>118</sup> Huh did his part in initially gaining McConaughy’s confidence during their first meeting by committing to heeding American advice, something that Rhee often failed to do. The Ambassador was especially impressed by the new President’s expressions of “desire (to) work closely with US, not only in taking steps (to) surmount (the) current crisis but in longer-range measures (to) lay foundations for more stable political order (in) Korea.”<sup>119</sup> In retrospect, though this ardent commitment to Korean democracy lasted barely a year, the Department’s hopes for the ROK were certainly high in late April due to an aura of political optimism and the presence of a cooperative partner in Huh.

### ***General Song Yo-chan***

The individual that received nearly universal praise from both Korean and American observers was the ROK CSA and Martial Law Commander, Song Yo-chan. His adept handling of the demonstrators during the most crucial points of the revolution secured the General a lasting place in Korean history, and for the right reasons. Song’s actions and willingness to sympathize with the revolutionaries earned him numerous accolades from the general public. He became known as the “People’s General” while also characterized as “the protector of students and friend of the people.”<sup>120</sup> Perhaps the strongest indicator of his growing prestige, however, were the rumors concerning a potential coup led by Song, one that the students and the USG supported. These whispers surfaced both immediately after Rhee’s resignation and lasted well

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<sup>118</sup> DEPTTEL 897, 27 April 1960, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>119</sup> *FRUS, 1958-1960*, Volume XVIII, Japan; Korea, 1958-1960, Document 312.

<sup>120</sup> Kim, *The Fall of Syngman Rhee*, 171.

into the following month. The prospect of a potential coup even reached as far as the United Kingdom where US Embassy London annotated an Economist article that cited the widespread conversations in the ROK concerning Song seizing power, though only if the political situation deteriorated rapidly.<sup>121</sup> The available archival evidence did not indicate American support for such a move, but rather painted Song as a reliable source of stability that needed to be leveraged in the future to meet US objectives in Korea.

While the chances of the USG advocating for a forceful seizure of power by Song seems low, it is still worth briefly discussing given that an actual military coup did occur in a little over a year's time. The idea of such an event comes primarily from sociologist Quee-Young Kim's 1983 monograph on the revolution titled *The Fall of Syngman Rhee*. Published prior to release of most relevant DOS and DOD archival material, Kim relied primarily on interviews, most notably with Kim Chung-yul, the ROK MINDEF during the uprising who played a critical role during the course of events. The Minister asserted that on April 27<sup>th</sup>, the day that the National Assembly accepted Rhee's resignation, General Song received a message from the KMAG Chief while meeting with the MINDEF. The note's first line allegedly read that "I am pleased to inform you that the American government is ready to support you as the head of a military government." Song vehemently denied any intention to accept the offer and asserted that he had already rejected overtures by General Magruder.<sup>122</sup> Shocked by the offer, the MINDEF immediately contacted the CINCUNC.

As the first ROK Air Force Chief of Staff and former liaison officer to the United Nations Command in Tokyo prior to its move to Seoul, Kim had a strong relationship with American Commanders and the Ambassador. Magruder expressed his unwavering support for the

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<sup>121</sup> EMBTEL G-1112, 25 May 1961, Box 9, File 330 Korea: May 1960, RG 84: General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>122</sup> Kim, *The Fall of Syngman Rhee*, 200.

MINDEF shortly after Rhee's resignation, writing to Lemnitzer that Kim was a "tower of strength and appears to be the mainstay of the government in its time of crisis."<sup>123</sup> During Kim's recollection of the events, he remembered asking Magruder to explain why the US wanted a military government when it already had a civilian one under Huh. Magruder's reply was that the message originated from the State Department. Kim subsequently telephoned McConaughy, who allegedly explained that placing Song into leadership was the best available contingency plan. The reasoning was that the US did not know Huh well enough. The MINDEF's response was that the Ambassador should simply get to know him better. He further characterized any plan for a military government as "scandalous" and "contradicting the ideals of your government." Kim asserted that McConaughy agreed to drop the plan in exchange for a guarantee that the US would retain OPCON of the Korean military.<sup>124</sup>

The State Department had considered a coup as a potential option during the revolution's earliest days as evidenced by a telegram sent to the US Embassy on April 23<sup>rd</sup> that advocated support for "a potential coup or military takeover as a caretaker government."<sup>125</sup> This plan, however, was a contingent on Rhee choosing to not go gently into the night. The situation by April 26<sup>th</sup> had changed drastically as observers realized that Song would not allow for violence overtaking the capital. The chances of the USG pressing for a military regime following Rhee's resignation were low, especially after its officials made very public calls for fair and democratic elections.

Magruder's support for a coup was also unlikely considering his personal message to Song on April 25<sup>th</sup> that expressed his opinion that "now we come to your opportunity, I think

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<sup>123</sup> Message UJ 80301, 28 April 1960, RG 218.2.1, NACP.

<sup>124</sup> Kim, *The Fall of Syngman Rhee*, 201.

<sup>125</sup> DEPTTEL 878, 23 April 1960, RG 84, NACP.

now is the time to get the military out of politics."<sup>126</sup> The idea that the State Department's preferred a military government due to its unfamiliarity with Huh's does not add up as well. The newly appointed President was already a known quantity to the USG. Allen Dulles described him to the rest of the NSC on April 28<sup>th</sup> as someone who "American observers had a high regard for" as a former Seoul Mayor and friend of Rhee, that recently displayed a great competence during his negotiations with the Japanese government over normalization of relations.<sup>127</sup> The USG certainly did have a place in mind for Song, but just not at the head of a military government.

Song did receive much adulation from American agencies for the restraint that he and his Soldiers exercised during the tense days of the revolution. The State Department instructed McConaughy on April 27<sup>th</sup> to commend Song for his actions and communicate the USG's intent to retain him on a most-favored government official status. The Department instructional telegram stated that "you (McConaughy) should also express our hope that General Song will continue to exercise his influence to maintain stability and to ensure that the Republic of Korea's vital security interests are not impaired. We will look forward to cooperating closely with him in helping these objectives."<sup>128</sup> The last line is of particular interest and distinctly communicated how important that the USG as a whole, and not just the DOD, considered its close ties with Korean military. The relationship was vital enough for the Secretary of State to essentially communicate directly with Song to encourage further cooperation.

The CINCUNC offered similar complementary remarks about Song in the period that

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<sup>126</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP.

<sup>127</sup> *FRUS, 1958-1960*, Volume XVIII, Japan; Korea, 1958-1960, Document 313. Huh had been serving as Foreign Minister prior to assuming the Presidency. Despite Rhee's staunch anti-Japanese stance, Huh's meeting with his Japanese counterparts allowed for positive progress being made towards a normalization of relations, more so than any other previous time of the First Republic.

<sup>128</sup> DEPTTEL 897, 27 April 1960, RG 84, NACP.

followed the uprising. Speaking at the change of command ceremony where Song relinquished his position to Lieutenant General Choi Kyong-nok, Magruder lauded the outgoing officer's achievements by stating that "you have maintained law and order without bloodshed. You have done much to establish the prestige of the Army and it is because of this great prestige that you have been able to maintain law and order during this difficult period."<sup>129</sup> Aside from the kind words, Magruder's regard for Song manifested most strongly when the ROK CSA finally faced judgement in late May for his actions during the Presidential elections. Song tendered his resignation to the interim President on May 20th citing pressure from younger ROKA officers that pushed for his ouster given his political improprieties.

Song believed that only a public statement of support by the interim government could preserve his authority as the CSA.<sup>130</sup> Magruder immediately met with President Huh on the same day to push for such a statement. Unfortunately for Song, his role in delivering the ROKA vote to Rhee's Liberal Party was already well-known. Though Huh offered to call the General in private for encouragement, he refused to support him publicly, which resulted in the CSA's resignation. While Song failed to retain his position, Magruder continued to watch out for him until the very end by arranging attendance to a fully paid yearlong program at George Washington University.<sup>131</sup>

### ***The ROKA***

For much of its modern existence, the ROK military was an entity that was widely seen but rarely heard. As a country that had recently endured a devastating war, it would have been

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<sup>129</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks" (Address, ROKA Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, May 26, 1960). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>130</sup> Message KA 61326, 23 May 1960, RG 338.9.8, NACP.

<sup>131</sup> Message UK 80757, CINCUNC to CSA, 12 October 1960, Box 301, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

difficult to find anyone in the ROK that did not have a link to its armed forces. It was, after all, the government's largest employer where males from all backgrounds and regions served a compulsory commitment. Its leaders, still young when compared to their American counterparts, were generally unknown and rarely garnered attention in the political sphere. The situation following the 1960 Student Revolution was completely foreign to the organization largely credited with its ultimate success, the ROKA. For the first time in the ROK's young history, its military not only intervened in a critical political affair, but also garnered universal praise for its actions. The greatest source of approval came from the American military, who for years viewed the Korean armed forces as the country's best hope for stability and growth. The exemplary conduct by Korean Soldiers pressed into Martial Law duty in April only validated the US military's faith in the institution.

Not surprisingly, Carter Magruder led the charge in advertising the ROKA's laudable performance to both officials in Washington and the wider Korean military. The General's initial reaction concerning the ROKA following Rhee's resignation was that it, under the leadership of Song Yo-chan, had conducted itself well during the crisis and emerged with greater prestige. The CINCUNC reiterated to the CJCS that "throughout this period, I have not felt concern as to the loyalty of the Korean Army nor its willingness to fight if the Communists attacked."<sup>132</sup> The ROKA had proven its ability to maintain its focus on the external defense of the country while simultaneously handling a major internal crisis. Most importantly for the US, the military had displayed its adherence to the CINCUNC's OPCON and did not in any way, deviate from the command arrangement. The ROKA had instead proven that American OPCON was still viable and strong.

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<sup>132</sup> Message UJ 80301, 28 April 1960, RG 218.2.1, NACP.

Magruder also credited the ROKA for its positive role during the revolution. He believed that the uprising's success was due to the efforts of moderate elements that included some members of the ruling Liberal Party, a few high government officials (such as the MINDEF), and much of the ROKA whose sympathy towards the students prevented it from taking strong measures against them.<sup>133</sup> In the CINCUNC's opinion, the ROKA performed exactly as he expected during the April uprisings, facing north to maintain the country's defense while maintaining law and order in Seoul when the police could not. As a result, "the Korean military forces not only gave the Korean people continuing assurance against overt aggression but they also may have given the Korean people a great deal of protection against internal disorders."<sup>134</sup> The army proved that both the external and internal defense of the country rested on its shoulders. Reflecting on the uprising at the start of the new year, Magruder could not help but to "look back on recent events with a sense of pride in the Republic of Korea Armed Forces.... during and after the April Revolution, they were the most stable of the public institutions within Korea."<sup>135</sup>

### **The Aftermath**

Not unlike other successful revolutions, the initial euphoria in the ROK wore off quickly as government officials, both new and old, realized that the dire economic conditions plaguing the country still existed. Though the general populace recognized that the new government would better reflect the will of the people, those elected found themselves with a short suspense to produce tangible results. As for the military, many ROKG civilian officials likely considered

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<sup>133</sup> Message UK 80306, CINCUNC to CJCS, 29 April 1960, Box 75, Folder: April 1960 Revolution, RG 218.2.1: Records of the JCS, General Records, NACP.

<sup>134</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks" (Address, USMC Mess Night, Seoul, Korea, January 23, 1961). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>135</sup> CINCUNC Message to Staff, 3 January 1961, Box 301, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

the army's first foray into national politics as an anomaly, believing that the organization would retreat into the background once again. Carter Magruder, on the other hand, recognized even as the revolution raged on that strong efforts needed to be made to discourage further ROKA involvement in political affairs. He personally interjected himself in the matter but unfortunately for Magruder, and the wider ROKG, this task proved more difficult than initially expected. As the General waged what seemed like a one-man battle aimed at maintaining the military's stability and detaching it from politics, he soon realized the impossibility of placing the proverbial toothpaste back in the tube once it had been squeezed out.

### ***Extricating the Military from Politics***

Through its actions during the 1960 Student Revolution, the Korean military received unprecedented levels of prestige and goodwill from the general populace. While the public's high regard for the institution remained intact after the events, the ROKA still sorely needed to address endemic problems that had plagued the organization prior to the uprising. The revolution had temporarily diverted the attention away from these internal issues, but they resurfaced again once the dust had settled. The critical difference was that Rhee was no longer present to assert his dominance over the military as he had done throughout his entire presidency. Instead, neither Huh's interim government or the soon-to-be elected Chang Myon administration had the power or inclination to assert its control over the armed forces. Economic issues, rather than security matters, dominated both of their governments. As a result, the ROKA descended into a period of internal turmoil which in retrospect, set the conditions for the May 1961 military coup.

As the CINCUNC, Magruder identified senior officer involvement in the illegal diversion of supplies and funds along with their misbehavior connected to the March Presidential election

as the two main issues still plaguing the ROKA following Rhee's departure.<sup>136</sup> These actions flamed the discontent of the younger generation of officers, junior leaders that Magruder assessed as getting stronger with US efforts in training and indoctrination. While the ROKA's role during the 1960 Student Revolution projected an image of professionalism and integrity to external observers, for a small group of junior officers, it served as the impetus for agitation against their corrupt, senior leaders.<sup>137</sup> Song had already initiated an integrity program to address the first endemic issue with relative success earlier in the year. Unfortunately, given his overt role in the election irregularities, he along with the other senior officers that supported Rhee became prime targets.

The subordinate officers who sought to eliminate their seniors relied on rhetoric that expounded a justification based on moral grounds, but they also fully recognized that a culling at the higher ranks opened previously closed doors for personal advancement. Magruder perceptively recognized the unhealthy environment within the Korean military and made a series of public remarks throughout the next year preaching the importance of loyalty and integrity within the armed forces. His efforts, however, received limited support from senior ROKG leaders. Magruder expressed his frustration that he had "sought to stiffen the attitude of the Chief of Staff of the ROKA and the Minister of Defense.... have been successful with the Chief of Staff but the Minister of Defense, like the Acting Prime Minister, is avoiding many issues that may arouse controversy."<sup>138</sup>

The greatest obstacle to Magruder's attempts to hold the ROKA together was the very

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<sup>136</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks" (address, ROK Army Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, February 20, 1961). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>137</sup> CINCUNC's Assessment on the ROK Army, February 1960, Box 293, EUSA G2 Intel Admin File 1960, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

public knowledge of Song's role in the March elections. Adding to the fire was the depth of involvement from numerous senior leaders below Song. The American military command was fully aware of the ROKA's political activities before the election. Intelligence reports prior to the event identified the usage of the ROKA's Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) for political matters.<sup>139</sup> One instance included orders to all CIC detachment chiefs instructing them to conduct secret investigations on all embassies in Seoul in order to report on their views of the election process. Another example included Song leading one-hundred and nineteen officers attending a ROKA commander's conference to Rhee's residence to reaffirm their allegiance to the President prior to the election. The CSA also led a smaller delegation to see Lee Ki-poong, Rhee's chosen Vice Presidential candidate, for similar reasons. In addition, thirty-eight officers recommended by Song received promotions to Brigadier and Major General early in 1960 so they could assume key command positions at the Division, Corps, and Army levels by mid-February. This strategic move essentially guaranteed Song's control of the military vote for the March election.<sup>140</sup>

Magruder never openly criticized Song's involvement in the election but rather expressed his understanding by asserting that it was more important that the CSA not be eliminated from his position for ignoring Rhee's directive. He did, however, press Song to prepare for the withdrawal of the ROKA from politics prior to Rhee's resignation. In his initial meeting with the CSA following his return from Hawaii on April 25<sup>th</sup>, Magruder expressed his opinion that the Korean government required sweeping reforms to survive and ensure fair elections. The ROKA

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<sup>139</sup> The CIC's primary function was supposed to be the prevention of subversion or espionage within the ROKA, but was often used for other means as directed by the President.

<sup>140</sup> Report on the Utilization of Armed Forces in Civilian Political Activity-1960 Presidential Election, Eighth US Army G-2, February 25, 1960, Box 293, EUSA G2 Intelligence Administration File 1960, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP

needed to be a key element of these efforts with “the discontinuance of any expectation on the part of politicians that the military will be influenced by its officers to vote for the party in power.”<sup>141</sup> He also recognized that the ROKA’s exit from politics required an education program for all ranks that strategically communicated the military’s positive role in the revolution. Rather than risk the interpretation that it was the ROKA’s duty to correct any political wrongdoings, the CINCUNC sought to inculcate the message that the uprising was successful because people within the ROKG felt that it was justified, to include the military who chose not to fight. The events proved that the government already had a mechanism to address wrongdoings and prevent further uprisings. The ROKA was part of this mechanism, but not the sole solution.<sup>142</sup>

What was the ROKA’s role in this new political atmosphere in the eyes of the CINCUNC? As Magruder frequently engaged the broader military audience through a series of speeches at various units and changes of command, his answer was clear. The ROKA must support the democratic process by serving as its protector. The post-revolutionary environment gave the military the perfect opportunity to retreat from politics and utilize its prestige to bolster a democratic government. Magruder’s message to Korean Soldiers was that “the Army must recognize no country can tolerate frequent overthrows of its government, it must do what is necessary to maintain law and order. If you in the Army, who enjoy much prestige, can convince your family and friends that the Army will be *resolute in supporting the government* and expects

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<sup>141</sup> Carter Magruder Personal Notes for Meeting with Song Yo-chan, 26 April 1960, CBMP.

<sup>142</sup> Message UK 80307, CINCUNC to CJCS, 29 April 1960, LLP, Box 17, Folder: Rhee’s Overthrow, April-May 1960, USAMHI.

(the) people to accomplish further objectives through polls, you will help the wise and moderate elements among people in maintaining restraint during (the) hour of trial.”<sup>143</sup>

Magruder’s success in removing the ROKA from politics was limited. In his defense, the military did largely retreat from direct political involvement during the Huh and Chang governments. The elections that swept Chang and his Democratic Party into power were widely considered fair and void of any ROKA involvement. The CINCUNC gave all the credit to Lieutenant Choi Kyong-nok, Song’s replacement as ROK CSA. Magruder’s remarks during Choi’s outgoing ceremony in February 1961 praised the General for his role in divesting the ROKA from politics. The CINCUNC asserted that during Choi’s tenure, “you have not only taken the Army out of politics, you have kept the politicians from exerting improper influence within the Army. You have continued the campaign to raise the integrity of the Army and although much remains to be done much has been accomplished.”<sup>144</sup> Choi’s time as the ROKA’s top officer, however, lasted only five months and the likely reason for his dismissal reflected the ROKA’s lingering connection to the political world. Although chosen as the first post-Rhee CSA for his reputation of political neutrality and nonalignment with the former President, the government decided to replace Choi early because he had refused to divert nearly \$2.4 million from the Army budget to support the ruling Democratic Party.<sup>145</sup>

### ***Turmoil within the Ranks***

The strongest argument against Magruder’s success in removing the ROKA from politics stems from the undeniable fact that elements led by Park Chung Hee executed a military coup a

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<sup>143</sup> Carter Magruder, “Commander’s Remarks” (address, First ROK Corps Visit, Korea, May 17, 1960). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>144</sup> Carter Magruder, “Commander’s Remarks” (address, ROK Army Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, February 20, 1961). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>145</sup> Kim, *Politics of Military Revolution*, 83.

year after Rhee's ouster. Park's ability to conduct a coup, however, was not due to the CINCUNC's failure to discourage senior military leaders from political involvement, but rather his inability to prevent the internal culling of senior officers that occurred between the 1960 Student Revolution and the May 1961 coup. As addressed in the previous chapter, a group of relatively junior Field Grade officers led the charge to remove any senior leader implicated for fiscal and political improprieties. Aided partially by the Chang administration's purported drive to clean up the government, this movement was partially successful in removing select senior officers from service, most of whom agreed with Magruder's message against the ROKA's political involvement. These officers, branded as Rhee supporters and forced to retire, were also the ones that had the prestige and seniority to counter Park's actions in May 1961.

Magruder recognized early on the dangers of junior officer agitation engulfing the military following the revolution. During his first remarks to the ROKA on May 17<sup>th</sup> following Rhee's resignation, the CINCUNC warned that "now is no time to work off grudges on senior officers."<sup>146</sup> He reiterated the point at Song Yo-chan's departure ceremony later in the month by asserting that "in my opinion, the greatest threat against the prestige of the Army is internal dissention.... now is not the time for junior officers to act against grudges but to look to the future and do what is best for the interest of Korea and the army."<sup>147</sup> Magruder also emphasized that his first priority remained stopping the elimination of senior officers for political reasons at a year-end ROKA senior commander conference. He lamented that many senior officers who proved their ability to command in the Korean War had been eliminated based on evidence that

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<sup>146</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks," First ROK Corps Visit, CBMP.

<sup>147</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks" (Address, ROKA Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, May 26, 1960), available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

would not stand up in American court.<sup>148</sup> While the CINCUNC was able to temporarily to stop the heavy bleeding by discharging many of the agitators to include Kim Jong-pil, a key coup participant, the collateral damage experienced by the ROKA left it in a weakened state.<sup>149</sup>

On the eve of the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 coup, most of the senior Korean officers with the strongest ties to the American military were either retired or out of the country. Examining the status of the former ROK CSAs during this timeframe illuminates the severe lack of senior leaders positioned to exercise their influence in preventing a coup. It should also be noted that these former Chiefs were significant not only for their seniority, but also because some were leaders of military factions that served as the basis of loyalty within the army. It is amazing to consider that of the seven General officers who served as the ROK CSA prior to the coup, four were out of the country at the time, three of which that departed as a result of the 1960 Student Revolution. Three of the four not in the ROK, Chung Il-kwon, Paik Sun-yup, and Song Yo-chan, also were the ones that had the personal power to stop Park if desired. The common denominator between these three General officers was that they were all renowned military figures with strong personal ties to the US and Rhee. The reasons behind Song's prestige and absence from the ROK has already been previously discussed in the detail. Chung and Paik, both of whom professed the desire to keep the ROKA out of politics in the past, held even more influence than the Student Revolution's hero.

Chung Il-kwon and Paik Sun-yup represented the ROKA's two most illustrious figures, making a name for themselves and earning the respect of American military officers due to their combat leadership during the Korean War. They also were the leaders of the two most powerful

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<sup>148</sup> Carter Magruder, "Commander's Remarks" (Address, ROKA Senior Commander's Conference, Seoul, Korea, December 14, 1960). Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>149</sup> Magruder Oral History, 17.

rival factions in the early days of the ROKA, the Northeastern (Hamgyong Province) faction led by Chung and the Northwestern (Pyongan Province) faction led by Paik.<sup>150</sup> Chung retired from service in 1957 and left the ROK to serve as Ambassador to Turkey after being reprimanded by Rhee for his alleged involvement in the assassination of the President's CIC Commander. He was studying at Harvard University when the coup occurred. Paik resigned from active duty on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 following Song's resignation as CSA. At the time, he was the ROKA's most senior officer and serving as the CJCS. Despite his war hero status, the ROKA's first four-star general was also implicated for delivering the military vote to Rhee and left the country to serve as the Ambassador to the Philippines. These two officers, along with Song, possessed the prestige and personal following to counter any coup attempt by a small group of relatively junior officers. Their absence was a key reason for Park's unexpected success.

The effects of the 1960 Student Revolution on the ROK military were undoubtedly significant. On an external level, the uprising reaffirmed the existing belief that as an institution, the ROKA represented a modern, professional organization that could be trusted in defending the interests of the Korean people. Internally, the revolution gave the ROKA first-hand experience in determining the outcome of a mainly political matter. While the event may not have automatically caused senior military leaders to support the army's involvement in politics, it inevitably made a lasting impression on a small group of officers that ultimately executed the coup. These officers acted due to their professed disdain for the corruption that had engulfed both politicians and senior officers. From a practical standpoint, they witnessed first-hand how vulnerable the civilian government was to the power of military action.

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<sup>150</sup> Men originally with North Korean backgrounds dominated the ROKA officer corps during its earliest days. With the four-year Korean Military Academy yet to be in existence during the first years of the Army, loyalty to geographical factions was the driving force behind intra-military politics.

The most significant connection between the 1960 Student Revolution and the 1961 coup was the weakened state that the ROKA found itself after months of internal discord. A leadership void appeared due to the dismissal of many of the military's most capable leaders, ones that likely would not have condoned a coup, but were tainted by their illicit involvement in previous presidential elections. The conditions only worsened when Prime Minister Chang Myon and his Democratic Party assumed power and sought to expunge anyone with connections to Rhee and his Liberal Party. Multiple senior military leaders, most of whom supported the CINCUNC's push for noninvolvement in political affairs, faced retirement or were absent during that fateful spring day in 1961. As a result, a relatively junior General Officer who did not have broad support within the ROKA was able to capitalize on this void, and successfully execute a coup with minimal resistance.

### **Conclusion: Identifying the Links**

Assessing the events of the April 1960 Revolution from a military point of view reinforces the idea that American OPCON over the ROK military gave the US a unique lever to exercise its influence over Korean political affairs. The public mantra by senior American officials to include the Secretary of State and the Ambassador during the uprising was that the US did not interfere in Korean domestic affairs, but rather gave advice as a close friend. When considering the overt pressure by the State Department compounded by the CINCUNC's behind-the-scenes influence, it was evident that the American role extended far beyond giving friendly advice. For Carter Magruder, the revolution reinforced the existence of a uniquely strong bond between the American and Korean militaries. He doubted that "any other overseas forces of the US Army enjoy closer relationships with foreign military personnel than in Korea. The fruits of

our close relations became evident during and after the April political uprising in this nation.”<sup>151</sup>

What were the “fruits” that the General was so enthusiastically touting? The golden apple was the influence that he as the CINCUNC along with the American military advisors from KMAG exercised over the ROKA during the tense days of the uprising. Magruder clearly believed the US military was able to positively affect the behavior of the ROKA throughout the course of the revolution. According to the CINCUNC, “ROK leaders could have used this opportunity to usurp political power. Instead, they took decisive action to ensure orderly restoration of civilian control by democratic processes.”<sup>152</sup> Despite being a political uprising, once the ROKA interjected itself into the situation, especially after the declaration of Martial Law, the American military command’s grasp of the situation through daily reporting proved to be unmatched. Whether through the KMAG officers or direct communication with the Martial Law Commander, the information flow kept the CINCUNC fully apprised of the developing situation and in turn, served as channels of direct influence over the ROKA’s actions.

Secondly, the ROK military’s conduct also reaffirmed that the OPCON channels were fully functioning. The Korean government had shown its willingness to work through the American command to gain release of ROKA troops for the uprisings at Masan and Seoul. While seeking CINCUNC permission for troop employment placed Magruder in a position to be personally accountable if events went south, it was a comforting symbol of the ROK’s respect for American OPCON of its forces. The relationships that existed as a result of the OPCON relationship also proved pivotal. Song Yo-chan’s crucial role in the uprising was incontrovertible, but so was his willingness to respect Magruder’s position as the overall military

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<sup>151</sup> Carter Magruder to Lyman Lemnitzer, 2 July 1960, Box 301, General Officer Correspondence, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

commander and keep the lines of communication open. The same can be said for Kim Chung-yul, who many considered one of the driving forces within the ROKG that convinced Rhee to resign. The MINDEF's actions throughout the crisis also reflected respect for Magruder's OPCON authority and a desire to keep the senior American officials in the ROK updated on the news emanating within the palace.

Magruder understood that despite the optimism that sprung from the successful student uprising, the future of a strong democratic government was far from guaranteed. The CINCUNC offered this opinion to the CJCS shortly following Rhee's official resignation by stating that "I consider it mandatory that we do everything we possibly can to help the ROK through this period, which may now be approaching the true crisis. If we do not so act and if the Korean leaders do not move vigorously to establish a strong, free democracy, then this could well be the beginning, rather than the end, of serious uprisings."<sup>153</sup> The CINCUNC's warning proved true in that the actual crisis was yet to come, but would arrive unexpectedly on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961.

To fully understand the causes of 1961 Military Revolution and the actions of its key figures, the links to the 1960 Student Revolution must first be considered. Magruder received yet another opportunity to influence Korean political affairs as the CINCUNC a year later. Through his own admission, the General admitted that the actions he observed in April 1960 directly influenced the critical decisions he made in May 1961.<sup>154</sup> The same line of thought can also be applied to the Korean public, who because of the good reputation earned by the ROKA in April 1960, were secure in placing their trust in them again in May 1961.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Message UK 80306, 29 April 1960, RG 218.2.1, NACP.

<sup>154</sup> Magruder Oral History, 196.

<sup>155</sup> Embassy Dispatch 550, 31 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea May 20-31, 1961 RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

**CHAPTER III**  
**The May 16<sup>th</sup> Military Coup:**  
**American Operational Control at the Brink**

At approximately 3:00 am on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961, General Carter Magruder, CINCUNC, received a call from Lieutenant General Chang Do-young, ROKA Chief of Staff, notifying him that a military coup had commenced. Troops drawn from the First ROK Marine Brigade, Sixth ROK Corps Artillery, and three ROKA Reserve Divisions were in the progress of seizing control of Seoul, meeting little resistance along the way. It had only been thirteen months since a massive student uprising ended Korea's twelve-year First Republic under Syngman Rhee. The US had played a significant role in an event that was supposed to set its ally on a course for a viable democracy. Instead, Magruder found himself once again deeply entrenched in another political maelstrom less than two months from the end of his tenure as CINCUNC. With coup forces moving rapidly and efficiently, there was only a small window that existed for the US to counter the unexpected seizure of power.

The situation in Washington and Seoul set the conditions for the CINCUNC to assume the driver's seat in dictating the USG's response. Both the President and Secretary of State were out of the country at the time. The US Embassy also lacked an Ambassador as the designated appointee awaited Senate confirmation. Within a short forty-eight-hour period, Magruder made a series of pivotal decisions with little to no guidance from Washington that directly influenced the coup's outcome. The CINCUNC's actions received a fair share of criticism from the press and other Korea observers who did not fully comprehend the situation on the ground. While the coup was a political act, the key actors were primarily in the military. Unfortunately, the existing scholarship on this pivotal event focuses little on Magruder's role. A deeper

understanding of the event requires recognition of the political-military priorities that drove both the CINUNC's early decisions and Washington's subsequent guidance once a new Korea policy had been set.

### **Existing Interpretations**

The purpose of this chapter is to address two primary questions, why Park Chung Hee's May 16<sup>th</sup> military coup succeeded and why the US chose to accept his military junta as the new government in the ROK. Recent scholarship addressing similar historical questions have provided strong answers based on a renewed interest of the event. In accordance with the unifying theme that ties together all the sections in Ezra Vogel's edited volume *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Yong-Sup Han's "The May Sixteenth Military Coup" chapter argues that the revolution's success was due to the man that masterminded it, Park Chung Hee. Han lists a series of factors that drove the military's entry into politics but asserts that the junta's ability to consolidate power after the coup was due to Park's strategic thinking and acute understanding of power. Under Park's leadership, he was able to quickly gain the confidence of a Korean populace that had become disillusioned with its civilian politicians. He was also able to expertly maintain his own power by controlling factionalism within the military and effectively utilizing the newly created Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to suppress any potential challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Greg Brazinsky offers a related explanation that focuses on Park, but from the American perspective. He argues that that the US could have challenged Park, but chose to accept his regime because the Kennedy administration believed that his military background and relative

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<sup>1</sup> Han Yong-sup, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup" in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, ed. Ezra Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 56.

youth were needed to push reform and modernization in the beleaguered country.<sup>2</sup> The US initially chose a wait and see approach, which transitioned into open support after Park consolidated power. The administration recognized the military regime's ability to promote development in spite of its nationalistic and authoritarian tendencies.<sup>3</sup> Brazinsky's argument largely rests on the attitude of multiple Kennedy administration officials that supported popular theories that considered militaries within developing countries as potential catalysts for economic and social change.<sup>4</sup> While these theories primarily focused on Latin America, recent successful military coups in Turkey and Pakistan, along with existing frustrations over the ROK's democratic government, lessened the concern over the Korean military's seizure of power, especially considering its close relationship with their American counterparts.

The primary weakness behind both Han's and Brazinsky's arguments is that they focus on the coup's success *after* Park's initial consolidation of power. By doing so, they gloss over a critical phase of extreme vulnerability for the military junta. Park's rule experienced multiple periods of instability until 1965, but none more so than within the first three weeks of the revolution when American support was not fully guaranteed. Analyzing the coup in two distinct phases assists in the understanding of its intricacies. The first phase encompasses the initial seventy-two-hours after the coup commenced, which was the only period that the US could have forcefully reversed the outcome. The second phase encompasses the first three-weeks of the military revolution, where the US adopted a wait and see approach, though scholars have not addressed in detail what Washington was actually waiting to see. It was during these two phases that the US ultimately determined the viability of Park's regime.

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<sup>2</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>4</sup> See Morris Janowitz's *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*.

The underlying thread that ties these phases together is the US-ROK military alliance. I argue that the success of Park's May 16<sup>th</sup> military coup and the American acceptance of his military government were driven by the unique characteristics of the alliance, primarily American OPCON over Korean military forces. While Park did display a remarkable level of preparation and foresight as he executed the revolution, American action (and inaction) ultimately determined its success. Park's coup was not a massive uprising by the wider ROK armed forces, but rather an event instigated by a smaller group within it. The CINCUNC demonstrated the ability to leverage his command authority to suppress the coup early on, but chose not to do so because of broader political implications. Understanding that his primary mission was the ROK's defense against external aggression, Magruder avoided acting against the coup forces without first gaining support of the ROKG's civilian leadership. When both the serving Prime Minister and President showed little interest in standing up to Park's actions, Magruder refocused his efforts from reversing the coup to reestablishing OPCON over the Korean military.

The USG's decision to accept the military junta stemmed from Park's willingness to guarantee American OPCON over the ROK armed forces. Washington remained noncommittal to the Park's revolutionary group early on, causing a high-level of consternation among the junta who despite nationalistic tendencies, realized that its survival depended on American backing. Assured USG support for the regime did not occur until June 6<sup>th</sup> as it initially adopted a wait and see approach. What was the US waiting to see? A noticeable change in the USG's attitude coincided with an agreement between the military junta and the CINCUNC that formalized Park's commitment to a command relationship that had existed since the earliest days of the Korean War. Restoring and preserving the OPCON arrangement was Washington's top priority

and once Park showed a willingness to honor the historical agreement, the US was in a position to openly accept the junta.

The military uprising initially fueled criticisms against Magruder's actual authority as the CINCUNC and the strength of American OPCON over the Korean military. Deeper analysis of the event, however, demonstrates that the coup was actually a testament to the CINCUNC's influence in both Korean political and military affairs. He alone retained the ability to crush the revolution with key ROK military leaders remaining loyal to him as the senior commander on the peninsula. The coup also demonstrated that retaining OPCON over Korean forces was the top priority not just to the CINCUNC, but also for the broader USG. While other factors such as avowed anti-Communism were certainly influential in the USG's decision-making calculus, support for any regime that did not guarantee American OPCON was highly unlikely.

### **I. The ROK on the Eve of Military Revolution**

The immediate period following the 1960 Student Revolution rightfully provided the Korean populace a reason for optimism going forward. A massive general uprising had after all, caused the end of an increasingly authoritarian regime that did not reflect the general will of the people. The ROK military also proved supportive of the public's need for political change, as did the US. The interim government under President Huh Chung proved capable of reestablishing stability across the country and paving the way for legitimate elections in July 1960. As a result, the ROK's Second Republic emerged as the country's first truly democratic government under the leadership of Prime Minister Chang Myon and the Democratic Party. This new administration differed greatly from Rhee's as a bicameral parliamentary system replaced a government previously based on centralized Presidential authority. While hopes for a free, democratic government remained high, the reality was that the ROK suffered from the same

economic woes that it had endured under Rhee. The Prime Minister's ability to address these realities ultimately determined the fate of his government.

### **Assessing the Second Republic**

Understanding the USG's views on the ROK's Second Republic in the months leading up to the May 16<sup>th</sup> revolution provides insight as to why the US did not fight tooth and nail to preserve the democratically elected Chang government. While the Prime Minister had been in power for eight months when the coup occurred, internal USG documents reveal that American confidence on the viability of his administration had soured many months earlier. The same assessments that considered Chang cooperative and pro-American also viewed him as a weak and ineffective leader. His government faced a no-win situation as adherence to US-backed policies, many of which were unpopular but necessary for the ROK's economic survival, became construed as symbols of Chang's weakness. Park's seizure of power barely registered a blip on the radar in the eyes of the Korean people. Embassy reports described life in Seoul as "routine" with "people going about their business" by May 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup> While Park's coup itself was a surprise, the demise of Chang's government was not. Multiple US agencies assessed that the Second Republic was on precarious footing, but none predicted that its downfall would come at the hands of a small, relatively junior group of military officers.

### ***The Chang Myon Government***

The ROK's Second Republic arrived following a National Assembly election held on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1960 and a Presidential election on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1960. The nation's first and only attempt at a parliamentary democracy resulted in the political power resting with the Democratic Party, the opposition party to Syngman Rhee under the leadership of Prime Minister Chang

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<sup>5</sup> EMBTEL 1557, 17 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, RG84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

Myon. Yun Po-sun, a longtime rival to Chang, assumed the now largely ceremonial role of President. While optimism over the ROK's first true democratic government was certainly high, the reality was that as early as September 1960, USG elements began to question the viability of this new regime. It soon became evident to American observers that the Chang administration would not rise above the endemic corruption that long-plagued Korean politics or satisfy the public's demand for immediate improvements.

The American military command in the ROK was the earliest to express doubts over the new regime. An Eighth Army G-2 Political Assessment written on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, predicted that "the Chang administration will enjoy a four to six-month lifespan, and most likely endure for eight months to a year. In the long-term, however, the government will founder (sic) because of (its) inability to fulfill overoptimistic public expectations for basic economic and social improvements."<sup>6</sup> This statement proved to be a remarkably accurate prediction of future events. The US Embassy also provided a similar assessment as Ambassador Walter McConaughy observed an "inevitable public let-down" by late September as the honeymoon period for the new government wore off. According to the Ambassador, the inflated expectations of those that ousted Rhee faced by the summer's end the stark reality of economic underdevelopment, unemployment, continued division of the peninsula, and existing human fragility.<sup>7</sup>

By the new year, additional negative assessments percolated up to the senior levels of the USG. One example was the widely distributed Farley Report dated March 1961 and authored by Hugh D. Farley, recently returned from the ROK after serving as the Director of the International

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<sup>6</sup> Francis K. Cook, "Local Political Situation", G2 Political Assessment, 1 September 1960, Box 293, EUSA G2 Intel Admin File 1960, RG 338.9.8: Records of Eighth Army, NACP.

<sup>7</sup> Walter McConaughy to J. Graham Parsons, 20 December 1960, J. Graham Parsons Papers (JGPP) Box 2, Folder 53, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, University Library, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Cooperation Administration's (ICA) Technical Assistance Program. He painted a dire picture of a Korean government plagued with graft and corruption. Farley described the ROK as a "sick society" as of February 1961, with the "whole fabric of Korean life, the structure of its basic institutions" as being "shot through graft, corruption, and fraud."<sup>8</sup> While senior USG officials downplayed the alarm sounded by Farley, they did recognize that the potential for further instability was very real. This belief was clearly evident in a memo written in response to the Farley Report by Robert Johnson, NSC Staffer, to Walter Rostow, Kennedy's National Security Advisor, that expressed concern over further revolutionary action. According to Johnson, the April 1960 Revolution had "awakened Korean Nationalism, cast up new political forces, aroused public interest in public matters, created strong public pressure to end corruption and economic ineptitude that characterized the Rhee administrations."<sup>9</sup>

Farley's assessment on the ROKG proved to be quite accurate as the Korean public grew increasingly disillusioned with the corruption associated with civilian politicians, an issue that was supposed to be eradicated following the 1960 Student Revolution. General Hamilton Howze, KMAG Chief during the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup, also recollected associating corruption with the Chang government. He described the administration as one doing reasonably well in the eyes of the Embassy while being friendly to the US and supportive of its policies. It had, however, done almost nothing to address the rampant corruption within the government.<sup>10</sup> The Korean press in turn, widely publicized the new government's infatuation with maintaining a majority in the National Assembly. Media reports colored the Chang government as one displaced from reality and more concerned with maintaining political power than meeting the needs of the people.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh D. Farley Report, 15 March 1960, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: 1/61-3/61, JFKL.

<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Komer to Walt W. Rostow, 15 March 1960, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: 1/61-3/61, JFKL.

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton Howze Oral History, 29.

<sup>11</sup> McConaughy to Parsons, 20 December 1960, JGPP.

When elements of the Korean military, the one government entity not associated with malfeasance in the Farley Report, forcibly seized power in May, it had done so in the spirit of rooting out corruption.

The USG also maintained a fairly accurate grasp of the changing views of the Korean youth as a result of the April 1960 Revolution. Possibly the worst course of action that Chang's government could have taken was to appear as an extension of the corrupt old guard, just through a different political party. Secretary of State Dean Rusk communicated these exact concerns to Walter McConaughy a month before the coup as the Ambassador prepared to exit the ROK and become the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (A/S FE). Rusk warned McConaughy that the ROK, with its seemingly tenuous future, would continue to be one of the Department's greatest concerns as long as it "lacks forceful leadership, exhibits serious weakness in moral fiber, and permits graft and corruption on scale equaling if not excelling that during the moral nadir of (the) Rhee regime."<sup>12</sup> In Rusk's estimate, Chang had indeed followed the worst road possible. In the eyes of some observers, the Prime Minister's government reached levels of corruption within eight months that bested even Rhee's twelve-year effort.

Rusk also advised McConaughy that prior to his departure, he needed to stress upon the Prime Minister that the "youth and intelligentsia in Asia are no longer in the mood to continue accepting Asian accommodation to graft, nepotism, and apathy." The Secretary observed that Chang's government was not recognizing the importance of the "commanding youthful element" and if his administration wanted to remain in power, the Prime Minister needed to deliver them a tangible hope for a better life. Failure to do so would result in his government's downfall and

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<sup>12</sup> DEPTTEL 1123, 2 April 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

open the door for increased Communist influence in the ROK.<sup>13</sup> Rusk's comments communicated an understanding that Korea was in the midst of a generational shift where the younger generation felt increasingly compelled to take action when the older one showed an inability to lift the country out of economic despair. Where he miscalculated was in assuming that Korean students were the youth waiting to act. The Secretary failed to consider that the impetus for change could come at the hands of young military officers, most of whom were in the early thirties. CIA reports after the coup communicated that a group of junior officers had originally planned to seize power following the March 1960 presidential elections. The April 1960 Revolution's success, however, convinced them to give the civilian government another chance. When Chang's government proved equally corrupt, weak, and inept in their eyes, they chose to pursue their original plan after first seeking broader support from other disaffected junior officers in the armed forces.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Prime Minister***

Syngman Rhee had been the cause of many headaches among USG officials during his twelve-year rule but the ROK's first President was never considered weak or ineffective, even during the last months of his rule. Chang Myon on the other hand (a man that Rhee deeply disliked), was rarely a pain for the US but was considered both weak and ineffective as a leader by most, if not all Korea observers. His Democratic Party did little to help as the organization plunged into factional strife and financial corruption after gaining power.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately for Chang, no amount of cooperation with the US could overshadow his deficiencies as a leader. His poor reputation had already been firmly established by the coup, and his actions in response

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<sup>13</sup> DEPTTEL 1123, 2 April 1961, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>14</sup> CIA Report on the Internal Situation of Korea, July 1961, JVFP, Box 75, Folder: JVF Papers, Folder: Correspondence-Korean Military Junta 1961, GCML.

<sup>15</sup> EMBTEL 1142, 11 March 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea General, 1/61-3/61, JFKL.

to the usurpation of power did very little to help his cause.

Unlike Rhee, Chang never had the firm support of all senior US officials in the ROK. Magruder did not make great efforts to hide his lack of enthusiasm towards the Prime Minister. As an open supporter of Rhee, the CINCUNC held little admiration for Chang, who he considered a State Department project.<sup>16</sup> In retrospect, the General viewed the Prime Minister as a weak, unpopular, and unsuccessful leader. Much of his criticism stemmed from the fact that Chang had done very little to curb the purging of numerous senior Army officers on corruption charges after the April 1960 Revolution. These leaders, proven in combat during the Korean War and irreplaceable for maintaining the ROK's defense, were far from completely innocent. Their greatest crime, however, was that they had been appointed by Rhee and anyone with connections to the former President was corrupt in the eyes of the new government.<sup>17</sup> Chang had shown Magruder that he was less concerned with operational readiness and that he placed a higher priority in eliminating the vestiges of the prior regime for political reasons. While Chang's position was certainly distasteful to the CINCUNC, when the time came to defend the civilian government in May, Magruder did not hesitate to initially act on his behalf.

The State Department also recognized Chang's deficiencies but was more conciliatory while working incessantly to ensure his success. The Department, after all, had played a very open role during the 1960 Student Revolution and the chance for a viable democratic government on Communism's doorstep was too good of an opportunity to ignore. The Embassy assessed that the Chang government had three primary vulnerabilities. The first was the Prime Minister himself, who was described as "irresolute and incapable of providing determined

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<sup>16</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UN Command, 1961, RG84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>17</sup> Magruder Oral History, 16.

leadership when needed.” The second factor was the perception, albeit accurate, that government appointments were based on favoritism and not merit. The final issue was the Democratic Party’s blatant corruption.<sup>18</sup> Ambassador McConaughy mentioned the Prime Minister specifically in his final cable to Washington that offered suggestions on how to make the Korean democratic system more effective. He stressed that the US needed to do more to influence Chang so he exercised leadership, “an ingredient definitely lacking at present in the Korean political scene.” Calling the Prime Minister neither dynamic or decisive, the Ambassador lamented at Chang’s inability to connect with the people, pointing to his unwillingness to leave Seoul and even visit areas outside the capital suffering from famine.<sup>19</sup>

Marshall Green, who served as Charge de Affaires following McConaughy’s departure, offered additional insight on the Prime Minister that did not absolve him of his weak leadership, but added a level of understanding. In Green’s view, Chang was simply too nice and appeared as if he acquiesced too easily to US demands, which were aimed at reducing the American burden in the ROK. Chang had in fact successfully taken on multiple unpopular but necessary reforms at the behest of the US to include the adoption of a more realistic exchange rate that slashed the value of the ROK’s currency by half. He also agreed to normalize foreign aid procedures after years of mismanagement under Rhee. The PM even committed to the ROK assuming more direct responsibility of its own defense budget as the country struggled to maintain a military far out of proportion to its economy.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, these bold actions did not equate to better economic conditions for the average person. Instead, it appeared as if he was simply being

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<sup>18</sup> EMBTEL 1142, 11 March 1961, JFKP.

<sup>19</sup> EMBTEL 1349, 11 April 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 1/20/61 - 5/17/61, JFKL.

<sup>20</sup> Green Oral History, 56.

steamrolled by the US. Taking a cue from McConaughy's desire to bolster Chang as a leader, Green described Embassy efforts to avoid contributing to the already established negative perceptions of the Prime Minister. According to the Charge de Affaires, "we (US Embassy) leaned over backwards to avoid the appearance of dictating to the government or pushing them around." Meetings with Chang were actually conducted at private residences instead of offices so the US could maintain a lower profile.<sup>21</sup> Despite these efforts, the Second Republic entered the Spring of 1961 as a government beset with scandal, corruption, and weak leadership unable to realistically cope with the dire situation at hand. When asked by another foreign official as to why the military coup had occurred, A/S McConaughy pointed to the ROKG's inability to convince the public that it was doing enough in the areas of economic reform, unemployment, production, and preserving discipline. Despite understanding fully that these issues took time to solve, the former Ambassador opined that Chang had done a poor job in projecting a positive image and as a result, became regarded as leader of a "do nothing government," despite making tangible progress in many areas.<sup>22</sup>

## **The Coup in Retrospect**

### ***Did the US Know?***

Questions on whether the US knew about the coup in advance or even secretly supported the uprising have lingered over the years. In answering the latter question first, none of the available documents from the National Security Council, State Department, or American military indicate that the US sponsored Park's successful attempt to usurp power. The answer to the first question, however, is both yes and no. The USG agencies monitoring the political situation in

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<sup>21</sup> Green Oral History, 61.

<sup>22</sup> MOC between D.N. Chatterjee and Walter C. McConaughy, 18 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

the ROK believed that the *potential* for a military coup existed, though each differed on the probability of such an action. None appeared to have known the exact date and time of when Park would strike. The two US officials that could have best predicted the coup were Generals Carter Magruder and Hamilton Howze, who as the KMAG Chief had American military advisors at most of the major ROKA units. Magruder's position was that he did have some warning about a potential uprising based on CIA reports and existing information he had on the coup group members, some of whom were already familiar to the CINCUNC for their history of disruptive activities.<sup>23</sup> Howze recollected having no advanced warning and the coup being a great surprise to him, even with his close connections to the ROKA.<sup>24</sup>

The US Embassy also recognized the potential for a military uprising as early as March 1961 noting in a cable back to Washington the steady flow of reports concerning planned coups against the Chang government. Embassy officials, however, considered the likelihood of such an action unlikely. They did not consider the possibility that the military itself would independently seize power, but rather believed that any coup would serve as conduit for a new civilian government. Since the only potential instigators were members of Rhee's disgraced Liberal Party, a group that did not have wide public support or the backing of the ROK military, the Embassy minimized the probability of such an event. American officials still regarded the ROK armed forces as the "key factor providing stability for (the) immediate future" and despite the rumors, believed that they would continue to support the government.<sup>25</sup>

The CIA initially supported the Embassy's view and offered an assessment prior to the one-year anniversary of the student uprisings that downplayed the likelihood of a major political

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<sup>23</sup> Carter Magruder Oral History, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton Howze Oral History, 30.

<sup>25</sup> EMBTEL 1142, 11 March 1961, JFKP.

explosion given that the “present grievances are not as intense or focused as those which gave rise to the 1960 revolution.”<sup>26</sup> By April, the odds for a coup became significantly greater and the CIA began to change its tone. The Agency received reports on April 21<sup>st</sup> that supported the likelihood of coup. It also revealed that Park, as the primary instigator, had been pushing the view to subordinate officers that weak and corrupt politicians had caused the overall weakening of the ROK military. By April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the CIA had concluded that a group composed of “elements which are bitter, rash, purposeful, and quite capable of abrupt and violent action” was seriously considering seizing power.

The CIA passed the information to the ROK CSA, Chang Do-young, who wanted to arrest Park but could not do so due to a lack of concrete evidence. Chang, a confidant of the CIA Station Chief Peer da Silva, notified the Prime Minister (another confidant of da Silva) who expressed little concern due to his faith in the CSA.<sup>27</sup> Key American allies to include the British also received the intelligence and expressed little surprise when the coup did occur. The British Foreign Office received copies of CIA assessments created prior to the military revolution. It had, however, downgraded the importance of these intelligence reports after taking its lead from the State Department, which expressed a lack of concern to their British counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

While musing over the depth of American knowledge on the coup does allow for an additional level of intrigue on the subject, the reality was that the USG’s ability to predict the military uprising was far less important than its capability of stopping it once it commenced. The CINCUNC was already fully aware of the activities of certain junior officer agitators to

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<sup>26</sup> SNIE 42-61 "Short Range Outlook in the ROK," 21 March 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: General, 1/61-3/61 Folder, JFKL.

<sup>27</sup> *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, eds. Edward C. Keefer, David W. Mabon, and Harriett Dashiell Schwar, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010) Document 217.

<sup>28</sup> EMBTEL 4899, 19 June 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

include Kim Jong-pil, having expelled a number of them from service. Magruder was also knowledgeable on Park's role as a mentor to these agitators, which was a key reason why the future President worked far from Seoul in what was supposed to be a relatively uninfluential role as the Deputy Commander of the Second ROK Army. While it is difficult to predict how Magruder would have acted had he known the exact details of Park's coup in advance, once the uprising began, the CINCUNC quickly demonstrated his ability to suppress the revolution if desired.

### *The CINCUNC's Failure?*

As Korean citizens woke up to a military coup in progress on May 16<sup>th</sup>, American media outlets wasted little time in providing what could be considered heavy coverage for 1961 standards throughout the week. It did not take long for most major periodicals to run stories about the unexpected event. A general reading of the initial articles reveals two basic themes. The first is that the majority of stories considered the coup a testament to American ignorance in the region. Much of the criticism was directly hurled at the CINCUNC. One especially critical article opined that though the ROK was virtually an American satellite, the coup demonstrated that "the ignorance in Washington was complete."<sup>29</sup> Magruder's inability to predict the coup and decision to initially back the Chang government were considered unmistakable signs of American ineptitude. Other astute articles picked up on the significance of the CINCUNC's loss of OPCON during the uprising. Several editorials began to question if American command over Korean forces could even be trusted while others wondered who really controlled the ROK military.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Midweek Coup," *Baltimore Sun*, May 19, 1961.

<sup>30</sup> DEPTTEL G-103, 17 June 1961, Box 11, Folder 350: Korea, January-June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

There were also numerous articles that clearly favored the ROK military's bold seizure of power. These commentaries illuminated the second theme that Park's coup group represented the interests of the entire ROK military, a misconception that still exists today. General James Van Fleet played a significant role in perpetuating this misunderstanding by offering public praise of the coup, emphatically declaring that "we have no, repeat, no stauncher ally" than the Korean Army.<sup>31</sup> Upon learning about the uprising, Van Fleet utilized his connections with the media by sending statements of full support to all the Hearst Newspapers, Henry Luce of *Time-Life*, and Dewitt Wallace of *Reader's Digest*.<sup>32</sup> While his statement was not altogether false, it did not take into account that the events surrounding the coup were more nuanced than the simple explanation that the most reliable and pro-American Korean organization, the ROKA, rightfully seized power due to the civilian government's incompetence. In reality, much of the Korean military initially chose to take the same approach as the USG, wait and see how the events progressed prior to joining Park's regime. Magruder understood fully that the coup was not a military-wide action and effectively wielded his OPCON over the remainder of the ROKA to set the conditions for a restoration of the Chang government.

## **II.) Phase I: The First Seventy-Two Hours of the May 16<sup>th</sup> Revolution**

Major General Park Chung Hee executed his long-planned military coup during the pre-dawn hours of May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961. Within a twenty-four-hour period, Park successfully seized control of the city via a well-rehearsed and efficiently executed military operation involving roughly only 3,500 troops mainly from the First ROK Marine Brigade and the Sixth ROK Corps Artillery. These elements were not from front-line units, but primarily reserve troops whose

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<sup>31</sup> DEPTTEL G-103, 17 June 1961, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>32</sup> James Van Fleet to Chang Do-young, 1 June 1961, JVFP, Box 75, Folder 22: Correspondence-Korean Military Junta 1961, GCML.

absence posed less of a threat towards the ROK's external defense.<sup>33</sup> These units utilized a nearly identical occupation plan rehearsed by the ROKA a month earlier in preparation for potential civilian riots in Seoul marking the first anniversary of the April 1960 Revolution.<sup>34</sup>

By 5:00 am, coup forces seized control of the main radio facilities in Seoul and began making broadcasts in the name of the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) which designated General Chang Do-young as its leader. The initial statement conveyed the impression that the MRC had seized control of the government in order to end corruption and to guide the country past its current difficulties. The new regime pledged to be strictly anti-Communist, root out corruption, observe the UN charter and cooperate with the US along with other free nations, unify Korea as a non-Communist nation, and turn over the government to "honest and competent political leaders." The next major announcement occurred at 9:00 am with the MRC's declaration of emergency Martial Law. Also broadcasted were the purported names of key MRC members that included Lieutenant General Chang Do-young as Chairman, Major General Park Chung Hee as Vice-Chairman, along with Lieutenant General Lee Han-lim, First ROK Army Commanding General, and Lieutenant General Choi Kyong-nok, Second ROK Army Commanding General. By 10:00 am, most of downtown Seoul was under MRC control.<sup>35</sup>

Park's decision to seize the Seoul radio stations and the strategic content of his broadcasts were nothing less than brilliant. Chang Do-young had not agreed to join the MRC prior to the initial public broadcast, a point that the CSA made clear to Magruder during their initial face-to-

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<sup>33</sup> Message UK 70304, CINCUNC to CJCS, 16 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman's Messages, March 1 to July 7 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP. ROKMC element was a reserve battalion from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade on the Kimpo Peninsula. The commanding general of the brigade personally led the Marines into Seoul. The Corps Artillery elements were under the OPCON of I US Corps (Group). Other participating units came from the 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, and 33<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Divisions and the ROK Special Forces.

<sup>34</sup> Message CX-48, ARMA Seoul to DA, 19 May 1961, JFKP, NSF. Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 5/18/61 - 5/19/61, JFKL.

<sup>35</sup> Message JOC 70305, CINCUNC to CJCS, 16 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman's Messages, March 1 to July 7, 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

face meeting at 6:30 am.<sup>36</sup> Park essentially forced the CSA's hand following this announcement likely causing Chang to consider first why he should not support the coup, rather than why he should. From a strategic messaging standpoint, implicating the CSA as the revolutionary leader from the beginning displayed commendable foresight. Park was a relatively unknown quantity in the eyes of the public and not someone that observers within the non-committed elements of the military and the civilian populace could easily identify. Chang on the other hand was the ROK military's senior officer, a well-regarded war hero, and most importantly, appointed by the Prime Minister himself. Identifying the General with the uprising gave it an air of credibility and spread the misconception among casual observers that the coup was a military-wide phenomenon, and not actually the work of a small fringe group.

Park's second announcement that initiated Martial Law and named the MRC members was equally brilliant. While Martial Law usually connotes a negative action, the last instance that Seoul was under such a declaration turned out to be a positive experience for the country. The ROKA had assumed responsibility of the capital during the April 1960 student uprising. Through their conduct, the military earned praise as the protectors of the people who were sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. The perception that they had returned once again to act on the behalf of the general populace likely existed with only a year separating both revolutions. More importantly, the broadcast identified Lieutenant Generals Lee Han-lim and Choi Kyong-nok as MRC members, even though both were in actuality not. These two officers commanded the bulk of the ROKA combat units across the peninsula and falsely including them in the MRC gave the impression that again, the coup was a military-wide movement. It also misled some of their subordinate commanders spread across the country into believing that their Commanding

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<sup>36</sup> Message JOC 70305, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

Generals supported the revolution.

Many senior ROK military officials did not appear surprised by Park's coup, though most were caught off guard by its timing. Chang Do-young claimed to have prior knowledge of the event, but expected it to occur in the summer during a planned trip to the US by the Prime Minister. The General also believed that Park initiated the operation when he realized that he was under government investigation and was in danger of arrest.<sup>37</sup> The ROK Vice-Minister of Defense also professed partial knowledge of the coup after the fact, but did not deem it alarming enough to raise any major red flags.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of the level of prior knowledge, General Chang remained in constant contact with the CINCUNC throughout the course of a hectic first day. The initial conversation occurred at approximately 3:00 am when the CSA called Magruder to notify him about the coup. During the conversation, Chang requested that the CINCUNC order US Army Military Police units to stop the ROK Marines from entering the city. Magruder denied the request on the grounds that American Soldiers were in the ROK explicitly for the external defense of the country.<sup>39</sup> While this conversation represented the CINCUNC's first chance to crush the rebellion, it did not turn out to be his only opportunity.

A thorough analysis of the first phase of the military revolution reveals two conclusions regarding the USG's role. The first is that the CINCUNC was clearly in charge as senior officials in Washington struggled to keep up with the rapid pace of events and develop a consensus opinion on a response. Operating under little guidance, Magruder wielded his power as the CINCUNC to set the conditions for the ROKG's survival. While widely panned for his inability to stop the coup, the reality was that Magruder presented an opportunity to do just that,

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<sup>37</sup> Message UK 70323, COMUSK to CJCS, 17 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>38</sup> Message CX-48, 19 May 1960, JFKP.

<sup>39</sup> Message JOC 70305, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP

but neither the existing ROKG leadership or senior US officials in Washington chose to grasp it. The second critical point was that though the CINCUNC operated in tandem with the US Embassy to the maximum extent, he still retained his own set of priorities. The Charge de Affaires, Marshall Green, expressed American support for the existing government based on the principal of saving a democratically elected government. Magruder's number one priority lay with reestablishing his OPCON over the Korean military. Preserving Korean democracy was certainly preferable to Magruder, but he did not view it as a necessity. This first phase of the revolution provided a clear picture of the extent of the CINCUNC's influence not only in military matters, but also in dictating the political future of the ROK.

### **Exercising the CINCUNC's Authority**

It is unlikely that a playbook existed that adequately explained how to handle a revolution while in a foreign country, but if there was ever an individual that could write one for the ROK, it was General Carter Magruder. Fitting the stereotype of somewhat imposing military man of little words, Magruder played a significant, yet unadvertised role during the 1960 Student Revolution. During his second Korean uprising, Magruder had a much more visible part, one that garnered more attention than the lead actor behind the coup. While the CINCUNC's mission primarily lay with the external defense of Korea, the fact that the perpetrators were under his command caused both civilian and military officials to look to him during the hour of crisis. Magruder responded both methodically and rapidly during the initial phase of the coup, operating under very little guidance from Washington or the incumbent ROKG. Both the President and the Secretary of State were in Canada at the time while the new Ambassador to the ROK had yet to arrive in country. Prime Minister Chang immediately went into hiding and was initially uncontactable. Even if all these individuals were readily available when the coup

commenced, it is unlikely that Magruder, as the CINCUNC, would have taken any less of a lead role during the initial stages.

### ***Initial Guidance***

As the CINCUNC, Magruder maintained a direct line back to Washington where his primary point of contact was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lyman Lemnitzer. Lemnitzer was well-versed in Korean affairs as a former CINCUNC and having just returned from the ROK prior to the military uprising. The timing of his trip did not go unnoticed during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing three weeks after the coup where the venerable Senator from Tennessee, Al Gore Sr., pressed the Chairman on whether he had prior knowledge of the revolution. Apparently not satisfied with the Senator's reactions to his answers, Lemnitzer made it a point to put on record that "there was not the slightest indication in anything that I or a good many other people who were visiting Korea at the time, that there was going to be a coup d'état or an overthrow of government in Korea. I want to make that very clear."<sup>40</sup> Despite his keen understanding of the situation, Lemnitzer had a very hands-off approach that allowed Magruder as the commander on the ground to make timely decisions during a rapidly moving situation. The CJCS and CINCUNC remained in frequent contact throughout the event and it was Lemnitzer who eventually passed on the decisions made in Washington to Magruder.

The first conversation between the Lemnitzer and Magruder occurred at 8:30 am (Seoul time) on May 16th and lasted only fifteen minutes with the Chairman asking a few short questions. The first one requested an update on the situation, to which Magruder replied

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<sup>40</sup> United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series), Vol. XIII, Part 2, Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Eighty-Seventh Congress, First Session, Washington: US GPO, 1961, 120. Available through *Proquest Congressional*.

“Revolutionary coup has 3,600 men in Seoul in control of government offices, Seoul is quiet, other cities relatively quiet, First ROK Army, First US Corps are steadfast against possible Communist intervention from the North.” The other inquiries requested information on the coup leader (Park, SROKA Deputy Commander), position of the Service Chiefs (loyalty to ROKG currently unknown), and Embassy contacts with the Prime Minister (no contact, whereabouts unknown). The last question, and perhaps the most important, was Lemnitzer asking if Magruder required any guidance from Washington, to which the CINCUNC replied no.<sup>41</sup> The CINCUNC entered the crucial first day of the revolution with essentially an open license to act as he saw fit. No specific guidance, in fact, reached Seoul until late on May 17<sup>th</sup>, only after a flurry of decisive events. The senior military leader charged with the ROK’s defense now held the power to dictate the political future of the country and the course of US-ROK relations.

The State Department was equally quiet in providing the Embassy with any initial direction. With Dean Rusk out of the country, the Under Secretary of State, Chester Bowles, assumed responsibility for the Department’s response. Unfortunately, according to Marshall Green, he “knew nothing about the Korean situation.” The Charge de Affaires remembered only receiving two calls on the first day of the coup. The first was from US Embassy Tokyo expressing support and full understanding of the situation. The second was a call from the State Department’s Korea Desk Officer, Donald MacDonald, informing the Embassy that they were working on a position and would do everything possible to help. In retrospect, Green suspected that Washington struggled to provide an immediate response due to strongly divided positions on

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<sup>41</sup> Record of Telephone Conversation between CJCS and CINCUNC, 16 May 1961, Box 6, Folder 2: Korea Incident, RG 218.3 Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

how to react to the revolutionaries, especially given the apathetic response shown by the Korean populace.<sup>42</sup>

### ***OPCON in Action***

The USG was fortunate that both its senior military and diplomatic official in the ROK were individuals who had experienced the April 1960 Student Revolution, had a deep understanding of Korean affairs, and maintained a strong network of contacts throughout the ROKG. Green and Magruder worked in tandem to best provide order in a chaotic situation. While the CINCUNC focused on reestablishing his OPCON and assessing the coup group's intentions, the Charge de Affaires concentrated on locating the Prime Minister and advising multiple cabinet officials, many of whom sought guidance from the Embassy on what they should do. The first contact between Green and the Prime Minister occurred at 9:00 am on May 16th via a short telephone conversation. Chang implored that the US assist his administration, calling the conversation "a formal request to support the government." He also asked Green to tell General Magruder to "cope with the situation."<sup>43</sup> The Prime Minister viewed the coup as a military matter, one that the senior commander needed to address. Chang repeated this view during his follow-on conversations with the Embassy throughout the day, clearly expressing his hope that the CINCUNC "take charge of the situation."<sup>44</sup>

A key point usually overlooked in past narratives of this historical event is how General Magruder leveraged his authority as the CINCUNC to mobilize countercoup forces that were ready to act in support of the existing government. The civilian leadership, in turn, needed only

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<sup>42</sup> Green Oral History, 70.

<sup>43</sup> MOC between Marshall Green and Chang Myon, 16 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>44</sup> EMBTEL 1530, 16 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

to grasp the opportunity by coming back out into the open and providing strong leadership during the tense situation. Park's coup group was small, as was the number of troops originally committed to his cause, and noticeably vulnerable early in the uprising. Magruder exercised his OPCON over the Korean military in two distinct ways that afforded him the ability to counter Park's moves during the revolution's first phase. He first leaned hard on the Service Chiefs to regain control of the coup troops. None of the Chiefs initially supported Park's action and either remained neutral or supported Magruder's directive. Secondly, and most importantly, the CINCUNC retained his authority over the First ROK Army (FROKA), whose Commander was prepared to send troops into Seoul and expel the coup forces if given the order by the ROKG.

The importance of Magruder's OPCON over FROKA cannot be understated. Under the leadership of Lieutenant General Lee Han-lim, this command encompassed the bulk of the ROK military's combat power, eighteen divisions facing north and defending the western half of the DMZ. FROKA was intimately tied to the American military due to the CINCUNC's direct command over the formation as the EUSA Commander. The rest of the Korean Army reported to the ROK CSA first, who in then reported to Magruder.<sup>45</sup> Lee knew Park well, having enrolled together in the Manchurian Military Academy in 1940 and the Japanese Military Academy in 1942. He was also highly regarded by the American military after earning a Silver Star for his actions as the Ninth Division Commander during the Korean War.<sup>46</sup> One of the earliest moves taken by Magruder was to ascertain the loyalty of FROKA. He did so by first sending Lee the following message:

I wish to affirm once more the vital mission which is the responsibility of the First ROK Army under your command. It is the obligation of the Army to devote its attentions to the defense of its assigned sector in undivided loyalty to the CINCUNC who bears the

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<sup>45</sup> Carter B. Magruder, "The Eighth US Army," Carter B. Magruder Papers (CBMP), Box 8, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>46</sup> Tae-hoon Lee, "Heroic General Lee Passes Away at 91," *The Korea Times*, April 30, 2012.

responsibility for the defense of the ROK. You are additionally instructed to keep ready for commitment to Seoul, if necessary to keep order, at least two of your infantry battalions. I accordingly charge you to receive no emissary of, nor make any commitments, to any political or military factions whatsoever.<sup>47</sup>

Magruder was likely relieved to hear from his embedded KMAG personnel that Lee intended to fully implement the message and not receive any representatives from the coup group. The advisors did, however, offer caution that there was an existing unfavorable perception among ROKA commanders of the Prime Minister.<sup>48</sup> Magruder also assisted in sheltering the FROKA CG from the ensuing political chaos in the capital. When notified by the ROK CSA that he intended to call in all senior military commanders into Seoul to get their pulse on the situation, Chang Do-young agreed to the CINCUNC's request that he refrain from recalling Lee Han-lim, fearing that Park's supporters would use the opportunity to arrest and replace him.<sup>49</sup> The Magruder's greatest assistance came in the form of a statement released to the Korean public, and reported around the world, at approximately 10:18 am that called for the military to support the current ROKG under Prime Minister Chang. The full message read:

General Magruder, in his capacity as the CINCUNC, calls upon all military personnel in his command to support the duly recognized government of the ROK headed by Prime Minister Chang Myon. General Magruder expects that the Chiefs of the Korean armed forces will use their authority and influence to see that control is immediately turned back to the government authorities and that order is restored in the armed forces.<sup>50</sup>

As with many of Magruder's earliest actions, the intent behind this statement was also initially misunderstood and misconstrued. The CINCUNC received a fair share of criticism from the media and reportedly from other American military officers, both active and retired, for what

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<sup>47</sup> Message UK 70317, COMUSK to CJCS, 17 May 1961, RG84, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> MOC between Marshall Green and Carter Magruder, 16 May 1961, Box 11, Folder 350: Korea January-June, 1961, RG 84: General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>50</sup> Message UK 30493, CINCUNC Announcement, 16 May 1961, Box 11, Folder 350: Korea January-June, 1961, RG 84: General Records, 1961, NACP.

appeared to be an unnecessary and premature commitment of US support to a sinking ship. An examination of the two main reasons behind the announcement reveal that Magruder was not simply seeking to blindly bolster a faltering government. He was in fact attempting to disabuse any existing perception of American involvement in the coup, while also solidifying his OPCON over FROKA.

To entirely understand Magruder's initial intent, one must first recall the major decisions made by the CINCUNC during the April 1960 Revolution. None was more significant than Magruder's approval to release ROKA units under his OPCON to assist with Martial Law operations in Seoul. This point was fresh on the General's mind when making the announcement as he feared that the public would automatically assume that the ROK Marine and Artillery units occupying the city were doing so with USG consent.<sup>51</sup> The importance of distancing the US from the coup was especially critical given the timing of the event. It had only been a month since the Kennedy administration experienced the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. The US was also implicated in supporting a failed coup d'état by French Generals against Charles de Gaulle in Algiers, an incident specifically addressed in a memo to the President concerning the Korean situation.<sup>52</sup> It would not have been a stretch for the casual observer to connect the dots and assume American support for Park's revolution.

The CINCUNC's announcement was also not his own idea, but rather one proposed by Lee Han-lim. The FROKA Commander understood that a variety of personal opinions on the desirability to support the current ROKG existed across his eighteen combat divisions. By explicitly communicating the USG's non-support of the coup forces, Lee hoped that the open

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<sup>51</sup> Magruder Oral History, 195.

<sup>52</sup> Memorandum to the President, "Background of Statements by American Representatives in Korea, 18 May 1961, Box 6, Folder 2: Korea Incident, 218.3 Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

declaration would be enough to hold FROKA together in its position facing north. The announcement could also discourage any neutral officers from crossing the line and joining Park. The coup group had already been spreading rumors that it had gained US support since the CINCUNC's role during the April 1960 Revolution was common knowledge among senior ROK military leaders.<sup>53</sup>

While Marshall Green released a similar message on behalf of the US Embassy, his discussions over the statements with Magruder revealed that the two senior officials had slightly different priorities. Green emphasized the importance of openly supporting the current ROKG and pushed for the ROK CSA to take an active role in reassuring the general public. Magruder, on the other hand, was not convinced that Chang Do-young even retained that level of sway and even if he did, believed that the CSA's efforts should first focus on stabilizing the Army. The CINCUNC informed the Charge de Affaires that "the reassurance of the people for stability is a hell of a lot less important than the stability of the Army."<sup>54</sup> In other words, the public's support of Prime Minister Chang's government was a luxury while the adherence of military units such as FROKA to traditional command relationships was an absolute necessity. The current administration had no chance of surviving without a stable Korean military united against the minority coup forces.

The available evidence suggests that Magruder's statement met its intent. Information passed from ROKA officers to their EUSA counterparts expressed that many military and civilian personnel had cooled toward the uprising after the Magruder and Green declarations. The MRC had suffered and were increasingly concerned with the USG's reaction, understanding

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<sup>53</sup> Message UK 70316, CINCUNC to CJCS, 17 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman's Messages, 11 March to 1 July 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>54</sup> MOC between Carter Magruder and Marshall Green, 16 May 1961, Box 11, Folder 350: Korea January-June 1961, RG 84: General Records, 1961, NACP.

that their viability ultimately depended on American support.<sup>55</sup> Most importantly, Lee Han-lim contacted Magruder shortly after the public announcement to inform the CINCUNC that the FROKA was ready to move if called upon by the ROKG. The SROKA Commanding General, Choi Kyong-nok, also touched base with the CINCUNC at 11:15, less than an hour after the statement, assuring Magruder that he was loyal and his command committed to the current ROKG.<sup>56</sup> Choi, who was Park's supervisor at the time, showed through this action that he chose not to accept the apology offered by his deputy earlier in the day. Park has telephoned his Commanding General directly to express his remorse over keeping him in the dark while plotting a coup under his nose.<sup>57</sup> Choi went on to become one of Park's most vocal critics from exile in the US during the junta's early years.

Lee Han-lim acted quickly and decisively in making preparations to intervene on the behalf of the existing government. He immediately sent a message to ROKA Headquarters, which was in the process of transitioning into the MRC Headquarters, requesting the return of the Sixth ROK Corps Artillery units currently in Seoul, though under FROKA command. Major General Kim Ung-soo, the Sixth ROK Corps Commander, also acted in support of the CINCUNC by severing communications with the ROKA and committing to only taking orders from First US Corps (Group).<sup>58</sup> Magruder notified the JCS of his confidence in FROKA, asserting that he could likely "suppress the uprising by bringing to Seoul such an overwhelming force as to make it hopeless for the insurgents to fight." Lee already had four reserve divisions

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<sup>55</sup> Message UK 70319, COMUSK to CJCS, 17 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>56</sup> Message JOC 70305, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>57</sup> Summary of Conversation, ARMA and Vice MINDEF Shin Eung-kyun, 16 May 1961, Box 11, Folder 350 Korea: January to June, 1961, RG 84: General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>58</sup> Message UK 70321, COMUSK to CJCS, 17 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

on alert and Magruder assessed that the FROKA Commander would carry out countercoup orders if given by the Prime Minister or the CINCUNC.<sup>59</sup>

Magruder's focus on retaining OPCON over FROKA shows his astute recognition that as long as Lee Han-lim continued to recognize the CINCUNC's authority, reassurances from the ROK CSA and other Service Chiefs were less of a necessity. By the end of the military revolution's second day on May 17th, Magruder maintained his command over both the ROKA's major commands. The senior officers that pledged their adherence to established American command relationships took credible steps that went beyond simple verbal commitments. For their actions, the FROKA and VI Corps commanders faced imprisonment following Park's consolidation of power. Both were eventually released and sent to the US largely due to constant pressure applied by senior American military officers. The SROKA commander escaped jail time and left for the US with the help of the Embassy and the military command. Unfortunately for these officers, their risky commitment to the established ROKG was not met with equally decisive moves by the civilian leadership. As the second day ended, the Prime Minister still remained in hiding.

### ***Rallying the Chiefs***

While FROKA's combat power represented the CINCUNC's best means to forcefully end the military uprising, working through the Service Chiefs was Magruder's best option in seeking a peaceful resolution. If the coup forces proved more loyal to their services than Park, these senior officers could potentially leverage their influence to recall the units from Seoul. Magruder spoke to each Service Chief personally on May 16<sup>th</sup>, urging them to direct the revolutionaries back to their regular commands and to prevent others from joining. The Service

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<sup>59</sup> Message UK 70316, 17 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

Chiefs assured the CINCUNC that they would try their best, but could not offer any guarantees.<sup>60</sup> In the meantime, Magruder ordered that all supplies be cut off from units participating in the uprising.<sup>61</sup> He was reasonably confident that the Service Chiefs and the ROK CJCS would at the minimum remain neutral, with the exception of ROK CSA Chang Do-young, who Magruder described as “two-faced.”<sup>62</sup> Chang’s allegiance was still up in the air and needed to be closely monitored. As the day progressed, it became increasingly apparent to the CINCUNC that he still retained the loyalty of most Service Chiefs.

One of the first assurances came on May 16th from the ROK Navy’s Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Lee Song-ho, and the Commandant of the ROK Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Kim Sung-eun, who notified their primary American counterpart, Rear Admiral George Pressey, Commander of Naval Forces Korea, that they remained loyal to the government and the CINCUNC. The ROKMC Commandant stated that he would order the Marines to withdraw from the capital if given assurances that there would be no retaliatory measures. Magruder committed to trying his best.<sup>63</sup> By the next day, the American advisor to the ROK Marines reported that the Commandant had relieved the First ROK Marine Brigade Commander and directed elements in Seoul to return at once, though no movement had yet to be seen.<sup>64</sup> While the ROK Navy had a minimal role in the revolution, the Marines played a significant part due to number of troops that participated in the coup. A successful withdrawal of the Marines would have eliminated a large portion of the revolutionary troops in Seoul.

The ROK Air Force (ROKAF) also tacitly communicated to the US military early on its

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<sup>60</sup> Message UK 70304, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>61</sup> Message UK 70316, 17 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>62</sup> Message JOC 70312, 16 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman’s Messages, March 1 to July 7 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>63</sup> Message UK 70309, COMUSK to CJCS, 16 May 1961, Box 43. Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84, Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>64</sup> Message UK 70321, 17 May 1961, Box 43, RG 84, NACP.

intention to stay out of the political uprising. The ROKAF Chief of Staff dispatched a senior staff officer, Col Yoon Il-kwon, to meet with the US Air Attaché (AIRA) following Chang Do-young's commander conference with the MRC on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Yoon informed the AIRA that the ROKAF Chief of Staff had instructed his service to follow existing laws and regulations, reminded them that the mission had not changed, and emphasized that the focus was still defending the country from the Communist threat. The AIRA assessed that the purpose of Yoon's visit was to inform the US military that the ROKAF had taken a "middle of a road position" and would not assist or counter the coup forces. The second reason was to try and ascertain the USG position since the MRC currently felt paralyzed. Indications were that the coup group, and the rest of the military, were hesitant to make any more decisive moves until they understood American intentions.<sup>65</sup>

By May 17<sup>th</sup>, the CINCUNC received strong signals that the lack of American support and the unwillingness of the ROK military to wholly support the uprising were straining the MRC. The fact that the coup was actually in the hands of a small, relatively junior group of officers also became apparent after the Service Chiefs reported being held "hostage" by the MRC for nearly three hours. During this time, these senior officers faced pressure to sign a paper or create a recording criticizing the current government and supporting the military regime. Despite facing death threats and being held at gunpoint, only Chang Do-young relented. The other three senior officers were eventually released without concurring. The Chiefs informed their American counterparts that the MRC was extremely conscious that they still did not have the support of the US or all the military services. They also expressed caution that the young colonels in the group held significant power and were seemingly uncontrollable by Chang or

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<sup>65</sup> Message CX-46, 17 May 1961, HQ USAF to SECSTATE, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 1/20/61 - 5/17/61, JFKL.

Park.<sup>66</sup>

When executing a military revolution with 3,500 troops out of a 600,000-strong military, neutrality can be considered just as harmful as open defiance to the uprising. Park's advantages of audacity and surprise on May 16th dissipated by the second day as the MRC began to recognize its tenuous position. Though coup forces had secured most of downtown Seoul, it had failed to garner the full support of any of the ROK military services, let alone the US. In the meantime, the CINCUNC had skillfully maneuvered the remaining forces and established the conditions for the current ROKG's survival. All eyes turned to the Prime Minister as the MRC, ROK armed forces, the CINCUNC, the Embassy, and the rest of the USG waited for Chang Myon's countermove.

### **The Demise of the ROK's Second Republic**

The shift in momentum from May 17<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup> was staggering. Park's MRC was on its heels and the CINCUNC had set the pieces for a potential countercoup on the 17<sup>th</sup>. By the 18<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Chang had resigned, which effectively ended the ROK's short-lived Second Republic. Lee Han-lim was also arrested on that day by revolutionary forces and publicly announced his support for the coup. The first phase of Park's revolution was complete and he had succeeded in ousting the Chang government. Questions on how the next regime would take shape, however, still lingered. Why did Park's coup initially succeed? A fair share of credit should certainly be given to Park himself for his meticulous planning and efficient execution of the operation. As the US Embassy noted on the 18<sup>th</sup>, despite having a relatively small coup force, Park's success derived largely from his ability to create an "impression of universal

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<sup>66</sup> Message KRA 278, CINCUNC to CJCS, 17 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JKFL.

support.”<sup>67</sup> His decision to quickly capture the Seoul radio stations and broadcast strategically crafted messages was exceptional. Yet, despite these brilliant moves, the MRC still found itself at the mercy of the CINCUNC a day after the coup began.

The ultimate reason for the coup’s success was that the USG decided not to save the current government since no civilian leader, to include the Prime Minister himself, wanted to expend much energy for its preservation. Magruder and Green met and discussed the situation with several ROKG civilian officials on the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> to include President Yun Po-son. The outcome of these interactions was an unshakeable feeling that every government official of significance had given up on Chang’s government. This lack of support, however, should not have come to a surprise given the doubts over the administration’s viability that had been present since September 1960. The atmosphere in Seoul was one of ambivalence towards Park’s coup. These conditions placed Magruder and Green in a difficult position where they, and not the ROKG civilian leaders, were making the most effort to preserve the current government. With little indication of public or governmental support for Chang Myon, Washington’s decision to not openly act on the Prime Minister’s behalf was an easy one to make.

### ***A Deafening Silence, the ROKG Responds***

The two ROKG leaders that could have directed FROKA to retake Seoul and expel the coup troops were the Prime Minister and the President. While Lee Han-lim’s troops remained on standby, it soon became evident that neither leader wished to engage directly with Park to regain the initiative. President Yun Po-son, a long-time rival of Chang Myon, was perhaps in the best position to take action, but failed to act even after being presented viable options by the

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<sup>67</sup> EMBTEL 1570, 18 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

CINCUNC. The Prime Minister continued to remain in hiding, adding only insult to the injury that his personal reputation as leader already suffered months earlier.

Magruder and Green met with President Yun Po-son late on May 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss options against the coup forces. The impression that Yun made on the CINCUNC was a strong one, leaving little doubt in Magruder's mind that the President was against taking any decisive action. According to the General, "my personal observation is that the President is either a part of the revolutionary group or is so pleased with Chang Myon's possible downfall that he will take *no steps* to support the existing government."<sup>68</sup> Green offered a similar view that emphasized the President's focus on the existing mistrust and dissatisfaction towards the Chang government.<sup>69</sup> Yun's lack of support for the Prime Minister should not have been surprising. Just a month earlier during a final meeting between the President and the outgoing American Ambassador, Walter McConaughy, Yun had on several occasions criticized the Cabinet Ministers while indicating that the PM did not provide effective leadership. The encounter reinforced existing knowledge of the rivalry between Yun and Chang. McConaughy assessed that "the President and his former associates seem intent on removing and undermining present Cabinet Ministers" as a means to indirectly attack Chang.<sup>70</sup>

When presented with an opportunity to seize control of the situation by the CINCUNC, Yun declined. Magruder informed the Korean President that he retained the loyalty of both FROKA and SROKA. The CINCUNC suggested moving FROKA troops to the edge of Seoul, a move that significantly strengthened the bargaining position of the actual government.<sup>71</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> Message UK 70304, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>69</sup> EMBTEL 1536, 16 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>70</sup> EMBTEL 1377, 14 April 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>71</sup> Message UK 70304, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

General's suggestion even surprised Green, who just heard about the offer for the first time as well.<sup>72</sup> According to the President, he was reluctant to give such an order as he sought to avoid bloodshed at all costs. In Green's opinion, the President seemed more focused on sympathizing with the coup and blaming the situation on Chang. Though the Charge de Affaires did exact a commitment from Yun to contact the PM and attempt to reconcile differences with the revolutionary leaders, neither US official left the meeting with great confidence.<sup>73</sup>

Where was Prime Minister Chang during this initial period? It took some effort but the Embassy was finally able to locate him through a variety of sources, to include the CIA, at a French nunnery. The PM had contacted the Embassy by telephone on multiple occasions throughout May 16<sup>th</sup> but the conversations were short and essentially pleas for the CINCUNC to resolve the matter. Chang did, however, manage to deliver a more detailed letter to Green on May 17<sup>th</sup>, one that ended with "please destroy after reading." Through it, the PM sought to assess the USG's determination to support his government. Chang wrote:

I would very much like to know what is your government's policy to cope with the present situation now existing and what General Magruder is going to do to control this rebellion. I must know this point clearly so I that I can make up my mind to face the future developments.

I hope that USG does not yield to rebels, you know my government has done the best we could, who else could have done better in such adverse circumstances? And just imagine, I should be court-martialed and condemned for all that I have done for the country. I can hardly conceive of the idea that US will ever allow such unfair tragedy should happen.<sup>74</sup>

The PM's comments revealed a few unfortunate realities about the current situation. The first was that Chang showed little intent to take action, but was rather content to rely on the USG to extricate him from the situation. The second was that the PM seemed out of touch with the

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<sup>72</sup> Green Oral History, 62.

<sup>73</sup> EMBTEL 1536, 16 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>74</sup> EMBTEL 1546, 17 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 1/20/61 - 5/17/61, JFKL.

current political environment and the level of discontent that the Korean populace felt towards his government. While his personal contributions to the country were likely commendable, the Prime Minister's popularity among the Korean population was severely lacking at the time. Lastly, Chang appeared to have overestimated his standing in the eyes of the US. Though the Embassy had certainly worked hard to ensure his success, the PM appeared oblivious to the USG's doubts on his government and particularly his ability as its leader.

Green responded through an intermediary to inform Chang Myon that the USG still stood by his government and would attempt to utilize its powers of persuasion to remove the military from the city. He also stressed that the PM should contact the President and ROK CSA immediately to coordinate a response. In actuality, the letter convinced the Charge de Affaires that the Second Republic was about to fold. His final comment in an Embassy cable back to Washington was telling and stated that "it may be well that Chang Myon's capabilities to return to office have eroded beyond repair."<sup>75</sup> Magruder shared Green's view, who as someone never enamored with the PM, offered a much blunter assessment back to the JCS. The CINCUNC expressed little surprise over Chang's decision to remain in hiding by noting that the PM did not "have a reputation for personal courage."<sup>76</sup> Magruder also recognized the diminishing likelihood of Chang regaining power, noting that the longer he stayed in hiding, the greater his image "as being a weakling, indecisive, and without personal courage" would prevent the military from acting on his behalf.<sup>77</sup>

### ***The USG Abandons Ship***

The meeting with President Yun Po-sun gave Carter Magruder an opportunity to reassess

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<sup>75</sup> EMBTEL 1551, 17 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 1/20/61 - 5/17/61, JFKL.

<sup>76</sup> Message UK 70316, 17 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>77</sup> Message UK 70323, 17 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

his options as CINCUNC. Upon doing so, he came to the realization that there was no long-term future for the current ROKG. In a telegram back to Lemnitzer, the CINCUNC remarked that Yun considered the coup an acceptable method to eliminate his political rival.<sup>78</sup> The prospect of replacing a weak leader with an unscrupulous one likely did little to engender much confidence in Magruder's mind. He also recommended against sending FROKA elements into Seoul on his authority alone through the following statement:

If I should do so and were successful we might restore a government with no one to run it and lacking popular support. Basically my mission is to protect Korea from external aggression. To this end, the Korean forces appear to be 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 inspired.<sup>79</sup>

Magruder understood that long-term political stability in the ROK directly affected his ability to defend the country from external aggression. This realization influenced his decision to advise the ROKA against direct involvement during the April 1960 Student Revolution, despite being a strong supporter of Rhee himself. In this situation, acting to save the current government could actually lead to a larger void since Chang's administration had been rapidly taking in water for months. The reality was that even if Magruder wanted to take independent action against the revolutionary forces, it would not have been possible. While Washington had remained silent for nearly two days, guidance from the capital started to flow in by May 18<sup>th</sup> (Seoul Time). The first actual directives from the CJCS, in fact, arrived while the CINCUNC was in the process of composing the above telegram that recommended against independent action. The senior USG leadership had made a decision and it was now clear that the US was moving on from PM Chang's government.

Magruder and Green received similar telegrams from the JCS and the State Department

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<sup>78</sup> Message UK 70316, 17 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

that reaffirmed Washington's support for their actions to date, but also designated a change in direction. Senior officials had convened at the White House and according to Lemnitzer, determined that the US had gone as far as it could without becoming seriously involved in ROK domestic affairs.<sup>80</sup> While Lemnitzer offered no guidance during his initial conversation with Magruder, he had clear counsel this time around. The Chairman wrote that Washington recognized the CINCUNC's difficult position, "but agree that is important that you carefully avoid statements or actions which involve your interference in the internal affairs of the ROK unless required by your basic mission to preserve security of the ROK against external or internal communist attack." Lemnitzer also believed that the likelihood of the Prime Minister reasserting power was bleak and cautioned Magruder against acting in a manner that would "open yourself to charges that you, as CINCUNC, are fighting (the) Prime Minister's battles for him particularly since he seems unwilling to appear and assert his position of leadership."<sup>81</sup> Judging from his earlier messages, Magruder likely felt little inclination to do just that.

The State Department's message from A/S FE McConaughy to Green also began with a statement of support. The former Ambassador remarked that "handling of current situation by you and General Magruder has our full endorsement.... we have full confidence in (the) sound judgement (of) yourself and General Magruder." The bulk of the cable, however, discussed the post-Chang Myon government outlook. The Department directed Green to work along lines that encouraged the "early emergence of broadly based, responsible, nonpartisan government of national unity and predominantly civilian composition."<sup>82</sup> Just as the State Department assessed

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<sup>80</sup> Message JCS 686-61, Exclusive for Magruder from Lemnitzer, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 1/20/61 - 5/17/61, JFKP.

<sup>81</sup> Message JCS 996150, CJCS to CINCUNC, 17 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman's Messages, March 1 to July 7 1961, RG: 218.3 Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>82</sup> DEPTTEL 1321, 17 May 1961, Box 6, File 2: Korea Incident, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

prior to the coup, it still did not strongly consider that the military could actually hold onto power. McConaughy considered the MRC as simply a “starting point” that the Embassy should influence on the way towards the creation of the next government that has an “aura of legality, continuity, and legitimate constitutional succession.”<sup>83</sup>

Though direct action by FROKA was no longer an option, neither Magruder nor Green jettisoned the idea of using its forces going forward. The CINCUNC saw value in retaining FROKA as a separate, independent entity that could provide a restraining influence on the MRC in the event that its actions did not align with US objectives in the ROK. The option made perfect sense to Magruder since FROKA was under his direct OPCON. Green believed that the retention of Lee Han-lim as Commanding General could provide the US valuable leverage against Park.<sup>84</sup> McConaughy also supported the idea from Washington, emphasizing the need for the US to exercise all available “moderating, balancing, and restraining influences” on the MRC. He specifically named Lee as a possible means to this end.<sup>85</sup> As the first phase of the military revolution drew to a close, it became apparent that US priorities were no longer focused on preserving the Second Republic. While Magruder exercised his CINCUNC powers effectively during this initial period, his priority shifted towards preserving the one element that allowed him to take such significant actions against the coup, his OPCON over the Korean military.

### **III.) Phase II: Paving the Way towards USG Acceptance**

As Park’s coup forces steadily gained control of the capital, most observers adopted the same ‘wait and see’ approach. Many Korean bystanders awaited clarification on the USG’s

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<sup>83</sup> DEPTTEL 1321, 17 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>84</sup> Message KRA 278, 17 May 1961, JFKP.

<sup>85</sup> DEPTTEL 1321, 17 May 1961, RG218.3, NACP.

stance since the powerful ally had played such a critical role during the April 1960 Student Revolution. With a universal lack of support for the Chang government, most Korean civilian and military leaders were content in hedging their bets early on, towing the line between acceptance and neutrality until the US revealed its hand. The origins of the USG's 'wait and see' approach was a cable sent by the State Department to the US Embassy on May 17<sup>th</sup> (Seoul time). While the Department acknowledged that the coup was against US interests, it also expressed concern over the lack of protest against the action by the ROKG and the disappearance of PM Chang in particular. Assessing early on that the likelihood of the Second Republic's survival was low, the Department determined that a "cautious attitude of wait and see has been adopted pending clarification of situation."<sup>86</sup>

What exactly was the USG waiting to see before determining its position? The available evidence indicates that the American priorities were ensuring that the new military regime was still anti-Communist and most importantly, committed to honoring the 1954 Agreed Minutes that codified American OPCON over ROK military forces. The CINCUNC made these priorities indirectly known to the MRC as early as May 18<sup>th</sup> when the ROK Vice Minister of Defense, Kim Up, visited him early in the morning as an unofficial emissary. The Vice Minister communicated that the MRC was anxiously awaiting clarification on the USG's position before making its next moves. The CINCUNC responded with equal clarity that American support was contingent on US confidence of the new government's anti-Communist stance and the restoration of American OPCON over all UN forces.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> DEPTTEL 1316, 16 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>87</sup> Message UK 70327, CINCUNC to CJCS, 18 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman's Messages, 1 March to 7 July 1961, RG 218.3 Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

## **The Communist Factor**

In a somewhat ironic twist, it actually took very little time for the US to determine that the coup was not Communist inspired, in spite of the fact that its leader had once been arrested for Communist ties. Park Chung Hee's first assignment as a Korean Army officer was in a US-ROK unit charged with suppressing the Yeosu Rebellion of October 1948. This uprising occurred after the ROKA's Sixth and Fourteenth Regiments refused to accept orders that called for the suppression of leftist guerillas on Cheju Island. Several leaders within the regiment were alleged to have Communist ties.<sup>88</sup> As a known member of the South Korea's Worker's Party (SKWP), the military police arrested Park when his name surfaced during an investigation on Communist cells within the ROKA. He originally received a death sentence, which was then reduced to twenty years in prison, but actually only served very little time. The charges were eventually cleared largely due to the efforts of Generals Paik Son-yup and Chang Do-young. Park rejoined the ROKA as a civilian until he regained his commission as an officer during the Korean War.<sup>89</sup> The coup leader's past link to Communism was already known to US officials in May 1961, which resulted in some suspicion against Park, but not outright hostility.

General Magruder was the first senior US official to rule out any linkages between the coup group and Communists. He was already intimately familiar with a number of the junior officers in the group to include Kim Jong-pil, whose agitation against their senior leaders resulted in the early retirements of former ROK CSA Song Yo-chan and ROK CJCS Choi Young-hee. While the CINCUNC deplored their actions, he did not develop any suspicions of Communist influence during the initial investigation that led to the discharge of many of these same Field Grade Officers earlier in the year. Magruder also utilized his KMAG advisors to

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<sup>88</sup> See Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 221-4 for additional details on the Yeosu Rebellion.

<sup>89</sup> Yong-sup Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 37.

produce initial assessments of the MRC officers, none of which revealed Communist ties. He offered this view to the JCS on May 17<sup>th</sup> in a telegram that read "there appears to be no known Communists among the other members of the coup group nor are there any who are known to be anti-American." The CIA produced a similar assessment for President Kennedy a day later in an office memo from the Director of Central Intelligence that highlighted the MRC actions to enforce its stated anti-Communist program.<sup>90</sup>

Park's coup group made a concerted effort to 'grease the skids' for American acceptance by vociferously advertising its anti-Communist stance. Marshall Green recollected that the "junta group was making a great deal of the fact that they were militantly anti-Communist, as though the fact in itself would amply justify the coup in the eyes of the Korean people and the US."<sup>91</sup> The first public announcement made by the revolutionaries early on May 16<sup>th</sup> professed their commitment to an anti-Communist government.<sup>92</sup> The MRC's initial six-point political platform also released on the same day listed as its first decree its intention to "oppose Communism and reorganize and strengthen anti-Communist readiness." The fourth point was also relevant, stating that the MRC would "increase the national capacity to achieve national unification, the unanimous goal of all Korean people, and to oppose Communism."<sup>93</sup>

The MRC's new leader, Chang Do-young, contributed heavily to delivering the junta's anti-Communist message. While retained primarily as a figurehead, Chang did have one useful characteristic that the actual coup leader did not, existing relationships with senior American officers. If there was one organization that recognized the ROKA's anti-Communist nature, it

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<sup>90</sup> Direct of Current Intelligence, Memorandum to the President: Current Situation in South Korea, 18 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JFKL.

<sup>91</sup> Green Oral History, 73.

<sup>92</sup> Message JOC 70305, 16 May 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

<sup>93</sup> Yong-sup Han, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," 51.

was the American military having fought side-by-side with them during the Korean War. Chang sent out nearly identical letters explaining the junta's intentions to the three-highest ranking American officers that he knew, retired General James Van Fleet, the CJCS Lyman Lemnitzer, and the President's Military Representative Maxwell Taylor. It was no accident that Chang justified the coup on the grounds of meeting the Communist threat and correcting the misuse of American aid. The critical section that was consistent in all three letters stated the following:

The government replaced these democratic practices by the people with their ill practices of all kinds, among which the grafting of the US aid amounting to billions of dollars is counted, thereby resulting in incurable social disorder that paved the way for the Communists and pro-Communists who both gained ground threatening so gravely the security of the Republic.<sup>94</sup>

Korean officials used nearly every encounter with their American counterparts to allay existing concerns that the new military government had ties with Communism. The effort stemmed from the junta's realization that any hope for USG support depended first and foremost on eliminating these doubts. The ROK Vice Minister of Defense expressed little concern during his meeting with Magruder on May 18<sup>th</sup> in this regard stating that "the new regime realizes it must have US aid and they won't get it unless they are anti-Communist."<sup>95</sup> While the US continued to evaluate potential Communist influences on the new government over time, initial assessments did not raise any significant red flags that precluded contact with Park's junta. With the likelihood of a Communist-inspired uprising quickly discounted, the US instead focused its attention on its top priority, preserving American OPCON over all military forces in the ROK.

### **The Preservation of OPCON**

The US military's desire to retain OPCON over all allied forces in the ROK stemmed from its belief that unity of command was absolutely necessary for the defense of the peninsula.

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<sup>94</sup> Chang Do-young to Lyman Lemnitzer, 26 May 1961, LLP, Box 26, Folder: C, USAMHI.

<sup>95</sup> Message UK 70327, 7 July 1961, RG 218.3, NACP.

Preservation of the relationship, however, exceeded far beyond military concerns as the US-ROK alliance and the UN Command were also symbolic weapons in the Cold War. From the military standpoint, American OPCON was the best deterrent against the resumption of hostilities on the Korean peninsula. A strong and dependable military posture benefited the security of the ROK and the Asia-Pacific in general as well. The CINCUNC believed that the country could not be defended by its own resources alone, a point he firmly communicated to his Korean counterparts. American OPCON was critical not only for the proper defense of the country, but also required to guarantee that other UN members continued to contribute troops to the command. In Magruder's opinion, no other country would even consider committing its military to the ROK if not under American leadership.<sup>96</sup> The CINCUNC was likely correct in his assessment as it was difficult to imagine any ally maintaining a presence in the ROK without the American security blanket and the other material benefits received by sending a force, no matter how small, to serve under the UN flag.

Questions concerning the viability of the American command over ROK military forces also had the potential of diminishing the superpower's influence in the region. Doubts over US strength or resolve were open to Communist exploitation aimed at causing instability in Northeast Asia. The US military's concerns over preserving OPCON were shared by the State Department. When asked about the American view of the coup by the Japanese Ambassador to the US, Koichiro Asakai, on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Secretary of State Rusk dwelled mostly on his concerns over preserving OPCON. The UN Command was after all critical to Japan's security as well. Rusk told the Ambassador that "We are disturbed by the inroads into the UN command as a result of the coup and hope that all units will quickly return to the command of the UN

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<sup>96</sup> Magruder Oral History, 201.

Commander since the present situation could create a temptation of the other side to start trouble.”<sup>97</sup> In Rusk’s view, anything less than the new regime’s commitment to American OPCON was potential fuel for Communist agitation.

The best indicator of American OPCON’s importance was that the USG simply did not make any moves in support of Park’s regime until after an agreement was made that preserved the command relationship. It was no coincidence that tangible actions symbolizing American recognition of the military government came immediately after a May 26<sup>th</sup> agreement between Magruder and Park that cemented the junta’s adherence to American OPCON. The road towards this agreement, however, was a difficult one for both sides. The CINCUNC, as the USG’s lead official on the matter, found himself negotiating from a position of weakness with little to no leverage against the junta due to restrictions placed on him by Washington. Park also faced his own challenges as he sought to gain support from the younger, nationalistic, and more radical elements of his coup group that did not necessarily believe that retaining American OPCON was essential for the country’s future.

### ***Prioritizing the CINCUNC’s Authority***

Unlike the relative silence from Washington during the first forty-eight hours of the revolution, the American senior officials in the ROK received a steady stream of guidance during the critical second phase, the period between May 18<sup>th</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup>. It was during this phase that the US carefully observed the military junta’s actions as it decided whether or not to openly support Park’s new government. The Second Republic was already in the rearview mirror but the composition of the next government had yet to be determined. Shortly after directing the

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<sup>97</sup> MOC between Dean Rusk and Koichiro Asakai, 23 May 1961, Box 9, Folder: MOC - Japan, 1960, RG 59: Personal Name and 1961 Subject Files, NACP.

CINCUNC to not independently suppress the coup forces, the CJCS made it evident on May 18<sup>th</sup> that the new priority was regaining OPCON. Lemnitzer advised Magruder to meet with Generals Chang and Park immediately to “emphasize in strongest terms (the) necessity of reestablishing command relationships as soon as possible and the vital importance of maintaining ROK armed forces at a high state of combat readiness responsive to the CINCUNC.”<sup>98</sup>

The first meeting between Magruder and Chang occurred on May 20<sup>th</sup> where the CINCUNC “laid heavy accent on OPCON being restored to me.” Magruder also pressed for deeds over words, telling the ROK CSA that “lip service was no interest to the US. We will be convinced only by actions.” The CINCUNC called for the return of troops withdrawn from FROKA and the First US Corps without his permission. The true measure of OPCON restoration, however, was the extent that the MRC restored commanders who had been removed for following Magruder’s orders instead of Park’s. The General viewed the disposition of the former FROKA Commander, Lee Han-lim, as the true litmus test of the MRC’s commitment. Magruder asserted that “if he (Lee) is returned to command, everyone in Korea, including the MRC, will feel that I am in command again.”<sup>99</sup> Chang’s position as a figurehead was painfully obvious as he was only able to express understanding of the Magruder’s position rather than offer any assurances.

As Magruder continued to work the military channels, Marshall Green sought to reestablish contacts with a ROK government that was largely void of Ministerial leaders, the traditional counterparts to Embassy officials. This problem ended when Park appointed Kim Hong-il, a former officer in the Chinese Army and a retired Lieutenant General, as the new

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<sup>98</sup> Message JCS 996156, CJCS to CINCUNC, 18 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman’s Messages, 1 March to 7 July 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>99</sup> Message US 70342, CINCUNC to CJCS, 20 May 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman’s Messages, 1 March to 7 July 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman 1942-70, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

Foreign Minister (FOMIN). One of Kim's earliest priorities was reassuring the US that the new government remained committed to strong relations with its patron, one with a shared anti-Communist stance. As the former Ambassador to Taiwan, the CIA assessed that Kim was an ardent anti-Communist that favored an authoritarian government similar to Chiang Kai-shek's.<sup>100</sup> His appointment as FOMIN was a strategic move by Park as he sought to effectively disabuse any existing concerns regarding the new regime's potential ties with Communists.

Green met with the Foreign Minister for the first time on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. He assured the newly appointed official that it was not the Embassy's intent to create obstacles or hardships for the new government, but rather to work towards common objectives. Moving the relationship forward, however, required Korean clarification on multiple key issues, with command relationships being number one. Green strongly emphasized this point by warning Kim that prolonged challenges against the CINCUNC's authority directly resulted in increased doubts that the ROK still desired American support. In response, the Minister reaffirmed the ROKG's desire to preserve an OPCON arrangement that had lasted for over a decade. He requested patience, stressing that "some of the eager forces involved in the coup had to be brought back into line and would require time and persuasion."<sup>101</sup> Kim's comment provided a glimpse of the internal divisions that existed within the coup group even from the earliest days. The "eager forces" undoubtedly referred to the younger Field Grade Officer faction that did not necessarily support an American intrusion into the ROK military's chain of command. The more senior officers, on the other hand, recognized the necessity of such an arrangement despite the infringement on the country's sovereignty.

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<sup>100</sup> Central Intelligence Bulletin, 23 May 1961, available at [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0005641946.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005641946.pdf).

<sup>101</sup> EMBTEL 1630, 22 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables 5/20/61 - 5/24/61, JFKL.

The initial meetings with Chang Do-young and Kim Hong-il represented the opening salvos to a multi-day negotiation effort between the US and ROK over American OPCON. They provided opportunities for the CINCUNC and the Charge de Affaires to express USG priorities to the junta prior to meeting with Park himself. These advance engagements minimized the likelihood of any surprises that could potentially derail the USG's initial contact with the junta's actual leader. For Park, the meetings gave him the opportunity to digest the American demands and formulate a response in advance. The first meeting between the CINCUNC and the ROK's new leader occurred on May 23<sup>rd</sup> at the UN Command's headquarters. The event turned out to be a three hour marathon. While Marshall Green was not in attendance, General Guy S. Meloy, Magruder's eventual replacement as CINCUNC, did participate having recently arrived in the ROK.

Park used this initial meeting to reassure the CINCUNC that the troops withdrawn from his OPCON would return to their positions as soon as possible, emphasize that he was not a Communist, and acknowledge the importance of the US-ROK relationship. He also chose to avoid any misconceptions about Korean dependence on the superpower by directly acknowledging the fact that the ROK simply could not recover without American aid.<sup>102</sup> The junta leader displayed his keen understanding of the situation by specifically addressing the exact points that the USG needed to hear in order to consider supporting his regime.

Magruder used the meeting to impress upon the Park the importance of American OPCON not only for the ROK's defense, but for broader support of the country. The CINCUNC warned that the loss of OPCON would have an adverse effect on the opinions of the American public, Congress, and senior USG officials. This shift could cause questions over the necessity

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<sup>102</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

of American involvement in the ROK and result in a review of American support. Such an action could lead to unpredictable consequences, which was Magruder's way of quietly implying potential cuts to foreign aid for the ROK. He also pressed upon his belief that American confidence over the new regime's commitment to the OPCON agreement required tangible actions on the part of the MRC, foremost of which was the restoration of commanders removed without the CINCUNC's consent. Magruder ended his opening bid by offering to make a joint statement with Park reaffirming the US-ROK partnership that contained the following text:

1. The SCNR announces that it has returned operational control of all Republic of Korea Armed Forces to the CINCUNC.
2. The CINCUNC has directed the return to former positions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade and VI Corps Artillery units now on duty in Seoul to restore the strength that formerly defended the front.
3. The CINCUNC has released to the SCNR the 30<sup>th</sup> and 33d Reserve Divisions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne) and 5 additional Military Police Companies from forward units.
4. The SCNR will obtain approval from the CINCUNC before replacing any general officer or flag officer in the future.
5. The CINCUNC will use his operational control only to defend Korea from Communist aggression.<sup>103</sup>

Park's primary objection was to the fourth point that affirmed the CINCUNC's authority in approving General and Flag officer reassignments. He expressed his opinion that the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR), the MRC's successor and new ruling body of the government, would not accept this proposal. While he did not elaborate on the reasons why, it is likely that a highly nationalistic junta did not want it publicly known that a foreign officer held such powerful influence over internal personnel matters. Park also stated that no officer that had already been removed could be reinstated. He would, however, ensure that future reassignments first gained the CINCUNC's approval as done in the past.<sup>104</sup> After three hours, the initial

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<sup>103</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

negotiating lines had been drawn. Complete victory for the CINCUNC consisted of the restoration of all removed commanders with Lee Han-lim being the most important piece of the puzzle. For the military junta, it needed to deliver a solution that recognized the CINCUNC's authority while not diminishing its desire for renewed independence in internal affairs.

Park held a press conference following his meeting with Magruder and announced that he had reached a partial understanding with the CINCUNC, though not offering any specific details on the three-hour meeting. The press had already caught wind that Magruder requested to retain his authority in reviewing senior officer assignments along with the removal of units under his direct OPCON from Seoul. Park did not indicate that he would accede to the CINCUNC's demands, but did reaffirm the fact that the ROK military was still under the UN command.<sup>105</sup> Magruder, on the other hand, had little interest in spinning the meeting into a positive event. Instead, the three-hour meeting reaffirmed his existing beliefs of the coup group, which he communicated to the JCS through the following statement:

We are dealing with a group of unscrupulous opportunists who are skilled revolutionaries. I have the impression that the general belief in Washington is that the coup was the work of the senior officers of the military services. It was not. Many of the strongly pro-US senior officers are now in confinement. Most of the rest are without real power. The revolutionaries are consolidating their power. Their pronouncements are oriented to reassure the US. They are wonderfully effective. Once the power of the revolutionaries is consolidated, I have no idea what direction that they will take.<sup>106</sup>

Magruder's assessment proved accurate and highlighted a misunderstanding that still exists today concerning the military coup. The key point was his emphasis that the revolution was not the work of senior ROKA officers traditionally supportive of the US, though some would eventually join the regime in the future. Of the three senior officers that had shown the

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<sup>105</sup> EMBTEL 1651, 24 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UN Command, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>106</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

most loyalty to the CINCUNC, Lee Han-lim and Kim Ung-soo were under arrest while Choi Kyong-nok fled the country. Those with the longest and closest ties to the American military, retired Generals Chung Il-kwon, Paik Sun-yup, and Song Yo-chan were already overseas due to past ties with the Rhee regime. Either one of these individuals had the seniority and following among the military to stop Park's coup, or provide instant credibility to the junta by supporting it. Magruder instead found himself trying to negotiate with a group of younger, highly nationalistic officers that did not necessarily value the traditional connections with the US military. The one officer that did, Chang Do-young, proved to have minimal influence overall.

### *Negotiating from a Position of Weakness*

Magruder entered negotiations with Park at a severe disadvantage. The leverage he held over Park's forces during the first three days of the coup evaporated along with his direct command of FROKA. The new FROKA commander, Major General Bak Im-hang, immediately sought to assuage the CINCUNC's concerns by using established EUSA channels to request Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) Three, otherwise known as Roundhouse. The intended message was clear, Bak planned on adhering to established protocols and respecting the OPCON channels.<sup>107</sup> Despite the symbolism, it did not negate the fact that Park, without Magruder's approval, had chosen FROKA's new Commanding General. While Bak may have dutifully executed orders from the CINCUNC, he would undoubtedly have cleared any controversial ones with Park first. The existence of parallel chains of command was not conducive to restoring Magruder's confidence in his OPCON over the ROK military. The General recognized that in order to guarantee Park's commitment, he needed clout at the

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<sup>107</sup> Message UK 70330, COMUSK to CJCS, 18 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP. There are five DEFCON levels with five being the lowest and one being the highest. Roundhouse referred to the necessity of increased force readiness beyond normal levels.

negotiating table beyond verbal pressure.

Fortunately for the US, it did have extreme leverage over Park in the form of foreign aid. While differing views on the new government's future existed within the coup group, the absolute necessity of securing American economic and military assistance was not a subject up for debate. Magruder recognized this exact point and wrote to Lemnitzer on May 20<sup>th</sup> that his only weapon to compel Park to reestablish OPCON was the Military Assistance Program (MAP). The CINCUNC requested permission to leverage this assistance in the event that verbal pressure proved ineffective. He offered a list of nine categories with increasing importance that he could withhold from the ROK without negatively effecting the Korean military's ability to execute its mission. These levers ranged from deferring military observation tours to the US at the lowest rung to ceasing delivery of MAP supplies and equipment at the highest.<sup>108</sup> Magruder's plan was to base MAP deliveries in proportion to the new ROKG's cooperation. While some within the Korean military privately protested against American OPCON, all realized that the very existence of its military depended on MAP. Unfortunately for the CINCUNC, Washington denied his initial request to utilize military aid as a bargaining chip prior to Magruder's first meeting with Park on May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

As previously described, Magruder's first meeting with Park was categorically unsuccessful for the US. Not only had the CINCUNC been unable to secure a joint statement recommitting the ROK to American OPCON over its forces, it also became evident that the new leader had little intention of easily acceding to any of Magruder's demands. The CINCUNC

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<sup>108</sup> Message KRA 293, CINCUNC to CJCS, 20 May 1961, JFKL, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cable 5/20/61 - 5/24/61, JFKL. The nine categories in order of ascending importance were: 1.) Defer orientation tours/observer tours to the US 2.) Defer on selective basis all training in US military schools (3) Withdraw US forces support for National Construction Service (4) Suspend AFAK program (5) Defer donations/sales of scrap/salvage (5) Suspend Buy Korea Program (6) Suspend MAP delivery of construction materials (6) Selective support of Force Improvement Program (7) Defer MAP raw materials delivery (8) Reduce employment of Korean nationals by USFK (9) Stop delivery of other MAP supplies/equipment.

informed the CJCS that the meeting's outcome required a reassessment of his earlier directive preventing the use of MAP as leverage. Magruder stressed that his situation was synonymous to being in a "negotiation without any negotiating assets" and that "negotiations from positions of weakness are seldom successful."<sup>109</sup> His earlier request had been denied without much explanation and since it occurred prior to this crucial meeting, Magruder felt that he had a stronger case this time around.

The US Embassy supported the CINCUNC's plan to use of foreign aid as leverage if it became necessary. Green offered the Embassy-controlled economic assistance program as a bargaining chip as well. In a joint UNC/Embassy cable sent to Washington on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, both organizations expressed the shared belief that "Regaining United Nations OPCON presents (the) most urgent problem in current situation as far as retrieving US position in Korea (is) concerned." The message noted three different instances where the US had pressed the military junta directly to restore the traditional command relationship: meetings between the Embassy Special Assistant (likely referring to Peer De Silva, CIA Station Chief) and Kim Jong-pil, Green and Foreign Minister Kim Hong-il, and Magruder and Park. The message went further to recommend that if the new ROKG continued to ignore vital American concerns, then the USG should take measures that affect military and economic aid progressively. Expressing full understanding of the delicate situation, the cable recommended against public statements but suggested a carrot and stick approach where if the need arose, "we have means to quietly and progressively restrict military and economic aid, conversely, we have means to reuse aid or sign new agreements."<sup>110</sup>

Despite the combined pressure from both the military command and the Embassy,

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<sup>109</sup> Message K-303, CINCUNC to CJCS, 24 May 1961, RG 84, NACP.

<sup>110</sup> EMBTEL 1640, 13 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables: 5/20/61 - 5/24/61, JFKL.

Washington once again rebuffed the request to use foreign aid as leverage. Lemnitzer responded to Magruder's latest request on May 23<sup>rd</sup> (Washington time) by stating that it was not yet the right time for such actions, though it could become necessary in the future. He added that choosing an aggressive approach "could well be counterproductive and produce results opposite to those we are seeking." Playing this hand too early could "arouse strong and adverse reactions in the form of anti-Americanism and an open split with the UN Command."<sup>111</sup> Senior officials back in Washington did not want to take any actions that emboldened the coup group to act unpredictably or in desperation. While the desire to take a cautious approach was justifiable in some regards, it did little to alleviate the pressures that both Magruder and Green faced during this critical period.

Who in Washington was the greatest roadblock in utilizing military aid as leverage? While avoiding direct details in his message, the Chairman's final statement was telling. Lemnitzer wrote that "the situation in which we found ourselves in Korea once again demonstrates how wrong it was to remove economic programs from CINCUNC control."<sup>112</sup> Up until 1959, the CINCUNC, and not the Ambassador, retained control over all foreign assistance programs in Korea. Since then, the Embassy assumed the lead while the military command retained oversight only over the *execution* of the Military Assistance Program. The change occurred after much debate between the Departments of Defense and State, with Lemnitzer providing the strongest voice of opposition while serving as the Army Chief of Staff. His statement was a veiled, but an unmistakable indication that the opposition stemmed from the State Department. This conclusion made sense since it was Lemnitzer himself who suggested to

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<sup>111</sup> Message P-1177, Lyman Lemnitzer to Carter Magruder, 23 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables: 5/20/61 - 5/24/61, JFKL.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Magruder in an earlier message the possibility of utilizing MAP as negotiation tool.

While the CINCUNC's request did undergo an interagency review, the ultimate decision was that using MAP as leverage was potentially counterproductive and could harden the attitudes of the SCNR members with more conservative views. This change, in turn, could swing their support to certain extremists who were suspected of advocating modification of command relations.<sup>113</sup> Even Washington feared the unpredictable nature of the younger Field Grade Officers within the junta. Green also received a tepid reaction from the State Department after suggesting that Washington make a public statement to encourage the ROK's commitment to American OPCON. The Department's stance was that it did not intend to make any new announcements that could be misconstrued by the military junta. The response indicated that "we do not want to take any new initiatives at this stage which might embolden them to withhold actions responsive to our known wishes."<sup>114</sup> Just as with the first two days after the coup, Magruder and Green were on their own to handle the situation.

### ***The Push Towards Resolution***

By May 25<sup>th</sup>, the military junta communicated its intent to reengage the CINCUNC over OPCON negotiations. The SCNR's lead negotiator was Kim Jong-pil, Park's right-hand man and someone deeply familiar to Magruder. The coup leaders understood that continued US support was contingent on reestablishment of the traditional OPCON relationship. What they feared most, however, was the CINCUNC's ability to use the authority derived from this arrangement against the military revolution in the future. The junta's concern was valid and proved that even they recognized how close that they came to failure earlier in the uprising. The

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<sup>113</sup> Talking Paper for the CJCS, Subject: Problems Faced by CINCUNC Resulting from the Recent Coup in Korea, 26 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 6/5/61, JFKL.

<sup>114</sup> DEPTTEL 1377, 24 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JFKL.

coup's success was due to Magruder's decision to not independently dispatch FROKA units into Seoul during the previous week. Kim utilized indirect channels to pass messages to the UN Command that the SCNR was prepared to accept the proposed joint statement. Acceptance, however, depended on if they were convinced that the CINCUNC would not use his OPCON authority to break their revolution.<sup>115</sup>

Kim Jong-pil requested a meeting with Magruder on May 25<sup>th</sup> in order to finalize the details of a joint SCNR-UNC statement. The meeting must have been both humbling and infuriating for the career officer who was entering his final month in the service. Across from the negotiating table sat a Colonel twenty-six years his junior as an equal partner. This pill could have been swallowed if not for the fact that the Korean officer was also the same one that the CINCUNC had successfully discharged earlier in the year for disruptive activities. Magruder assured Kim that he had no intention of interfering with the revolution. Instead, he stressed that "my mission was to defend Korea, not to determine what kind of government Korea had." The General also made it clear that "as long as the revolutionary government took no action that would prejudice the defense of Korea, they had nothing to fear from me."<sup>116</sup> While purely coincidence, Magruder's comments prophetically encapsulated American policy towards the ROK for the next three decades. The country experienced a tough and many times dark road towards democracy but as long as the ROK supported American objectives in the region, the US usually remained quiet on domestic affairs.

Park agreed to issue a joint statement at 3:00 pm on May 26<sup>th</sup> that effectively resolved the most pressing and sensitive issue between the US and the ROK. The announcement was similar

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<sup>115</sup> Message K-306, CINCUNC to CJCS, 25 May 1961, Box 43: Folder 321.9, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

to Magruder's previous proposal but only with three points highlighted by the SCNR's commitment to return the operational control of the ROK military to the CINCUNC, who in turn pledged to use his authority "only to defend Korea from Communist aggression." The final two points addressed the disposition of units that participated in the coup. The SCNR ordered elements of the First ROK Marine Brigade and Sixth ROK Corps artillery to return to their original positions on the front. In exchange, the CINCUNC authorized the release of non-essential elements to include two reserve Divisions, a Special Forces Group, and five Military Police Companies directly to the SCNR for operations in and around Seoul.<sup>117</sup> While short, the statement adequately addressed the primary concerns of both sides. The CINCUNC regained his OPCON, at least on paper, while the SCNR received some security knowing that the CINCUNC would not utilize his weight against them.

What was notably missing from the joint statement was any mention of the CINCUNC's traditional role in approving General and Flag officer reassignments. Agreement on this crucial point did not enter the public sphere, but was rather addressed by a private exchange of letters between the MINDEF and the CINCUNC. Chang Do-young, triple-hatted as the SCNR Chairman, MINDEF, and CSA, delivered a letter to Magruder also on May 26<sup>th</sup> that acknowledged the CINCUNC's oversight of senior officer assignments in the past, and expressed regret that this authority had been temporarily suspended. Chang was forthright on the SCNR's willingness to impart this authority onto Magruder once again stating in detail that "senior officers who we define as Division Commander or higher, including Navy, Marine, and Air Force offices of comparable responsibilities, will not be relieved or assigned without your prior concurrence."<sup>118</sup> The one SCNR's one condition caveat was that the letter never be made

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<sup>117</sup> Message K-309, 26 May 1961, RG 84, JFKP.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

public. The contents did not, after all, assist the military junta's efforts to project itself as a dynamic, independent, and nationalistic force.

Magruder's response letter to Chang expressed recognition of the ROK's pledges by stating that "with this action, I feel that to a considerable degree, the OPCON that I exercised over the Korea armed forces before the revolution of May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 has been restored."<sup>119</sup> In reality, the CINCUNC recognized that his influence had been severely diminished as a result of the coup and much work still needed to be done to address multiple consistencies that arose due to the presence of a military-led governing body. One glaring example was the presence of Division Commanders who as early coup supporters, also served as SCNR members. Though they were subordinate to their Corps Commander in the military chain of command, they in fact held more authority than their superiors by having a seat at the junta's table.

Magruder also recognized that none of the officers removed for following his orders during the coup had any chance of remaining in service. The General had fought hardest to restore Lee Han-lim, who as FROKA commander, followed the CINCUNC's orders without question and placed Magruder in a position to suppress the military uprising. Park visited Magruder shortly after the announcement of the joint statement and offered his regrets that OPCON had been violated while also expressing optimism for the future. Magruder used the encounter to push one final time for the reinstatement of Lee and the other commanders that had been relieved without his concurrence. Park replied that he would consider the General's wishes, which was a diplomatic way of saying no. Magruder was cognizant of the agreement's shortcomings but also understood that there was no better deal available. He informed Lemnitzer that "I was convinced that I could get no more without negotiating assets for which I

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<sup>119</sup> Message K-309, 26 May 1961, RG 84, JFKP.

asked and which the JCS denied me.”<sup>120</sup> Despite the lack of any real bargaining chips such as MAP, Magruder performance at the negotiating table was commendable.

Magruder’s days in the ROK may have been numbered but as a seasoned commander, he recognized that this agreement signified only the first of many steps that lay ahead. This outlook directly influenced his decision to accept the negotiation terms. While Park may have initially succeeded in consolidating his power, several senior ROKA officers were still hesitant to support the junta. Many, in fact, contacted Magruder for guidance. The CINCUNC advised them to comply, understanding that they could play an important role in the government’s future.<sup>121</sup> Magruder expressed this exact thought to Lemnitzer following the announcement of the joint statement. The CINCUNC felt the necessity of protecting reliable officers still occupying positions of authority who without an agreement, would be vulnerable to the more extreme members of the military junta. Magruder envisioned these officers actually joining the new government and “exercising a conservative influence on the coup group.”<sup>122</sup> It was crucial that pro-American officers were not completely devoid from positions of influence that impacted the junta’s future.

### ***Rewarding Commitment***

The May 26<sup>th</sup> joint SCNR-CINCUNC statement marked a pivotal milestone for the new regime, one that symbolized the USG’s openness to normalize relations with the military junta. The premium that the US placed on retaining OPCON over the Korean military was indisputable. One of the best indications of its importance was the steady flow of directives from Washington permitting favorable overtures towards Park’s government that began only *after* he

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Magruder Oral History, 204.

<sup>122</sup> Message K-309, 26 May 1961, RG 84, JFKP.

made assurances to preserve American OPCON. While full recognition of the new regime was still on the horizon, a series of positive actions that occurred within a week following the joint announcement sent a resounding message to the junta that it was on the path towards American acceptance, despite the manner in which it seized power.

The first “reward” occurred immediately following the Embassy’s notification of the OPCON agreement to the State Department. In response, the Department’s May 26<sup>th</sup> (Washington time) cable stated that with the new government’s reaffirmation of the CINCUNC’s command authority, “reciprocation on our part now in order.”<sup>123</sup> The first beneficiary was Chang Do-young, who despite strong protestations by the US Embassy, inexplicably declared on May 18th that he would travel to Washington. His intent was to meet with President Kennedy and explain face-to-face exactly why this coup needed to occur. As the designated SCNR Chairman and effective head of government, he mistakenly believed that this venture was within the realm of possibility.

It is unclear as to why Chang assumed that he could simply fly to Washington for a hastily arranged meeting with the leader of the free world. While he was not cognizant of the diplomatic protocols associated with such an event, the driving force behind his actions was likely his tenuous position within the SCNR. His role as Chairman carried little weight and he needed to deliver a sizeable victory to secure his place. While Chang may have been aware about the coup in general, it was evident that Park co-opted the ROK CSA’s symbolic value for the benefit of the coup. The revolution would have marched on regardless of his support. Though designated as Chairman, most realized from the beginning that Chang was merely a

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<sup>123</sup> DEPTTEL 1381, 26 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 5/25/61-5/31/61, JFKL

figurehead and faced an eventual exit in the near future.<sup>124</sup> Chang's connections to the US, however, were exponentially stronger and widespread than any other SCNR member. While certainly a gamble, successfully leveraging his positive standing among senior American officials to arrange a meeting with Kennedy could assure Chang's position within the junta.

Chang immediately attempted to enlist the aid of the senior American military officers with whom he had existing personal relationships with since the Korean War. He called General Maxwell Taylor, serving as the Military Assistant to the President, directly on May 24<sup>th</sup> to plead his case. Taylor requested a meeting with Kennedy the following day to pass along Chang's request. The General's opinion was that as one of his former officers, Chang was a good Soldier, but he knew little of his current political orientation. Taylor, like the State Department, recommended against a special meeting but suggested that sending a special Presidential Emissary to the ROK could be of value.<sup>125</sup> Chang also called General James Van Fleet on May 25<sup>th</sup> with a similar request, who in turn contacted A/S McConaughy on his behalf. According to Van Fleet, the State Department was sympathetic to Chang's proposed June visit, but could not make any firm decisions while the President was out of the country.<sup>126</sup> While unsuccessful, Chang's direct link to these individuals symbolized the unparalleled access he had to the highest levels of the USG courtesy of his ties with the American military.

Chang had gambled and lost, which led him into a position where according to Marshall Green, he was "obviously looking to us to bail him out of a situation which he probably wished he had never gotten."<sup>127</sup> The newly appointed FOMIN, Kim Hong-il, apologized for the breach

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<sup>124</sup> EMBTEL 1711, 31 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: May 20-31, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, 25 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JFKL.

<sup>126</sup> Chang Do-young to James Van Fleet, 1 June 1961, JVFP, Box 75, Folder: Correspondence-Korean Military Junta 1961, GCML.

<sup>127</sup> EMBTEL 1661, 25 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JFKL.

in diplomatic protocol while Chang directed his subordinates to seek out a face-saving measure on his behalf. Fortunately for the beleaguered Chairman, the successful agreement concerning the CINCUNC's OPCON produced such an opportunity. The State Department's directive was to inform Chang that the President was supportive of a visit to Washington at a future date and regretted that June was not feasible due to scheduling conflicts.<sup>128</sup> Despite his rather amateurish approach to the situation, the SCNR Chairman did manage to pull a small victory from the jaws of defeat by securing a high-level visit to the US, an indisputable recognition of the military government. Unfortunately for Chang, he never made the trip since as predicted, his tenure as Chairman proved to be short-lived.

From a policy standpoint, the "Presidential Task Force Report on Korea" officially released in early June codified the USG's intent to support the new regime. This report, primarily a State Department document with input from all relevant agencies, was actually completed prior to the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup. The gravity of the event, however, necessitated a reappraisal of the paper led by A/S FE McConaughy with significant contributions from the newly confirmed Ambassador to the ROK, Samuel D. Berger. The final draft was finished by late May and sent up for NSC review on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The recommendations unmistakably indicated that the USG was now prepared to work with the military regime. In the summary statement of the report written by Berger, the new Ambassador concluded that the SCNR was now in complete control and the US needed to win the junta's confidence in order to "channel dynamism and emergency powers towards constructive ends."<sup>129</sup> The choice for the US was evident. While Park's group was far from perfect, it did possess several encouraging

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<sup>128</sup> DEPTTEL 1392, 26 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 5/25/61-5/31/61, JFKL.

<sup>129</sup> President's Task Force on Korea: Report of the National Security Council, 6 June 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, TF Korea Folder, JFKL.

characteristics that if properly harnessed, could deliver positive outcomes previously unobtainable by the ROK's civilian governments.

The primary Task Force recommendation was for the new Ambassador to immediately depart for Seoul and engage the regime in a friendly and cooperative manner. Berger's pressing priority was to inform Park that it would be in their best interest to reaffirm their intent to eventually cede power to a representative government elected by constitutional means. Understanding that such a transfer may take time, the US was committed to continue both economic and military assistance in the interim. American support for any of the junta's national development plans, however, was contingent on its commitment to recognizing the CINCUNC's authority and his OPCON over Korean military forces.<sup>130</sup> Despite the ROK's recent history of political turmoil, the US still recognized its strategic importance for American objectives in the region. The USG was willing to give Park a chance to succeed but certain conditions, such as OPCON, were simply nonnegotiable.

The State Department dispatched the basic elements of the Task Force's recommendations to the US Embassy on June 8<sup>th</sup> as the Charge de Affaires prepared to meet Park for the first time. All the Embassy's interactions to date had either been with the President's office or the Foreign Ministry since an official meeting with Park was synonymous with American recognition of his leadership. Only the CINCUNC had held meetings with the coup leader. Green met with Park on the same day with Kim Jong-pil in attendance. He used the opportunity to pass along almost verbatim the guidance he had received from Washington in the latest cable that included:

1. The USG sees the SCNR as the established government, and is prepared to work in good faith on friendly and cooperative terms.

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<sup>130</sup> President's Task Force on Korea: Report of the National Security Council, 6 June 1961, JFKP.

2. The May 16<sup>th</sup> objectives are welcomed by the USG and accepted in good faith
3. The US hopes for a fruitful relationship between our governments
4. Ambassador Berger will arrive and be prepared to discuss ways to cooperate to realize SCNR pledges. Meanwhile, there are certain key economic reforms discussed with the previous government, the USG hopes that the new government will move forward on these
5. The USG welcomes joint statement affirming the CINCUNC's OPCON<sup>131</sup>

Green described Park's reaction as one of relief as he once again expressed his regret over the interruption of General Magruder's authority, which in his opinion, had been fully restored. Park reiterated that the revolution's primary objective was to root out Communism and corruption in the government, goals that he believed aligned with American interests as well.<sup>132</sup> Park's three-week roller coaster ride of uncertainty had temporarily come to an end. He had faced the prospect of an overwhelming suppression of his coup during the first three days of the revolution but had survived. He then dealt with the uncertainty of American support for the nearly ten days, only to finally receive a breath of reassurance after agreeing to respect the CINCUNC's OPCON authority. Nearly three weeks since his revolution started, Park was finally able push forward with confidence that USG backing, and foreign assistance, were behind him.

#### **IV.) Postlude: The CINCUNC's Retrospection**

General Carter Magruder's tenure as the CINCUNC ended on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1961 when he transferred command to General Guy S. Meloy. While never destined to become a household name in military lore, with two revolutions under his belt, Magruder still remains the most influential CINCUNC following the Korean War. His end of tour came at an opportune time as

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<sup>131</sup> DEPTTEL 1465, 8 June 1961, Box 42, Folder 320: US-ROK, 8 June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>132</sup> EMBTEL 1764, 8 June 1961, Box 42, Folder 320: US-ROK, 8 June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

the military command required a new senior officer with a fresh set of eyes to tackle the restoration of relations with the new ROKG. Though Magruder avoided making emotional decisions during his tenure, his public remarks made during the last month of his command reflected disappointment and betrayal.

The CINCUNC did not hesitate to make his thoughts known to the commanders of FROKA and the five ROKA Corps during their first official call with Magruder following the coup on June 8<sup>th</sup>. The General stressed that the CINCUNC's OPCON, which had been exercised successfully for over a decade and strengthened during the war, had been recently destroyed. He also considered many of the commanders sitting before him as manifestations of this breach as most had been appointed without his consent, while those that obeyed his orders were in jail.<sup>133</sup> Magruder did not use this meeting to provide confidence or encouragement to these senior officers, but rather impress upon them the seriousness of the disruption and the need for proven actions to restore the CINCUNC's authority.

The fates of General Lee Han-lim and the other commanders imprisoned for following the CINCUNC's orders became a lasting reminder of the new regime's initial actions. Magruder used his final address to American troops to remind the audience that the ROK's defense had been weakened with the breaking of OPCON and the unauthorized relief of certain commanding officers. While encouraging everyone to look to the future and not the past, the General again emphasized that the regime's future actions, and not words, were the true indicators of its intent to restore traditional command relationships. Magruder closed his remarks by challenging his command to work with the new regime by "seeking to exert a conservative influence, to the end that someday there may be reestablished between the Korean and American forces the trust and

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<sup>133</sup> Carter Magruder, "CINCUNC's Remarks" (address, Conference with FROKA and Corps Commanders, Seoul, Korea, June 8, 1961. Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

confidence that once served to strengthen us both.”<sup>134</sup> The General did not leave the ROK, however, with only doubts over the CINCUNC’s authority. Park was fully transparent in selecting his first ROK CSA, Kim Chong-oh, a choice approved in advance and enthusiastically supported by Magruder. Though full OPCON restoration was still far off, the outgoing CINCUNC considered Kim’s appointment as “a measure that definitely helps to increase the strength of my OPCON.”<sup>135</sup>

When asked about the military coup eleven years later, Magruder voiced little regret over what had occurred. He also expressed the belief that the coup leaders ultimately had no choice but to accept the USG’s conditions since they knew American support was paramount. The only unknown factor was how long it would take for the junta to accept its dependence. Having continually observed the ROK over the last decade, the former CINCUNC commended Park’s performance, even acknowledging the coup’s justification given the weakness of PM Chang and his government. In retrospect, Magruder appeared as a man content with his part in this significant historical event stating that “I am happy that I did not take any more action than I did to discourage it.”<sup>136</sup>

### **Understanding the Coup’s Success**

The May 1961 military revolution was a dynamic event that unexpectedly changed the course of US-ROK relations. Several factors provide explanations as to why the coup was so successful. Park Chung Hee’s meticulous planning and nearly flawless coup execution were undoubtedly key factors. His ability to keep the uprising relatively quiet was crucial, only to be

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<sup>134</sup> Carter Magruder, “CINCUNC’s Remarks” (address, Farewell Address to American Troops in Korea, Seoul, Korea, June 30, 1961. Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>135</sup> Carter Magruder, “CINCUNC’s Remarks” (address, ROKA Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, June 7, 1961. Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

<sup>136</sup> Carter B. Magruder, Oral History Interview 211.

outdone by his adeptness in quickly initiating the coup after suspicions that investigating authorities were onto his plans. Yet, despite everything falling into place for the revolutionaries from the very beginning, they still found themselves at the mercy of the CINCUNC, who despite the breach of his OPCON, remained in a position to crush the uprising. Park's success depended on the actions of Magruder. With FROKA units on standby to enter Seoul, the CINCUNC ultimately decided not to independently intervene due to the disconcerting lack of resolve shown by Chang Myon and his government during the crisis. His decision mirrored the late-arriving guidance sent by Washington on May 18th.

The USG's May 18<sup>th</sup> decision to not crush Park's uprising did not constitute American support for his new regime. While the US lost its opportunity to stop the revolution by force, it still retained the leverage to facilitate its demise by withholding recognition and aid. The following week turned out to be harrowing time for the military junta as it attempted to consolidate its power without knowing whether the US would support it, a prerequisite for survival. Contrary to established opinion, the US did not decide to support the coup group due to its confidence in Park or optimism towards the junta's vigor. On the contrary, the USG expressed internal concerns from the very beginning of the character of the younger elements within the coup group. Confidence in Park as a leader also came later as well. It was rather the SCNR's commitment to honor American OPCON over the ROK military on May 26<sup>th</sup> that opened the door for support. As long as Park adhered to this top USG priority, his government would at the minimum receive an opportunity to prove its value.

Second only to the USG's decision not to act was the residue left behind by the April 1960 Student Revolution that established an environment conducive to the coup's success. In a certain twist of irony, the internal purge of ROKA commanders supported by PM Chang

following the student uprising eliminated all the officers with enough seniority and influence to oppose Park's plan. General Paik Sun-yup, a renowned Korean War hero and faction leader, along with Lieutenant General Song Yo-chan, hero of the Student Revolution, left the country shortly after Rhee. Both of these men professed support for the ROKA's political neutrality and held immense respect from USG officials familiar with the ROK. Yet both, along with General Chung Il-kwon, were all out of the country on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

The actions by the ROKA during the April 1960 Student Revolution earned the organization lasting respect among the Korean general public. Park brilliantly exploited this fact by falsely advertising that the military revolution was an Army-wide supported event and not the actions of a fringe group. Comments from students, professors, cultural leaders, and business professionals compiled by the US Information Service three days after the coup produced a singular theme that "because the Army gained such a reputation in April 1960, the people felt secure in putting their trust in them know."<sup>137</sup> The general public chose to accept the junta not because they believed in the relatively unknown personalities of Park Chung Hee and Kim Jong-pil, but rather because these relative unknowns were able to convince almost everyone that they represented the wider ROKA. Though the military may have been a respected organization since the war, the coup would not have succeeded without the positive standing it had gained after the Student Revolution.

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<sup>137</sup> Dispatch 550, 31 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, May 20-31, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**The Park Regime's Early Years:**  
**The Alliance and the Pursuit of Political Stability**

Korea's most notable foray into military rule occurred in the Tenth Century when General Wang Geun established the Koryo Dynasty in 918. The new kingdom experienced early successes by defeating the rival Silla and Baekje states during the Later Three Kingdom's Period and established boundaries similar to the modern day Korean peninsula. Despite the continued dominance by military leaders, Koryo was unable to withstand the Mongol onslaught and became a semi-autonomous tributary state under Kublai Khan's Yuan Dynasty. Koryo ceased to exist by the end of the Fourteenth Century when another General, Yi Seong-gye, usurped the throne and established the Joseon Dynasty. The military never regained power or prominence during Joseon's five-hundred-year existence as Confucian values subsumed the martial traditions of its predecessor. Over one-thousand years later, the ROK began its latest venture into military rule with Major General Park Chung Hee's successful coup de tat on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961. His victory was far from guaranteed but the relatively unknown General managed to quickly establish a tenuous hold on power. By July, the only entity that could stop Park, the USG, had accepted the new political reality and sought to steady the ship as the military junta entered a season of political turbulence.

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question of how the US-ROK military alliance affected South Korean political development during the early years of Park's regime. The period between 1961 and 1965 is especially important given the churn and instability that the military junta faced as its inexperience in national government collided head-on with a myriad of endemic problems that had plagued previous administrations. I argue that the alliance was a conduit for American influence on Korean political affairs that was both powerful, yet

simultaneously unassuming. The USG was successfully able to leverage its existing military-to-military connections with senior Korean general officers, primarily the ROK Service Chiefs, to ensure that Park maintained a political course guided by moderation and stability.

As the ROK once again plunged into a period of internal turmoil less than a year after the coup, American officials in Washington and Seoul coalesced around the opinion that Park was the best means to stop the endless cycle of domestic turbulence. No one else had the ability to manage the junta's competing factions while maintaining support of the most critical ROKG entity, the Korean military. The US chose to bolster Park quietly not due to his dynamic leadership or ambitious economic development plans, but simply due to his ability to hold the government together. The USG came to value above all else, a stable and moderate ROK, which Park could best ensure. The alliance provided the US the best means to influence internal politics through access to the Service Chiefs and other senior military officers that represented a pro-American moderating force. Park came to rely on these leaders to guarantee the military's support of his regime, while the US utilized the same individuals to ensure that Park did not succumb to the more radical and nationalistic impulses of the younger, Field Grade Officers within the junta considered the zealots of the military revolution.

Understanding this argument first requires clarification on two essential points often overlooked when observing Park's rule from a broad lens. The first is that while Park was able to retain power for over eighteen years, the authoritarianism synonymous with his later years was not characteristic of his entire rule. His hold on power from 1961-1965 was in fact uncharacteristically fragile for a military leader who had seized control by force. Park faced the consistent threat of countercoups, junta implosion as a result of internal factional strife, and the constant push by civilian politicians for more political authority. While his initial seizure of

power was met by general disinterest from the overall population, maintaining legitimacy as a ruler became increasingly difficult for Park as May 1961 further faded into history.

The second critical observation is that the Korean military cannot be considered a monolithic organization, especially during this time period. As the previous chapter explained, Park executed the coup with the support of only a small segment of the armed forces. Few in the military enthusiastically supported his cause, most chose to wait and see how the events unfolded prior to making a decision. Park understood the necessity of expanding his junta to encompass a wider range of military leaders, to include those characteristically loyal to the US and disinterested in political affairs. By expanding SCNR membership, Park also invited factional conflict and embittered rivalries among distinct groups. The most notable conflict that developed was between the more radical Field Grade Officer clique led by Kim Jong-pil and the seasoned, senior General Officers accustomed to close US-ROK relations. The USG's ability to impact the outcome of this conflict heavily influenced the formation of the ROK's next government, which for at least the balance of the decade, preserved some characteristics of democracy.

### **The Search for Stability**

As a country consistently plagued by economic hardships due to the dual shocks of national division and a devastating war, the ROK's source of stability in the eyes of the USG was the strong military bond between the American and Korean forces. The initial euphoria of change wore off by 1962 as the military junta failed to solve the lasting problem of economic insecurity. Despite this critical shortcoming, the US Embassy still expressed cautious optimism for the government's future due to the loyalty of the Korean military to the government and the UN Command. Embassy officials described the existing OPCON command relationship as the "anchor and foundation of the military government's existence and an area in which we have

considerable influence.”<sup>1</sup> Alexis Johnson, Deputy Undersecretary of State, echoed a similar sentiment a year later in a letter to the CJCS, General Maxwell Taylor, regarding possible American force reductions in the ROK. Johnson asserted that any reductions would greatly reduce American influence in the country, adding that “our conventional forces have placed a certain limit to the extremes to which events could move” by not only providing a defense against the Communist north, but by also limiting civil strife.<sup>2</sup>

These statements supported the idea shared by most USG officials in Washington and Seoul that during uncertain political and economic times, the special military-to-military relationship between the two countries was especially important in preserving stability. The alliance guaranteed a nearly permanent presence of American troops in the ROK, but to consider them as merely military tools underestimated their political utility as alluded to by Alexis Johnson’s statement. He understood that the mere presence of a large American military footprint on the peninsula opened normally inaccessible doors of influence. The Embassy shared this opinion in a cable back to Washington that emphasized that the US needed to “maintain a close association and influence with Armed Forces leaders who in the end may prove to be the arbiters should there be internal upheaval.”<sup>3</sup>

Why was the USG seemingly seeking to hedge its bets after openly accepting Park’s regime shortly after his seizure of power? In actuality, the US had a long history of designating pro-American military officers as potential alternatives to the existing government should stability and political moderation fall by the wayside. The USG had designated the ROK’s first four-star General and Korean War hero, Paik Sun-yup, as Syngman Rhee’s replacement if the it

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<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, eds. Edward C. Keefer, David W. Mabon, and Harriett Dashiell Schwar, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 268.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis Johnson to Maxwell Taylor, 28 May 1963, JFKP, NSF, Box 127a, Folder: 4/63-11/63, JFKL.

<sup>3</sup> *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, Document 311.

had decided to depose the elderly President in the early 1950s through a plan dubbed Operation Everready.<sup>4</sup> The US Embassy received clear instruction from Washington shortly following Rhee's forced resignation in 1960 to cultivate a relationship with Lieutenant General Song Yo-chan, hero of the revolution, in the event the next civilian administration proved untenable.<sup>5</sup> Similar instructions were also given following the May 1961 coup as the State Department identified Lieutenant General Lee Han-lim, FROKA CG, as a potential moderate ally that could be leveraged against Park if needed.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, or at the minimum unexpectedly, the USG grew to view Park himself in the same light as his government nearly imploded within its first years.

### **A Year in Review**

A relationship first characterized by uncertainty and suspicion soon became one of optimism as the USG observed the decisive actions of Park's junta. The feeling that the ROK for the first time in its modern history had a government capable of addressing endemic national problems was not unlike the one felt by American officials following Rhee's overthrow as a result of the 1960 Student Revolution. General Guy S. Meloy, the new CINCUNC, expressed guarded confidence as early as October 1961 in a letter to General Lyman Lemnitzer, CJCS, that acknowledged Park's success in consolidating power. According to the CINCUNC, if the ROK's economy could survive the next few months and show some sign of improvement, then the country "may well be on the way to a strong stabilized government with which we can deal with confidence."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, given the state of the ROK economy, the "if" proved to be too great of a challenge to overcome. The junta was not, however, without early successes as it

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<sup>4</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952–1954*, Volume XV, Part 1, Korea 1952-1953, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1984), Document 559.

<sup>5</sup> DEPTTEL 897, 27 April 1960, Box 34, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1960, NACP.

<sup>6</sup> Message KRA 278, CINCUNC to CJCS, 17 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General 4/1/61 - 5/25/61, JKFL.

<sup>7</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 3 October 1961, Guy S. Meloy, Jr Papers (GSMP), Box 1, Folder: Weekly Roundup to CJCS, USAMHI.

proved effective in reducing the deep-seated corruption that had plagued the national government since its inception.

Samuel D. Berger arrived in Seoul in June 1961 to begin what would become a three-year tenure as Ambassador during both a tumultuous yet formative period of history in US-ROK relations. His arrival coincided with Washington's decision to accept the military government and though his relations with Park were somewhat strained early on, Berger eventually departed the ROK in 1964 as a strong supporter of the Chairman and his ability to lead the nation. The Ambassador described the first year of the junta as one characterized by speed, energy, and zeal, along with ruthlessness and the tendency not to consult the US on key matters. The scope of action was both impressive while at times unwise, but Park managed to communicate the impression that a young, vigorous government with an ambitious plan was now in charge.<sup>8</sup> This youth and vigor impressed many within the Kennedy administration, to include the President himself.<sup>9</sup> To argue that these characteristics were the primary reason behind USG support for Park, however, is problematic in that he also needed to inevitably produce tangible results. The positive developments that the ROK experienced during the junta's first year were indeed palpable, but at the same time limited in scope and quickly overwhelmed by broader issues of greater significance.

Morris Janowitz published his essay, *The Military in the Political Development of New*

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961 – 1965," Samuel Berger Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>9</sup> Brazinsky argues in *Nation Building in South Korea* that Washington backed the junta due to its determination to promote economic development. He posits that the JFK administration viewed Park's youth and military background as the forces needed to push modernization and reform. While these opinions may have been initially valid following the coup, the reality was that the junta's economic development plans did not always align with the USG's vision. The ROK plunged into economic crisis once again in 1962 as the inexperienced military government chose to implement controversial measures, often without consultation with the US. Washington did make a conscious effort to bolster Park during his difficult early years not because of his economic successes, but rather due to his innate ability to hold the junta together despite significant internal turmoil.

*Nations* in 1964, the same period in which the ROK transitioned back to a pseudo-civilian government. Janowitz asserted that the one area that military regimes traditionally displayed weakness was in economic development. The military's organizational assets allowed it to make early successes in this field, primarily in the form of anticorruption drives or efficient management of key sectors such as transportation or sanitation. When it came to the management of economic development in support of long-term growth, however, the limitations became apparent.<sup>10</sup> Janowitz's assertions proved true in the ROK's case as the initial successes of the junta centered mainly on establishing managerial efficiencies and driving out latent corruption. A few of the most noticeable measures implemented by the SCNR included unifying multiple electric power systems under a central office that produced a rational rate structure, a reform long-pushed by USAID. Military officers, known for their order and efficiency, also assumed leadership positions in numerous idle public enterprises subsidized by the government that included fertilizer plants, steel mills, foundries, and shipbuilding yards. The result was a perceivable revitalization at these sites due to effective, new leadership.<sup>11</sup>

The junta's most visible accomplishment, however, was tackling the endemic corruption present throughout the government. The ROKA already had experience in this field due to a robust anti-corruption program initiated by Song Yo-chan in 1959. The SCNR continued the initiative by stamping out military corruption ruthlessly through well-publicized court-martials of senior officers. The junta also expanded the effort to the broader ROKG, significantly increasing the pay of civil servants while also jailing those judged guilty of excesses. The new government initiated a country-wide reform effort against usury in agriculture and even imprisoned leading businessman as profiteers or tax evaders, though the junta soon realized that in the field of

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<sup>10</sup> Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations*, 78.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961 – 1965," SBP, AJA.

economics, businesses cannot exist without businessmen, and eventually curbed these types of arrests. These deliberate actions initially led to feelings of satisfaction by the general populace that an energetic regime was now in charge in contrast to the ineffective Chang government. Despite these tangible efforts, the junta could not assuage the lingering sense of uneasiness and fear that the military, like its civilian predecessors, would eventually become corrupt and embroiled in factional fighting.<sup>12</sup> This sense of doubt proved to be remarkably prescient.

As Ambassador Berger reflected back on his time in Seoul, he judged that the positive start to the military government lasted only ten months. While 1961 produced enough successes to promote a sense of optimism, such sentiments disappeared by mid-1962. This year produced a series of poor decisions that quickly derailed any hopes of rapid political or economic stability. Though the USG urged the SCNR to transition into a provisional government that integrated civilian politicians in order to give Park a broad base across the country, it instead chose to enact a Political Purification Law in February that alienated most of the ROK's capable politicians. Kim Jong-pil, Park's closest confidant, then executed a series of misguided measures aimed at shoring up the junta and the economy. He rigged the stock market in April with the intent of amassing funds for the SCNR's future political party, a measure that caused the market to collapse. Kim also enacted a financial reform measure in June that confiscated all bank deposits over a specified minimum with the aim of raising capital for the regime's five-year industrial plan. As a result, the already anemic Korean economy screeched to a halt.<sup>13</sup> The trend was clear, the junta recognized the need for American assistance but it would not hesitate to act even without USG support or prior consultation.

While Park did experience some limited successes during the first five years of his rule,

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961 – 1965," SBP, AJA.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

his ability to truly govern with confidence did not manifest itself until 1965. It was during this historic year that the ROK finally normalized relations with Japan and agreed to deploy significant levels of its military forces to Vietnam in support of the US.<sup>14</sup> The road to 1965, however, was a treacherous one as Park dealt with intense factional infighting within his junta, overcame multiple real (and some contrived) coup attempts all while attempting to effectively govern a country in dire economic straits. His ability to hold the junta together was impressive, but his survival ultimately depended on the quiet and mostly invisible support of the US.

### **I. The Quest for Legitimacy Part I: Leveraging Military Ties to Preserve US Support**

Perhaps the most contradictory stance by the ROK's new military government was the junta's effort to showcase its independence from the US, while simultaneously seeking to solidify financial support from its longtime benefactor. Even as the two governments sought to stabilize relations during the late summer of 1961, the US Embassy recognized that a distinct change in tone had occurred with the new Korean officials in charge. Whereas one of Prime Minister Chang's strengths, at least in the eyes of the US, was his willingness to consult and coordinate with the Embassy prior to critical decisions, consultation with SCNR leaders was initially quite rare while coordination was virtually non-existent. The lack of collaboration was not uniform throughout the military government but rather most pronounced in the economic field, where Kim Jong-pil assumed the lead with many of his younger Field Grade Officer associates in support. In the area of security and defense, where senior Korean General Officers still maintained dominance, the cooperation was much stronger and a source of confidence for the CINCUNC.

Park's greatest challenge was balancing the competing interests and diametrically

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<sup>14</sup> Both events delivered much needed capital to the ROK economy in the form of "loans," "investments," or "foreign assistance."

opposed viewpoints of the younger and older SCNR officers. His decisions, however, indicate that he understood the necessity of strong US-ROK relations, not just for the good of his country's economy but also for his political survival. The Chairman purposefully sought to utilize the unique channels open to him via the military alliance by appointing officials with strong ties to the American military to key governmental posts. He simultaneously demonstrated his desire to honor the OPCON commitment that had produced the USG's first recognition of his regime. These measures in turn engendered confidence within the one USG entity that Park could rely on for support, the US military. The USG, in turn, also utilized these same channels to encourage moderation in the junta's actions aimed at preserving the country's stability.

### **Key Appointments**

As a relative unknown to the US, Park faced the initial challenge of inspiring enough confidence in the eyes of Washington to guarantee continued economic support. Unfortunately, his claims to fame were that he had once been sentenced to death for being a Communist and had most recently seized political power by undemocratic means. Fortunately for the Chairman, he had a deep bench of both retired and active Korean General Officers that were well-known and respected in the US, especially among the American military. Once Park's coup became an accepted fact by mid-summer, many of these individuals returned to the ROK to serve in the new government. Park did not squander the strong ties that existed between these individuals and senior American military officials. It was no coincidence that the General Officers appointed as the Prime Minister, ROK Ambassador to the US, and the ROKA Chief of Staff already maintained close relations with the USG in addition to favorable reputations. These positions also were the ones that required the most interaction with American officials, often on a daily basis.

### ***Prime Minister Song Yo-chan***

Retired Lieutenant General Song Yo-chan was conveniently a student at George Washington University in DC when the May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961 coup occurred. Chapter two addresses his exploits during the April 1960 Student Revolution and the rumors that the USG considered at least for a brief period of time, the potential of an interim military government under Song following Syngman Rhee's resignation. The "People's General" did not have the opportunity to bask in his exploits following the uprising as his role in delivering the ROKA vote to Rhee's party during the 1960 Presidential election forced him into early retirement and exile. Once news of the coup reached him in Washington, Song became an early and vocal supporter of the junta, visiting various USG offices to encourage American backing for the new government.

Park requested that Song return to Seoul and become the MINDEF, only to be offered the Prime Minister position shortly after his arrival. Unlike the previous government, this office was largely devoid of power as all major decisions ran through the SCNR. As the PM, however, Song did represent the face of the new Korean government and his positive standing in the US was his most valuable asset to the junta. His appointment inspired confidence within the USG, primarily within the American military, especially after observing the initial purge of Korean officers that had remained loyal to the CINCUNC during the coup. Lemnitzer as the CJCS expressed his support for the appointment in a July 1961 letter to the CINCUNC, General Guy Meloy. He also cautioned that if the rumors that Song was only a temporary appointment were true, his early removal would "certainly set back American confidence in the junta" because "Tiger Song is well known and highly respected by many Americans, particularly by senior

officers in our Armed Forces.”<sup>15</sup> Fortunately for the sake of bilateral relations, Song was not prematurely replaced, though he had no illusions as to why he was appointed Prime Minister.

Song quickly met with Embassy officials upon his return to Seoul in June 1961 to urge USG support for Park. He asserted that “rash young men,” specifically pointing to the young Field Grade Officers within the junta, had made mistakes that only Park could correct. His candid assessment concerning his own position was that the SCNR called him back only to strengthen the military government’s name and though he had no real influence, he would do his best to encourage the junta to improve bilateral cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Song received early positive marks from the CINCUNC, who recognized his lack of real political power, but considered him “an ace in the hole in the event we need a leader that the Korean people would rally behind.”<sup>17</sup> It was the same sentiment echoed by the State Department following Rhee’s ouster a year earlier.

### ***ROK Ambassador to the US Chung Il-kwon***

Park’s decision to appoint retired General Chung Il-kwon was also a move generally supported by Korea observers in Washington. Chung was enrolled at Harvard during the coup and though he retired from the service in 1957, he still exercised strong influence over the ROKA as the head of the powerful Hamgyong-do faction, which maintained a significant presence within the SCNR. The US Army Command and General Staff College graduate was also well-known among American military circles due to his service as the ROKA CSA during the first year of the Korean War and again prior to his retirement. Song communicated to

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<sup>15</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer to Guy Meloy, 10 July 1961, Box 26, Folder: Chairman’s Messages, March 1 to July 7, 1961, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>16</sup> EMBTEL 1894, 23 June 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>17</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 16 July 1961 GSMP, USAMHI. Song eventually left the Park government after becoming deeply embroiled in political conflicts with other SCNR members. He then became a loud voice of anti-government opposition which led to his arrest by the regime. Song, largely due to his strong network of American supporters, was eventually released and moved to the US, not unlike his rival, Chang Do-young.

Embassy officials that Chung's return to Seoul was doubtful due to opposition from the younger military officers within the SCNR that likely feared his influence as a factional leader.<sup>18</sup> The future Prime Minister correctly predicted that Chung would stay in the US where he could provide American officials valuable advice on how to deal with the junta while also influencing the USG primarily through his military contacts.<sup>19</sup>

Chung's established network with USG officials and fluency in English made him an obvious choice for Ambassador. He was immediately tested in Washington, most notably with coordinating Park's November 1961 visit to the US which included a high-visibility meeting with President Kennedy. Chung worked closely with retired General James Van Fleet to develop an overall strategy and program for the Washington portion of Park's visit. He also found assistance readily available from the JCS as well, particularly from General Lyman Lemnitzer. According to Van Fleet, he had spoken to the CJCS on May 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss the coup, and asserted that Lemnitzer was "as happy about the situation as I am," as were General George Decker (Army Chief of Staff), Admiral Arleigh Burke (Chief of Naval Operations), and General I.D. White (Commanding General of US Army Pacific).<sup>20</sup> The message indicated that regardless of what came out of Washington, there existed an influential cohort of senior American military officers supportive of the junta and willing to assist on its behalf when necessary.

The importance of a successful visit by Park to Washington for the military government cannot be understated. While the junta was initially elated by the USG's invitation, as the date

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<sup>18</sup> The primary opposition against Kim Jong-pil and his Young Tiger clique were members of the Hamgyong-do faction, led in country by retired Marine General Kim Tong-ha.

<sup>19</sup> DEPTTEL 1344, 21 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, 20-31 May 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961.

<sup>20</sup> James Van Fleet to Chang Do-young, 1 June 1961, JVFP, Box 75, Folder 22: Correspondence Korean Military Junta 1961, GCML. All individuals mentioned by Van Fleet had extensive experience in Korea. Lemnitzer and Decker were former CINCUNCs, Burke led a Cruiser Division during the Korean War and was part of the UN Truce Delegation charged with negotiating an armistice, and White was a former EUSA Commander.

actually drew closer, debate ensued within the SCNR over the wisdom of sending Park. All agreed that the Chairman needed to return to the ROK with tangible evidence that the US intended to continue its economic and military assistance to the country. Opponents of the visit believed that the USG would not entertain such guarantees, which would severely weaken the junta's domestic and international standing. Proponents of the visit argued that the trip would greatly enhance the public prestige of both Park and the military regime. They also believed that only through direct talks with President Kennedy could the ROK hope to achieve its basic objectives.<sup>21</sup>

Senior American officials in Washington and Seoul were in agreement that a visit by Park was in the best interest of the US as well. Meloy observed that the most educated and experienced non-military elements of Korean society still maintained a wait-and-see attitude. The best remedy to encourage their support for Park was a successful visit by the Chairman to the US.<sup>22</sup> The US Embassy's opinion, in line with the CINCUNC's, also advocated for the visit on the grounds that American recognition of the junta would have a stabilizing influence. It could enhance Park's standing within the SCNR itself and across the country, which was desirable since he had proven to be a moderating influence.<sup>23</sup> Secretary of State Rusk ultimately adopted the Embassy's position and recommended to Kennedy that the visit could be beneficial to American interests and relations with the ROK's new ruling regime. He advised the President that Park's trip to the US would "enhance international prestige of the government" and "strengthen the domestic position of Park who is a moderating influence."<sup>24</sup> The need to bolster

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<sup>21</sup> Guy S. Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 15 October 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>22</sup> Guy S. Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 13 November 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>23</sup> EMBTEL 370, 23 August 1961, Box 128, Folder: Korea, Subjects, Park Visit, 8/61-10/61, JFKL.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of State, 1 September 1961, Box 128, Folder: Korea, Subjects, Park Visit, 8/61-10/61, JFKL.

Park was not lost on the US military or the State Department, who remained concerned over his ability to temper the “young enthusiasts that lead the government.”<sup>25</sup>

Park’s only trip to the US occurred in 1955 when he attended the US Army’s Field Artillery Captain’s Career Course, an experience that failed to leave a lasting impression on him. Nearly seven years later, Park returned as a Major General and the leader of his country. Despite his lack of fluency in English or an engaging personality, the Chairman managed to leave a positive impression across the USG. The State Department considered the visit an unmitigated success and instructed the Embassy to notify Prime Minister Song that a greater understanding and desire for cooperation had been achieved thanks to the face-to-face meetings with the President and other senior American officials. In State’s view, Park appeared “dedicated, intelligent, confident, fully in command of his government, and quite aware of the magnitude (of the) problems he faces.”<sup>26</sup>

Park also considered the trip to the US a triumph and returned to his country with increased prestige and confidence. As the new year approached, the USG was reasonably confident in Park’s ability to lead his nation and supportive of the Ambassador he had appointed to represent the ROK’s interests. Chung served with distinction until 1963 when he too temporarily broke with Park due to the junta’s decision to extend military rule. His replacement, Kim Chung-yol, was cut from the same cloth as Chung and selected primarily because of his long, close relationships with US officials particularly in the military.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chairman Park’s Visit to Washington, November 14-16, 1961 Scope Paper: KCV-G-9, Box 13, Folder: Visit of Chairman Park 1961, RG59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of East Asian Affairs (FE/EA) Central Files, 1961, NACP.

<sup>26</sup> DEPTTEL 1587, 4 December 1961, Box 128, Folder: Korea, Subjects, Park Visit, 11/61-12/61, JKFL.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum by Roger Hilsman, 17 April 1963, Box 21, Folder: POL -7 Visits and MTGs, April-June 1963, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Subject Files, 1963, NACP. Kim, often referred to as “Mike” by his American associates, was a graduate of the Japanese Air Force Academy and the ROK Air Force’s first Chief of Staff. He also served as the ROK’s Liaison Officer to the UN Command and Syngman Rhee’s last Minister of Defense. Kim was

### ***ROKA Chief of Staff General Kim Chong-oh***

The fact that the Park's coup forces had acted against the CINCUNC's directives and endangered his OPCON over the Korean military was the key source of tension between the new ROKG and the USG during the earliest days of the military revolution. As the previous chapter describes in detail, USG support for the military junta coincided with Park's willingness to honor the historic OPCON command relationship that had existed since the Korean War. Another related point that caused much consternation to the previous CINCUNC, Carter Magruder, was the junta's independent action in removing and replacing senior commanders under his command. Park had the opportunity to send a clear signal to the US that his support for American OPCON was unquestionable through his first appointment of the ROK CSA, the individual that would work with the CINCUNC on a daily basis to ensure the country's defense. Park displayed his respect for the CINCUNC on defense matters by asking his approval to appoint Kim Chong-oh as the next CSA, a decision whole-heartedly supported by Magruder.

Magruder considered Kim's appointment as the CSA as tangible evidence that Park was serious about supporting American OPCON.<sup>28</sup> Kim had served as the ROK CJCS during the coup, a position of prestige but still with little direct influence during the time. Like Song Yo-chan and Chung Il-kwon, he was a known quantity among American military commanders primarily due to his strong leadership during the Korean War. Kim was the Commanding General of the Ninth ROK Infantry Division during the famed 1952 Battle of White Horse Mountain. After successfully repelling the attack of a full Chinese Corps, the Ninth Division subsequently became known as the White Horse Division, eventually deploying to Vietnam and

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a popular figure among civilian politicians and military leaders who often served as an important bridge between the US and ROK.

<sup>28</sup> Carter Magruder, "CINCUNC's Remarks" (address, ROKA Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony, Seoul, Korea, June 7, 1961. Available in CBMP, Box 7, Folder: Speeches, USAMHI.

also partaking in Chun Doo-hwan's December 1979 military coup under the command of future President, Roh Tae-woo.

The Embassy assessed early on that ROK CSA Kim was not a hardliner but rather a moderate who did not openly endorse the coup and would push for a return to the civilian government.<sup>29</sup> Kim made visible efforts to allay any American concerns about the ROKA's ability to remain neutral in spite of the presence of a military government. He focused his early efforts on eliminating corruption within the ranks and assured his old comrade, Lyman Lemnitzer, that no misuse of MAP materials within the ROKA would be tolerated, a problem that had plagued the military during the Rhee Administration.<sup>30</sup> Kim did not hesitate to flex his political muscles when needed and played a key role in convincing Park to follow through with his pledge to support Presidential elections in 1963. His performance inspired confidence in General Meloy, who commented that "every day I am more and more favorably impressed with the way in which Kim Chong-oh is managing the ROK army. He is making wise decisions and selections. The ROK armed forces are growing up. They have matured and look more and more professional every day."<sup>31</sup> While the comments do ring a paternalistic tone, the wider message was that though there were plenty of disappointing facets of the US-ROK relationship, the military aspect was not one of them.

### **Preserving OPCON**

The appointment of General Kim Chong-oh as the ROK CSA was just the first indication that Park intended to support American OPCON over the Korean military. The Chairman's intention to fulfill the agreement made between the CINCUNC and SCNR on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1961

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<sup>29</sup> EMBTEL 1621, 22 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, May 20-31, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961.

<sup>30</sup> Kim Chong-oh to Lyman Lemnitzer, 29 November 1961, Lyman Lemnitzer Papers, Box 27, Folder: K, USAMHI.

<sup>31</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 11 March 1962, USAMHI.

was done out of necessity as the junta realized that it was a non-negotiable point in the eyes of the USG. The ensuing situation was quite unique where the military junta sought to consolidate its dominance in all areas of national government except on defense matters. The SCNR's continued support for American OPCON indicated that they either realized that any change was simply impossible, or it was a small price to pay for continued American support.

The outgoing CINCUNC, Carter Magruder, used his final speaking engagements to stress the idea that the true restoration of OPCON could only be judged by the SCNR's actions. Rather than simply give superficial recognition of the importance of American OPCON, Park pursued tangible measures to address points of contention that resulted with the existence of a military governing body. One key idiosyncrasy was the presence of Division Commanders on the SCNR, which gave them greater authority than the Corps Commanders who were their superiors in the military chain of command. Magruder had lamented against the presence of dueling command channels after the coup due to the SCNR's emergence. He, along with Meloy, had stressed this point during an earlier meeting with Park in June. The point of contention was focused on the fact that the three Brigadier Generals commanding the three ROKA Divisions most accessible to Seoul were also SCNR members. Given their membership, their Corps Commanders first sought their concurrence prior to making any major decisions. The Chairman made good on his promise to address the issue and officially removed all Division Commanders from the SCNR in August 1961.<sup>32</sup> While SCNR members still held a variety of ranks between the Field Grade and General Officer levels, Park committed to avoiding arrangements that muddled the chain of command, a concept considered sacred by the American military.

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Guy Meloy, Song Yo-chan, and Park Chung Hee, 7 August 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UN Command 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records 1961, NACP.

Park also deliberately sought to gain the CINCUNC's support on senior military promotions. The first post-coup promotion board occurred in August 1961. Meloy believed that the selection process was reasonably conducted, though SCNR members clearly fared well.<sup>33</sup> By January 1962, the SCNR approved a new Military Personnel Act aimed at implementing a fair promotion system. Meloy assessed that it was best personnel management system that the ROK military ever had.<sup>34</sup> As in the past, the CINCUNC received promotion lists in advance and vetted them through his KMAG channels. Promotions were rarely overturned, but the symbolism of the gesture was what was most important. Rather than attempt to circumvent or minimize the CINCUNC's authority, Park chose to deliberately demonstrate his support for the Commander, a wise tactical decision that paid dividends on the strategic level.

When it came time for Meloy to relinquish command in the summer of 1963, he did so with a sense of optimism that had alluded his predecessor upon his departure. Meloy provided General Maxwell Taylor, Lemnitzer's successor as the CJCS, an assessment of the Korean situation prior to his change of command. Despite the deep involvement of certain senior officers in political affairs during his tenure as the CINCUNC, Meloy believed that the armed forces remained untarnished by scandal in the eyes of the public. He also asserted that "the overall security of the ROK has remained high, a reliable chain of command has prevailed, and in no instance has my operational control of ROK forces been questioned."<sup>35</sup> It was a conclusion also reaffirmed by the new CINCUNC, General Hamilton Howze, during his initial assessment

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<sup>33</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 13 August 1961, GSMP, USAMHI. One notable promotion that occurred during this board was Park Chung Hee's selection to Lieutenant General. Though the exact details are not available, his promotion likely received unanimous support.

<sup>34</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 21 January 1962, GSMP, USAMHI. A chief complaint by younger officers in the ROKA was the inability to receive promotions in a consistent and fair manner. Due to the relative youth of the armed forces, individuals who reached the most senior levels did so at a relatively young age, allowing for extended careers. Accusations that promotions depended on personal connections rather than performance existed as well.

<sup>35</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 26 July 1963, Box 10, Folder 091: Letters from CINCUNC, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Maxwell Taylor, NACP.

of the Korean situation in August 1963.<sup>36</sup> Likely by design, Park had solidified the American military's support for his regime by diminishing any fears in the one area that was their greatest concern.

### **Prisoner Releases**

As Park and his junta tackled the steep learning curve involved with governing an entire nation, the military regime also faced the dual task of earning international recognition as a legitimate government. While not uncommon following forced transitions of power, the junta experienced an internal purge within the military as it sought to consolidate its power base. The reality was that numerous senior leaders in the ROKA, with Lieutenant General Lee Han-lim being the most notable, did not support the coup and instead followed the CINCUNC's orders when the uprising occurred. The SCNR, as a result, found itself in a difficult position in addressing these 'disloyal' officers. On one hand, these officers could not be retained in the service due to their actions, causing many to be arrested and jailed. On the other hand, any severe punishment invited swift criticism by the US military, whose senior officers waged an extremely powerful lobbying campaign on their behalf. While not always immediate, the SCNR ultimately chose to release most of the senior officers that had been arrested for following the CINCUNC's orders back in May, a decision that paid dividends in building a positive image for the junta during a time it desperately needed one. Park could simply not afford to risk harming the relationship with the US military.

Unfortunately for many of the Korean officers arrested, the junta did not immediately comply to the requests made by the outgoing CINCUNC, Carter Magruder, and other military officials in Washington advising a quick release for the prisoners. The delay caused

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<sup>36</sup> Message UK 50558, 24 August 1963, Box 10, Folder: Korea, August 1963, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Maxwell Taylor, NACP.

consternation back in the US, a sentiment communicated by Lemnitzer in a July letter to Meloy that stated “all this rapid juggling of personnel, removal of General Officers, does not inspire too much confidence here in the new regime. Unless they settle down and get on with the business of establishing a sound government in Korea, many are going to wonder if they know what they are doing.”<sup>37</sup> Lemnitzer personally intervened by writing letters directly on the behalf of the imprisoned officers, as did retired General James Van Fleet during his multiple trips back to the ROK following the coup.

The first major release of Korean officers occurred in August 1961 with Lee Han-lim being the most notable. Lee’s release was a great relief to the CINCUNC and many of his supporters back in Washington. They recognized that if not for Lee’s actions as the FROKA Commander during the coup, the US would have had little to no leverage against Park’s junta.<sup>38</sup> By September, seven of the eight officers of particular interest to the US had been released. As a result, ROK CSA Kim Chong-oh, a supporter of American efforts, commented to Meloy that “we can credit ourselves with a pretty fair batting average.”<sup>39</sup> Park understood the value of displaying leniency. He systematically dropped charges and released numerous people connected with Chang Myon’s government on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The timing was no coincidence as the Chairman’s intent was to send a message to observers in Washington prior to his upcoming visit in November.<sup>40</sup> These actions gained recognition from Lemnitzer, who wrote to Prime Minister Song in late October expressing his gratitude for supporting American efforts to gain the release of Lee Han-lim and other officers. The CJCS communicated to the PM that “these

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<sup>37</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer to Guy Meloy, 19 July 1961, Box 6, Folder 091 Korea, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Lyman Lemnitzer, NACP.

<sup>38</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 20 August 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>39</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 11 September 1961, GSMP, USAMHI

<sup>40</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 23 October 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

actions were warmly received here in Washington, particularly by the senior members of the US armed forces, who were deeply concerned regarding the confinement of these officers who, after all, were loyally carrying out their duties to the UNC.”<sup>41</sup>

The final prisoner release did not occur until later in 1962. Major General Kim Ung-soo, Sixth ROK Corps Commander during the coup, had taken some of the most decisive actions against the junta in May. His artillery units were the ones that supported the uprising and entered Seoul without his permission. As a result, Kim chose to completely sever ties with the ROKA and only take orders from the First US Corps Group.<sup>42</sup> His trial, which did not occur until January 1962, received much attention from Meloy who deployed his own Judge Advocate General lawyers to observe the proceedings. They reported back that throughout the entire trial, the court avoided any charges, testimony, or evidence that highlighted the OPCON aspects of the case, instead concentrating on other factors relating to his loyalty to the junta. Meloy’s assessment was that the SCNR recognized the sensitivities that surrounded the command relationship and chose to avoid any indication that they did not support OPCON agreement.<sup>43</sup>

Kim Ung-soo’s release eventually did occur in early May 1962, an action that Meloy believed was timed with the one year anniversary of the military coup. His release wiped the slate clean of the Generals that the US military felt a degree of obligation.<sup>44</sup> As a result of the hardships endured, Kim received permission to attend school in the US at the University of Washington, a path taken by numerous senior military officers when a brief exile from the ROK was required. By the end of 1961, the American military through Lemnitzer’s personal support

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<sup>41</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer to Song Yo-chan, 31 October 1961, Lyman Lemnitzer Papers, Box 28, Folder S, USAMHI.

<sup>42</sup> Message UK 70321, 17 May 1961, Box 43, Folder 350: Korea, May 1-19, 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>43</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 11 January 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>44</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 7 May 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

had already sponsored the education of four officers in the US, to include Lee Han-lim's enrollment at the University of Oregon. While George Washington University was normally the traditional waypoint for exiled ROK military officers, campuses at New Mexico, Fresno State, and even Idaho soon welcomed inconspicuous foreign students that had taken very conspicuous actions during the military revolution.<sup>45</sup>

Park's decision to cultivate positive relations with the USG and the American military in particular, was wise not only for preserving his government, but also his standing as the junta's leader. His deliberate actions aimed at assuaging American concerns in critical areas such as government appointments, OPCON, and prisoner releases provided a steady stream of positive actions that the USG could interpret as confidence building measures. To believe that all actions taken by the regime were accepted by the US with equal optimism, however, is inaccurate. The two governments as expected did weather periods of extreme tension, especially regarding the ROK economy and the related actions of Kim Jong-pil. The USG also keenly observed the internal strife and turmoil within Park's junta that directly threatened his future as the country's leader. Despite these negative aspects, Park did enough to inspire confidence in the USG that he, and he alone, was the country's best option for achieving political and economic stability, an objective as strongly desired by the US.

## **II. The Quest for Legitimacy Part II: Overcoming Internal Regime Instability**

The troubles that occurred during the years of 1962 and 1963 stood in stark contrast to the relative successes earned by the military junta during 1961. Rather than solidifying his hold on power as time progressed, Park found himself embroiled in crisis after crisis that jeopardized his position as the ROK's national leader. Ironically, the main opposition did not come from the

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<sup>45</sup> Memorandum for Chief of Exploitation Branch from COL F.B. Keller, Box 12, Folder: General Reports and Statistics, Korea 1964, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Central Files, 1964, NACP.

civilian politicians that he had effectively marginalized early in his rule. The source of uncertainty was within the junta itself as the issues that divided the disparate factions could no longer be contained for the sake of unity. While the junta had earned early positive reviews for its hardline stance against corruption, certain elements within it had engaged in illicit activities on a national scale that contributed to Park's increasing vulnerability. External pressure on Park from the US to honor his pledge for democratic elections only added fuel to the burning fire. Despite this confluence of competing crises, the Chairman managed to somehow retain power due to his personal ability of balancing competing factions and more importantly, the USG's determination that Park was the ROK's best chance at stability.

At the center of all these crises was Kim Jong-pil, Park's right hand and the Director of the newly created Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA). Kim, described by Meloy as a "a genius, but an evil one" was both Park's greatest supporter and threat.<sup>46</sup> His faction, often referred to as the Young Tigers, represented a highly nationalistic group of younger Field Grade Officers that did not tow the traditional party line as many of the senior General Officers. They were the zealots of the military revolution loyal to Park but also unpredictable and prone to make rash decisions on measures that sometimes ended poorly. Ambassador Berger, who in time developed a personal enmity for Kim Jong-pil, described this group as one favoring a strong, central government, having little understanding of democracy, and convinced that only the military could enact needed reform. Their sources of inspiration sprung from leaders that included Ayub Khan of Pakistan, Gamal Nasser of Egypt, and Indonesia's Sukarno.<sup>47</sup>

Different factions within the junta opposed Kim Jong-pil for various reasons. The influential Hamgyong-do group resented Kim's and the KCIA's monopoly on political power, a

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<sup>46</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 28 January 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

situation that the Director planned on prolonging even after the SCNR relinquished control to a civilian government. Others, such as select Service Chiefs and Ministers of Defense, rejected Kim's push to extend military rule by postponing Presidential elections originally set for 1963. It was during this period of political turmoil that the USG effectively utilized the channels available as a result of the military alliance to quietly influence ROK political affairs. American officials recognized even from the earliest days of the coup the dangers of allowing the younger military clique to gain too much political power. The USG sought above all else, to see a stable government in the ROK, and found willing partners with the retired and active senior military circles to achieve this end. These officers, with the MINDEF and Service Chiefs in particular, became the counterweights that the US could support against Kim Jong-pil and his younger associates. This approach proved to be an effective method utilized by the USG to bolster Park while encouraging political moderation, which became especially important in 1963 as the ROK struggled to hold its first democratic election following the coup.

### **The “Young” versus “Old”**

The 1961 Military Revolution represented a generational conflict within the Armed Forces as younger officers sought to claim the power and influence that had long remained out of their reach. The “older” generation of military leaders in 1961 was actually still quite young by American standards with most of the Korean General Officers being in their late thirties or early forties. The ensuing conflict was less due to age and more because of disparate outlooks. The senior officers that had retained the premiere positions of influence since the Korean military's birth were largely pro-American, having grown up in the Korean War fighting side-by-side with the US military. Following the Armistice, these officers also witnessed the ROK become a primary beneficiary of a generous Military Assistance Program where the US provided

everything from fuel to weapons. Maintaining close ties with the American military was a must for survival, as was ensuring continued US support for the military alliance.

Most of the original coup participants did not come from this group of pro-American senior officers. In actuality, Park's base for support was essentially devoid of this older generation, and relied heavily on a tight-knit group of younger officers that had a history of agitation against their seniors. The CIA produced a Special National Intelligence Assessment (SNIE) in late May 1961, just a few weeks after the revolution, that determined that the coup leaders were a "new and different breed" from the senior military personnel that the US had grown accustomed to working with over the years. They tended to be more authoritarian, nationalistic, and less receptive to American guidance. While they recognized the necessity of retaining close relations with the US, the CIA believed that the coup group sought to assert its independence in military, economic, and political affairs.<sup>48</sup> While not the case for all SNIEs, this assessment provided a relatively accurate picture of the course of events in the short-term.

It became apparent that the coup group faced internal divisions that called into question the junta's lasting power. According to Kim Chung-yul (Mike), former MINDEF and close confidant to both the SCNR and the USG, there was an unquestionable division between the Field Grade Officers and General Officers within the junta from the earliest stages of the revolution. The younger group possessed the zeal and determination, but showed little interest in returning control to civilian politicians. Kim also asserted that they were also very limited in comprehending the full scope of the nation's problems being largely devoid of experience in economic and social matters, along with international relations.<sup>49</sup> What they lacked in

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<sup>48</sup> SNIE 42-2-61: Short-term Prospects in South Korea, 31 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Task Force Korea, JFKL.

<sup>49</sup> EMBTEL 1711, 31 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, 20-31 May 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

experience, they sought to make up with zeal, an approach that produced some early successes along with other dismal failures. This young group, with Kim Jong-pil as the primary leader, became a necessary evil for Park, one that bolstered his hold on power, but also invited legitimate attacks due to their questionable actions.

### ***The Young Tigers***

The Field Grade Officers that formed the Young Tiger faction hailed from similar backgrounds and formed a tight-knit group primarily under the leadership of Kim Jong-pil. These officers mostly came out of the Korean Military Academy's (KMA) eighth class. Whereas regional roots drove factional loyalty in the earliest days of the ROKA, the introduction of a professional officer commissioning source such as the KMA started the slow transition to a system where officers identified first and foremost with their graduating class. The 1960s represented a transitional decade where factional loyalties derived from geography intersected with those based on graduating classes. By the time of the military revolution, the Class Eight coup members were mostly Lieutenant Colonels, long frustrated by the lack of promotion opportunities.

The Class Eight members, the first to enter and graduate as commissioned ROKA officers as opposed to members of the preceding National Constabulary Force, rose no higher than the Lieutenant Colonel rank. Those who were commissioned earlier and far less-educated, however, became General Officers and monopolized the positions of significance.<sup>50</sup> Few, if any, Korea observers predicted that this Young Tiger group would effectively orchestrate a military coup. Nearly all traditional participants in government affairs, however, both Korean and foreign, assessed early on that these new actors were the greatest threat to the ROK's future.

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<sup>50</sup> Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea*, 87.

While some characterizations of this group were borderline comical in painting their nefarious intentions, the French Ambassador to the ROK, Roger Chambard, provided the best assessment of the group ten days after the coup through the following statement:

True government is in the hands of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR) whose balance of power is clearly in the hands of Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, who are fired with an implacable hatred toward all politicians, who feel that democracy has no justification in Korea, who are cocksure, fanatical, and afraid of nothing. They are not anti-American, but they deeply resent Korea's dependence on America, and, now that the hot war has been long over, they do not understand why an American is in charge as Commander-in-Chief of their army, yet they do not want Americans to leave.<sup>51</sup>

Why did this group elicit such fear from external observers? The likely answer is that in an environment where bilateral relations depended on predictability and status quo, the various “unknowns” that accompanied this group were automatically perceived as threats. The USG, in particular, has grown accustomed to relatively stable relations with the ROKG, one anchored around a long-standing military alliance and a predictability unpredictable elderly President named Syngman Rhee. This new political actor showed little willingness to abide by old conventions and instead communicated the opposite intent. Respected officers from both the Korean and American militaries voiced similar concerns about the Young Tigers. Former ROKN CNO Son Won-il and future PM Song Yo-chan warned the US Embassy that these Field Grade Officers were the greatest threat since they are likely to pursue a “repressive totalitarian approach” if left unchecked.<sup>52</sup> General George Decker, CSA and former CINCUNC echoed a similar sentiment to President Kennedy and advised that the US demand control of the Armed Forces, and the country, to be handed over to senior officers rather than “a bunch of Lieutenant Colonels.” The President offered a different assessment, however, stating that the US had no

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<sup>51</sup> EMBTEL 1669, 26 May 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 128, Folder: Korea Cables, 5/25/61-5/31/61, JFKL. Roger Chambard served as French Ambassador to the ROK for ten years from 1959-1969.

<sup>52</sup> DEPTTEL 1344, 21 May 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, 20-31 May 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

alternative but to deal with the people in power.<sup>53</sup> Realistically, the Young Tigers were a permanent fixture as long as Park remained in power. The challenge for the USG lay with finding an effective method to counterbalance this group.

### ***Kim Jong-pil***

Kim Jong-pil, the self-proclaimed “Father of the Military Revolution,” was no stranger to defying conventional norms. He was the first to initiate a purification campaign against corrupt senior military officers following Rhee’s overthrow. Kim also organized the Ha Kuk Sang, or “the challenge of the seniors by the junior” movement that resulted in the removal of the standing ROK CJCS in 1960.<sup>54</sup> His background was unique in that unlike many of his contemporaries that spent the majority of their military careers in the infantry, Kim worked primarily in intelligence units, undoubtedly an unintended foreshadowing of his KCIA future.<sup>55</sup> Related to Park by marriage, Kim also had the most to lose from a failed military coup in 1961. He was the mastermind behind the revolution that provided Park support via his Class Eight compatriots and even the majority of the funding after he sold his own house.<sup>56</sup> The relationship that developed between Park and Kim was a strong one, with Ambassador Berger likening it to Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Nguyễn Cao Kỳ of Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> Kim’s actions, however, regularly pushed Park into a corner as the young Lieutenant Colonel often found himself in conflict with other senior military and defense officials.

Kim Jong-pil’s oft unparalleled power lay with his access to Park and his position as the KCIA Director. Established in June 1961 by a SCNR directive, the KCIA’s original mandate

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<sup>53</sup> Notes from the NSC Meeting, 13 June 1961, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers (LBJP), Vice-President Security File (VPSF), Box 4, Folder: National Security Council (III), Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (LBJL).

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 1 for additional details.

<sup>55</sup> Sejin Kim, *The Politics of Military Revolution in Korea*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> Samuel Berger, “The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965,” SBP, AJA.

was to coordinate and supervise activities of government ministries, including the armed forces, concerning domestic and international matters related to national security and criminal investigation. Given its broad mandate and direct reporting chain to Park, the Embassy assessed that the intent behind the new organization was to provide a powerful and repressive tool for uncovering and eliminating junta opposition.<sup>58</sup> The idea was not a novel one as Syngmn Rhee had long utilized his National Police and Army CIC units for similar purposes. The SCNR created the KCIA in order to protect the military revolution but by 1963, with Kim's power nearly unchecked, the KCIA had taken over the revolution.<sup>59</sup> Filling the organization primarily with members of his own clique, Kim created an expansive network with a reach into all areas of governmental affairs and staffed by those strictly loyal to him. The KCIA's authority, however, expanded far beyond security and intelligence matters. By establishing its own Policy Research Institute tasked with providing Kim advice on matters pertaining to politics, economics, society, law, culture, and reconstruction, the charismatic Director seized control of the junta's policy planning, with special emphasis on politics and economics.<sup>60</sup>

Kim Jong-pil did not have strong ties to the USG given his relative junior rank in the military. Once he became the KCIA Director, he also showed little interest in cultivating a relationship with the American CIA. His standing within the SCNR as Park's right-hand afforded him direct access to the Ambassador and CINCUNC. Kim appeared most eager to establish ties with the American military command and also found an influential benefactor in the US as well. Perhaps understanding the value of the General's Lobby, Kim developed a close

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<sup>58</sup> EMBTEL 1799, 13 June 1961, Box 44, Folder 350: Korea, June 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>59</sup> US Embassy Seoul Airgram-556, 1 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>60</sup> Hyung A. Kim, "State Building: The Military Junta's Path to Modernity through Administrative Reforms" in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, 97.

relationship with retired General James Van Fleet. Van Fleet was rarely without praise for Kim, referring to him as the “present day savior of your country and my other home” in a 1963 letter prior to the ROK’s Presidential election.<sup>61</sup> Van Fleet also worked directly with Kim to provide a strategic vision for Park’s initial visit to the US in November 1961. The utility of Van Fleet’s support was on full display in the fall of 1962 as Kim Jong-pil prepared for his first visit to the US. The General personally requested to President Kennedy that he meet with Kim, an action that the President was willing to support, though ultimately rejected due to strong protestations by the State Department. Kim did, however, obtain meetings with the Secretaries of State and Defense, along with the Attorney General, despite the obvious disparity in rank.<sup>62</sup>

## **The Internal Struggle for Power**

### ***Chang Do-young’s Exit***

Kim Jong-pil’s authority, influence, and drive were undeniable, but so was the enmity he garnered from many senior Korean military officers. During the first two years of the junta, however, Kim’s hold on power was unquestionable. He systematically eliminated rival SCNR members and factions with efficiency as he extended his reach to all major corners of government affairs. Kim’s first victory came early in July 1961 when Park authorized the purging of the titular head of the SCNR, General Chang Do-young. While Chang had originally been invited into the SCNR to serve as a figurehead and recognizable figure to the US, he had also gained an unexpected following within the junta, primarily due to his senior position within the powerful Hamgyong-do faction. General Magruder observed that the “pedestal on which he

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<sup>61</sup> James Van Fleet to Kim Jong-pil, 24 January 1963, JVFP, Box 70, Folder 9: Correspondence-Alphabetical, Kim Jong-pil, GCML.

<sup>62</sup> Memorandum for the President-Visit of KCIA Director Kim by Mike Forrester, 17 October 1962, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General, 8/62 to 3/63, JFKL.

has been placed, makes him a power to reckon with.”<sup>63</sup> Despite his questionable actions during the coup itself, US Embassy officials assessed that strengthening Chang’s position was desirable as he represented a moderating influence within the junta.<sup>64</sup>

Rumors began to surface that Chang and Park were engaged in the power struggle. Park retained the majority of support but Chang had amassed enough strength where whispers of an imminent countercoup ran rampant in early July 1961. Utilizing what would become a familiar KCIA tactic, Kim Jong-pil arrested Chang and twenty of his supporters, including three that were SCNR members, during the first week of July on charges of conspiring to execute a coup. Meloy commented that the quick and silent manner that the KCIA eliminated Chang highlighted the deadly efficiency of Kim Jong-pil’s organization. The disposed SCNR Chairman was caught completely off guard, preventing him from even mobilizing loyal troops in defense.<sup>65</sup> A military court sentenced Chang to death, which was eventually commuted largely due to the lobbying of influential American General Officers who remembered his Korean War performance. Park permitted Chang to begin a new life in American exile in 1962, where he eventually became a professor of political science at Western Michigan University before passing at the age of eighty-nine in 2012.

### ***Breaking the Hamgyong-do Faction***

Chang Do-young’s removal was a blow to the Hamgyong-do faction, but not a mortal one. Senior officers within this group continued to be thorn in Kim Jong-pil’s side, constantly pushing back at the Director’s machinations while warning Park of the imminent dangers associated with the KCIA’s unchecked power. The conflict nearly tore the junta in half by early

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<sup>63</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman, Lemnitzer, 2 July 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>64</sup> EMBTEL 1926, 30 June 1961, Box 42, Folder 320: US-ROK, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961, NACP.

<sup>65</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman, Lemnitzer, 9 July 1961, GSMP, USAMHI.

1963 after Kim resigned from the KCIA to concentrate on forming the political party of the military government. Dubbed the Democratic Republican Party (DRP), Kim's organizational vision was more akin to a Communist Party, with him at the head and supported by former KCIA personnel and Class Eight members.<sup>66</sup> His strongest opponent was retired ROKMC General and influential SCNR member Kim Tong-ha, who resigned in January 1963 as a protest to Kim Jong-pil's activities, denouncing the junta and DRP in the process. If the DRP leader realized his vision, members of the Hamgyong-do faction regardless of their loyalty to Park had no future in the next government. The KCIA utilized reports of an actual coup being planned by disaffected ROKAF and ROKA officers in March 1963 to finally eliminate the longstanding resistance from the Hamgyong-do faction and its senior ROKMC officers who were original participants of the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup. US intelligence reports confirmed the existence of the ROKAF/ROKA coup plot, but no one actually believed that the Hamgyong-do leaders were also involved.<sup>67</sup>

What was most interesting about this coup plot was that it was not aimed at eliminating Park, but rather targeted Kim Jong-pil. This distinction was not surprising given the increasing enmity towards the KCIA Director by rank and file military officers. Kim, however, did not allow a slight complication such as the Hamgyong-do faction's actual noninvolvement in the planned coup to disrupt his plans. He instead used it as a pretext to arrest several mid-grade officers from the faction along with prominent leaders to include Kim Tong-ha and retired ROKA General Pak Im-hang.<sup>68</sup> While many of the Hamgyong-do officers were eventually

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<sup>66</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-556, 1 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>67</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-870, 23 April 1963, Box 58, Folder 350: Korea, April 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>68</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-725, 12 March 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, March 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP. Kim Tong-ha was a critical figure in the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup. His support guaranteed that Park had access to the ROK Marines that were the bulk of the troops that occupied Seoul during the coup. Pak Im-hang replaced Lee Han-lim as the FROKA CG three days after the coup.

found innocent and released from prison, most never regained entry back into the political circle. The faction also lost its position as the main counterweight to the Young Tigers. This victory was undoubtedly a resounding one for Kim, one that should have guaranteed his unchecked power. While it did represent the removal of his greatest obstacle within the junta, Kim soon discovered that officials from without would ultimately be his match.

### ***The Service Chiefs: The Unexpected Counterweights***

As long as Park had the loyalty and support of Kim Jong-pil, he also retained at his disposal an efficient tool to counter any direct threats against the junta via the KCIA and the close-knit Field Grade Officer faction. His political longevity, however, was dependent on the Chairman's ability to retain the loyalty of the wider ROK military. Park made a decision early in his rule to expand SCNR membership to include more senior officers that were not original supporters of the coup. By doing so, Park acknowledged the risk of allowing the Class Eight officers to remain unchecked within the junta.<sup>69</sup> While Kim's KCIA remained a highly effective organization in multiple fields, it could not guarantee the support of the Korean military. This critical ingredient was in the hands of the ROK Service Chiefs, and the ROKA CSA in particular, who commanded the vast majority of the Korean military and worked hand-in-hand with the CINCUNC.

The Service Chiefs remained generally loyal to Park, choosing mainly to observe political developments rather than become directly involved in them. General Meloy expressed little doubt of their aversion to the military's involvement in politics, commenting that with their broad exposure to the US through extended schooling and close partnership with the American military, "our characteristic national respect for democratic processes and for civilian leadership

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum for Record: Weekend Discussions between Guy S. Meloy and Song Yo-chan, Park Chung Hee, 7 August 1961, Box 43, Folder 321.9: UNC 1961, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1961.

has rubbed off and impressed them.” The CINCUNC added that “the Chiefs and most of the senior officers are most sincere in their desire to get out of the military government role and politics as soon as possible,” due to their desire to salvage the military’s reputation.<sup>70</sup> To the US, these senior officers provided the best chance of influencing Park to pursue a path of political moderation. The USG’s faith in the Service Chiefs did not go unrewarded as they played critical rolls in temporarily ousting Kim Jong-pil after his corrupt activities came to light. They also were influential in persuading Park to honor his pledge for Presidential elections, especially after he initially announced the extension of military rule primarily at the behest of the Young Tigers.

What was the primary catalyst for the Service Chiefs to enter the political arena?

Understanding their actions first requires recognition of the fact that since the 1960 Student Revolution, the military alone retained a positive reputation in the eyes of the Korean populace. They had intervened during the 1960 Student Revolution to protect the interests of the people and even when the military coup occurred, many assumed that the armed forces had only acted as a last resort due to the civilian government’s endemic corruption. When elements within the junta, however, took actions that threatened the military’s reputation, the Service Chiefs chose not to stay idle. The first instance occurred in early 1963 when egregious corruption linked to Kim Jong-pil and the KCIA threatened to bring down Park and his government. They emerged as an influential voice again later in the year when the Chairman’s cold feet threatened the 1963 Presidential elections, a pledge made by the SCNR following the coup and one of the justifications behind the military’s seizure of political power.

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<sup>70</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 8 April 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

### **III. The Uncertain Path Towards the Presidential Election**

The USG's support for Park's military government was contingent on the eventual return of political power to civilian authorities. American officials, however, had little expectation of a rapid transfer. This realization was not a disappointment since as long as the ROK was moving towards a government that somewhat resembled a democracy, the US could still utilize the country as a symbolic counterweight to Communist aggression in the region. Park did just enough during his first year to convince American observers that a democratic government was still conceivable. The junta declared on the revolution's first day that it intended to eventually transfer power back to civilian politicians. The Chairman's visit to the US in November 1961 further strengthened this pledge with a line in the Joint Communique specifying Park's intent to return power by the summer of 1963.<sup>71</sup> While Presidential elections did eventually occur during the Autumn of 1963, the path itself was both uncertain and tortuous. The USG understood that it could not become openly involved since it was unquestionably an internal political matter. Fortunately, American officials found willing partners in the ROK Service Chiefs and other senior military officers that were willing to push Park to honor the junta's pledges.

#### **The Movement against Kim Jong-pil**

Few would argue against the statement that no other individual held more sway over Park than Kim Jong-pil. While the KCIA Director was destined to have a long political life that extended into the Twenty-First Century, the controversial Lieutenant Colonel invited much praise, but even more hostility. Just as the coup troops had done during the early morning hours of May 16<sup>th</sup>, Kim worked quickly and efficiently to consolidate and extend his power to the most critical areas of national government. The KCIA guaranteed that the junta, and Park in

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<sup>71</sup> "Text of the Joint Communique between President Kennedy and his Excellency Chung Hee Park," 14 November 196, Box 10, Folder: Park Visit, RG59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Subject Files, 1961, NACP.

particular, was free from any external threat that could shorten the military government's lifespan. Kim had received the proverbial keys to castle as the SCNR's lead figure in economic and political planning. By 1962, however, it became evident that his questionable actions were direct threats against the military government's survival and Park's legitimacy.

Kim's efforts to jumpstart the Korean economy and at the same time, amass wealth for the SCNR's future political party embroiled the junta in the exact type of corruption synonymous with previous civilian administrations. Kim astutely recognized that the SCNR needed to prepare for its future life within a civilian government. His vision, however, was one that did not invite broad participation by loyal junta members, but rather prioritized the concentration of power within his hands. Kim's actions in 1962 led to a near implosion of Park's junta by early 1963. Rival factions resented Kim's growing political power and their marginalized standing in the future party. The Service Chiefs and senior commanders were appalled by the stains left on the military's reputation as a result of Kim's actions. Both decided to move against Kim, with only one being successful.

### ***Corruption Stains the SCNR***

Taking a note from its neighbor to the east, the SCNR established an Economic Planning Board (EPB) in July 1961 charged with creating Five-Year Economic Development Plans (FYEDP) that supported the government's long-term growth objectives. Park's principle of "guided capitalism," where the state served as the driving force, provided a strategic vision for these plans.<sup>72</sup> As a testament to Kim's expanding power, the KCIA usurped the EPB's role as economic policymaker by mid-1962 and enacted a currency conversion reform measure that virtually brought the Korean economy to a halt. The goal of the reform was to raise capital for

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<sup>72</sup> Hyung-A Kim, "State Building," 101.

the junta's FYEDP by confiscating all bank deposits over a certain minimum amount.<sup>73</sup> The action was poorly planned and executed, initiated without consultation with the US, and infuriated many USG officials especially within the foreign aid circles. The miscalculation proved to be a boon for Kim's critics within the SCNR and the US Embassy, who utilized the failure to urge Park to limit the KCIA's reach.<sup>74</sup> The junta quickly abandoned the measure and Kim's KCIA withdrew from economic affairs to focus on the political arena. While not necessarily corrupt, Kim's ill-fated reform was just one of multiple actions that tarnished the junta's reputation that year.

Charged by Park to create the junta's political party for the future civilian government, Kim Jong-pil launched the Democratic Republican Party (DRP) and appointed himself as the Chairman in 1962. Kim understood that above all else, the DRP required immense funding if it hoped to have a political future. He pursued four different routes to raise party funds, actions referred to as the "Four Scandals," which gives the casual observer an idea of their legality. The most notorious action was the rigging of the Korean stock market in April 1962 which drained an estimated twenty-five million dollars through wild speculation and gross inflation before crashing the market. While only a small segment of stockholders lost significant funds, the widely publicized scheme resulted in the loss of public confidence over the junta's ability to govern.<sup>75</sup>

Park also appointed Kim as the junta's primary representative for talks with Japan regarding the diplomatic normalization. Syngman Rhee's legendary anti-Japanese stance precluded any chance for the reestablishment of relations between the two countries for nearly a

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<sup>73</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

<sup>74</sup> Hyung-A Kim, "State Building," 101-2.

<sup>75</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 17 June 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

decade. Park did not hold these same misgivings and in many ways, looked to Japan's modern day emergence as a model for his own country. The Chairman understood that the ROK's economy was in desperate need of capital and increased trade. Japan was simply the most logical partner for potential economic revitalization. Kim's frequent trips across the sea opened doors to opportunities that also supported his quest to enrich his political coffers. Known as the Saenara (New Country) Auto Scandal, Kim supervised the import of Japanese vehicles at a price of \$1800 per unit, though the amount paid to the supplier was actually \$800. The difference remained in Kim's Japanese bank account.<sup>76</sup> He also authorized the duty-free import of 880 pinball machines from Japan. The final scandal, though not related to Japan, involved bribes and questionable contracts associated with the construction of the Walker Hill resort area aimed at attracting American servicemen.

In terms of dollar amounts, these three scandals paled in comparison to the rigging of the stock market. The frequency of illicit activities involving the KCIA under Kim's direction, however, caught the attention of senior Korean military leaders that were fully aware that the general populace would eventually connect these corrupt activities directly back to the junta. The Korean military entered national politics for the sake of removing corrupt politicians. Now, they were in danger of losing the moral high ground due to these illicit KCIA activities. These actions also flamed internal dissension with the military government. 1962 was a tough year for the junta in general, who was rapidly learning the difficulties of national government. Its standing among the Korean public continued to trend downward, especially after word of the KCIA's corrupt activities came to light. Rather than stand idly by and allow Kim's schemes to

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<sup>76</sup> MOC between Kim Chae-Chun and William L. Magistretti, 19 June 1963, Box 61, Folder 600.1: Kim Chong Pil, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

increasingly discredit the junta, and by extension the military, senior military leaders led by the MINDEF (a retired General Officer) and the Service Chiefs decided to take firm action against Kim displaying their political weight in the process.

Fully understanding Kim Jong-pil's moment of vulnerability, many senior officers serving with the SCNR or as unit commanders, along with the Service Chiefs, issued Park an ultimatum in June 1962. Unless the Chairman curbed Kim's power or demanded his temporary exile, they pledged to take matters into their own hands. Many of these officers also privately protested to Park the apparent hostility that Kim had taken towards the US. Ambassador Berger, reflecting on his tenure in Seoul, recollected a concerted effort to quietly encourage these senior officers to make such a stand. Their willingness to comply symbolized a great victory for the USG since according to Berger, "from this time on the US had powerful allies among the older, more sober and wiser General Officers in stemming Kim Jong-pil's power and exerting a *constructive influence* on Pak and his military regime."<sup>77</sup>

Park's response was nothing less than astounding and on June 27<sup>th</sup>, the Chairman notified Kim that he was relieved as the KCIA Director due to the organization's role in the stock market scandal and other illicit activities outside of intelligence duties. His replacement was Major General Kim Chae-chun, the ROKA CIC Chief, who the CINCUNC considered a "friend and confidant of the US military" in Korea.<sup>78</sup> Kim did not protest the decision and even admitted to the EUSA G-2 during a June 29<sup>th</sup> meeting that he accepted responsibility for the stock market crisis and any resulting disciplinary action.<sup>79</sup> Kim's quiet acquiescence should not, however, be interpreted as a humble recognition of his past mistakes. While he was no longer the KCIA

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<sup>77</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

<sup>78</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 25 February 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>79</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 1 July 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

Director, his Class Eight classmates and other Field Grade Officer loyalists still retained the bulk of the critical positions within the organization. Kim did not have to be concerned with unemployment either as the Chairman tasked him with the crucial mission of creating the SCNR's political party.

### ***The Junta Survives***

Ironically, Kim Jong-pil's resignation from the KCIA did not save the military government, but rather set into motion a period of intense discord that threatened to collapse it from within. The actual grenade that nearly destroyed the junta was Kim's creation of the SCNR's Democratic Republican Party (DRP). Modelled after the Kuomintang, Kim envisioned a highly centralized apparatus that controlled National Assemblyman selection along with the legislative body itself via executive branch orders issued to the party.<sup>80</sup> As Chairman, Kim planned on retaining KCIA control through his Class Eight associates and transferring select KCIA advisors to the DRP. As the Chairman's plans came to light, he faced fierce resistance from within the SCNR primarily from the Hamgyong-do faction, who were clearly not in the party's future plans. Meloy described the situation in January 1963 by stating that "the political pot is beginning to boil."<sup>81</sup>

Retired ROKMC General Kim Tong-ha led the opposition in January 1963 by threatening to resign from the SCNR. Several other senior officers followed suit, forcing Park to face a dire situation of disunity within his junta.<sup>82</sup> The Hamgyong-do faction sought to lessen Kim Jong-pil's influence, break all his ties to the KCIA, and enlarge the political party organ to

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<sup>80</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

<sup>81</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 13 January 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>82</sup> CIA Current Intelligence Memo: The South Korean Crisis, 25 January 1963, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General, 8/62 to 3/63, JFKL.

accommodate its own members.<sup>83</sup> As the military government teetered on the brink of collapse, American officials in Seoul closely monitored the situation. The CINCUNC notified the CJCS that Kim Jong-pil represented a long-term problem who was destined to “remain the power behind the throne.” Meloy further added that Kim was too strong to topple at once, but had to be weakened piecemeal over time, or the ROK would experience yet another uprising similar to one that toppled Rhee.<sup>84</sup> Despite its official position of noninterference in the ROK’s internal political matters, the USG still sought ways to influence the outcome. Ambassador Berger recollected that the American strategy was a quiet one, “working with a handful of carefully cultivated senior officers who had by then been taken into the Pak government.”<sup>85</sup>

The USG’s approach proved to be an effective one as the very individuals that it had “cultivated” became the voices that swayed Park to make extremely difficult decisions concerning his closest confidante. The ROK CSA General Kim Chong-oh had already been earning high marks from the CINCUNC and other Washington observers for his leadership of the army and close cooperation with the American military. General Kim believed that Park needed to address the growing list of illicit activities associated with Kim Jong-pil. He stressed to the Chairman that the military government must finish on a successful note by conducting elections and cleaning house of corrupt individuals within the junta. Otherwise, a negative stigma would follow the armed forces and ruin its reputation among the people, making the rule of future governments that much more difficult.<sup>86</sup> In the CSA’s assessment, legitimacy of any regime was tied with the willingness of the military to support it. This support in turn, brought

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<sup>83</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 13 January 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>84</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 28 January 1962, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Berger, “The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965,” SBP, AJA.

<sup>86</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor and Harry Felt, 14 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

the government credibility in the eyes of the people.

Park received similar entreaties from the MINDEF, Bak Byeong-kwon, who notified the Chairman that unless Kim Jong-pil left the government, he could not take responsibility for keeping the ROKA in line. Along with this veiled threat, he also offered his resignation for good measure.<sup>87</sup> The message was resounding. As much as Park relied on Kim, he could not afford to lose his most powerful base of supporters, the ROK military. While Kim and the KCIA may have been the single-most dominant entity within the government, it could not withstand the combined weight of the MINDEF, Service Chiefs, key military commanders, and opposing SCNR Generals, all of whom had the quiet backing of the USG. Representing an unexpected fall from grace, Kim resigned as the DRP Chairman on February 20<sup>th</sup> and departed the ROK five days later as the military government's roving Ambassador.

The CIA assessed that Park's willingness to expel Kim Jong-pil was directly impacted by the extent of support that his opponents had within the armed forces.<sup>88</sup> The military's influence on the ROK's political affairs remained constant as any national leader, civilian or military, required the backing of the armed forces to stay in power. The USG had chosen its allies within the junta wisely as most senior military officers shared a common vision with their long-standing ally, one where bilateral relations revolved around a formidable military alliance with armed forces focused on the country's defense. Within less than seven months, the Service Chiefs and other senior military leaders had twice directly influenced Park to take decisive action that preserved stability and guaranteed political moderation. The Chairman's willingness to make extremely difficult decisions in uncertain times ensured that the military government survived to

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<sup>87</sup> MOC between Sim Yon-sop and Hugh Waters, 15 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>88</sup> CIA Current Intelligence Memo: The South Korean Crisis, 25 January 1963, JFKP, JFKL.

rule another day. Despite Kim's departure from the ROK in February, which represented the absence of the junta's most polarizing figure, a greater challenge still lay ahead.

### **Extending Military Rule or Holding Elections**

The period between February and May 1963 was a turbulent one as Park's commitment to democratic elections wavered. There was, however, cause for optimism in February, although it was very short-lived. Corresponding with Kim's exile, Park pronounced that he would not run for President if civilian political leaders agreed to a nine-point program guaranteeing political harmony and the continuation of the military revolution's political objectives. The leading civilian politicians agreed to the proposal and Park in turn assured them that he intended to remain in power only to see fair elections later in the year.<sup>89</sup> The US Embassy was ecstatic about the announcement as the Ambassador offered to make a public statement in support of the Chairman's decision, an offer that the junta respectfully refused in fear that it communicated American involvement. Berger instead passed a private message to Park through his aide stating that the US had special confidence in the Chairman, as did the CINCUNC through the ROK CSA.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Chairman Park Gets Cold Feet***

The hope for normalcy did not last long as Park unexpectedly moved to salvage junta unity by eliminating the Hamgyong-do faction in March. As explained earlier, the KCIA conveniently used the existence of an actual coup plot by several ROKAF and ROKA officers to justify the arrest of numerous Hamgyong-do officers to include Kim Tong-ha. Though Kim Jong-pil was no longer in the country, it was evident that his influence still remained as the

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<sup>89</sup> Memorandum for the President by Michael Forrestal, 28 March 1963, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, General, 8/62 to 3/63, JFKL.

<sup>90</sup> MOC between Samuel Berger and Cho Sang-ho, 18 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

junta's extremists with the Young Tigers in the lead retained heavy influence on Park's decision making. Following the faction's elimination, the Chairman issued a statement on March 15<sup>th</sup> without consulting the Service Chiefs or any US officials stating his intent to extend military rule for another four years through a national referendum in April. He also declared the suspension of all political activity while imposing restrictions on the press.<sup>91</sup> Park immediately wrote to President Kennedy directly and explained his decision on March 19th, stating that:

With the emergence of numerous political parties, and by the dishonorable feud among politicians, the political confusion has been extremely deepened to the unendurable point. The anti-state plot masterminded by certain radical elements taking advantage of such political confusion and disorder has given rise to the extreme unrest, insecurity, and terror among the people.<sup>92</sup>

Park's argument was that transferring power without assurance of political stability to corrupt politicians was a risk to national security. ROK Ambassador Chung Il-kwon, who was personally opposed to extending military rule, expounded on the junta's decision to the State Department the following week in a meeting with Edward Rice, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Chung explained that the coup plot shocked military leaders causing them to reevaluate the feasibility of elections. They also feared transferring power to corrupt politicians. Rice's response illuminated the glaring holes behind Park's justifications. In terms of the coup, the perpetrators were within the military so it should not have had any effect on transferring political power to civilians. Secondly, the junta had little ground to stand on when it came to corruption given the series of illicit activities performed by Kim Jong-pil and his associates over the last year.<sup>93</sup> The seasoned General had little to offer in response since he

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<sup>91</sup> Memorandum to Alexis U. Johnson from Edward E. Rice, 26 March 1963, Box 21, Folder: Defense Affairs, April-June 1963, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Subject Files, 1963, NACP.

<sup>92</sup> Park Chung Hee to John F. Kennedy, 19 March 1963, JFKP, NSF, Box 127a, Folder: Subjects, Park Correspondence Part II, JFKL.

<sup>93</sup> MOC between Edward E. Rice and Chung Il-kwon, 26 March 1963, Box 21, Folder: Defense Affairs, April-June 1963, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Subject Files, 1963, NACP.

himself was in agreement with the USG's concerns. Chung's continued stance against extended military rule eventually resulted in his termination as Ambassador, though as a consolation, he was able to depart Washington and attend a one year fellowship at Oxford University before returning to Seoul.

Park's unexpected pronouncement reflected the dominance that the Young Tiger faction still held over political matters. Despite the inconvenience of Kim Jong-pil's expulsion, four Class Eight members remained on the SCNR. The CINCUNC assessed that even with Kim's absence, senior military officers, the MINDEF, and the Service Chiefs still feared the actions and influence of the "impetuous Young Tigers."<sup>94</sup> The SCNR Field Grade Officers were generally known for their mistrust of civilian authority and support for prolonged military rule under Park's leadership. By March, popular support for the military government had faded, a food shortage rocked the country, and Kim Jong-pil's activities had given the junta a dishonest reputation. Expectations that Park could win an open democratic election were low. The Chairman's unforeseen decision did, however, rally the Service Chiefs and remaining senior officers to act against the extension of military rule.

### ***The Elections Preserved***

Convincing Park to honor his pledge for Presidential elections turned out to be a team effort. Once again, the direct pressure provided by senior Korean General Officers with indirect support by USG officials proved effective in delaying a potential mass uprising against Park's government. Ambassador Berger recalled that hours following the Chairman's announcement to hold a national referendum for extended military rule, urgent secret messages flowed into the US Embassy and the American military command from SCNR members, Park's friends, military

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<sup>94</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 8 April 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

officers in the field, and civilians friendly to the Chairman with a singular message. If the SCNR insisted on extending the junta's rule, another massive uprising aimed at overthrowing Park's government was highly likely. Some of these messages also called for direct American intervention to force the Chairman in abandoning his plan.<sup>95</sup> Such a request was common from civilian politicians who viewed themselves as virtually powerless against the military officials in control. Former Interim President Huh Chung had made a similar request a few weeks earlier, assuring the Embassy that Koreans would not be opposed to American interference in internal political affairs since most still had faith in the US.<sup>96</sup>

The US Embassy's official response was that the current problem was a Korean one that needed to be solved by Koreans. In actuality, American officials went to work secretly in a broad effort to convince Park that abandoning his plan to extend military rule was in the best interest of his country's future. Once again, the primary targets were the Service Chiefs, receptive military commanders, and the few civilian officials that held positions of influence within the junta. The USG did not make any public statements for nine days but instead ensured that its stance opposing any extension of military rule made its way to multiple military and civilian circles.<sup>97</sup> From an external vantage point, the response by the Service Chiefs was perplexing in that they initially issued statements supporting Park's plan. In actuality, having no prior knowledge of the Chairman's intentions, they faced a situation with no good options other than expressing their continued loyalty to Park.

ROK CSA Kim Chong-oh informed the CINCUNC on March 25<sup>th</sup> that had the Service Chiefs known in advance about Park's intentions, they would have strongly opposed him. They

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<sup>95</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

<sup>96</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-621, 14 February 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, January-February 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Berger, "The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965," SBP, AJA.

had already convinced Park that his desire to declare Martial Law in order to cool the heated political environment was out of the question. In response, the Chairman unilaterally decided on the referendum. The Service Chiefs ultimately chose to support the Chairman on the grounds of national security.<sup>98</sup> They believed that open knowledge of a feud between them and Park only invited disunity within the armed forces, adversely affecting the military's ability to fulfill its mission while also inviting further political chaos.<sup>99</sup> While publicly casting a vision of unity, the Service Chiefs communicated their opposition to extended military rule in private. The ROK CNO confirmed to the US Naval Attaché on March 18<sup>th</sup> that Park's announcement had shocked all the Chiefs, but they along with the MINDEF remained opposed to four more years of extended military rule. The only immediate recourse was another coup, which meant disaster for the ROK, which is why they chose to support Park until better options became available.<sup>100</sup>

The political tide had begun to shift by April as the CINCUNC assessed that "the saner heads in the Supreme Council, the Service Chiefs, and Chairman Park are working hard and long to persuade these Young Tigers to gracefully accept a transfer to a civilian government in a minimum period of time."<sup>101</sup> The SCNR's extremist faction remained committed to extending military rule, at least until a tangible nudge by the USG provided the impetus for change. Park informed the US Embassy in April that due to continued disagreements with civilian politicians over the future of the ROKG, he still intended to hold the national referendum. In response, American officials in Seoul informed intermediaries of a preapproved USG response that stated "American support for this government had been predicated on the fulfillment of pledges given

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<sup>98</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor and Harry Felt, 17 March 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, March 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>99</sup> Draft EMBTEL 710, 24 March 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, March 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>100</sup> Memorandum from Naval Attache to Political Counselor, 19 March 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, March 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>101</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 9 April 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

to the Korean people and to the US to hold elections, and restore civilian government. If pledges were not fulfilled, we would be forced to reexamine our attitude toward the Park government.”<sup>102</sup>

Reexamining the USG’s attitude unmistakably translated into reevaluating the amount of foreign aid allocated for the ROK, language that resounded with even the Young Tigers. Faced with dual pressures from the US and his own Service Chiefs, Park chose to back down and announced as a face-saving measure that if the situation had calmed down by September, Presidential elections could be held in the fall. By July, however, the Chairman had already given personal assurances to the Ambassador that the Presidential and National Assembly elections were set for October and November respectively.<sup>103</sup> The US provided additional incentive for Park to honor his commitment by providing an emergency shipment of American wheat to address the ongoing food shortage in the ROK, a glaring problem that had adversely affected the public’s opinion of the military government.<sup>104</sup>

The justification behind the Service Chiefs’ opposition to select decisions made by Park was fairly constant throughout the junta’s first two years. They, along with MINDEF and other senior military commanders, believed that if the SCNR failed to honor its commitments and collapsed due to corruption, the prestige, honor, and integrity of the military risked permanent damage. The pro-military spirit that had emanated following the April 1960 Student Revolution was still strong, and these senior leaders intended to preserve it at all cost. The path towards protecting the military’s reputation in their view was for Park to clean up the government by expelling corrupt elements, conducting fair elections, and transferring control back to civilian

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<sup>102</sup> Samuel Berger, “The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965,” SBP, AJA.

<sup>103</sup> EMBTEL 66, 16 July 1963, Box 58, Folder 350: Korea, June-July 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>104</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-10, 2 July 1963, Box 58, Folder 350: Korea, June-July 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

officials as soon as possible. General Meloy strongly believed that throughout all the turmoil, the armed forces continued to be the major force for stability as in the past. The CINCUNC judged that “their prestige, integrity, and good reputation must be retained in high regard among the Korean people” since future governments needed the military’s support for the general public to have confidence in them.<sup>105</sup>

For the USG, its decision to oppose the extension of military rule and support democratic elections was actually not a matter of moral principle but one of practical political realities. Ambassador Berger admitted that neither officials in Washington or Seoul believed that elections would result in much needed political stability. The cycle of initial optimism followed by immense disappointment seemed to be pattern with each new Korean government in the 1960s. The ROK had after all undergone fair and democratic elections in 1960 that brought the Chang Myon government to power, which succumbed to a military coup after only nine months of existence. What the USG was reasonably assured of was that prolonged military rule was the surest path towards continued upheaval, internal division, and likely bloodshed.<sup>106</sup> Repeated forceful changes in government guaranteed that a quick resolution to the ROK’s myriad of national-level difficulties remained only a long-term aspiration.

Utilizing the second anniversary of the military coup as a backdrop, Park announced on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1963 his commitment to ensure fair and democratic elections during the fall. He justified his previous call for extended military rule by stating that transferring political power back to civilian hands when the threats of counterrevolution and a dire economic situation still existed would have been a decision made without considerable foresight. The Chairman credited government officials and politicians for working incessantly to ease the political tension,

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<sup>105</sup> Guy Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 23 February 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel Berger, “The Transformation of Korea: 1961-1965,” SBP, AJA.

allowing for the elections to occur as planned.<sup>107</sup> Park retired from the military in August and ran as the DRP candidate in the October 1963 Presidential election. External observers sponsored by the United Nations considered them as being generally fair and organized. The Chairman defeated former President Yun Po-sun only by the narrowest of margins, mainly due to the opposition's inability to unite which resulted in a division of their votes.<sup>108</sup> Park wisely resisted calls by nervous members of the Young Tiger faction to falsify results as real-time updates proved too close for comfort and by doing so, earned a legitimate mandate to govern.<sup>109</sup>

The Chairman's narrow victory was an unmistakable shot across the SCNR's bow. It became painfully obvious that actual support base for Park was quite narrow. One especially noticeable statistic was that the opposition candidates dominated in certain military heavy voting areas. The junta could no longer take the military vote for granted or assume that it would be automatically in their favor.<sup>110</sup> Kim Jong-pil's supporters used Park's narrow victory to justify the former KCIA Director's return to the ROK. He arrived back in Seoul in time to lead the DRP's efforts for the November National Assembly election. Park's party experienced an overwhelming success by winning 110 out of 175 seats, though only one-third of the popular vote.<sup>111</sup> Kim also ran and won a seat in the National Assembly. Park had cause for optimism entering 1964 as the democratically elected President with his first legitimate mandate to lead his country.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Commemorative Address by Park Chung Hee, 16 May 1963, Box 58, Folder 350: Korea, May 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>108</sup> See MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 224-225 for additional details.

<sup>109</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-331, 22 October 1963, Box 58, Folder 350: Korea, October-November 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>110</sup> *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, Document 316.

<sup>111</sup> MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 225.

<sup>112</sup> While the election process itself was relatively fair, the proverbial chips were stacked against the opposition parties. None could raise nearly as much money as the DRP. The SCNR also made sure that they received the minimal amount of time to prepare for the campaigns, whereas the DRP had been installing a widespread support system since 1962.

### **The Third Republic on the Brink**

The ROK's Third Republic emerged in 1964 as the country's new civilian government, though recently retired military officers still held many of the positions of power within the Executive Branch and the National Assembly. By fulfilling the original pledge to hold democratic elections and winning the vast majority of seats in the National Assembly, Park and the DRP entered the year with bold aspirations. Unfortunately, the former junta members quickly realized that running a country with a functioning National Assembly and zealous opposition parties was infinitely more difficult than leading it through uncontested SCNR decrees. Park had little time to bask in his electoral victory. Seoul was once again inundated with mass protests only three months into his administration, with the American military command assessing that the political tension was at its highest since the May 1961 coup.<sup>113</sup>

### ***The Students Reemerge***

Rather than providing inspired leadership following the 1963 elections, both Park and the DRP stumbled into 1964 without a strategic vision, a lack of boldness, and no visible guiding policy for the country. The Australian Ambassador to the ROK, R.A. Peacher, assessed that as a coalition of factions rather than a united party, the DRP had become a "do nothing" organization, outmaneuvered by more skillful and experienced civilian politicians of the opposition party. Park had sequestered himself in the Blue House only emerging for formal functions, while proving his lack of knowledge on critical issues by failing to answer even basic questions at rare press conferences.<sup>114</sup> By March, the political opposition led by former President Yun Po-sun managed to rally an estimated 30,000 anti-government demonstrators. The students exceeded

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<sup>113</sup> EUSA Intelligence Summary 13-64, 27 March 1964, Box 13, Folder: Political Affairs Korea, POLMIL Reports, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Central Files, 1964, NACP.

<sup>114</sup> Memorandum from R.A. Peacher to the Department of External Affairs, 10 June 1964, Box 12, Folder: Political Affairs Korea, Political Summaries, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Central Files, 1964, NACP.

the impressive number with a rally of their own during the same month.<sup>115</sup> What were these demonstrators protesting about? The sources of frustration were familiar ones that centered around government corruption and Kim Jong-pil.

Park had made the bold decision to make a strong push for diplomatic normalization with Japan early in 1964. The new President understood, as did former Korean Presidents, that his government's future depended mostly on addressing the long-standing economic issues that continued to plague the country. Park had been unsuccessful in executing his Five Year Economic Development Plan and the potential capital available from Japan was critical for the ROK to regain economic solvency. In retrospect, Park's decision to appoint Kim Jong-pil as his senior representative in diplomatic talks was a disastrous one that nearly caused the fall of his government. Yun Po-son originally used the ongoing talks with Japan to stir anti-government fervor. Over the time, however, it became evident that the true source of angst was Kim Jong-pil himself and the corruption that he represented, especially in the eyes of the students.

With Seoul once again embroiled in mass protests, the ROK Embassy informed the US State Department that the public opposed a settlement with Japan not because they hated their former colonizer (though they likely still did), but rather due to the fact that Kim Jong-pil and his associates were using the negotiations for their own personal profit. Many believed that Kim was too close to Japan and the political opposition had effectively fanned the flame by stating that he had already received a large sum of money for the negotiations, some of which he used for his own election campaign.<sup>116</sup> Other examples of DRP corruption included mounting evidence that it had been amassing wealth through kickbacks, sale of public lands, and by pressuring small businessmen and farmers. The situation was especially intolerable in that Park

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<sup>115</sup> EUSA Intelligence Summary 13-64, 27 March 1964, RG 59, NACP.

<sup>116</sup> Harry Felt to Maxwell Taylor, 5 April 1963, LBJP, NSF, Box 254, Folder: Korea Cables, 5/63-10/63, LBJL.

and Kim had justified the military revolution by pledging to wipe out the endemic corruption in the national government.<sup>117</sup> By June, the situation had reached a boiling point and observers in Washington and Seoul prepared for the distinct possibility that Park had reached the end of his political career.

### *A Familiar Solution*

For the third time in four years, the ROKG requested the release of military units under the CINUNC's operational control to restore order in the capital through Martial Law. General Hamilton Howze, now the senior commander in the ROK, previously served as the KMAG Chief during both the April 1960 Student Revolution and May 1961 Military Coup, the two earlier instances of Martial Law. As in the previous crises, the opportunity arose once again for American military officials to work jointly with the Service Chiefs to guarantee stability within the ROK. Park needed to act decisively to preserve his government by reaching out to opposition parties and the demonstrating students in order to address their grievances. Both the USG and the Service Chiefs, however, agreed that the key to Park's political survival was a familiar one, removing Kim Jong-pil from any role within the DRP and exiling him outside the country once again.

As protestors continued to voice their opposition against Park's government, the USG was fortunate to have two seasoned senior officials that had developed a personal rapport and a mutual trust with the Korean President. Ambassador Berger was nearing the end of his tour but had already experienced multiple crises with Park over the previous two years. General Howze was also well-known across the ROK military from his KMAG days and had the distinction of being the first US official to meet with Park, though unplanned, on the day of the coup. Both

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<sup>117</sup> Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy from Marshall Green, 1 June 1964, Box 13, Folder: Political Affairs Korea, POLMIL Reports, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Central Files, 1964.

retained a level of comfort with the President that allowed them to give candid assessments on the situation at hand. Park met with both Berger and Howze on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964 to request the release of the Sixth and Twenty-eighth ROK Infantry Divisions to implement Martial Law. Berger did not mince his words and offered the President the following assessment of the situation:

Mr. President, I know how painful this subject is but the situation is serious, and it is important that we speak frankly. Since March 23<sup>rd</sup>, at least a dozen Korean leaders who support you have told me that if martial law is invoked, you and your government will be in serious danger unless Kim Jong-pil is removed. I want to make clear that I am not saying he should be removed, but this is what some of your most loyal supporting are saying.<sup>118</sup>

Park fully understand the long-standing enmity that had characterized Berger's relationship with Kim but he too acknowledged that his closest confidante had lost the confidence of many people, including some in the armed forces and in the DRP. Howze added that he was ready to release the two divisions to the ROK and compared the situation to his experience in the April 1960 Student Revolution. The CINCUNC advised the President that back then, there was universal hostility against the elected government, which was not the case now. He did caution, however, that the Korean military did reflect the views and feelings of the general populace and that he was unsure if the general public would cheer the arrival of the ROKA as it had done in 1960.<sup>119</sup>

When the Ambassador and the CINCUNC met with the President again on June 6<sup>th</sup> following Martial Law implementation, the "advice" became even more direct. Berger, perhaps understanding that his time was up in Seoul as well, bluntly told Park that most of the President's problems during the last three years were due to Kim Jong-pil's activities. By ridding himself of

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<sup>118</sup> EMBTEL 1593, 3 June 1964, LBJP, NSF, Box 254, Folder: Korea Cables, 11/63-6/64, LBJL.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Kim, Park was eliminating a divisive force that prevented him from achieving the objectives that he had strived for since becoming the country's leader. Howze added that the Korean military was loyal to Park, but not Kim. The CINCUNC assessed that the military would not shoot civilians just to keep Kim in office.<sup>120</sup> This advice followed on the heels of a meeting between Park and the ROK CSA, General Min Ki-sik. Min's message was equally unambiguous, the price that the President needed to pay was taking drastic actions against Kim Jong-pil, reforming the DRP, and making a concerted drive against government corruption. Unless Park made the hard decision to expel Kim, the General believed that "a million-man army cannot protect the government from the great power of the people."<sup>121</sup>

Park had already enacted measures aimed at curbing the protests against his government. He had reduced the DRP's staff, ordered the drafting of legislation that required public release of party funds, and even had Kim Jong-pil resign his position within his party.<sup>122</sup> The President's conversations with the two senior American officials and his ROKA Chief of Staff further convinced Park that there was no alternative but to exile Kim Jong-pil once again. Kim agreed to depart the ROK by the mid-June and with the US Embassy's assistance, secured a spot in Henry Kissinger's international seminar at Harvard University. The President continued to make a concerted effort to address student grievances and to work with the political opposition. His plan to complete negotiations with Japan, however, was put on hold until the following year. By diffusing the situation through Kim's departure, Park eliminated the grounds for mass demonstrations and for the remainder of the year, Seoul avoided political unrest.

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<sup>120</sup> EMBTEL 1620, 6 June 1964, LBJP, NSF, Box 254, Folder: Korea Cables, 11/63-6/64, LBJL.

<sup>121</sup> Department of the Air Force Message 9996, 4 June 1964, Box 13, Folder: Political Affairs, Korea 23-8, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Central Files, 1964, NACP.

<sup>122</sup> EMBTEL 1620, 6 June 1964, LBJP, LBJL.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Why Park?**

Park Chung Hee faced a significant crisis in every year from 1961 to 1964 that threatened to end his precarious hold on political power. Yet, despite the multiple countercoup plots and mass demonstrations, he managed to survive each time. 1965 was a banner year for the President as he successfully gained approval to dispatch combat troops in support of American efforts in Vietnam and finally concluded a normalization treaty with Japan by the year's end. The opposition party led by Yun Po-son once again incited the masses against any treaty with Japan in April 1965 but Park's political position was stronger then. The President had the robust backing of the US who for years had been pushing both sides to normalize relations. More importantly, Park had confidence that he could weather the storm with the majority of the National Assembly ready to support his initiatives. The National Assembly ultimately voted in favor of a treaty on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1965 with a tally of 110 to 0. No opposition party members participated in the vote, but no significant demonstrations followed as well.<sup>123</sup> Establishing diplomatic relations with Japan and dispatching troops to Vietnam turned out to be economic boons for the ROK and provided Park for the first-time enough capital to push his modernization efforts in earnest.

The US had multiple opportunities to jettison Park during these years of turbulence yet it consistently took actions aimed at preserving his position. Why was the USG so intent on keeping Park in power? The likely explanation is that the USG assessed that the coup leader was simply best equipped to manage the factional rivalries that persistently threatened to tear apart his junta. Multiple American officials shared this opinion but Walter McConaughy, the former US Ambassador to Seoul and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, captured it best

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<sup>123</sup> MacDonald, *US-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance*, 134.

by describing Park as a leader “inexperienced in statecraft and not a spellbinder” but one that proved effective in “behind the scenes maneuvering” and “maintaining the balance between the young Colonels and the older Generals among his supporters.”<sup>124</sup>

When factional rivalries reached dangerous levels by mid-1962, the consensus among key American officials with interest in Korea was that the US needed to ensure that Park stayed in power. The US Embassy described Park as “our best hope” adding that “through his leadership we can hopefully expect a measure of stability.”<sup>125</sup> The CINCUNC concurred and informed the CJCS that the Chairman had “exhibited remarkable ability and finesse in controlling these factional elements.”<sup>126</sup> Park was never known for his charisma, but he had managed to make a lasting positive impression on senior American officials during his November 1961 visit as well. While it was evident that Park favored the Young Tiger faction due to their diehard support, he also displayed a rare ability to inspire loyalty from all groups within the SCNR. Even the Hamgyong-do faction, which Park had no direct ties to, had been with him from the first day of the revolution. They continued to support him despite understanding that while the Chairman may not have known about all of Kim Jong-pil’s illicit activities, he likely did approve of the major ones.

Park also consistently provided the US reassurance that he understood and respected Washington’s concerns in the ROK. American officials prioritized actions that led to a stable Korean peninsula, a politically moderate government, and a unified military. They judged that Park was the leader best able to achieve these ends. Despite Park’s vacillation over allowing free elections, the US Embassy considered the President in March 1963 as “uniquely capable of

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<sup>124</sup> MOC between Walter McConaughy and Gunji Hosono, 30 October 1961, Box 9: Folder: MC-Japan, 1960, RG 59: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Subject Files, 1961, NACP.

<sup>125</sup> *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Volume XXII, NE Asia, 1961-1963, Document 272.

<sup>126</sup> Guy Meloy to Lyman Lemnitzer, 7 May 1963, GSMP, USAMHI.

holding the military intact, ensuring an acceptable political evolution, preventing sharp change, and bringing about political, economic, and foreign policy actions which are in the US as well as Korean interest.”<sup>127</sup> The Embassy also considered Park as the only one that could retain authority over the armed forces, settle differences between contending elements, and prevent another forceful change in government that would have disastrous effects on the ROK and on American objectives for the region.<sup>128</sup>

When Park drifted away from the path of stability and political moderation, the USG maintained access to an influential group of senior Korean military officers that had a shared vision of close bilateral relations between the two countries. The work of national government, economic planning, and political elections were primarily the interest of the younger generation of officers who felt both compelled and capable of running the country. Most of the senior military officials, however, believed that the armed forces had no place in politics and held a singular purpose in defending the homeland. The USG’s strong partnership with the Service Chiefs and other senior military commanders was made possible by the unique military alliance that banded the two countries together. The US worked in tandem with these individuals to positively influence Park and ensure the best possible outcome when the Chairman became entangled in the questionable machinations of Kim Jong-pil.

The Korean military continued to play the most direct role in preserving the nation’s stability throughout the 1960s. For Park, they were his greatest supporters and as long as they continued to back him, he remained reasonably confident that he could also stay in power. For the Korean people, the armed forces still represented an honest organization that had once and

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<sup>127</sup> EMBTEL 624, 10 March 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, March 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

<sup>128</sup> US Embassy-Seoul Airgram-891, 1 May 1963, Box 57, Folder 350: Korea, May 1963, RG 84: Classified General Records, 1963, NACP.

would again act in the defense of the general populace, just as it had first done in April 1960. For the US, the military was its best means to influence the political development of its allies. Not since the American Military Government in Korea following World War II did the US have unencumbered access to a group capable of impacting the national government's internal politics. While other levers were certainly available during the Rhee regime, his monopoly on power and dominance over the armed forces limited the areas of direct American influence. The emergence of a military junta certainly provided new challenges for the US as it initially sought to follow a highly nationalistic, independent path. As the dust settled and the normalcy of bilateral relations reemerged, the military government's existence ironically increased the level of direct American influence over Korean affairs as the entity with the closest ties to the US, the ROK military, assumed the lead in the affairs of national government along with defense.

## CONCLUSION

For the first time in its modern history, the Republic of Korea became an international donor instead of a recipient by the mid-1960s. Granted the donation was in the form of military troops, the country's ability to provide forces in support of American efforts in Vietnam was nothing less than a milestone achievement. Since its inception, the ROK had been one of the world's top recipients in American foreign aid. The country had just experienced a period of intense political turmoil and still struggled with an anemic economy when President Park successfully negotiated the deployment of a 20,000-strong combat division in 1965. By the end of its participation, the ROK had provided the second-most foreign troops for the defense of South Vietnam, behind only the US. In return, the country received millions of dollars in MAP funds and scores of modern military equipment, along with lucrative opportunities to boost its economy. The dispatch of Korean troops symbolized an evolution of the US-ROK military alliance from one centered solely on the peninsula to a partnership that had export potential throughout the Asia-Pacific.

As the Cold War entered a new phase in the 1960s with the escalating conflict in Southeast Asia, the importance of the US-ROK military alliance also exponentially increased in importance. Broadcasting the strength of the bilateral partnership now had greater utility than simply deterring the DPRK from resuming hostilities on the peninsula. The likelihood of renewed conflict was low with the last Chinese forces departing the North in 1958 as Kim Il-sung focused his attention on rebuilding his country through a strong economy, rather than another invasion of the South. The Alliance was now a powerful symbolic weapon aimed at heart of Communism. In the minds of select USG officials, any perception of reduced American commitment to the ROK could negatively impact the legitimacy of the superpower's resolve in

the Asia-Pacific.

The ROK's 600,000 military was an immense burden on the Korean economy and the American taxpayers that continued to fund millions of dollars in MAP. The financial burden of supporting the Korean military was often the target of Congress along with select members in the NSC and DOD that viewed these American commitments as an overinvestment. The ROK faced multiple attempts at MAP cuts and troop reductions between 1958 and 1968. Robert W. Komer, a senior NSC staffer during the Kennedy administration, was one voice that furiously pushed for a MAP reduction in favor of increased economic investment in the ROK. He asserted that "for too many years a disproportionate share of MAP dollars has been going to maintain huge ROK forces far beyond the likely need."<sup>1</sup> This sentiment gained support within the DOD with McNamara's team of analysts seeking ways to increase efficiencies within the defense budget. The State Department also supported the push to a limited degree with its priority focused on economic development in the ROK. Yet, each time a new force cut proposal surfaced, the ROK managed to avoid any significant changes.

How did Korea manage to fare so well in the 1960s when the desire to provide foreign countries with military assistance reached an all-time low? The answer lies in the fact that the ROK continued to have influential supporters within the US military, and the JCS in particular, who adopted a view that a strong commitment of forces on the peninsula supported broader strategic efforts in the Asia-Pacific. These same supporters also understood the new symbolic value of the alliance, which increased exponentially as the Vietnam War progressed. The JCS played critical roles with national security strategy development and military assistance planning. Fortunately for the ROKG, its main priorities of preserving MAP funds and military force levels

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Komer to Walt Rostow, 9 March 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea General, 1/61-3/61, JFKL.

aligned with those in the American military that viewed the ally as an integral piece to a broader regional puzzle.

### **The Alliance's Growing Symbolic Importance**

The age-old adage of being at the right place at the right time was especially applicable to the ROK during the 1960s as ideas pertaining to Flexible Response, Close-in Containment, and the Domino Theory generally favored robust support of its armed forces. From a military standpoint, the JCS's primary concern during the early 1960s was the global spectrum of challenges that simultaneously surfaced in areas such as Cuba, Berlin, the Congo, Saudi Arabia, India, Laos, South Vietnam, and Korea. The broad scope of these challenges produced a belief among select American policymakers that failure anywhere in the world could lead to repercussions on a global scale. In this challenging environment, the JCS feared any reduction of American credibility around the world would directly encourage aggressive Communist actions.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining credibility, especially in the military sense, involved having American troops where conflict was most likely and honoring the traditional bilateral alliances throughout the region. Both considerations converged in the ROK.

### ***Embracing Close-in Containment***

Appointed as the CJCS in 1960, General Lyman Lemnitzer represented a bridge between the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. The differences between each President's grand strategy, however, could not have been more pronounced. In general, Eisenhower sought ways to reduce defense expenditures and leverage the nation's nuclear dominance to its advantage. Lemnitzer's JCS under this administration emphasized the need for a robust collective security network across the globe which was capable of countering the growing Communist Empire. He

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<sup>2</sup> Bryon R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1961-64* (Washington: Office of Joint History Office of Joint History, 2011), ix.

advocated a Forward Strategy where American military power, along with its allies, were positioned along the free world's periphery, enabling them to quickly counter Communist aggression.<sup>3</sup> While constraints in the defense budget precluded massive deployments of American troops, capable allies provided the second-best alternative. Lemnitzer's background in MAP affairs was evident as he strongly believed in the necessity of building up allied militaries. His consistent support for robust MAP allocations for the ROK reflected this overall strategic view.

When President Kennedy assumed office in January 1961, he eschewed defense cuts and instead sought to dramatically increase the Pentagon's budget. His Flexible Response strategy was not one that could be implemented cheaply and required a significant overseas presence by American troops. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, informed the President on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1961 that the primary mission of American forces overseas would be non-nuclear warfare.<sup>4</sup> The administration's willingness to deploy American forces to the far reaches of the world with questionable value facilitated the nation's rising commitment to Vietnam throughout the 1960s. While Southeast Asia became the nation's top priority in the Asia-Pacific during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, it remained inextricably tied to the only other place where the Cold War went hot, the Korean peninsula.

By the mid-1960s, the JCS identified the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a real and growing threat against American interests in the Asia-Pacific. The PRC's push to obtain regional hegemony and enflame global revolution ran counter to the fundamental objectives of the US. In response, the JCS fully embraced the idea of Close-in Containment, a strategy that

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<sup>3</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer, "Forward Strategy Reappraised" (Address, Annual Meeting of the AUSA, Washington, DC, 9 August 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Bryon R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VII*, 18.

required significant American military presence on the Asian mainland.<sup>5</sup> In order to prevent Chinese dominance of the continent, the JCS believed that the US and its allies must be ready to defeat or deter all manners of aggression with the ROK, Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and South Vietnam comprising the critical elements of US posture in the region. Southeast Asia served as the testing ground for its updated strategy.<sup>6</sup> While the Korean Peninsula was no longer the top US priority, as long as the American military viewed it as a critical piece of the overall regional strategy, the ROK still reaped the financial benefits and ironclad commitment that it had grown accustomed to during the previous decade.

### ***A War over World Opinion***

Historian Frank Ninkovich argued in his work *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century*, that the advent of nuclear weapons made it impossible for wars to be won in traditional ways. Ninkovich asserted that for much of the Twentieth Century, American Foreign Policy focused on maintaining the country's credibility as opposed to traditional realist concerns for matching means with ends. As a result, determinants such as military threats and economic gain or loss no longer decided the country's national interests. Instead, an international event's ability to change world opinion in favor for or against American beliefs ultimately determined its importance. Ninkovich referred to a "symbolic approach to the management of power" that explained American decisions to intervene in seemingly valueless conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

In regards to the Kennedy presidency, Ninkovich argued that rather than seeking to win

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<sup>5</sup> Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VIII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1965-68* (Washington: Office of Joint History Office of Joint History, 2012), 225.

<sup>6</sup> Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VIII: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1965-68*, 226.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), xiv-xv.

the Cold War, the administration's main concern was preventing the collapse of global morale. America's ability to show other nations that it was willing to fight the Cold War until the end was most important. Kennedy communicated this exact point to Nikita Khrushchev in the June 1961 Vienna Summit by stating "it is strategically important that the world believe the US is a serious country whose commitments one could rely on."<sup>8</sup> The significance of maintaining American credibility was not lost on Lemnitzer, who believed that while the Cold War was fought on a variety of fronts that encompassed political, economic, and military considerations, the root of the conflict was psychological.<sup>9</sup>

US policies towards the ROK in the 1960s supported this notion that the superpower placed a premium on preserving its global credibility. If more tangible concerns such as dollars saved or actual forces required had dominated the USG's decision-making calculus, the amount of assistance that continued to flow into the ROK would have been drastically reduced over the course of the decade. Instead, even as the conflict in Southeast Asia escalated, the US chose to remain firmly committed to Korea. The ROK, however, did not stand idly by and assume that its benefactor would continue to view the small country as a key ally. Instead, President Park proactively sought means to lessen the global burden of the US. Unfortunately for the ROK, it had little in the way to offer in terms of money or supplies. The one commodity that it did have plenty of was military forces. Park was fortunate that additional troops were exactly what the US sought after the most under the Johnson administration as its commitment to Vietnam escalated.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer, "Forward Strategy Reappraised" (Address, Annual Meeting of the AUSA, Washington, DC, 9 August 1960).

<sup>10</sup> President Johnson pushed the "More Flags Program," an attempt to internationalize the war in Vietnam with increased participation from other American allies.

By the mid-1960s, the ROK was able to start shedding its reputation as an endless black hole of American foreign assistance that provided little tangible returns to the US. The bilateral alliance also underwent a transformation as well. While its primary function still remained the deterrence of the North Korean threat, it also became a symbol for American commitment to the region. Once the ROK volunteered to dispatch combat troops to Vietnam in 1965, the alliance became even more valued as it served as an example of a MAP investment that not only succeeded, but also produced profitable returns. The Korean War essentially forced the US to make the ROK a regional priority. In the 1960s, however, the country's integral part in the American strategy of Close-in Containment and the symbolic value that the bilateral alliance offered guaranteed that it would not be unceremoniously forgotten once again.<sup>11</sup>

### **Reaping the Benefits of a Symbolically Important Alliance**

The diminishing threat of renewed conventional hostilities on the Korean peninsula during the 1960s did not correspond with a matching reduction of military forces in the country. Whether the need was justified or not, the size of the Korean armed forces remained around 600,000 throughout the decade. While MAP amounts did decline due to an overall shrinkage of Congressionally appropriated funds, the percentage that the ROK received remained high with the country consistently ranking as a top-five recipient. Avoiding these cuts was far from guaranteed as many within the USG pushed aggressively to decrease the American commitment in the ROK. One constant that was present at each attempt, however, was the CJCS supported by the CINCUNC who both strongly opposed any proposed reductions.

While the military certainly had the reputation of aggressively attempting to protect its resources, its effort to preserve US commitment in the ROK went far beyond parochial

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<sup>11</sup> While his intent is historically debatable, Dean Acheson's non-mention of the ROK in the American defense perimeter across the Asia-Pacific in his famous National Press Club speech still scores low ratings in Korea.

institutional interests. American military leaders and at times, senior State Department officials increasingly acknowledged that a strong Korea provided concrete benefits for the US throughout the region. The greatest benefactor of the bilateral alliance's increasing symbolic importance was surprisingly not the ROK military, but the national government itself. The JCS and UN Command understood that cuts were never just cuts, but also potential shocks that could derail any progress being made by the new government. For many of these senior military officers, saving a few million dollars was simply not worth risking the downfall of Park's fragile regime in the early 1960s.

### ***The Case against Force Reductions***

Both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations sought reductions in the financial burden of many of its client states around the world and the ROK was no exception. Force levels in the ROK were generally protected throughout the 1950s with the serving CJCS, Admiral Arthur Radford, successfully torpedoing any significant reductions while the PRC maintained troops in the DPRK.<sup>12</sup> The USG made three attempts to cut force levels in the 1960s, each resulting in relative failure. The first occurred during the initial year of the Kennedy administration with the height of debate raging in June 1961. General Lemnitzer provided vociferous opposition citing that the CINCUNC's operational control was the most effective deterrent in the region. Any reduction of forces ultimately reduced American influence and the strength of the deterrent.<sup>13</sup> Robert McNamara supported the Chairman's position on this occasion, citing that the risk of alienating the new military leadership was too great, especially with the potential cut coming less than a month after the military coup.<sup>14</sup> Even if the intent was

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<sup>12</sup> Park Tae-gyun, "The Impracticable Plan: The Phase-down Policy of Korean Army by the U.S. in 1950s and 1960," 25 September 2001, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, Australia.

<sup>13</sup> Bryon R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume VII*, 284.

<sup>14</sup> Notes from the NSC Meeting, 13 June 1961, LBJP, VPSF, Box 4, Folder: National Security Council (III), LBJL.

not there, any proposed cut during the early months of Park's new government ultimately communicated American non-support for the junta.

Even as early as 1961, the USG recognized the regional value of the US-ROK military alliance. The President's Task Force on Korea report of June 1961 described the alliance as a "global psychological symbol of validity of the Free World's collective security." While the first deployment of Korean troops outside the country was still years away, the report also acknowledged this potential citing that the ROK military was a proven combat force that could be a major asset to other free nations in the region.<sup>15</sup> These same arguments surfaced again in 1963 when President Kennedy asked the SECDEF once again to explore force reductions. General Meloy best reflected the military's position arguing that a powerful Korean military was part of the American forward strategy in the Pacific capable of having a strategic impact in Asia along with a tactical one in Korea.<sup>16</sup> Reductions were once again rejected due to the strong opposition of the US military and the risk of exacerbating political instability in the ROK.<sup>17</sup>

By 1964, the Korean armed forces had proven its worth time and time again in providing internal stability within the country and maintained a high standing in the eyes of several USG entities. General Hamilton Howze described the Korean military as one that constituted a "real and visible anti-Communist asset of considerable magnitude."<sup>18</sup> With a string of unsuccessful attempts at cutting Korean forces, the SECDEF ordered the reduction of nearly 49,000 American military personnel in Korea in February 1965. The US military again opposed the action citing

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix C to the President's Task Force on Korea's Report to the NSC, 6 June 1961, JFKP, NSF, Box 127, Folder: Korea, TF Korea Folder, JFKL.

<sup>16</sup> Guy S. Meloy to Maxwell Taylor, 26 July 1963, Box 10, Folder 091: Letters from the CINCUNC, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Maxwell Taylor NACP.

<sup>17</sup> The potential decision for force reductions coincided with the Park's vacillation towards Presidential elections and the accompanying unrest.

<sup>18</sup> Hamilton Howze to Maxwell Taylor, 2 April 1964, Box 13, Folder: MAP, RG 218.3: Records of the Chairman, Maxwell Taylor, NACP.

the negative political and psychological repercussions. Its officials stressed that the reassurance of American commitment to the country was essential to the ROK's stability and development. While plans for a phased reduction were eventually agreed upon by mid-1966, the ROK's initial deployment of nearly 21,000 troops to Vietnam caused the Johnson administration to postpone any drawdowns as long as Korean troops remained in Vietnam.

### ***A Badger within the International System***

Robert Keohane once described the American alliance system as one populated by badgers, mice, pigeons, and even some doves with mutual defense pacts or close political ties with the American elephant. Despite the glaring power disparity that existed between most of these countries and the US, these smaller allies were remarkably successful in leading the superpower at select times.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the 1960s, the ROK emerged as one these badgers, aggressively able to influence American policies on multiple occasions. The conduit for its influence was the US-ROK military alliance and more specifically, the stout military-to-military relationship that had existed since the Korean War. The ROK faced the prospect of a devalued alliance as the likelihood of renewed conflict on the peninsula diminished into 1960s. Yet, it was able to remain the focal point of bilateral relations and in the process, started its evolution to a broader security alliance that eventually displayed its potential utility outside the peninsula. The ROKG unquestionably benefitted from the presence of strong advocates within the US military that successfully encouraged the broader USG to adopt policies aligned with Korean interests. Influence via the military alliance, however, also flowed both ways as the USG expertly used its ties with the Korean armed forces to quietly encourage the ROK's new military government to take actions that supported political moderation and internal stability during one of the most

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<sup>19</sup> Robert O. Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," *Foreign Policy* 2 (Spring, 1971), 161.

turbulent times in the country's modern history.

Examining the alliance's evolution during the 1960s invites further inquiries that assist in answering the broader question of how military alliances remain relevant when the threats that inspired them continue to change. Had both countries remained stubbornly fixated on the alliance's role as only a military deterrent, each would not have enjoyed the benefits of a broader security arrangement. The bilateral alliance benefitted from one of the strongest, if not the strongest, ties between two countries. With American OPCON being the hallmark of the alliance, the truly unique command structure that intertwined the armed forces of both countries ensured that the military relationship would continue to serve as the root of bilateral relations. Both governments expertly used this facet of the alliance to address a variety of needs throughout the 1960s. Its utility was destined to ebb and flow as American priorities and regional threats also changed, but as long as this physical manifestation of the alliance existed, the ROK would maintain its place as a critical ally in the region.

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