

The London School of Economics and Political Science

***The American Press and the Rise of Authoritarianism in South Korea 1945-1954***

**Oliver Elliott**

A thesis submitted to the Department of International History of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, September 2016

## Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. In accordance with the Regulations, I have deposited an electronic copy of it in LSE Theses Online held by the British Library of Political and Economic Science and have granted permission for my thesis to be made available for public reference. Otherwise, this thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that my thesis consists of 88,115 words.

## Abstract

This thesis looks at American press coverage of the rise of authoritarian rule in South Korea between 1945 and 1954, during the period of the American occupation government and the first six years of the Syngman Rhee regime. Making use of government, military and press archives, it is the first scholarly analysis of how the American press wrote about the early political development of South Korea and explores the question of why political repression under both the occupation and the Rhee regime did not receive greater attention from American journalists.

This thesis focuses primarily on the production process of press coverage. Specifically, it shows how coverage of the authoritarianism issue was shaped by U.S. and South Korean political and military authorities, the professional working culture of the journalism profession and the worldviews and activism of individual journalists and lobbyists. It argues that coverage was sharply limited by five major factors. Firstly, the dominance of anti-Korean and Cold War press narratives ensured that relatively little attention was paid to the repression of the South Korean population. Secondly, most journalists working in the Far East were highly deferential to American authorities. Thirdly, American military authorities greatly constrained reporting during the occupation period. Fourthly, the Syngman Rhee regime became increasingly effective in its public relations activities. Fifthly, the low level of U.S. political interest in the political situation in South Korea greatly reduced the importance of the topic for the American press.

## Acknowledgements

This project began as a question conceived while preparing for a Master's seminar with my supervisor Steven Casey. To him I owe a great debt of thanks for inspiring me to study the role of the press in American history and ensuring that the project remained on track. His comments and suggestions have played a crucial role in every step of the Ph.D. process.

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial assistance provided by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Department of International History. Research visits to the United States were also supported by a great many kind people. I dedicate a special thank you to Jamie Nelson, Brian Slagle, Candy and Jonathan Piscioti and Amy and Jon Wedell for their extraordinary hospitality and friendship.

At LSE, I wish to thank Antony Best and Kristina Spohr for providing much needed perspective on the scope of this project at the end of my first year. Teaching on Antony's course HY113 was one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences I've had during these four years and it greatly influenced the development of this thesis. I was fortunate to be surrounded by a wonderful group of peers- Cees Heere, Scott Gilfillan and Jin Li Lim always made attending HY501 a pleasure. I learned a great deal from the History Department's research seminars and perhaps even more from the visits to the White Horse afterwards. Thanks especially to Jonas Gjersø, Rosalind Coffey, Aurelie Basha, Chris Parkes, Yu Suzuki, Artemis Photiadou, Nawal Mustafa, Takahiro Yamamoto and Simon Toner for making four years at LSE such an enjoyable and memorable experience.

A special thanks to Dan Wertz for putting me in touch with James Person at the Woodrow Wilson Center and for showing me the ropes of life in DC. James and the staff of the Woodrow Wilson Center, along with the staff of the Marshall Foundation, the Eisenhower Foundation's Host Committee and Francesca Pitaro at the AP deserve special mention for the many kindnesses they bestowed on me. I also wish to thank the staff and fellow scholars who attended the American history seminar at the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg. Their positive and insightful comments came at a crucial moment in the Ph.D. I am also grateful to the University of Buckingham for providing a working space in which much of this thesis was written.

Thank you to Charlotte Gaughan for reminding me of my love of history. Thanks also to Thomas Knecht, Pietro Cammerini and Seb Ash for providing just the right balance of encouragement and distraction at Bankside and elsewhere. The last four years in London wouldn't have been anywhere near as fun without Christopher Beach, Thomas Daniels, Nicola Honer, Max Sloan, James Ellis, Hanna Krebs, Nadav Atik, Reanna Keer-Keer, Goran Lukic, Tom Brown and Catherine Tsalikis. Andy Gawthorpe has been a vital source of insight, enthusiasm and friendship.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to three people who offered the most incredible support through the highs and lows of the Ph.D. To my parents Tam and Dave, thank you for being always there to give a word of encouragement, advice or much needed perspective. And to Daria Gavrilova, who I met just a few months before this project began, thank you for all the love and the kindness. This could never have been done without you.

## **Abbreviations:**

AMG – American Military Government

AP – Associated Press

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CINFE – Commander In Chief, Far East

DOS – Department of State

DPRK – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

FRUS – Foreign Relations of the United States

INS – International News Service

KMAG – Korean Military Advisory Group

KPP – Korean Pacific Press

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

OSS – Office of Strategic Services

ROK – Republic of Korea

ROKA – Republic of Korea Army

SCAP – Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers

UNCURK – United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea

UNTCOK – United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea

UP – United Press

USFIK – U.S. Forces In Korea

USAMGIK – The United States Army Military Government in Korea

## A note on transliteration

This thesis includes both Chinese and Korean names. Both languages have multiple systems of Romanization. In order to avoid confusion, this thesis uses the older spellings of names that were in common use in the American press in the 1940s and 50s.

# Contents

Declaration.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
A note on transliteration.....	6
Introduction .....	8
Chapter 1: Occupation 1945-46: Hope and failure.....	33
Chapter 2: Occupation 1947-48: Division and independence .....	71
Chapter 3: The ROK Problem 1948-1950.....	102
Chapter 4: War 1950-1951 .....	127
Chapter 5: The 1952 Crisis: Rhee’s Takeover.....	155
Chapter 6: The Rise of the ROKA .....	181
Chapter 7: Legacies of war.....	204
Conclusions .....	226
Epilogue: Prelude to Vietnam? .....	237
Bibliography .....	239

## Introduction

The right of the press to scrutinise government is a foundational element of American democracy. Yet, from the very first days of the American Republic, there have been major tensions over the freedom of the press to criticise government, especially in its conduct of foreign affairs.<sup>1</sup> As the United States has become more interventionist overseas, these tensions have become both more visible and more controversial. During the Vietnam War, the role of the press became a highly politicised issue, with critics of the press, including President Richard Nixon, accusing journalists of losing the war on the home front.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of subsequent interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere, the question of whether the press has been too supportive or critical of U.S. foreign policy continues to inspire much public and academic debate.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis sits within a subset of this literature, which explores how the press has dealt with one of the most controversial aspects of U.S. foreign policy; its history of close relations with authoritarian allies. From the very beginning of the Cold War era, the United States supported repressive anti-communist governments across the world as part of the strategy of containment

---

<sup>1</sup> The often difficult relationship between the government and the press during major foreign policy crises is explored in detail in Ted Galen Carpenter, *The Captive Press: Foreign Policy Crises and the First Amendment* (Washington D.C.: Cato Institute, 1995). For a general overview of the development of the American press see Michael Emery, Edwin Emery and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media (9th Edition)* (New York: Pearson, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington, Volume 1* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977); Robert S. Elegant, *How to Lose a War: The Press and Viet Nam* (Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982). Both works produced a strong critical response from fellow Vietnam reporters: Peter Arnett, 'Tet Coverage: A Debate Renewed,' *Columbia Journalism Review*, Jan./Feb. 1978; Charles Mohr, 'Once Again — Did the Press Lose Vietnam?', *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov./Dec. 1983. For a more scholarly analysis see Daniel C. Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Left-wing critics claimed that the press did not go nearly far enough in questioning the rationale for the war: James Aronson, *Press and the Cold War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 103–26.

<sup>3</sup> For critical assessments of coverage of particular interventions see Steven Livingston, *When The Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007); *Leading to the 2003 Iraq War: The Global Media Debate*, ed. by Ernest Hakanen and Alexander Nikolaev (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). For more general overviews of coverage of U.S. military interventions see Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Michael S. Sweeney, *The Military and the Press: An Uneasy Truce* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).



against global communism.<sup>4</sup> Amongst the most significant and controversial of these alliances was the United States' pivotal role in establishing and supporting the Republic of Korea (ROK). Between 1945 and 1948 the United States occupied the southern half of the Korean peninsula and paved the way to it becoming an independent state under the leadership of U.S.-educated President Syngman Rhee. An ardent anti-communist and Korean nationalist, Rhee used his control of Korean security forces to repress virtually all dissenting political voices and progressively undermine the power of the elected National Assembly. During and after the Korean War, the authoritarianism of the South Korean government continued to grow, even as it became the beneficiary of one of the largest foreign aid programmes in U.S. history.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis provides an account of how the American press reported on these developments. Rather than focusing on just the Korean War, this thesis follows the trend of recent scholarship to look at the roots of authoritarianism in the occupation period. Historians such as Bruce Cumings and Allan Millett have powerfully argued that the United States made major errors in the development and implementation of policy in Korea and that the negative consequences of these errors were quite visible in the brutal political, social and economic climate of American-occupied Korea.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For more on the history of U.S. support for right-wing authoritarian regimes see the David F. Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-65* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For background on the origins and development of containment as the basis of U.S. strategy see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> One former U.S. diplomat wrote that by the mid-1950s, "No one dared threaten or seriously contend for rule. The institutions of democracy were either disregarded, overridden, corrupted or turned against themselves": Gregory Henderson, *The Politics Of The Vortex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 168. Many South Koreans today regard Rhee as the man responsible for dividing the peninsula and condemning the country to almost half a century of dictatorial rule: 'Syngman Rhee's legacy still disputed', *Korea Times*, 27 July 2015, online [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/07/116\\_183581.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/07/116_183581.html).

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Allan R. Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Similar arguments have also been made about the growing authoritarianism of the wartime period, although it has been far less studied: Edward C. Keefer, 'South Korean Political Crisis of 1952: Democracy's Failure?', *Pacific Historical Review*, 60 (1991).

Such studies raise fundamental questions; could the press have done more to bring these mistakes to light? Did the press fail to act as an adequate check on U.S. government power? Why did no major controversy ever erupt over American involvement in South Korea during this period? Was there a lack of public and press interest in Korean issues or the civil rights of the Korean people? Was Syngman Rhee able to present himself as a sympathetic and vital leader? How did journalists conceive of the problem of authoritarianism within the larger frameworks of the occupation and the Korean War?

These are questions that have rarely been asked by historians. This project is the first archive-based account of how American journalism responded to one of the most significant stories in the history of American foreign relations. The following two sections show how this thesis explores a major gap in the existing literature and how it has tackled the various methodological challenges posed by research of this kind.

### 1. *The American press and Rhee-era South Korea*

This thesis is the first scholarly study of press coverage of South Korea during the Rhee era.<sup>7</sup> It also the first study to examine any aspect of coverage of Korea in the years between the start of the occupation in 1945 and the onset of the Korean War in 1950. While the literature examining press coverage of the Korean War is relatively sizeable, it has generally focused on how journalists

---

<sup>7</sup> Several studies have looked at other periods of U.S. press coverage of Korea. Journalists and academics contributed to a volume on press coverage of Korea during the transition to democracy in the late 1980s: *First Drafts Of Korea: The U.S. Media And Perceptions Of The Last Cold War Frontier*, ed. by Donald A. L. Macintyre, Daniel C. Sneider, and Gi-Wook Shin (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center Books, 2009). Patrick Chung wrote about reporting of civil rights issues in South Korea in the 1970s: Patrick Chung, "'The Pictures in Our Heads': Journalists, Human Rights, and U.S.–South Korean Relations, 1970-1976.", *Diplomatic History*, 38.5 (2014), 1136–55. Jimin Kim's PhD thesis explored journalistic perceptions of Korea during the Japanese colonial period: Jimin Kim, *Representing The Invisible: The American Perceptions Of Colonial Korea* (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2011). Brandon K. Gauthier has written about media portrayals of the DPRK during the 1950s: Brandon K. Gauthier, 'A Tortured Relic: The Lasting Legacy of the Korean War and Portrayals of "North Korea" in the U.S. Media, 1953–1962', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22 (2015), 343–67.

covered U.S. combat operations and other U.S.-centric aspects of the war.<sup>8</sup> Very little attention has been paid to the way the press wrote about South Korea or its political situation.

One explanation for this dearth of scholarship is that the press paid South Korea only selective attention during the wartime period. In the most comprehensive study of the relationship between the U.S. government and journalists during the war, Steven Casey concluded that journalists showed a remarkable lack of interest in probing South Korean politics.<sup>9</sup> In his view, both U.S. authorities and American journalists played a role in suppressing critical coverage. At the broadest level, the U.S. government, and most journalists, interpreted the conflict as a Cold War struggle, and not a civil conflict. In South Korea, the U.S. military's public relations programmes encouraged journalists to ignore problems with the ROK and focus on more positive stories about the U.S.-ROK relationship. As a result, the press chose to ignore allegations of South Korean atrocities and President Syngman Rhee's repression of the ROK's National Assembly unless directly confronted with these problems.

---

<sup>8</sup> Studies which look at U.S.-centric aspects of press coverage include Steven Casey, 'Wilfred Burchett and the UN Command's Media Relations during the Korean War, 1951-52', *Journal of Military History*, 74 (2010); John Jenks, 'Consorting with the Enemy: American Reporters and "Red Sources" at the Korean Truce Talks, 1951-1953', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 22 (2002); Dane J. Cash, '*The Forgotten Debate: American Political Opinion Journals And The Korean War, 1950-1953*' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Boston University, 2012); Sun-A Kim, '*Life And War In Korea: Photographic Portrayals Of The Korean War In Life Magazine, July 1950-August 1953*', (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2008); Mason Edward Horrell, '*Reporting the "Forgotten War": Military-Press Relations in Korea 1950-1954*' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of Kentucky, 2002). The only general history of foreign affairs journalism barely mentioned coverage of Korea: John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge, LO: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). John Hohenberg's narrative account of the careers of the most celebrated American foreign reporters provided little analysis of broader trends in coverage: John Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence: Great Reporters and Their Times* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995). Philip Knightley offered a more insightful yet largely anecdotal account of war journalism in Korea: Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chap. 14. The chapter on Korea in James Aronson's history of the press during the Cold War has to be read in the context of his status as a trenchant left-wing critic of the war: Aronson, pp. 103–26. Korean War coverage has also been explored as part of bigger trends in American cultural history: Andrew J. Huebner, *Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Lisle A. Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 350.

Similar conclusions were reached by other notable scholars of the Korean War. In his seminal, albeit flawed, history of the origins of the Korean War, Bruce Cumings argued that most correspondents in Korea shared the military's "nauseating stew of racial stereotypes" which perceived little virtue in the Koreans and their affairs.<sup>10</sup> He also contended that American reporters, unlike some of their British counterparts, were simply "afraid to print what they witnessed in Korea".<sup>11</sup> Philip Knightley argued, in his history of war journalism, that virtually all American war reporters in Korea ignored the often horrendous impacts of the war on the South Korean population out of deference to cultural norms of anti-communist patriotism.<sup>12</sup>

While South Koreans were often given rather short shrift by the press during the war, this was not true of their leader, Syngman Rhee. In the 1950s Rhee became a heroic figure to the American Right and received adoring profiles in populist magazines such as *Time* and *Reader's Digest*. Robert E. Herzstein has shown how Rhee benefitted from a particularly friendly, albeit mercurial, relationship with *Time* publisher, and China lobbyist, Henry Luce.<sup>13</sup> In a study examining American perceptions of Rhee's fellow Asian autocrat, Ngo Dinh Diem, Seth Jacobs argued that Rhee, like Diem, and nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek, embodied exactly the kind of Christian, pro-American and anti-communist strongman that many on the Right believed the United States needed as a bulwark against Soviet and Chinese expansionism.<sup>14</sup> Yet Rhee was in some ways

---

<sup>10</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, p. 696. Cumings work has received much criticism for its overtly polemical critique of U.S. foreign policy in the 1940s. For a more detailed examination of the historiographical debate see William Stueck, "The Korean War As History: David Rees' Korea: The Limited War in Retrospect," Conference on "The Power of Free Inquiry and Cold War International History," National Archives II, September 1998, <http://www.nara.gov/research/coldwar/coldwar.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, p. 701. He restated these views in his most recent book on the Korean War: Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011). Apart from a brief discussion in Chapter Four this thesis does not look at coverage of Korea by non-American correspondents. Only Australian coverage of Korea has received significant scholarly attention: Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath, *Witnesses To War: The History Of Australian Conflict Reporting* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2011); Prue Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia's Neighbours 1941-75* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Knightley, p. 389.

<sup>13</sup> Robert E. Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 114–16.

<sup>14</sup> Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2004), pp. 122–24.

quite distinct from his fellow East Asian autocrats. When it was founded in 1948, the ROK was a constitutional democracy with a political system loosely modelled on that of France. Although Rhee had considerable power as president, he depended on the independent-minded National Assembly to pass legislation and, at least in theory, to re-elect him as president after the end of his four year term. While Rhee progressively undermined these democratic elements over the course of his presidency, his pro-democracy rhetoric and credentials were key parts of his appeal in the United States.

The literature's focus on Rhee's right-wing supporters has obscured both the scale and the vehemence of criticism of Syngman Rhee from other voices in the United States. Even before he became president of the ROK, Rhee was a major figure of hate for both liberals and those further on the left. Magazines such as *The Nation* persistently attacked Rhee for his reactionary anti-communist ideology and role in polarising Korean society. Reporters for mainstream newspapers with a liberal internationalist point of view, such as the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, often described Rhee as an extremist and brutally repressive autocrat. During the years of the American occupation, an influential group of American journalists fiercely opposed Rhee's rise to power under American auspices. Amongst a significant proportion of the American intellectual elite, Rhee was regarded as a dictator.<sup>15</sup>

Rhee's relationship with the United States has been neglected in the existing literature. Although studies of U.S. relations with authoritarian allies in this period have recently begun to appear in significant number, the Rhee regime has so far failed to attract much interest from

---

<sup>15</sup> Many scholars of South Korean politics have agreed with the assessment that Rhee was a dictator, or at the very least highly authoritarian. See for instance Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea: From 'Land of the Morning Calm' to States in Conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 400; J. B. Palais, "'Democracy' in South Korea, 1948–1972", in *Without Parallel: The American–Korean Relationship Since 1945*, ed. by Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon, 1974), pp. 318–57; Süng-ju Han, *The Failure of Democracy in South Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974); John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korea: Democracy on Trial* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

historians.<sup>16</sup> No full English-language biography of Rhee has been published since 1960.<sup>17</sup> In histories of the Korean War and its origins, the Rhee regime's controversial status is often alluded to without elaboration.<sup>18</sup> Few scholars have drawn attention to the fact that Rhee probably dedicated more attention to his image in the United States than any foreign leader in American history. South Korea's entire diplomatic strategy throughout much of the late 1940s and 1950s depended on reaching out for the support of the American public. As Stephen Jin-Woo Kim observed in a study of South Korean foreign policy in the late 1950s: "In place of soldiers, weapons and dollars, Korean officials employed press conferences, lobbying, demonstrations, and the threat of national collapse to implement their singular strategy of miring the United States in Korea".<sup>19</sup> Although this strategy

---

<sup>16</sup> David Schmitz explored how U.S. policymakers came to support right-wing dictatorships as part of the broader Cold War strategy of containment although he did not look at either the press or South Korea: Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-65*. In stark contrast to Korea, a lively historiographical debate has developed surrounding the evolution of U.S. support for the controversial government of South Vietnam in the 1950s: see for instance Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); James T. Fisher, 'A World Made Safe for Diversity: The Vietnam Lobby and the Politics of Pluralism, 1945-1963', in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, ed. by Christian G. Appy (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), pp. 217-37.

<sup>17</sup> Richard C. Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait* (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1960). For unclear reasons the author of this relatively balanced biography wrote under a pseudonym. In 2014, South Korean scholar Young Ick Lew published a laudatory biography of Rhee's life up until 1948, although the bulk of the book focuses on his early years: *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014). More general works on U.S.-ROK relations usually focused exclusively on diplomatic and military aspects of the relationship. See for instance *Child Of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship 1943-1953*, ed. by Bruce Cumings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); *U.S.-Korean Relations 1882-1982*, ed. by Tae-Hwan Kwak and others (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> See James I. Matray, *Reluctant Crusade: American Policy in Korea, 1941-50* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986). Charles Dobbs argued that South Korea's political symbolism was a crucial factor in U.S. Korea policy before the Korean War yet did not explore how this symbolism was publicly manifested: Charles M. Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981). Several studies have looked at the relationship from the opposite direction—South Korean perceptions of the U.S. Sang-Dawn Lee, *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002); *Korean Attitudes Toward The United States*, ed. by David I. Steinberg (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2005); *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, ed. by Young Ick Yew and others (Seoul: Asan Foundation, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Jin-Woo Kim, *Master of Manipulation: Syngman Rhee and the Seoul-Washington Alliance 1953-1960* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), p. 3.

was first deployed by Rhee in the years of occupation, Rhee's public lobbying efforts have received only passing mention in scholarly accounts of U.S.-Korean relations between 1945 and 1954.<sup>20</sup>

Virtually everything that is known about Rhee's public relations strategy comes from the memoir of former Rhee lobbyist Robert T. Oliver. While officially a Professor of Rhetoric and Speech Studies at a series of colleges in the U.S. Northeast, Oliver spent eighteen years, from 1942 to 1960, moonlighting as Rhee's director of public relations activities in the United States. As part of this work, he published a series of books on the history of the ROK and a biography of Rhee for the popular press. Almost two decades after the fall of the Rhee regime, he published a memoir of his time working for Rhee.<sup>21</sup> Oliver claimed that both American policymakers and the press reduced the issues in Korea to "oversimplified clichés" in which Rhee was portrayed as an "extreme rightist" in spite of his supposedly liberal socio-economic views.<sup>22</sup> After taking power in 1948, Oliver wrote that Rhee faced a crippling and unjustified barrage of savage criticism for his allegedly totalitarian treatment of the Korean people. Oliver thus portrayed Rhee as a perennial underdog without any major constituency of support in the United States.

Former Tokyo-based reporter Hugh Deane offered a very different interpretation in his memoir published in 1999. A correspondent for the liberal *Nation* magazine and several other left-wing newspapers, Deane recalled that the media portrayed the "Rhee quasi-dictatorship" as a "praiseworthy young democracy valiantly confronting a despotic Soviet puppet in the north".<sup>23</sup> He put the blame for this misrepresentation, at least in part, on the "frigidly Cold War" atmosphere in

---

<sup>20</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, pp. 110–13.; William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 41–47, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver's role in managing Rhee's public relations activities inevitably raises questions over the reliability of his work. While his biography of Rhee was hagiographic, he nonetheless made some effort to include the perspectives of Rhee's critics. His later writings were significantly more analytical and critical, although he never renounced his support for Rhee. Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960* (Seoul: Panmun Book Company, 1978). Also Robert T. Oliver, 'My Life As a Korean Ghost', *Korean Journal*, 33.4 (1995); Robert T. Oliver, 'Transition and Continuity in Korean-American Relations in the Postwar Period', in *Korean-American Relations 1866-1997*, ed. by Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, pp. 30, 208.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Deane, *The Korean War: 1945-1953* (San Francisco, CA: China Books & Periodicals, 1999), p. 19.

Korea in which journalists were expected to write in support of the fervently anti-communist stance of the American authorities.<sup>24</sup> Deane claimed that only a handful of reporters wrote honestly about what they saw, although Deane did not explore why they were different, nor what exact methods were used to control the rest of the press. The stark differences in Oliver and Deane's accounts of the same events reflect the need for scholarly synthesis.

Finally, it is important to outline the broader debate in which much of the literature on U.S.-South Korean relations in this period has been framed. Since the 1970s, a 'revisionist' approach to the Korean War has emphasised the Korean civil war roots of the conflict and the negative role played by the United States.<sup>25</sup> In recent years, this literature has focused on American complicity in acts of extreme violence, most notably the brutal crackdowns on uprisings on the island of Cheju in the late 1940s and atrocities against civilians during the Korean War.<sup>26</sup> Although the scale and culpability of the United States for these incidents remains contentious, most historians accept that they represent a dark stain on the record of American involvement in Korea. Even historians who have been relatively complimentary towards U.S. policy have argued that better approaches could have been found if there had been sufficient "wisdom, vision and courage".<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Deane, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> The first major work of the revisionist school was Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). Bruce Cumings has since become the dominant figure associated with Korean War revisionism, although he personally rejects the term. See William Stueck, 'Revisionism and the Korean War', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 22.1 (2002).

<sup>26</sup> The renewed interest in this topic can be traced back to 1999 when AP caused a major outcry with the publication of a story alleging that Korean civilians had been massacred by American soldiers near the village of No Gun Ri in July 1950. As more alleged atrocities subsequently came to light, the South Korean government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005 to investigate atrocities committed by government agencies in Korea between 1910 and 1993. For the AP reporters account of this investigation see Charles J. Hanley, Martha Mendoza and Sang-hun Choe, *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001). For examples of recent scholarship on political repression and wartime atrocities see Su-kyoung Hwang, *Korea's Grievous War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016); Tae-woo Kim, *Bombing: Reading the Korean War through the Aerial Bombing Records of the United States Air Force* (Seoul: Changbi Books, 2013); Jeremy Kuzmarov, 'Police Training, "Nation-Building," and Political Repression in Postcolonial South Korea', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 10.27 (2012); Suh Hee-Kyung, 'Atrocities Before And During The Korean War', *Critical Asian Studies*, 42.4 (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Jongsuk Chay, *Unequal Partners in Peace And War: The Republic of Korea and the United States, 1948-1953* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), p. 67.



This thesis adds to this debate in several ways. Most obviously, it shows why incidents and problems identified by revisionist scholars never emerged as significant political issues in the United States. This thesis also helps to build a much more nuanced picture of the prejudices and biases that informed reporting. While the press has long been exploited by scholars as a key source of insight into this period, it has rarely been studied as an independent actor in its own right. Finally, the thesis helps to shine a light on an aspect of the American intervention in Korea which is all too often ignored- the role played by South Koreans in shaping American perceptions of their country.

## 2. *Studying the American Press*

This study is primarily an investigation into the production processes of press coverage.<sup>28</sup> It explores the political, military, institutional, cultural, ideological, and personal factors that influenced American journalists working in both South Korea and the United States. In emphasising these factors, the thesis avoids the tendency, notably criticised by historian Chris Daly, of much journalism history to focus on “doggedly empirical” accounts of how X covered Y with little connection to other historical fields.<sup>29</sup> Instead, this thesis shows that journalism can only be properly understood in the context of the wider political and cultural forces in American society.

Much of the scholarly literature looking at the press and U.S. foreign relations during the early Cold War has focused on the growing influence of the U.S. government. In the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, American political leaders developed a range of powerful public relations tools - including press briefings, interviews, conferences, speeches, and the withholding and leaking of crucial information - to set the media agenda and even co-opt journalists into becoming

---

<sup>28</sup> With a couple of exceptions, this thesis does not look at broadcast media coverage. Although the Korean War received significant coverage on both radio and television, very few records relating to these programmes have survived. However, the crude level of recording technology meant that little of this coverage was produced in the field or involved independent reporting: J. Fred MacDonald, *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1985), pp. 33–36.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Daly, ‘The Historiography of Journalism History: Part 1: “An Overview”’, *American Journalism*, 26 (2009), 141–147. See also Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

cheerleaders for government policy.<sup>30</sup> After World War Two, government bureaucracies, including the military, the Department of State, and the occupation governments in the Far East, dedicated significant resources to public relations.<sup>31</sup> By the time of the Korean War, the Truman administration was able to deploy these sophisticated media management apparatuses to build public support for the war and the mobilisation of the country onto a militarised Cold War footing.<sup>32</sup>

A crucial enabling factor in the government's media management capabilities were the institutional structures and professional norms of the press. By the 1940s, American journalism was dominated by the ethic of 'objectivity', the expectation that reporters use attributable and reliable sources as the basis for their stories. Government sources were naturally treated as the pre-eminent source of legitimate news and information. This coincided with the development of the culture of 'pack' reporting in which journalists assigned to cover particular beats tended to build strong personal relationships with the officials who provided them with stories.<sup>33</sup>

The ties between journalists and the government officials grew even stronger following the onset of the Cold War. In a study of coverage of the Vietnam War, Daniel Hallin argued that the perceived existential threat posed by communism led American journalists to make a kind of unofficial pact with the government in their coverage of national security issues; "Journalists gave up the right to speak with a political voice of their own, and in turn they were granted a regular right of access to the inner counsels of government".<sup>34</sup> The consequence of this symbiosis between the press and the political establishment was a decline in the range of stories and opinions that could be freely discussed by the media- what Hallin labelled as the "sphere of legitimate controversy". Those

---

<sup>30</sup> David Randall Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945–1965* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> James Reston, 'Acheson Acts To Increase Foreign Policy Information', *The New York Times*, 3 November 1949. For more on how the U.S. military used television for propaganda purposes see Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> Hallin, p. 8.

journalists who breached the boundaries of acceptable reporting risked permanently isolating themselves from the political establishment and fatally sabotaging their own careers.

Hallin's findings have been confirmed by several similar studies, yet they share some common limitations; most importantly a focus on just one or two prestigious news outlets, in particular the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*.<sup>35</sup> In a wide-ranging survey of press coverage of four foreign policy crises during the Kennedy administration, Ralph and W. Patricia Levering and Kern Montague demonstrated the heterogeneity of American press coverage of foreign policy issues. The authors showed that although President Kennedy often had a privileged position as newsmaker-in-chief, he nonetheless was just one voice amongst many in the public debate over foreign policy issues.<sup>36</sup> Other sources quoted by journalists included foreign sources, non-administration political sources, interest groups, the general public and sources within the press, such as influential columnists. The degree of emphasis put on these different sources varied with each newspaper; key variables included the geographical location of the newspaper, the demographics of its readership and the political inclinations of its publishers.

This thesis takes this approach further in several ways. Rather than sampling a small number of newspapers, it explores the trends in coverage throughout the entire American press. It also broadens the scope of its investigation to not only look at the press through the institution of the newspaper but also the journalists doing the reporting. It thus follows in the tradition of historians such as Kendrick Oliver, David Engerman, Deborah Lipstadt who have shown how ideological

---

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Tsan-Kuo Chang, *The Press And China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations 1950-1984* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1993); W. Lance Bennett, 'Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States', *Journal of Communication*, 40.2 (1990), 103-27; Nicholas Berry, *Foreign Policy And The Press: An Analysis Of The New York Times Coverage Of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). All these studies found evidence of a close relationship between the press and the government, although Bennet suggested that Congress was the most significant influence on the *Times'* support for U.S. policy in the case of Nicaragua in the 1980s.

<sup>36</sup> Kern Montague, W. Patricia Levering and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), pp. 6-12.

frameworks and professional practices led reporters to ignore or marginalise significant international stories.<sup>37</sup>

Journalists covering Korea in the 1940s and 1950s faced a particularly complex moment of professional and ideological flux. World War Two had created a generation of reporters accustomed to working closely with military and political authorities in support of the war effort. Although most journalists regarded themselves as fiercely patriotic, their relationship with military authorities varied considerably. While some correspondents saw the military occupations of Japan and Korea as effectively continuations of the war effort, and thus deserving of the complete support of American reporters, others saw them as little better than the authoritarian regimes they were replacing.

Reporters also had very different perceptions of their own autonomy and professional responsibilities. Press agency reporters strove for objectivity, although this often meant different things to different people. UP correspondent Earnest Hoberecht wrote in his memoir that in his experience all correspondents were “obsessed with the idea of getting the truth. They want the facts. They want to get behind the false front.”<sup>38</sup> Marguerite Higgins framed the pursuit of truth as a necessary part of ‘watchdog journalism’, holding the government to account for its misdeeds and failures.<sup>39</sup> In her hastily written memoir of the military disasters that befell U.S. forces in the first

---

<sup>37</sup> All three of these scholars have explored the question of why the American press ignored stories of great human suffering that have been retrospectively understood as atrocities. Kendrick Oliver showed how the working practices and ideological loyalties of journalists covering the Vietnam War resulted in them overlooking serious lapses in the conduct of U.S. military forces. David Engerman has argued that the famine in Ukraine in the early 1930s was ignored by American journalists due to a combination of prejudice against Soviet peasants and an ideological attachment to the project of Soviet industrialisation. Deborah Lipstadt suggested that coverage of the growing repression against Jews in Nazi Germany was limited by the widespread anti-Semitism of American society and the refusal of many journalists to believe that the Nazis could be engaging in such heinous crimes: Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 16–52; David Engerman, ‘Modernization from the Other Shore: American Observers and the Costs of Soviet Economic Development’, *The American Historical Review*, 105.2 (2000), 383–416; Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> Earnest Hoberecht, *Asia Is My Beat* (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1961), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> It was in this era that the moniker the ‘fourth branch of government’ came to be commonly used to describe the American press’ vital role in the system of checks and balances on governmental power. For the classic statement of this view of government-press relations see Douglass Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959).

months of the Korean War, Higgins argued that “as long as our government requires the backing of an aroused and informed public opinion it is necessary to tell the hard bruising truth”.<sup>40</sup>

A further complication in the relationship between the press and authorities was the fundamentally competitive nature of the journalism profession. A reporter’s career largely depended on finding good stories and major scoops.<sup>41</sup> While a handful looked for these stories through investigative reporting and insightful analysis of the occupation regimes, most were dependent on the authorities for tips and leads on big stories.

The way journalists wrote about Korea was heavily influenced by the political and cultural values of American society. This was most directly manifested in the constant demands from editors in the United States for dispatches relating to subjects of American public interest such as accounts of American servicemen in action and general human interest stories. But journalists were also shaped by and exposed to wider American social trends. Like their peers back home, reporters believed that the United States model of liberal democracy was superior to any other political system. Most shared an instinctual dislike of authoritarianism, although a fuzzy distinction was often made between the pragmatic political authoritarianism of somewhere like South Korea and the indefensible totalitarianism of the communist world.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the collapse of the corrupt and highly authoritarian Chinese nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-Shek in the late 1940s was

---

<sup>40</sup> Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1951), p. 78.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism’s Colliding Traditions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 253. The distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian societies would become a major topic of academic debate in the 1950s. In 1982, Ronald Reagan’s Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane J. Kirkpatrick made a controversial attempt to codify this distinction in terms of U.S. foreign policy: Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982).

interpreted by many as evidence that reactionary and authoritarian governments could not win the support of their citizens.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, pure democracy was not always regarded as an unalloyed good. It was not forgotten that populist mass movements had brought into power both the Nazi and Soviet regimes or that the governments installed by the Soviet Union in eastern Europe and North Korea referred to themselves as 'democratic republics'. With its vast, uneducated and desperately poor population, Asia represented particularly fertile ground for communist movements. Many Americans looking at Asia after World War Two feared that communists would co-opt Japan's wartime rhetoric of 'Asia for the Asiatics' to stir up racial animosity towards the West.<sup>44</sup>

Americans sought pro-Western native elites who could channel these sentiments into less threatening political movements. These elites were not expected to establish participatory democracies in the mould of Western nations. Instead fidelity to political procedure and constitutional order were regarded as key measures of democratic development.<sup>45</sup> In South Korea this was manifested through the intensive coverage of elections in South Korea in 1948 and 1950. Large numbers of correspondents flew in to write detailed accounts of the procedural quality of elections, but rarely stayed around long enough to judge the actual experience of life under the autocratic Rhee regime.

Few journalists conceived of human rights or even large-scale civilian suffering as a topic of interest to the American public. Sehr Conway-Lenz has shown how civilian deaths caused by the Korean War were largely ignored by Americans due to the widespread notion that the death of non-

---

<sup>43</sup> Not everyone saw authoritarianism as the main cause of the Chiang Kai-Shek's downfall. After 1948, many American conservatives accused the Truman administration of failing to provide adequate support to the nationalist government.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race, and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 17–18.

<sup>45</sup> Nils Gilman has written an insightful account of how modernisation theorists grappled with many of these same issues, albeit in a rather more intellectually rigorous fashion. It's unlikely that many journalists in the Far East, few of whom laid any claim to academic pretensions, had any direct awareness of these intellectual debates: Nils Gilman, *Mandarins Of The Future* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 42–56.

combatants was an inevitable, if unfortunate, part of modern warfare.<sup>46</sup> In Korea, the disregard for suffering was undoubtedly amplified by American racial prejudices. John Tirman argued that racism explains why Koreans suffering was ignored by Americans both before and during the Korean War.<sup>47</sup> Most Americans believed Korean society was too primitive to operate by the liberal and humanistic values found in the United States. Stories of their suffering were thus disregarded as a sad but inevitable part of life in a backward society.

While Tirman was right to draw attention to the racial prejudices of Americans writing about South Korea, the overall impact of racial prejudice was complex. In the academic literature, much of the debate around racial prejudice has been framed around Edward Said's theory of orientalism, which posited that writers and artists in the West have systematically corrupted perceptions of the non-Western world through the recycling of simplistic and offensive colonial stereotypes.<sup>48</sup> In Said's understanding, European civilisation divided the world into two clearly defined and mutually exclusive categories of 'West' and 'East', or 'us' and 'them', where the West represented rationality and masculinity, and the East weakness, irrationality, femininity and childishness.<sup>49</sup> Said's many errors in facts, and extremely selective use of evidence, have been justifiably picked apart by scholars.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, his basic claim that Western writers often framed their perceptions of the East in highly ideological and racial terms remains a crucial insight.

---

<sup>46</sup> Sahr Conway-Lanz, *Collateral Damage: Americans, Noncombatant Immunity, and Atrocity after World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> John Tirman, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 121.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). In an earlier book, Said explicitly explored media coverage of the Islamic world: Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How The Media and The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> Although his work focused on European conceptions of the Orient, Said suggested that many of the same ideas had taken root in the United States following its emergence as a global superpower after the Second World War: Said, *Orientalism*, p. 295.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2006); John M. MacKenzie, 'Edward Said and the Historians', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18.1 (1994), pp. 127–43.

One of the most successful attempts to refine Orientalism in the context of American perceptions of East Asia was Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism*. Klein showed how the rejection of scientific racism in the early twentieth-century encouraged the United States to develop positive relationships with the peoples of Asia, based on bonds of toleration and ethnic inclusivity.<sup>51</sup> She posited an "imaginary of integration" in which the United States sought to modernise 'backward' Asia through cultural exchange rather than colonial exploitation. Cultural prejudices were thus reconfigured in such a way as to justify American interventionism as a paternalistic liberal project.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the American ambition to modernise Asia went hand-in-hand with the fear of the spread of communism. The escalation in tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1940s triggered a major anti-communist backlash in American society. Some scholars have suggested the emergence of the Cold War restructured the entire media system around anti-communistic ideology. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman posited a 'propaganda model' of the American media.<sup>52</sup> A polemical critique of the increasingly corporate nature of the American press, Chomsky and Herman argued that fervently self-interested capitalist media owners put heavy pressure on editorial staff to condemn communist ideology and write sympathetically about U.S. foreign policy. These pressures could often be subtle—editors might, for instance, decline to run a story in order to avoid upsetting advertisers or readers who had become accustomed to 'propagandistic' news values.

While Chomsky and Herman's model was simplistic, it captured the fundamental dynamics at work in the corporate media in the late 1940s and 1950s. From the late 1940s onwards, virtually the entire press presented communism as an existential threat to the United States and its free world allies.<sup>53</sup> Journalists with left-wing backgrounds found it increasingly difficult to find work as the

---

<sup>51</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Louis W. Liebovich, *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1947* (New York: Praeger, 1988).



leftist press collapsed and the mainstream press desperately sought to avoid accusations of harbouring communists.

However, even at the height of Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch-hunts in the early 1950s, there were still major political divisions on foreign policy issues. Anti-communists disagreed on issues as basic as American involvement in Korea and the rightfulness of American support for the Syngman Rhee regime. McCarthy himself was sympathetic to isolationism and rarely spoke about the Korean War beyond the occasional attack on Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson for blundering into a war which had cost thousands of young American lives.<sup>54</sup> While anti-communism undoubtedly narrowed the sphere of legitimate controversy, opposition and dissent were still possible.

To conclude, this section has shown how different influences on the press were manifested in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Most important among these were the relationship between the press and the government, the working practices of the press and broader American political and cultural values. The study of the interconnections between these factors in the shaping of coverage of South Korea forms the basic framework for this thesis.

## **Argument**

This thesis argues that five major factors influenced press coverage of South Korean authoritarianism. The first and most fundamental factor was the marginalisation of South Korean affairs through the dominance of anti-Korean and Cold War press narratives. This marginalisation was exacerbated by the second factor, the deference of most journalists to American authorities, and the third factor, the major constraints put on reporting by American military authorities. The two further factors were the increasing effectiveness of the Syngman Rhee regime in its public

---

<sup>54</sup> Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1981), p. 164.

relations activities and the low level of U.S. political interest in the political situation in South Korea for most of the period covered by this study.

The anti-Korean narrative emerged in the first year of the occupation of Korea. Prior to World War Two, the press had little knowledge of, or interest in, Korea, which was then regarded as an obscure part of the Japanese Empire. After the Cairo Conference made Korean independence an explicit goal of the war in 1943, the press accepted the view of most American experts that Koreans were a primitive and servile colonial people who would require a lengthy period of foreign trusteeship before being ready for independence. Following the division of Korea into American and Soviet spheres of occupation, Korean society became rapidly polarised into leftist and rightist camps while the American-occupied zone suffered intense social and economic strife. The small American press corps in Seoul largely ignored these problems due to their lack of interest in Korean affairs and the closeness of their connections to the AMG regime. Attempts by a handful of visiting liberal journalists to reveal the true extent of the problems in the American-occupied zone were aggressively suppressed by both the AMG and the military government in Japan. As the situation continued to deteriorate, observers became increasingly fatalistic about the situation- Korea was a tragic mess in which the United States could do little to alter the course of events.

This situation only began to shift in the autumn of 1947, when the United States handed responsibility for southern Korea's future to the UN. At this moment, it became clear that Syngman Rhee, the leading rightist political figure in South Korea, was destined to become president of an independent South Korean state. Years of lobbying by Rhee and his supporters in the United States paid off when right-wing American press outlets gave Rhee their backing as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. This laid the basis for the second major press narrative explored in this thesis, the Cold War narrative.

As relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated in the late 1940s, both South and North Korea emerged as separate states. The ROK emerged as a fervently anti-

communist state just as Cold War fears were hitting their peak in the United States. It was not until the onset of the Korean War, however, that the press fully accepted Korea as a key Cold War battlefield. While the Truman administration made only limited attempts to sell South Korea's virtues to the American people, the ROK benefitted from the radical changes in its geopolitical situation and military capability. The astonishing rebirth of the South Korean army and Syngman Rhee's staunch anti-communist stand helped the country establish itself as a crucial ally against communism in Asia.

A key argument of this thesis is that these were not the only narratives that were available. During the occupation period, an eclectic group of Americans and Koreans criticised this fatalistic anti-Korean mind-set and argued that the United States could make a significant positive impact if it adopted different policies on Korea. In the early days of the occupation a group of Tokyo-based correspondents became ardent critics of the American military governments in both Japan and Korea. They were horrified by the AMG's tacit support for the persecution of leftist elements organised by followers of Syngman Rhee and other leading rightists. However, the tight military controls on the press made it extremely difficult for correspondents to write about these developments.

In the years between the establishment of the ROK and the onset of the Korean War, the liberal critique of the ROK regime came close to becoming the dominant narrative. The ROK was beset by political, economic and military problems. Mass arrests of dissidents and government suppression of the Korean media received widespread coverage. Following the defeat of the Chinese nationalists in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, many observers predicted that South Korea's corrupt and reactionary government was destined for a similar fate. However, the Rhee regime proved to be more versatile and less explicitly authoritarian than expected. Rhee's losses in the May 1950 legislative elections suggested that democracy, at least in its procedural form, was still alive.

After the onset of the Korean War in 1950, several critical narratives emerged and then fell by the wayside. During the first month of the war, many commentators pondered whether the Rhee regime was too unpopular to survive the invasion of the DPRK. In the summer and autumn of 1950, Americans were shocked by a series of reports of atrocities committed by South Korean police and military units against civilians. In 1952, a handful of American reporters accused Rhee of dictatorship when he arrested his opponents in the National Assembly and used violent force to force them to support a constitutional amendment which effectively removed the last checks on his power as president. However, none of these narratives gained significant political traction in the United States. Press coverage of these incidents was too fleeting and the focus on the broader Cold War aspects of the conflict too strong. By the time the war ended in 1953, few observers bothered to comment on the authoritarianism of the ROK regime.

### **Sources**

This thesis takes advantage of several archival sources which have never before been used by historians working on American press coverage of South Korea. Amongst the most significant are the papers of the American Military Government (AMG) in Korea and the papers of General James Van Fleet and Syngman Rhee. They have been supplemented with material from a large number of other archives, including the Truman and Eisenhower presidential libraries, State Department records at the National Archives and Records Administration, the institutional archives of Associated Press, *Time* magazine and the *New York Times* and the personal papers of many of the key figures mentioned in this thesis.

It is necessary, however, to note the fragmentary nature of much of the archival material. The inconsistent nature of the U.S. commitment to Korea is very much reflected in the records available in official government archives. The period from 1948 to 1950, when the United States did not have a very significant bureaucratic presence in South Korea, is particularly poorly

documented.<sup>55</sup> Newspaper and journalist archives have proven to be even more problematic. Few news organisations have publicly accessible archives and much of what is available is a very limited sampling of correspondence. While a handful of journalists donated their personal papers to archives, the vast majority left nothing. Where possible, gaps have been filled using memoirs and published newspaper material to gain more insight into editorial decision-making and biographical details. While the Syngman Rhee papers provide a valuable insight into how Rhee and his American supporters tried to influence public opinion in the United States, they are also frustratingly incomplete.<sup>56</sup> Robert T. Oliver's book on Syngman Rhee's relationship with the United States remains a vital resource for understanding the development of the Rhee lobby.<sup>57</sup>

## Structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, arranged in chronological order with the partial exception of Chapter Six. The first two chapters cover the American occupation of Korea from 1945 until 1948. The third chapter looks at the two year period between the establishment of the ROK and the onset of the Korean War in 1950. The following three chapters explore different aspects of the Korean War. Chapter Four looks at coverage of the ROK during the first year of the war. Chapter Five centres on the growing conflict between Syngman Rhee and the National Assembly and the 1952 constitutional crisis. Chapter Six shifts the focus to coverage of the collapse and rebirth of the ROK's armed forces. Finally, Chapter Seven examines the period immediately after the end of the

---

<sup>55</sup> The most significant American presence in South Korea during most of this period was the Korean Military Advisory Mission (KMAAG).

<sup>56</sup> Given the importance of Syngman Rhee to this thesis, the provenance and limitations of his papers should be explained. While his official papers are kept at the Yonsei Institute in South Korea, a set of digital copies are available for consultation at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington D.C. These papers are far from complete. Virtually nothing exists from before December 1950, presumably as a result of the loss of Rhee's archives during the communist invasion. Correspondence after that date is patchy- with almost nothing from 1952 or 1953. Part of the collection is also labelled the 'Robert Oliver papers' but is missing almost all of the documents mentioned by Oliver in his books on Rhee. A separate and apparently much more extensive collection of documents also known as the 'Robert Oliver papers' is held by Professor Emeritus Chong-Sik Lee of the University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any way to access these papers. To add even further confusion, two more sets of documents known as the Robert Oliver papers are held by two South Korean research centres.

<sup>57</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*.

Korean War and up to Syngman Rhee's sweeping constitutional reforms which effectively made him president for life in November 1954.

Chapter one begins by providing a general overview of coverage of the Korean situation prior to the start of the occupation. It then explores four major facets of coverage during the first year of the occupation: the controversial start of the occupation, the AMG's co-option of the Seoul press corps, the attempts by a small group of Tokyo-based correspondents to draw attention to the severity of the crisis brewing in the country and finally the growing prominence of Syngman Rhee in the United States.

The second chapter looks at the period from December 1946 to August 1948. It begins by examining the battle in Washington between the AMG and Syngman Rhee for influence over American perceptions of the occupation regime and the possibility of a joint trusteeship with the Soviet Union. It then shifts focus back to Korea and the continued success of the AMG to suppress hostile coverage of the occupation. In the winter of 1947, Rhee secured the backing of key right-wing publications in the United States, while a small number of liberal journalists made a desperate bid to prevent elections which they believed would usher in a reactionary authoritarian government in South Korea.

Chapter three shows how the sharp polarisation of views of the ROK emerged in the period between the creation of South Korea in 1948 and the onset of the Korean War in June 1950. Although the right-wing press greeted the establishment of the ROK with enthusiasm, a major uprising in October 1948 raised troubling questions regarding the stability of the new country. Over the course of 1949, the Rhee regime and the Truman administration struggled to convince critics that the ROK could avoid the fate of Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalist Chinese regime. However, in the spring of 1950, a series of positive steps, most importantly the May 1950 elections, demonstrated that the regime was doing better than its critics had claimed.

In chapter four, the impact of the start of the Korean War on press perceptions of the ROK is examined. It shows how concerns over the unpopularity and controversial status of the regime were raised by the press during the first chaotic weeks of the war but failed to gather significant momentum amidst the Cold War-centric press narrative of the crisis. While many journalists reported on ROK atrocities against civilians throughout the first six months of the war, these stories did not trigger a major outcry in the United States. Instead, the regime's public relations officials effectively won the support of the war correspondents in South and the press back in the United States.

The fifth chapter explores American press coverage of worsening relations between Rhee and the National Assembly during the Korean War and its controversial resolution in the summer of 1952. It shows how journalists largely ignored the build-up to the crisis due to the low levels of interest in South Korean political affairs and the fixation of the press on the dramatic crisis at the Koje-do prison camp. When Rhee threatened the Assembly with mass arrests and violent repression in May 1952, only two correspondents for two liberal newspapers treated the crisis as a major scandal. Once the United States chose not to intervene in the crisis, the press re-framed the story around elements of Rhee's own self-justifying narrative.

Chapter six reveals how the press covered the collapse and rebirth of the ROK Army (ROKA). In one of the most dramatic developments of the Korean War, the ROKA recovered from almost total annihilation to one of the world's most advanced fighting machines in just a few years. It shows how the press initially wrote about the ROKA from the highly critical perspective of American military officials. After May 1951, Eighth Army commander General James Van Fleet worked hard to publicise the greatly improved capability of the ROKA. By 1953, the ROKA's military prowess became a key part of the ROK's new image as a major Cold War ally for the United States

The seventh and final chapter explores South Korea's image in the wake of the Korean War. It shows how Syngman Rhee became an ever more dominant figure in American perceptions of the ROK as a result of his high stakes diplomatic battle with the United States over the long-term future of the armistice. At the same time, Rhee worked with prominent American supporters of a more aggressive Cold War strategy to win the support of the American public for a resumption of the Korean War. Although this effort met with little success, Rhee established himself as a martyr figure in the eyes of many on the American Right. Finally, the chapter shows how American foreign correspondents covering South Korea faced growing political repression from the Rhee regime, and subsequently gave little coverage to the removal of the last constitutional constraints on his rule.



## Chapter 1: Occupation 1945-46: Hope and failure

On 8 September 1945, the United States began the occupation of the southern half of Korea, a once independent nation that had been colonised by Japan at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. While the American occupation lasted just three years, its consequences for Korea were catastrophic. The pragmatic administrative decision to divide the country into separate American and Soviet zones of occupation created a political border without precedent in Korean history. While the communists installed a Stalinist-style Korean-led communist regime in the northern half of the peninsula, in the south the United States struggled to develop a coherent political strategy. Within the chaotic whirl of politics in the south, nationalistic anti-communist groups became increasingly dominant. Under the auspices of the American occupation government, anyone perceived to have associations or sympathies with communists was subject to harassment, detention and even violence. By the time the two halves of the peninsula declared their independence in 1948, South Korea had effectively eliminated the Left as a political force, cementing the division of the peninsula into two opposed ideological camps.

The occupation period has been of significant interest to historians since the publication of Bruce Cumings two-volume history of the origins of the Korean War. Cumings controversially argued that the AMG, led by General John Hodge, had enthusiastically backed the establishment of a tyrannical rightist Korean-led government in the American zone of occupation. Although liberal internationalists at the State Department initially tried to salvage plans for a joint trusteeship with the Soviet Union, Cumings claimed that in the early months of 1946 Washington “fell in behind Seoul” and supported the development of a rightist police state totally incompatible with trusteeship.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, pp. 428–44.

Cummings' interpretation of the occupation era has received a great deal of scholarly criticism. Amongst the most influential and convincing rebuttals are the first two volumes of Allan Millett's planned three part study of the U.S. role in Korea from 1945 to 1954. Millett portrayed Hodge as a rather ineffectual and pragmatic leader.<sup>2</sup> In Millett's view, the AMG was deeply frustrated by the attachment of policymakers in Washington to unworkable geostrategic goals through virtually the entire occupation period. Hodge faced the near impossible task of laying the foundations of a Korean government in the south while simultaneously keeping the door open to joint U.S.-Soviet trusteeship over the whole of Korea.

Neither Cummings nor Millett paid much attention to the role of the press. The only notable assessments of press coverage during the occupation are the memoirs of two individuals who worked in South Korea in the late 1940s and who were highly critical of U.S. policy. The first of these was published, pseudonymously, in 1950 by Richard D. Robinson, an intelligence officer in the AMG who fiercely criticised U.S. support for Korean rightist groups.<sup>3</sup> He claimed that 75% of all that was written on the occupation was "either outright fabrication or highly inaccurate".<sup>4</sup> He blamed U.S. officials for being so obsessed with classifying all information that "even the basic political policy document for Korea was stamped 'top secret' and kept in a carefully guarded safe". Hamlin believed that both civilian and military authorities had a deep seated fear of public scandal: "If our activities in South Korea had been reported accurately in the contemporary press, events- and people- might have been altered. But as it was, secrecy prevailed and the American indulged in fantastic flights of fantasy in reporting events in Korea. These inaccurate press accounts were not without their international repercussions."

---

<sup>2</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, pp. 52–71.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson wrote that he first began to question the occupation while working for its Bureau of Public Opinion in 1946. After reporting that Koreans were deeply unhappy with the occupation, he was transferred to the historical section of military intelligence where he was able to read high level reports by occupation officials which he believed deliberately falsified information about the situation in South Korea: Richard D. Robinson, 'A Personal Journey Through Time and Space', *Journal Of International Business Studies*, 25 (1994), pp. 436–37.

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Robinson, '*Betrayal Of A Nation*' (Unpublished manuscript: Georgetown University Library, 1950), p. 2.

Left-wing reporter Hugh Deane made similar, albeit more polemical, accusations in his part memoir, part history of the Korean occupation period. Comparing the situation in Korea to that which correspondents later found in Vietnam, Deane argued that press coverage was often based on the product of official handouts and briefings.<sup>5</sup> AMG officials made it clear to visiting reporters that they could only write on the topics they deemed acceptable. Deane also criticised the tiny American press corps based in South Korea for its complicity in sticking to the official 'Cold War' line, although his account was somewhat marred by basic factual errors.<sup>6</sup>

These first two chapters reveal a rather more complex story. The lowly status of Korea in the minds of the American public gave journalists few incentives to learn or write about the political situation in the country. Most of the reporters who covered Korea in this period accepted without question that Koreans were too backward to rule themselves- a racialised paternalism that was heavily reinforced by the anti-Korean attitudes of American officials in both Korea and Washington.<sup>7</sup> The manifold problems of the occupation were persistently blamed on the obstreperousness and political naivety of the Koreans. As a result, the press became increasingly fatalistic about the prospects of an improvement in the political situation. With little hope of any positive outcome being possible, the press effectively gave up on extensive reporting of the conditions in the American occupied zone.

An important element in the development of this narrative was the nature of the relationship between the AMG and the press. The small and highly deferential press corps in Seoul almost exclusively relied on the AMG to supply them with both the raw information and

---

<sup>5</sup> Deane, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Deane for instance claimed that the Seoul press corps prior to 1950 primarily consisted of the wives of AMG personnel working as stringers for the main press agencies. In reality, the three major American press agencies had dedicated correspondents throughout this period: Deane, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> The impact of racialised and 'orientalist' thinking on American officials in Korea has been explored in several recent studies: William Stueck and Boram Yi, "'An Alliance Forged in Blood': The American Occupation of Korea, the Korean War, and the US-South Korean Alliance', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33.2 (2010); Bruce Cumings, 'American Orientalism at War in Korea and the United States', in *Orientalism and War*, ed. by Tarak Barkawi and Ketih Stanski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Charles Kraus, 'American Orientalism in Korea', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22 (2015).

interpretative frameworks for their stories. As a result, most of the reporters in the American occupation zone followed the propagandistic media narrative provided by the AMG, which emphasised both the achievements of the occupation and the problems caused by forces outside of its control.

Two very different groups tried to promote alternative, and at times highly critical, perspectives of U.S. policy in South Korea. Several critics of U.S. military rule in the Tokyo press corps became deeply concerned about the negative impact of the occupation on the Korean population. However, their attempts to report from South Korea were largely thwarted by the repressive behaviour of military authorities and, in the case of at least one journalist, the lack of editorial interest in further coverage from the Far East.

A second alternative perspective was presented by a group of Korean and American activists allied to former exile and Korean nationalist leader Syngman Rhee. Working through a U.S.-based publicity organisation established by Syngman Rhee during World War Two, known as the Korean Commission, Rhee's supporters tried to raise awareness of the problems caused by the occupation and create public sympathy for the establishment of an independent Korean state. Like American journalists in Tokyo, however, they struggled to overcome the fatalistic attitudes of most Americans towards the Korean occupation.

### **Rediscovering Korea**

In November 1943 delegations from the United States, United Kingdom and Republic of China met in Cairo to discuss plans for the next stage of the war against Japan. After several days of discussion, they released a joint statement to the press which set out the war aims of the Pacific Allies. They called for Japan's colonial empire to be disassembled and its constituent parts returned to their previous governing states. A sentence added at the urging of President Franklin D. Roosevelt specified that this included the restoration of Korea, a nation that had been fully annexed by Japan

in 1910 and largely forgotten by the outside world in the forty years since.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Allies declared, “in due course, Korea shall become free and independent”.

The reporting of the decision to restore Korean independence marked the first time most newspapers had given serious thought to Korea’s political status since the failed March 1 uprising against Japanese rule in 1919. During that uprising, which had been organised partly in response to President Woodrow Wilson’s call for greater global self-determination, many American newspapers had offered great sympathy and even support for Korea’s struggle.<sup>9</sup> In 1943, however, the geopolitics of war and the changes in American perceptions of their role in Asia made Korea’s future a far more complicated prospect. As *The New York Times* argued in an editorial, the position of the allies was “not necessarily taken for the benefit of the Koreans. It is part of the program to weaken Japan by stripping her of her loot.”<sup>10</sup> Reflecting the widespread assumption amongst the U.S. policy elite that Korea was too backward to govern itself, the *Times* suggested that after the war Korea should end up under some kind of protectorate until such time as she could manage her own affairs.

A mixture of pragmatic realpolitik and racial prejudice dominated the thinking of the American elite in regards to Korea’s future in the early 1940s. Under Japanese rule and with no direct involvement in the war, Korea’s internal political situation was little understood or discussed outside of the small group of State Department officials tasked with planning post-war policy. Within these circles, experts believed that after forty years of colonial rule and with no history of democratic self-rule, the Korean people needed time to develop the personnel and institutions to rule themselves.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, many policymakers believed that it was the duty of the United States,

---

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Ian Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943: Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang Kai-Shek and Madame Chiang* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 127–32.; AP, ‘Korean Women And Children Speared’, *The Washington Post*, 28 March 1919; ‘Japan’s Plan Unjust’, *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1919.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Hope for Korea’, *The New York Times*, 2 December 1943.

<sup>11</sup> Since Korea was rarely mentioned by the press prior to World War Two, Jimin Kim has argued that travel writing in the 1930s helped to cement American perceptions of the backwardness of the Korean people. Magazines such as *National Geographic* generally depicted native Koreans as trapped in their traditional and underdeveloped ways of life in sharp contrast to the modernising efforts of their Japanese rulers: Jimin Kim,

alongside other Western powers, to provide this young nation with the tutelage necessary to rule itself. This paternalistic idealism reflected what Christian Klein has described as the “imaginary of integration”, the belief that both the United States and Asia stood to benefit from the transfer of Western wisdom and help to underdeveloped peoples.<sup>12</sup> Plans were thus drawn up to establish a trusteeship, a modernised form of the mandates that had been established by the League of Nations after World War One.<sup>13</sup>

As the war drew to a close in the summer of 1945, leading commentators relayed aspects of these discussions to the general public. In June 1945, Walter Lippmann, the country’s most influential media voice on foreign affairs, argued that a trusteeship was necessary in Korea, although in a sign of how marginal the issue was perceived to be by leading strategic thinkers, he provided no justification for it.<sup>14</sup> After the Japanese surrender in mid-August, former U.S. diplomat Sumner Welles called for Korea to be placed under international trusteeship until “such time as the people of Korea are prepared for the responsibilities of self-government”.<sup>15</sup>

The only significant dissenting perspective on trusteeship emanated from a small group of Korean exiles in the United States. By far the most prominent of these was the septuagenarian Korean independence activist Syngman Rhee. A leading nationalist moderniser in the 1900s, Rhee had been imprisoned and tortured by the Japanese and subsequently forced into exile in the United

---

*‘Representing The Invisible: The American Perceptions Of Colonial Korea’* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2011), p. 237-243.

<sup>12</sup> Klein, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> The primary architect of the trusteeship concept was William Langdon, a State Department official who had served in the American consulate in Seoul in the 1930s. For a full account of how U.S. plans for trusteeship evolved during and after World War Two see Matray.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Lippmann, ‘Toward An Asiatic Settlement’, *The Washington Post*, 28 June 1945. Lippmann probably read or was briefed on the contents of a confidential State Department report which emphasised the potential for political chaos in Korea and the necessity of American aid in the creation of an independent and democratic Korean republic: An Estimate Of Conditions In Asia and the Pacific at the Close of the War in the Far East and the Objectives and Policies of the United States, 22 June 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 6: pp. 556-80. Lippmann’s failure to justify the need for trusteeship received criticism from at least one supporter of Korean independence: Inez Kong Pal, Letter ‘Lippmann on Korea’, *The Washington Post*, 8 July 1945.

<sup>15</sup> Sumner Welles, ‘America’s Duty in Far East to Free All China From Foreign Intrusion’, *The Boston Globe*, 30 August 1945.

States.<sup>16</sup> A key figure in the March 1 anti-Japanese protest movement, Rhee had become the president of the provisional Korean government-in-exile in 1919. Although removed from the position following a factional dispute in 1925, Rhee still claimed to represent the Korean Provisional Government in the United States. Just before the start of World War Two, he had moved to Washington D.C. to lobby for a strong American response to Japanese militarism and for the U.S. government to recognise Korea's government-in-waiting. He was aided by a small group of American and Korean supporters who made persistent, albeit mostly ineffectual, efforts to bring the Korean issue to the attention of policymakers and the American public.<sup>17</sup>

Identifying as a non-denominational Protestant, Rhee found his greatest source of support amongst Church congregations in Washington D.C.<sup>18</sup> Through weekly attendance at sermons and other social functions, Rhee came to make several contacts who profoundly influenced his relationship with the American press. In September 1942, Rhee met Robert T. Oliver, a scholar of rhetoric who was on secondment to Washington as part of the war effort. Although Oliver had no previous connection with Korea, he was captivated by Rhee's impassioned plea for help in liberating his country.<sup>19</sup> Within a few months, Oliver began publishing lengthy articles and letters in internationally-focused magazines and Washington newspapers about Korea's tragic forgotten status, using information provided by Rhee and his followers.

Rhee also met Henry Luce, then publisher of Time Inc., one of the most important media companies in the United States. Luce was a leading figure in the so-called 'China Lobby', a group of elite Americans with a profound interest in China's future and a strong attachment to its

---

<sup>16</sup> Rhee's early life has been extensively explored in several biographies: Lew; Chong-Sik Lee, *Syngman Rhee: The Prison Years of a Young Radical* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001); Allen; Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind The Myth* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1954).

<sup>17</sup> Jay Jerome Williams, Letter 'Korea Appeals For Our Help', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 10 September 1944; Colonel Ben C. Limb, Letter 'Hope For Korea', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 8 November 1944.

<sup>18</sup> Rhee's Christian faith was much commented on by the American press. Rhee claimed to have converted to Christianity while imprisoned by the Japanese in Korea. Although he initially identified as a Methodist, he left the Church in 1916 after a dispute over the segregation of Korean children in schools in Hawaii. See Allen, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Robert T. Oliver, 'My Life As a Korean Ghost', p. 64.

controversial leader Chiang-Kai-Shek.<sup>20</sup> As the child of American missionaries in China, Luce had witnessed first-hand the influence the United States could play in East Asia's march towards modernity. In 1941, Luce had written a widely discussed editorial essay in *Time* which set out a programme to spread American ideals around the world and establish the 20<sup>th</sup>-century as the "American century".<sup>21</sup> In a typical mix of paternalism and religious rhetoric, he called for the United States to lift "mankind from the level of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels".

Syngman Rhee's Protestant, Americanised background perfectly suited Luce's vision for global leadership in the 'American Century'. Although Luce declined to take up Rhee's cause directly, he pushed his media outlets to give exposure to the situation in Korea. In March 1944, *Time* ran two articles on Korea, one highlighting the anniversary of the 1919 uprising against Japanese rule and another on the historic role of American missionaries in providing Koreans with both "education and a sense of national pride".<sup>22</sup> In early June 1944, just a week after the D-Day landings in France, Luce sent a memo to his editors instructing them to make plans for adding Korea to the subjects the magazine should be looking at on the basis that Korea was likely to be one of the topmost strategic problems post-war.<sup>23</sup> A few months later, the Luce press magazine *Life*, then the most popular news magazine in the United States, ran an article outlining the basic history and culture of Korea.

Outside of the Luce press, Rhee struggled to be taken seriously. According to *Time* journalist Frank Gibney, Washington reporters dismissed him as an eccentric. One press agency correspondent remembered Rhee as a "funny old guy- always trying to get somebody to talk to him. We used to buy him lunch every once in a while, but he's a little nuts. A real lunatic".<sup>24</sup> Although Rhee's warnings

---

<sup>20</sup> For more on the origins and political influence of the China Lobby see Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). On Luce's relationship with China see Herzstein.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Life*, 17 February 1941.

<sup>22</sup> 'Voices In Bondage', *Time*, 13 March 1944; 'Missionaries to Korea', *Time*, 13 March 1944.

<sup>23</sup> Luce to All Managing Editors, 12 June 1944, Time-Life-Fortune Papers, John Shaw Billings Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Gibney, 'Syngman Rhee: The Free Man's Burden', *Harper's Magazine*, 1 February 1954.



about the danger posed by Japan were vindicated by Pearl Harbor, most journalists continued to ignore him until the end of the war.<sup>25</sup> AP correspondent Oliver King remembered his managers ordering him to dismiss handouts sent out by Rhee in early 1945 which accused the United States of handing over Korea to the Soviet Union at Yalta.<sup>26</sup> The only newspaper to give prominent space to Rhee's claims was the *Chicago Daily Tribune*- a newspaper run by the eccentric and fiercely isolationist Colonel Robert R. McCormick, a man much parodied for his editorial crusades against both New Deal Democrats and internationalist Republicans.<sup>27</sup> Although McCormick had previously met with Rhee and shown interest in the Korea problem, *The Tribune* showed little editorial concern for Korea's political fate in the summer of 1945.<sup>28</sup> The Yalta allegations were little more than an opportunistic attack on the perceived pro-Soviet agenda of the American policymaking elite. Rhee's rise to prominence began only after it became clear that the United States faced a major political problem in Korea following the start of the American occupation in September 1945.

### **Occupation crisis**

When Japan issued its formal surrender in August 1945, the fate of Korea presented a complicated problem for Allied planners. On 8 August, the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan and begun an invasion of Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Korea. In an attempt to avert the complete Soviet domination of Korea, the United States suggested a temporary division of the country into Soviet and American zones of occupation, along the same lines as Germany and Austria, with the dividing line set at the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The Soviet Union accepted the offer, leaving the

---

<sup>25</sup> One notable success for Rhee was an admiring mention in Eleanor Roosevelt's column 'My Day' in April 1945.

<sup>26</sup> O. H. P. King, *Tail of the Paper Tiger* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1961), p. 525.

<sup>27</sup> For more on McCormick's background see Richard Norton Smith, *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick, 1880-1955* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> It's not entirely clear when or how McCormick and Rhee became acquainted. The first letter from Rhee to McCormick in McCormick's personal papers, dated June 1946, indicated they had already known each other for some time before then: Rhee to McCormick, 28 June 1946, 'Korea, 1946-1955 (Syngman Rhee)' Folder, Box 48, Papers of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, First Division Museum.

southern half of Korea to await the arrival of American occupation forces from Okinawa in early September.

The first weeks of the American occupation of Korea offered the American public a dramatic and chaotic first insight into the country's political situation. The country teemed with American war correspondents looking for dramatic stories of the experience of liberation for the Korean people, but many instead encountered confusion and growing resentment against the Americans for failing to follow through on what many Koreans had believed to be a commitment to immediate Korean independence.

At the heart of the crisis was the severe disconnect between the expectations of the Korean people and the approach adopted by the Americans. The hurriedly appointed military commander of the American occupation zone, Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, had arrived in Korea without specific instructions from Washington on occupation policy beyond establishing law and order and preventing reprisals against the hundreds of thousands of Japanese who still remained on the peninsula. Hodge interpreted his mandate conservatively and refused to recognise a Korean-led leftist-oriented provisional government known as the Korean People's Republic that had taken control of much of the country in the weeks after the Japanese surrender in August. With very limited manpower and resources available to him, Hodge kept much of the Japanese police state in place for the transition to American rule, including its despised Japanese Governor. These developments shocked the Korean population, many of whom had expected their country to be given immediate independence following liberation. The American presence in Korea thus rapidly turned from a cause for celebration into a source of growing resentment and frustration for the Korean population.

The problems with the occupation government were far from surprising for the veteran Pacific War reporters in Korea. Many had regularly witnessed severe incompetence by military commanders during the war. Military attempts to suppress media criticism had created seething

resentment, especially in the Pacific theatre, where General Douglas MacArthur's strategic and tactical mistakes had been heavily suppressed by censors and the Supreme Commander's adoring inner circle.<sup>29</sup> Following the end of the war, journalists felt they had greater right to criticise military authorities over major blunders, yet still faced full censorship on their dispatches until early October.

One group of reporters was able to ignore these censorship restrictions entirely. In the late summer of 1945, the Air Force had ordered public relations officer Tex McCrary to chaperone a group of high profile journalists around East Asia on a mission to show off the devastation inflicted on Japan by U.S. bombers. Before their arrival in Japan, McCrary had warned the correspondents not to trust MacArthur as he sought to secure his position as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan. In order to ensure that the reporters could relay their articles back to their editors in the United States, the Air Force equipped their B-17 with a long distance short-wave radio set which allowed them to communicate directly with Washington, thus avoiding both Army and Navy censorship.<sup>30</sup> As the McCrary group moved from spot-to-spot through East Asia, they were free to report on stories as they saw fit.

By far the most famous member of McCrary's flying squad the *New York Herald Tribune's* Homer Bigart. As a battlefield reporter in Europe and Asia he had earned national recognition for his fearless courage and brutal honesty in depicting the lives and deaths of American fighting men. Bigart had also developed a reputation for being antagonistic towards uniformed authority figures.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Frank Kelley and Cornelius Ryan, *Star-Spangled Mikado* (New York: R. M. McBride, 1947), pp. 186–95.; 'MacArthur's Press Relations Deplored', *Editor & Publisher*, 1 April 1950. For an account of how this censorship system functioned see North to Lockheart, 11 August 1950, Box 5, C/S, U.S. Army Chief Of Information, Unclassified Decimal File 1949-1950, 000.7 to 000.74, NARA.

<sup>30</sup> Charles J. Kelly, *Tex McCrary: Wars-Women-Politics, An Adventurous Life Across The American Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009), pp. 82–94. The biography does not discuss the trip to Korea.

<sup>31</sup> William Prochnau argued that Bigart's suspicion of the establishment stemmed from two incidents during World War Two which had confirmed to him the "bullshit logic" of warfighters. While reporting on a bombing mission against Germany in February 1943, Bigart had been asked to man the guns on a B-17 as it was attacked by German fighters over the English Channel. After returning home, he learned that one of the other bombers carrying a fellow war reporter had been shot down by friendly fire and that he might have been the one responsible. On another bombing raid against Japan in 1945, Bigart witnessed the crew of the bomber learn of the Japanese surrender halfway through the flight. Hoping to avoid risking their lives and causing further unnecessary deaths, the crew waited for a mission abort order. Instead they flew on and completed

While working as a young reporter at the *Herald Tribune* he had shied away from the crime and politics beats, preferring instead to cover human interest stories as a general assignment reporter.<sup>32</sup> As a war reporter, he rarely held back in his criticism of mistakes by military leaders. In the early summer of 1945, he had caused the U.S. Navy severe embarrassment when he wrote a bitter critique of its bloody frontal-assault strategy during the Battle of Okinawa. After arriving in Japan with the McCrary group, Bigart published a powerful account of the devastating impact of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, much to the annoyance of Douglas MacArthur.<sup>33</sup>

The McCrary group arrived in Korea just a few days after visiting Hiroshima, once again on the hunt for big stories. Although they were in Korea for less than 24 hours and did not attend any press conference, the correspondents picked up on rumours from local correspondents and Korean activists.<sup>34</sup> These were particularly vicious following an outcry over General Hodge's announcement that Japanese administrators were to remain in office during the transition to American rule.<sup>35</sup> While most of the press reported the basic facts of the situation, Homer Bigart stormed onto the frontpage of the *New York Herald Tribune* with a bracing attack on the AMG for keeping Japanese officials in power:

Sullen Japanese police, armed with bayonets, are still patrolling the flag-decked streets of the Korean capital with the approval of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, commanding the American occupation force, who believes the country is not yet ready for self-rule... In an interview this morning Hodge defended not only the use of the Japanese police, but also his continued employment of the local government, which is completely dominated by

---

the mission, killing an unknown number of Japanese after the war was already over: William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War* (New York: Vintage, 1996), pp. 36–37.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Kluger, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 364–71.

<sup>33</sup> Hohenberg, p. 244.; Homer Bigart, 'A Month After The Atomic Bomb: Hiroshima Still Can't Believe It', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 3 September 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Langdon to Acheson, 26 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, 6: p. 1134.

<sup>35</sup> Neal Stanford, 'Korea Policy Defended', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 September 1945; 'Liberation In Korea', *The New York Times*, 11 September 1945.

Japanese. Hodge said the Korean members of the police department were absent from duty too often, and besides they were 'the same breed of cat as the Japanese'.<sup>36</sup>

Elsewhere in the article, Bigart accused Hodge of giving the impression that the "sole function of the occupation was to maintain law and order and act as custodians for Japanese property". He condemned the occupation for dismissing Korean political activity as an intolerable nuisance and failing to recruit Koreans into senior positions: "The defense of the status quo on the pretext of military expediency seems invalid. The American force is not fighting a campaign, and any confusion that might result from the replacement of Japanese officials by untrained Koreans would not seriously hamper the occupations units."

The story hit a nerve in the United States, where there were growing concerns about the fitness of the military to handle post-war occupation duties.<sup>37</sup> Although fellow correspondents felt that Bigart and his editors had succumbed to the temptation to throw a "high, hard lead", the story was generally regarded as legitimate.<sup>38</sup> *Time* reporter John Walker felt it was inevitable that editorial writers would use it to go on the attack against the "helpless carcasses of Hodge and Macarthur". On September 16, *Herald Tribune* columnist and CBS radio broadcaster William L. Shirer even went as far as to accuse Hodge of doing his best to insult the Korean people and "prolong their slavery to a hated people".<sup>39</sup>

The scandal prompted a swift intervention from Washington, which ordered Hodge to reverse the policy on using Japanese officials. However, sensational reports of rioting and Korean

---

<sup>36</sup> Homer Bigart, 'Hodge Backs Japanese Policing of Korea', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 12 September 1945.

<sup>37</sup> 'Remaking The Conquered Peoples: Japan And Germany Under Occupation', *The New York Times*, 23 September 1945. On 22 September, U.S. Army General George S. Patton caused a similar scandal when he told reporters at a press conference that he did not see the need for denazification and that the Nazi question was "much like a Democratic and Republican election fight". After Patton failed to adequately explain his remarks, General Eisenhower removed him from his position as governor of Bavaria: Raymond Daniell, 'Paton Belittles Denazification', *The New York Times*, 22 September 1945.

<sup>38</sup> John Walker to Time, 1 October 1945, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>39</sup> William L. Shirer, 'Korea Tangle Called Example Of Bungling U.S. Foreign Policy', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 16 September 1945.

anger towards occupation continued to appear for several more weeks. In a cable to *Time*, photographer George Silk alleged that U.S. correspondents were being exploited by Koreans for political purposes. He claimed that every evening Korean political groups vied to entertain reporters in the hopes of gaining their attention and sympathy. In such an environment, it was hardly surprising that some reporters “let fly with both barrels” on the basis of a one sided Korean perspective.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately for the Koreans, reports of their rage against the renewal of foreign rule under the AMG did little to advance the cause of Korean independence. The *Boston Globe* and *Baltimore Sun* reminded their readers that a period of international tutelage was still clearly necessary for a country with no recent experience of self-rule.<sup>41</sup> Even the *Washington Post*, which had published several articles by Robert T. Oliver during the war, argued that the Cairo declaration’s pledge to make Korea free “in due course”, had not implied Korean independence in the short-term:

There was no intention of turning Korea adrift on the international seas as soon as Japan had been conquered. Any such course would have been disastrous for Korea. Either she would have become a battleground for contending factions or she would have drifted into the care of her nearest strong power, in this case Russia. Korea must be helped to freedom, and this can be done only be done by putting Korea under the trusteeship of the United Nations.<sup>42</sup>

### **Covering Korea**

The public relations crisis faced by the budding occupation regime in Korea in September 1945 was a stark reminder to American authorities of the potential threat freewheeling reporters posed to the occupation government. During the Pacific War, General MacArthur’s head of public relations, Brigadier General LeGrande A. Diller, had carefully protected his commander’s reputation

---

<sup>40</sup> George Silk to Time, 15 September 1945, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Korean Powder Keg’, *The Boston Globe*, 13 September 1945; ‘Korea And The Pledge To Give Her Independence’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 September 1945.

<sup>42</sup> ‘In Due Course’, *The Washington Post*, 11 September 1945.

by censoring casualty reports and emphasising MacArthur's central role in allied victories. In the view of *New York Herald Tribune* reporter Frank Kelley, "with the help of sycophantic correspondents who scrambled for small favours, and aided by a ruthless system of censorship which was political as well as military, the Public Relations Office of MacArthur's headquarters built MacArthur into a demigod".<sup>43</sup> Now MacArthur's headquarters faced growing pressure to remove wartime censorship and allow journalists to report freely on the conduct of his occupation regime.

In early October, Diller made clear his intention to curtail the press presence in the Far East with the introduction of a quota system for foreign journalists. Under the plan, only seven newspapers were allowed to station correspondents across the entire of the Far East, with the press corps in the Korean occupation zone limited to just one correspondent from each of the major press agencies.<sup>44</sup> Correspondents would also lose their military privileges, making them entirely dependent on military beneficence for access to food, housing and transportation. Although Diller claimed that the plan was a necessary response to the lack of billeting facilities, newspaper correspondents were incensed by what they perceived as unjustifiable restrictions on the press. Correspondents in Tokyo formed their own press association and announced the establishment of a special press hostel that provided accommodation for all visiting foreign correspondents.<sup>45</sup> As criticism of the quota system mounted in both Japan and the United States, the War Department asked MacArthur to rethink his approach. MacArthur responded by firing Diller and declaring the abandonment of the quota system. Although the Diller crisis ended in a victory for the press, MacArthur ultimately made it clear that military assistance to the press was something he viewed as discretionary. Several times over the course of the occupation, he used the threat of removing logistical support for journalists to remind journalists of their reliance on military authorities.

---

<sup>43</sup> Kelley and Ryan, p. 186. Kelley described MacArthur's censorship as one of the most disgraceful episodes of the war in an article for the *Herald Tribune*: Frank Kelley, 'MacArthur's Censorship Off For U.S. Press', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 7 October 1945.

<sup>44</sup> 'M'Arthur Sets Up Quota For Press', *The New York Times*, 13 October 1945; William J. Coughlin, *Conquered Press: The MacArthur Era in Japanese Journalism* (Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1952), pp. 111–19.

<sup>45</sup> Kelley and Ryan, p. 194.

In Korea, General John Hodge had even less compassion for journalists. A traditional Army infantry general with a forthright manner and a short fuse, he did not take kindly to challenges to his authority. His main goal in dealing with the press was to present the occupation in as positive a light as possible and emphasise that any problems were a consequence of forces outside of his control; most importantly, the administrative challenges presented by the division of the country and the political intransigence and corruption of most Korean leaders.

Fortunately for Hodge, he faced only a small and relatively amateur press corps in the American zone of occupation. While dozens of news agencies and newspapers from around the world appointed correspondents in Tokyo, only the three main American wire press agencies- AP, UP and INS- and the *New York Times* assigned reporters to Seoul. In the press agency bureaus, turnover was rapid as fresh young reporters used the Seoul bureau as a stepping stone to better assignments elsewhere. UP's correspondent in late 1946, Stanley Rich, had only received his degree in journalism in 1945.<sup>46</sup> INS's William Harvey "Tiny" Buntin had worked as a departmental editor for several Nevada newspapers, but knew little about foreign correspondence and was regarded by many in Korea as an unprofessional drunk.<sup>47</sup> Press agency reporters were also expected to dedicate much of their time to selling their news service to the local press. One AP correspondent in Korea complained that he spent so much of his time preparing news for local distribution that during his first six weeks in Seoul he had no time to interview Korean leaders.<sup>48</sup>

Press agency reporting during this period was slavishly focused on conforming to journalistic 'objectivity', which required journalists to build stories around facts and quotations from trusted reliable sources such as U.S. military authorities. Reporters had little incentive to engage in investigative reporting or interpretative analysis. Instead, reporters developed close relationships

---

<sup>46</sup> Diary entry for 14 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>47</sup> 'W. H. Buntin Sells Newspaper Interest', *Reno Gazette-Journal*, 14 March 1942.

<sup>48</sup> Richard E. Lauterbach, 'A Failure Of the American Press', *PM*, 11 October 1946.



with American officials in the hopes of getting tip offs on major news events.<sup>49</sup> UP correspondent Stanley Rich told journalist Mark Gayn that his bosses at UP persistently instructed him to “applepolish” senior officers. AP and UP reporters were so fearful of missing out on the official daily government handout that they almost never left Seoul to do any independent reporting. Rich only ventured out to report on major rioting in October 1946 when his main rival, AP reporter Roy Roberts, was hospitalised with meningitis. Press agencies thus operated as little more than forwarding offices for occupation press releases which were often explicitly propagandistic in nature. In one case, AP published a virtually verbatim press release from an AMG official which showed how Koreans classrooms were bursting with “the spirit of democracy”:

#### **Democracy Action ‘Bursting’ In Korea**

Seoul, Korea, April 10 (AP) - The spirit of democracy is bursting so loudly in Korean school rooms that both teachers and students frequently confuse it with their devotion to partisan politics, a Military Government Official said.

Keyed up teachers have made stump speeches in their classrooms and committed whole classes and schools to political action and have mobilized school parades for parties.

Military Government are attempting to teach the teachers that the schools belong to the whole community and in a democracy the classroom may not be used to influence opinion in favor of a single party.<sup>50</sup>

The short, non-analytical stories produced by press agency reporters were a particularly poor fit for a complex issue like Korea. Within months of the start of the occupation, Korean politics had fractured into a bewildering variety of political parties and movements with confusing political

---

<sup>49</sup> Diary entry for 14 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. According to Gayn, the supportive relationship between journalists and military officials was reciprocated and on at least one occasion an intervention by General Hodge saved William Buntin from being recalled by INS for his poor behaviour.

<sup>50</sup> AP, ‘Democracy Action ‘Bursting’ in Korea’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 April 1946.

goals.<sup>51</sup> Aside from the South Korean communists led by Pak Hon-yong, most parties did not have political agendas that could be easily explained in Western terms. The Korean People's Party, the group associated with the provisional government that had been established following the Japanese surrender, for instance espoused both socialism and nationalism- a combination which did not easily fit into Moscow-centric understandings of leftist movements. More obviously appealing to American sentiments was the Korean Democratic Party, a group of wealthy, well-educated and business-oriented Koreans. Yet, many of its members suffered from politically toxic connections to the former Japanese colonial regime. The final major group were the returning former exiles of the Korean provisional government, most importantly Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo, the President of the Korean Provisional Government in Chungking, who rapidly established themselves as conservative nationalists, vociferously opposed to any foreign political control of Korea.

Journalists faced even greater uncertainty over the nature of the relationship between the two occupation zones. Although the Soviet occupation regime refused American reporters entry into its zone, refugees from the north relayed stories of mass looting and brutal crackdowns on dissenters by Soviet forces.<sup>52</sup> As the Soviets cut transportation links along the parallel and suspended supplies of key industrial goods to the south, it became increasingly evident that they intended to sever all interzonal activity. However, official U.S. policy remained focused on the negotiation of a joint U.S.-Soviet trusteeship over all Korea. For almost two years, Washington instructed the AMG to maintain an official stance supportive of trusteeship, even as some AMG officials believed that the American zone was better off pursuing independence.

Understanding the nuances of these issues was difficult enough for the military and diplomatic officials entirely focused on dealing with them. For non-expert American reporters, keeping up to speed was virtually impossible. Press agency reporters thus depended on the AMG not

---

<sup>51</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, pp. 60–61.; Richard Johnston, 'Radicals in Korea Hit Gen. A. V. Arnold', *The New York Times*, 30 October 1945.

<sup>52</sup> Harold Isaacs, 'Do We Run Korea Badly? Well, Look How Reds Do', *Newsweek*, 24 September 1945.

just for stories but also the interpretative background necessary to put such stories in context. This exacerbated the tendency of press agency reporters to act as relays for AMG publicity. In some cases, the reporters were also influenced by the increasingly cynical and negative views of occupation officials, many of whom saw Korea as an expensive drain on precious military resources and regarded Koreans as too primitive and backward to make democracy work. In an article for an American magazine, UP correspondent Palmer Hoyt Jr. explained that neither of the two main political groups in South Korea, Rhee's and Koo's Provisional Government and the Korean People's Party, had a meaningful political platform or even the capability to achieve democracy:

Both talk vaguely of agrarian reform, political reform, democracy and mostly of independence. Their talk of immediate democracy is a mockery. Immediate democracy cannot be accomplished by either of these groups. Today the people of Korea are not politically conscious. Of the 25,000,000 population probably five per cent know anything of the political situation. The rest do not care.<sup>53</sup>

Like most Americans in Korea, Hoyt had grown deeply fatalistic about the future of the American occupation zone. He believed that any Korean-led government established in the immediate future would be a benevolent oligarchy, dominated either by the Americans or the Russians.

A rather different dynamic developed between General Hodge and the *New York Times'* correspondent Richard J.H. Johnston. Unlike press agency reporters, Johnston was expected to produce in depth analytical coverage of political developments in Korea- a freedom which made Johnston the most influential journalist in Korea until his reassignment in January 1950. Prior to being in Korea, Johnston had mostly worked as a crime and general assignment reporter for the *Times* in New York, jobs which often depended on close relationships with police and political officials.<sup>54</sup> In 1944, Johnston had been assigned to Europe as a war reporter, where he earned a

---

<sup>53</sup> Palmer Hoyt Jr., 'Political Tugging in Korea', *Free World*, March 1946.

<sup>54</sup> Correspondent databook entry for Richard Johnston, Box 55, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

reputation as a “carefree, if not swashbuckling, chronicler of the day-to-day fighting”.<sup>55</sup> Unlike many of his peers in Europe and the Pacific, Johnston showed no sign of developing a temperamental aversion to military authority. After arriving in Korea alongside General Hodge in early September, Johnston became caught up in the momentousness of the occasion:

American occupation forces here under command of Lieut. Gen. John R. Hodge are charged with an experiment unprecedented in history. When the first American troops came ashore at the port of Jinsen on Sept. 9 they were hailed by the Koreans as liberators of the country that had been ground under vicious Japanese domination for forty years. The job facing General Hodge was not one of restoring a government, but, with the help of the Koreans, of building an entirely new political structure from the ground up.<sup>56</sup>

Johnston claimed that the Koreans were eager partners in the occupation- so much so that their main fear was of an American and Russian withdrawal from the peninsula. During the first months of the occupation, he paid little attention to the large number of Koreans demanding immediate independence, instead producing a stream of positive stories about developments in Korea, often based on press briefings by Hodge or military government spokesmen.<sup>57</sup>

In January 1946, Johnston’s close relationship with the military government may have helped him avoid a major scandal when the leader of the southern Korean communist party, Pak Hon-yong, and several Korean correspondents, alleged that Johnston had misquoted him in a press conference. In an article that was mysteriously leaked before making it into print, Johnston claimed that Pak had told the assembled correspondents that he was willing to see Korea end up under complete Soviet domination or even become part of the Soviet Union. Pak was instantly branded a traitor by rightist parties and lost much of his political credibility.<sup>58</sup> A report ordered by Hodge

---

<sup>55</sup> ‘Richard Johnston Is Dead At Age 76’, *The New York Times*, 25 December 1986.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Eager Koreans Help Us To Run Their Country’, *The New York Times*, 30 September 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Major Freedoms Restored In Korea’, 20 September 1945, *The New York Times*; Richard Johnston, ‘Korea’s Gaiety Survives Bondage’, *The New York Times*, 21 October 1945.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Party Rift Widens in Korea Dispute’, *The New York Times*, 18 January 1946.

exonerated Johnston of distorting Pak's comments, although Korean and American correspondents at the conference apparently gave conflicting testimony as to what exactly Pak had said.<sup>59</sup>

Johnston's close relationship with General Hodge was reflected in his sympathetic coverage of both the occupation government and, after January 1946, the Korean nationalist groups led by Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo which were emerging as the dominant political force in the American occupation zone. Although Johnston did not explicitly endorse the nationalist opposition to trusteeship, Johnston was praised by Rhee for his sympathetic interest in the nationalists and criticism of the Korean left.<sup>60</sup> Rhee's followers showered Johnston and other visiting *Times* journalists with attention and even gifts.<sup>61</sup> In October 1946, Syngman Rhee argued that Johnston was vital for both his and Korea's future: "We need him. Korea needs him. How can we go on without the support of the Times?"<sup>62</sup>

Despite the entreaties of the Korean nationalists, Johnston's main loyalty ultimately remained with Hodge. When John Sheridan, the chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, threatened to recall Hodge from Korea, ostensibly because of the low morale of American soldiers in Korea, Johnston launched an unprecedented attack on U.S. policy with an article which slammed Hodge's treatment by officials in Washington. Johnston argued that Korea's shortcomings should be blamed on the "vigorous and unceasing interference from the Soviet-inspired Communists in South Korea" and "Washington's refusal or inability to give [Hodge] clear-cut directives".<sup>63</sup> As the political

---

<sup>59</sup> Untitled report on Pak controversy, Box 1, General Correspondence 1943-46, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA. According to Bruce Cumings, *Stars & Stripes* reporter Sgt. Robert Cornwall accused Johnston of misrepresenting Pak's comments in an article in the English-language *Seoul Times* but there are no existent copies of the newspaper: Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, pp. 224-25.

<sup>60</sup> Diary entry for 20 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto; For an example of this anti-leftist coverage see 'Korean Christians Cite Abuse By Reds', *The New York Times*, 14 March 1946.

<sup>61</sup> Diary entry for 24 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>62</sup> Diary entry for 18 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Japan Looks Good After Korean Stay', *The New York Times*, 30 September 1946.

situation, and the relationship between Rhee and Hodge, deteriorated further in the autumn of 1946, Johnston acted as an informant for Hodge on developments in Washington during his brief recall to the United States.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Critics**

While Hodge found the Seoul press corps supportive of his goals, he was deeply concerned about the potential of the American “pinko press” to negatively influence perceptions of the occupation in Washington and trigger further embarrassing political interventions.<sup>65</sup> Hodge’s head of public relations, Major Buel A. Williamson, made it his business to brief every visiting reporter before they had time to form their own opinions about the situation in the occupation zone. Like Hodge, Williamson possessed a strong disdain for the press and had no qualms about making the lives of visiting correspondents very difficult.

Hodge and Williamson belonged to a generation of military officers with very simplistic perceptions of the political allegiances of the press. Anyone critical of American military authority tended to be regarded as a pinko or leftist. During the Korean War, by which time Williamson had moved to work as a press officer for the UN Command in Tokyo, Williamson recalled sending “left wing” American war correspondents out of Korea to stop them giving away military secrets in their dispatches, only to watch with frustration as State Department officials sent them back to Korea.<sup>66</sup> This highly inaccurate rendition of events completely ignored both the universally pro-American and anti-communist ideals of the reporters reporting on the UN side of the war, and the failure of military authorities to clarify what information was regarded as militarily sensitive.<sup>67</sup> These military

---

<sup>64</sup> Johnston to Hodge, 27 January 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA. The contents of this letter are discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, 22 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, 6: p. 1133.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Services Held for Former Man of Year’, *The Tustin News*, 3 January 1980.

<sup>67</sup> During the Korean War, MacArthur claimed that there had not been a single security breach providing assistance to the enemy: MacArthur to CINFO, 28 September 1950, Box 5, C/S, U.S. Army Chief Of Information, Unclassified Decimal File 1949-1950, 000.7 to 000.74, NARA.

men simply could not comprehend that some reporters felt obligated to report both honestly and critically.

During the first year of the occupation, many American journalists in Tokyo were suspicious of U.S. military authorities. Four reporters were more sceptical than most; Gordon Walker of the *Christian Science Monitor*, Mark Gayn of the *Chicago Sun*, John Luter of *Time* and Joe Fromm of *World Report* (the forerunner of *U.S. News And World Report*).<sup>68</sup> Although the authorities in Tokyo and Seoul privately regarded the reporters as communists, Mark Gayn generally perceived himself and his colleagues as liberals- a term which he associated with a commitment to democracy and the rejection of authoritarian rule of any kind.<sup>69</sup> In spite of their shared views on the flaws of military government, these four reporters had very different approaches to reporting and opportunities to publicise their views.

Gayn had one of the most unusual backgrounds of any journalist working for an American newspaper in the 1940s. The son of Russian dissidents exiled to China in the early 1900s, Gayn grew up with a deep attachment to his adopted home. While attending journalism school in California, Gayn had been impressed by the American democratic system. After returning to China as a stringer for the *Washington Post*, he covered the war with Japan in the late 1930s. Horrified by Japanese atrocities, Gayn called for the United States to break free of its isolationist shackles and resist Japanese expansionism with military force.<sup>70</sup> After the end of the Second World War, Gayn feared that American military authorities would fundamentally reform Japan's militaristic tendencies. As the Japan correspondent for the *Chicago Sun*, Gayn dedicated himself to revealing the compromises he believed the occupation was making with Japan's fascist elites.

---

<sup>68</sup> Diary entry for 18 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Gayn letter, 16 June 1946, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>70</sup> Mark Gayn, *Journey From The East* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), pp. 180–90.

Walker's path to becoming a critic of military government was rather more prosaic. After leaving Harvard to join the *Monitor* aged just 17, Walker had slowly worked his way up the reportorial ranks at its Boston headquarters. After being assigned to the Pacific as a war correspondent in 1942, Walker grew increasingly frustrated with the treatment of the press by MacArthur's public relations officials. When battlefield censorship ended in October 1945, Walker wrote a bitter comment article revealing how correspondents had been "bullied, cajoled, insulted, threatened and even coerced one way or another into writing General MacArthur's 'success story'".<sup>71</sup> Walker personally lost out on one of the biggest scoops of the war when, after becoming the first American to reach central Tokyo after the Japanese surrender, he was ordered to withdraw to a mile outside of the city limits until the U.S. First Cavalry Division could officially liberate it, an event instead reported to the world by the main Japanese press agency.<sup>72</sup>

Crucially, Walker and Gayn represented papers that believed in giving their correspondents the freedom to cover provocative stories without fear of sanction. Established in 1908 by Christian Scientist founder Mary Baker Eddy, Walker's paper, the *Christian Science Monitor*, had severed direct links with the Church in the early 1920s and subsequently emerged as one of the country's most respected newspapers.<sup>73</sup> Its global humanitarian focus was unlike that of any other contemporary mainstream newspaper. The *Monitor's* foreign correspondents were allowed to write at length about issues generally ignored by the rest of the media. When Walker began his stint in Tokyo, the paper had a newly appointed editor, Erwin D. Canham, who was a passionate believer in the paper's liberal humanitarian mission and made it a point of principle to not withhold tragic or distasteful news from readers.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Censorship: Pacific Wall', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 October 1945.

<sup>72</sup> Coughlin, p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> Erwin B. Canham, *Commitment to Freedom, the Story of the Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), pp. i–xx.

<sup>74</sup> Canham, p. 52. In the 1930s, correspondents picked *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Baltimore Sun* as the three most reliable and fair papers in the country: Leo C. Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), p. 356.



Gayn's paper, the *Chicago Sun*, was part of a media group owned by Marshall Field III, a Chicago business magnate with strong links to the progressive movement. Many *Sun* journalists also wrote for the more experimental and socialist-leaning Field-owned newspaper *PM*, a New York-based paper which carried a large number of well-known left-leaning writers, including the celebrated investigative journalist Izzy Stone. Gayn was greatly respected by *Sun* journalists, even after he became involved in a major scandal involving the passing of secret government documents to communists in mid-1945. Marshall Field's lawyer Louis Weiss helped to defend Gayn from criminal prosecution and begin an assignment as the Tokyo correspondent for *Sun* in occupied Japan.<sup>75</sup>

Gayn and Walker's freedom to report freely made them the envy of other correspondents in Tokyo, many of whom lived in fear that MacArthur's public relations officers could write to their editors accusing them of communist sympathies.<sup>76</sup> As was standard practice at the time, much of Luter's copy to *Time* was heavily edited to remove critical material while Joe Fromm was careful to not provoke his editors at *World Report*, a magazine which had been founded by the conservative columnist David Lawrence. This left Gayn and Walker as the only correspondents with both the motivation and the freedom to write about the stories they were interested in, although Gayn noted that Walker tended to get front-page play and far more latitude in editorial comment.<sup>77</sup>

This perhaps explains why, on Walker's first visit to Korea in the autumn of 1945, the AMG regarded him as a one man mission to discredit the military government. In a report on his activities, an officer wrote that Walker had arrived in Korea hostile to the military and "apparently with

---

<sup>75</sup> Gayn's involvement in the *Amerasia* scandal was used by his critics to cast doubt on the legitimacy of his reporting: Westbrook Pegler, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 11 August 1950. For more on the background of the *Amerasia* scandal see Harvey Klehr, *The Amerasia Spy Case: Prelude to McCarthyism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>76</sup> Sally Gayn letter, 11 June 1946, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>77</sup> Walker and Gayn did not meet each other until Walker returned to Japan in early 1946, following an extended trip to Korea and China. During their first dinner together, they made an agreement to "join forces reportorially", although it was not clear what this meant in practice: Mark Gayn letter, 16 June 1946, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

avowed sympathies for any and all leftist movements".<sup>78</sup> Interviews with people who has spoken to Walker revealed that he had described "American Army Officers as fascists and unfit to operate any government or deal with a people". The report argued that such statements were part of a "crusade" to convert fellow correspondents to his point of view and discredit those who disagreed with him.

In his dispatches back to the *Monitor* as well as two articles for the British newspaper the *Observer*, Walker was more restrained in his criticism, although they still made for uncomfortable reading in Seoul and Tokyo. In an article at the end of October, Walker accused the military government of letting the Soviets get ahead in the race to reform Korea due to an exaggerated fear of communism in the American zone of occupation. Walker added that the military government, being a purely military organization, were "not accustomed to anything which smacks of opposition to orders".<sup>79</sup> A few weeks later Walker wrote that America's prestige across the Far East was being "weakened in countries like this where politically untutored American Army officers are at present the only teachers of American-style democracy".<sup>80</sup> He compared the military government to the "tightest military dictatorship" and suggested that it was dangerously dependent on the support and advice of right-wing landlords and former Japanese occupation officials.

Walker's dispatches caused controversy in both Seoul and Washington. The Department of State asked the AMG to account for an article in the *Observer* which once again made reference to Hodge's infamous 'same breed of cats' statement.<sup>81</sup> AMG political adviser William Langdon wrote to Secretary of State James Byrnes to explain the remark and clarify that the United States was not represented in Korea by colonial-minded men contemptuous of the Korean people. Hodge, he wrote, was "100% trusted by all Korean leaders".<sup>82</sup> While Langdon criticised Walker for never

---

<sup>78</sup> Benis to USAFK, 29 November 1945, Box 1, General Correspondence 1943-46, USAFK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>79</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Americans Vie With Russians To Sell Democracy in Korea', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 29 October 1945.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon Walker, 'U.S. Policy in Korea: Found Warped By Untutored AMG', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 November 1945.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Blunders May Provoke Civil War In Korea', *The Observer*, 18 November 1945.

<sup>82</sup> Langdon to Byrnes, 26 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, 6: p. 1136.

meeting with Syngman Rhee during his time in Korea, he did not reveal to the State Department any of the more lurid allegations found in the internal military government report. Instead, the American occupation regimes used more indirect and informal methods to silence Walker. According to Gayn, Walker was repeatedly blocked from accessing transportation back to Japan by American military authorities until the *Monitor* protested to Washington and forced Tokyo to grant Walker permission to return.<sup>83</sup> Once back in Japan, MacArthur's public relations officer General Frayne Baker, told Walker that "we'll give you an opportunity to start afresh, as if you'd never done anything wrong". However, Walker continued to publish articles about Korea from Japan, causing Hodge to write a bitter complaint to MacArthur that Walker was inventing material.<sup>84</sup> According to Mark Gayn, it was subsequently intimated to Walker that he would face a court martial if he returned to Korea.<sup>85</sup>

Walker's articles accurately reflected the feelings of the large number of Koreans who had expected the Korean People's Republic to be recognised as an independent state and his assessment of the growing polarisation between left and right proved highly prescient. However, his coverage had only a limited impact on the press debate about Korea in the autumn of 1945.<sup>86</sup> His approach was too clearly fuelled by hostility to the military government. Ultimately, his self-righteous approach only served to limit his ability to do any further reporting from Korea.

After Walker left South Korea in November 1945, very few significant stories on the political situation by visiting journalists appeared in the American press. The focus of the Korea story shifted from the occupation itself to the growing tensions between the United States and Soviet Union over Korea's future.<sup>87</sup> According to an agreement signed in Moscow in December 1945, the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and China were committed to working out a model for joint

---

<sup>83</sup> Gayn letter, 16 June 1946, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>84</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, 1 January 1946, Box 1, General Correspondence 1943-46, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Gayn, *Japan Diary* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948), p. 450.

<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post* columnist and former chief of the U.S. propaganda monitoring service for the Far East Audrey Menefee called for a detailed examination of the situation in Korea in response to Walker's reporting: Audrey Menefee, 'Solution For Korea', *The Washington Post*, 24 November 1945.

<sup>87</sup> Richard E. Lauterbach, 'A Failure Of the American Press', *PM*, 11 October 1946.

trusteeship over the whole of Korea. But the glacial progress of the talks and inscrutability of the Soviets did not make for engaging press copy. No one followed up on Walker's interest in the mistakes of the occupation regime or the concerns of the Korean political classes. Most American observers accepted that the problems of the occupation were a result of the unfortunate division of the country and any resolution depended on reaching a compromise with the Soviet Union. The Koreans simply had to learn to deal with the reality of superpower politics; as the *New York Times* wrote at the end of December 1945, "regardless of how unpalatable the decision made at Moscow will be to Korean leaders, we hope they will accept it as the best bargain that can be made at this time".<sup>88</sup>

The situation in South Korea only reappeared on the press agenda in October 1946, when thousands of Koreans took to the streets in large-scale riots across the American occupation zone. While much of the violence centred on the isolated city of Taegu, attacks on police stations and sabotage were reported across the country. According to internal AMG reports at the time, the unrest drew strength from widespread grievances over the high level of inflation, particularly a steep rise in the price of rice, and festering anger over police brutality.<sup>89</sup> However, in its public statements, the AMG pinned the blame on communists and "professional troublemakers" who had infiltrated from Soviet-occupied Korea to undermine the government in the south.<sup>90</sup>

The uprising was not well reported in the American press. The only newspaper correspondent in South Korea at the time, the *New York Herald Tribune's* Tokyo correspondent Ralph Chapman, wrote a series of brief factual articles which mainly focused on the AMG's military

---

<sup>88</sup> 'Korean Independence', *The New York Times*, 29 December 1945. Similar views appeared even in more liberal newspapers: Rodney Gilbert, 'Koreans And Their Faith In America', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 7 January 1946; 'Korean Uncertainty', *The Washington Post*, 19 February 1946.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of the causes of the Autumn Harvest Uprising see Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, pp. 86–91.

<sup>90</sup> Ralph Chapman, 'Army Extends Martial Law In Korean Rioting', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 6 October 1946.

response.<sup>91</sup> One of those less than impressed with the coverage of the uprising was Mark Gayn, who applied for travel permission to spend several months doing detailed reporting across the American occupation zone. Ultimately, he was granted just a month- a period in which he learned more about the AMG's sophisticated procedures for controlling journalists than the situation in the country.

Gayn left Japan under a great deal of scrutiny from MacArthur's command. On 20 October he had been brought in for questioning over the source of a story he had written about a planned purge of Japanese wartime-era officials, only to be released when many of Gayn's fellow correspondents, including AP's Russell Brines and the *Times* Burton Crane, rallied to his defence.<sup>92</sup> Once in Korea, Gayn quickly found himself under pressure to stick to the official line. On his first day in the country, General Hodge attempted to give Gayn an off-the-record briefing, a move which Gayn suspected was designed to make it difficult to write about certain topics without opening himself up to accusations of breaching Hodge's confidence.<sup>93</sup> Gayn heard that Hodge had used a similar tactic with press agency reporters a week before the start of the riots: by informing them that the military government had captured documents which indicated plans for a communist uprising, Hodge forced them to adopt a framing narrative of the riots as a communist conspiracy.<sup>94</sup>

In Seoul, Gayn met *Newsweek* freelancer Charlotte Ebener, a young reporter who had hoped to make her name with the first report by an American reporter on life in Soviet-occupied Korea.<sup>95</sup> When she learned that the Soviets were not letting any American correspondents into the north, she opted to join Gayn on his intensive survey of the American zone. Hodge initially refused Gayn and

---

<sup>91</sup> Ralph Chapman, 'Troop Curfew Set On Eve Of Korea Holiday', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 11 October 1946.; Ralph Chapman, 'U.S. Army Rule Relaxed In Riot Zone Of Korea', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 13 October 1946.

<sup>92</sup> Diary entry for 13 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>93</sup> Diary entry for 16 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>94</sup> General Hodge's spokesmen also used briefings with journalists to reveal captured communist documents relating to the uprising, including one which outlined a scheme to establish a 500,000-man underground army in southern Korea: AP, 'Korean Reds Accused', *The New York Times*, 26 October 1946; UP, 'U.S. Tanks Patrol Seoul After Riot', *The New York Times*, 22 October 1946.

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Ebener, *No Facilities For Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 54.

Ebener permission to travel outside of Seoul, only to relent when Gayn threatened to report the incident to his editors in Chicago.<sup>96</sup> Once on the road, the pair of correspondents were assigned a chaperone who carefully managed their interactions with military officials on sensitive issues. In one instance, after consulting with the chaperone, an American provincial governor told Gayn and Ebener that he was not willing to speak to any reporters, whether Korean or American. When Gayn complained about these efforts to obstruct his reporting, the chaperone told Gayn that they didn't like visitors doing investigations. He explained that the press, and through them the American people, interfered with the Army's work in Korea and thus were not welcome- citing a *Time* story from January which had mocked the military government's welcome to a visiting Russian delegation.<sup>97</sup>

Gayn conducted interviews with many of southern Korea's leading political figures. While he perceived the preferred American candidate Kim Kyu-Sic to be a puppet of the military government, he admitted to admiring the "old fraud" Rhee for his "guts and political shrewdness".<sup>98</sup> He faced much greater difficulty tracking down leftist leaders, most of whom were in jail or in hiding after a police crackdown. During a secret meeting at a labour union headquarters, a police officer, aided by a group of young militia members, broke into the room and arrested Gayn's interview subject, Moon Eun-Chong, supposedly on the authority of General Hodge. When Gayn protested to the occupation authorities, he was initially accused of disrupting the arrest and fabricating the presence of the rightists. The *New York Times'* editorial writer Foster Hailey, who happened to also be visiting Korea at the time, called to ask Hodge what was going on and was told that he had no knowledge of the arrests.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> 'Searchlight on Korea' series, Box 29, Philip Jaffe Papers, Rose Library Archives, Emory University.

<sup>97</sup> 'Korea: The Russians Came', *Time*, 28 January 1946. The story was written by a friend of Gayn's, although he agreed with the AMG official that the article "stank".

<sup>98</sup> Diary entry for 18 October, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>99</sup> Foster Hailey, 'Prominent Leftist Arrested in Korea', *The New York Times*, 21 October 1946. This was the only story Hailey wrote during his time from Korea, although he later positively reviewed Gayn's diary for this period in the *Times*. Hailey wrote that Gayn reminded him of an "old time police reporter" with a "slightly

The Moon incident was a stark demonstration of the extent to which the United States was acquiescing to the brutal and authoritarian police state run by rightist political forces. While observing elections for the establishment of a Legislative Assembly in the south, an American official in Pusan admitted that the elections were undemocratic and that they would lead to Syngman Rhee's almost complete domination of the Assembly, in contradiction to the military government's strategy of supporting Korean moderates. When Gayn brought this up with Leonard Bertsch, one of the few AMG advisers with whom he felt he had a good relationship, Bertsch told him that the Assembly could simply be gerrymandered to diminish Rhee's power.<sup>100</sup> A few days later, Gayn was horrified to discover dozens of half-starved political prisoners being kept in tiny prison cells. An officer assigned to escort Gayn around Pusan told him that complaints about Korean police brutality were ignored by American commanders. In his published diary, Gayn would write that Korea was "the blackest, the most depressing story I have ever covered".<sup>101</sup>

Due to the primitive state of communications technology, and the heavy restrictions on using the phone to contact Tokyo, the only reliable method for Gayn to get stories back home was by finding people who could carry them on flights between Korea and Japan.<sup>102</sup> Only two articles were published by *The Chicago Sun* and its sister paper *PM*. The first was a short factual report on an appeal by South Koreans to revive the U.S.-Soviet joint commission talks.<sup>103</sup> The impetus for this story came from a meeting with Lieutenant Bertsch, who told Gayn that he had in fact had a hand in drafting the appeal.<sup>104</sup> The second and potentially much more controversial story came at the end of

---

misanthropic view of his fellow man, who believed nothing he didn't see with his own eyes and only half of that": Foster Hailey, 'Japan --- Fact and Evaluation', *The New York Times*, 5 December 1948.

<sup>100</sup> Diary entry for 29 October, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>101</sup> Gayn, *Japan Diary*, p. 443.

<sup>102</sup> Diary entry for 16 October, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>103</sup> Mark Gayn, 'Korean Appeal For Allies To Act', *The Chicago Sun*, 18 October 1946.

<sup>104</sup> Diary entry for 18 October 1946, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Gayn's trip and suggested that the results of the election for a planned legislative assembly might be voided due to Korean protests over its "travesty of democratic procedure".<sup>105</sup>

After returning to Tokyo, Gayn wrote up the trip into a series of eight reports which began with an explanation that it was the "inside story" of a 24-day reporting trip which the U.S. Army had done all it could to prevent.<sup>106</sup> The reports discussed topics including censorship, land reform, the October uprising and police abuses. In the last dispatch, Gayn suggested an eight-point programme of reform which called for the appointment of a new civilian governor, immediate democratic elections, the release of all political prisoners and an end to all official relations with Syngman Rhee and other rightists connected with violence. Gayn's no holds-barred approach to Korea was unquestionably controversial for its time. Although Gayn was careful to emphasise that he had interviewed a wide range of people in Korea, including members of the military government and rightist politicians, his criticisms of the mistakes and duplicity of U.S. military authorities threatened to trigger a major scandal.<sup>107</sup>

This version of the series was ultimately never published. Gayn arrived back in Tokyo to discover that the *Sun* was letting him go as part of an economy drive. After an unsuccessful bid to stay on in Japan as a correspondent for another newspaper, Gayn left Japan just a month later, much to the delight of American authorities. Although the *Sun's* editor Eli Dimitman still claimed to be interested in the series, he finally rejected it at the end of January 1947. Gayn believed this reflected both the paper's shift away from the liberal camp and the fact that Dimitman had been invited on a military junket to meet with MacArthur and Hodge.<sup>108</sup> By this point, Gayn also wanted to publish the story elsewhere and offered condensed versions to *Harper's* and the *New Republic*. The

---

<sup>105</sup> Mark Gayn, 'Korea Election May Be Voided', *The Chicago Sun*, 11 November 1946.

<sup>106</sup> 'Searchlight on Korea' series, Box 29, Philip Jaffe Papers, Rose Library Archives, Emory University.

<sup>107</sup> Gayn had great difficulty getting the series out of Japan due to rigid military censorship: Gayn to Dimitman, 12 November 1946, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>108</sup> Gayn letter, 2 February 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. When he was in Japan, Dimitman told Gayn's former colleagues that he had rejected the series because it was "too violent".



*New Republic* accepted one article for its September 1947 edition, almost a year after the trip to Korea.<sup>109</sup> Parts of the series also formed the basis for five articles Gayn wrote for *PM* in November 1947.<sup>110</sup> Yet, the lag between reporting and publication stripped these articles of almost all of their news value. They focused on general aspects of the situation in Korea and contained little of the hard-hitting criticism of military censorship.

Gayn's failure to publish his account of Korea was a great missed opportunity. As Joe Fromm argued in a letter to Gayn, it was a major scoop, "the only story on one of the biggest peasant revolts in history and one which would have made one of the bigger stinks in Washington".<sup>111</sup> While several other correspondents visited Korea during this time, the coverage they produced was perfunctory.<sup>112</sup> As a result, assessments of the cause of the riots in the U.S. press were often deeply confused. In its initial AMG-inflected account of the riots, *Time* suggested that the rioting was a communist orchestrated scheme to wreck U.S. plans for a popular election in Korea.<sup>113</sup> However, the following week, *Time* published an article, based on a briefing by State Department officials, which argued that both economic and political problems had made the Korean population susceptible to communist influence.<sup>114</sup> It assailed the military government's political mistakes, its willingness to "string along

---

<sup>109</sup> Mark Gayn, 'In Korea', *The New Republic*, 15 September 1947.

<sup>110</sup> The series was printed between 2 and 6 November 1947. For the first article see Mark Gayn, "Liberators' Turned Zones Into Military Bases", *PM*, 2 November 1947.

<sup>111</sup> Fromm to Mark and Sally Gayn, 3 August 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>112</sup> *Newsweek* published just one report during Charlotte Ebener's time in South Korea, a brief summary of the AMG's account of the October riots: 'Korea: Master Plan', *Newsweek*, 4 November 1946. In her memoir, Ebener wrote that she was initially sceptical of the leftist groups in Korea and knew that the military government suspected Gayn of being a communist. However, she admired the way he persisted in investigating the causes of the riots instead of accepting the official line like other correspondents. She was forced to leave South Korea early when the military refused to give her permission to visit the island of Cheju, which had been the only region to elect a leftist candidate to the interim assembly: Ebener, p. 65.

<sup>113</sup> 'Korea: Mounting Chaos', *Time*, 7 October 1946.

<sup>114</sup> 'Korea: Rx for Corns', *Time*, 14 October 1946. *Time's* editors had close contact with several senior officials in the Department of State, in particular Ed Pauley, President Truman's reparations commissioner, who had prepared a major report advocating Korean-led autonomy for southern Korea in the summer of 1946. State Department officials still believed that a young liberal leader could emerge in the south whereas Rhee would push Korean politics far to the right and end any chance of a rapprochement with the Soviet-occupied north. Almost all of the discussion about Korea in *Time's* editorial correspondence for 1946 relates to private briefings by or about Department of State officials, including Pauley. For example, see Brecht to Welch, May 30 1946, *Time*, inc. Dispatches from *Time* magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

with doddering Korean oldsters” and its grievous mishandling of rice supplies. A detailed and powerful critique of the occupation at this crucial moment could potentially have focused this critical coverage into a wider demand for a shift in policy. Ultimately, however, the moment passed and the momentum for Rhee’s rise to power became increasingly irresistible.

### **The Rhee lobby**

One of the most remarkable aspect of coverage of South Korea during the occupation period was the emergence of Syngman Rhee as the major, and perhaps only, Korean figure with any name recognition in the United States. Following his years of obscurity in Washington, Rhee exploded onto the South Korean political scene in October 1945. Hodge had persuaded the State Department to allow Rhee to return to Korea in the hope that he could be nurtured into supporting U.S. goals in Korea.<sup>115</sup> Hodge arranged for Rhee to stay in a palatial suite at the Chosun hotel in Seoul with armed guards and his own personal military aide.<sup>116</sup> Rhee’s American background made him a subject of intense interest for the American press corps in Seoul. Following a deluge of requests for interviews, Hodge instead enthusiastically introduced Rhee to journalists at a hastily arranged press conference. A few days later, Hodge presented Rhee as a “great man who has given his entire life to the freedom of Korea” at a national holiday event.<sup>117</sup>

The press coverage Rhee received in his first weeks and months in South Korea greatly surpassed anything he had received before in both scale and positivity. Richard Johnston portrayed him as the “elder statesmen of Korea’s political freedom movement” who could mend the divisions in Korean politics.<sup>118</sup> Another visiting correspondent wrote that “the Koreans appear to love, trust and respect him”.<sup>119</sup> Equally importantly, he was the one political man in Korea who claimed that he

---

<sup>115</sup> Hodge to Hearst, January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>116</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Rhee Calls Korea To Resist Division’, *The New York Times*, 21 October 1945.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Rhee, In Korea, Opposes Division; Urges Unity To Convince World’, *The New York Times*, 18 October 1945.

<sup>119</sup> Keith Wheeler, ‘Korea’s Provisional President’, *The Daily Boston Globe*, 1 December 1945.

did not want to be president. Even AMG critic Gordon Walker admitted that Rhee was a celebrated figure amongst many Koreans, although he was at pains to stress that Rhee's apparent popularity did not necessarily reflect his political support.<sup>120</sup>

Although the arrival of other members of the Korean provisional government, in particular president Kim Koo, stirred significant press coverage, all of them lacked Rhee's one great advantage; his close ties to the United States. After Koo and Rhee positioned themselves as the leaders of the nationalist movement against trusteeship in January 1946, Rhee could count on his lobby network, based around the Korean Commission in Washington D.C., to draw attention to Rhee's campaign for Korean independence.

A key figure in Rhee's lobby network was former Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) operative Preston Goodfellow, who Rhee had first met in 1941 when the U.S. government was gathering intelligence about Japan in anticipation of a potential military conflict.<sup>121</sup> Following Pearl Harbor, Goodfellow worked with Rhee to recruit a hundred young Koreans for a War Department scheme to infiltrate guerrilla fighters into Korea and use them to sabotage Japan's war fighting capability. Although the plan did not come to fruition, their relationship blossomed and Goodfellow was invited to join Rhee in Korea in October 1945. A hawkish anti-communist, Goodfellow was committed to the cause of establishing an independent government in the American occupation zone as a bulwark against Soviet annexation of all of Korea. Until his retirement in May 1946, Goodfellow worked as a political adviser to the AMG, acting as a go-between for General Hodge and the anti-trusteeship nationalists.<sup>122</sup> After returning to the United States, he continued in this role, as

---

<sup>120</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Exiled Koreans Cast As Leaders', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 3 November 1945.

<sup>121</sup> Goodfellow to Rhee, 4 September 1958, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>122</sup> Goodfellow to Rhee, 8 July 1946, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

well as meeting with policymakers, journalists and other members of the foreign policy elite accessible through his O.S.S. contracts.<sup>123</sup>

A small group of Rhee supporters worked alongside Goodfellow on lobbying and public advocacy projects. Amongst the most important of these figures were Robert T. Oliver and Colonel Ben C. Limb, the Chairman of the Korean Commission.<sup>124</sup> Following the announcement of plans for trusteeship at the Big Three Moscow conference in December 1945, Oliver and Limb took advantage of the increased public interest in Korea by writing a series of letters to major newspapers. In these letters, they argued that trusteeship was a mistake and that Korean nationalist groups opposed to it represented the best chance of establishing a broad-based democratic movement against communism. Limb suggested that their main rival, the leftist Korean People's Republic, was hopelessly compromised by its connections with the Soviet-controlled communist regime in the north.

Other Koreans made more dramatic attempts to draw attention to the Korean situation. An anti-trusteeship demonstration in Manhattan by the Korean Society of New York and Korean-American Council for instance attracted significant coverage in the New York press.<sup>125</sup> In September 1946, Rhee sent Louise Yim, another longstanding Korean independence activist, to lobby member states of the United Nations to sponsor a resolution calling for Korean independence. Although Yim's efforts received attention from journalists, the United States and the Soviet Union worked to quietly kill the plan.<sup>126</sup> It was clear that the UN would not discuss Korea until one of the superpowers had given up any hope for a bilateral resolution to the problem.

---

<sup>123</sup> Goodfellow to Rhee, 1 November 1946, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>124</sup> Limb had followed Syngman Rhee to the United States in the 1910s and worked on and off as a Rhee lobbyist in Washington over the following decades. During World War Two, Rhee bolstered Limb's credentials with a military commission to the rank of colonel in the practically non-existent Provisional Government army.

<sup>125</sup> 'Bringing Cause of Korea to Avenue of Americas', *The New York Times*, 2 April 1946.

<sup>126</sup> Louise Yim, *My Forty Year Fight For Korea* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1951), pp. 257–63.

While Rhee's U.S.-based lobby helped him establish a stronger profile in the United States, none of its attempts to generate greater public interest in Korea met with much success. Preston Goodfellow failed in his goal of interesting the Republican Party in Korea as a potential campaign issue for the 1946 mid-term elections.<sup>127</sup> Scattered articles and letters in newspapers could not persuade the American public to care about what seemed to be a remote and intractable problem. Rhee's reputation also suffered a significant hit when Korean leftists seized on rumours regarding Rhee's links with his American supporters as evidence that he was enriching his friends at Korea's expense. When Goodfellow suggested returning to Korea to General Hodge in October 1946, Hodge informed him such a trip would be ill-advised since rumours of a "Rhee-Staggers-Oliver-Goodfellow commercial combine" had made many Koreans suspicious, even amongst the rightist groups.<sup>128</sup> By the start of 1947, these rumours began spreading into the liberal press in the United States.<sup>129</sup>

With the political situation in Korea looking increasingly stalemated by the end of 1946, Rhee became convinced that the future of Korean independence rested with decision-makers in Washington. This could only be brought about, he believed, by returning to his lobbyist roots and making his case to the American public and their political leaders in person. Thus, in December 1946, Rhee once again set off for Washington to make one last decisive bid for the independence of his country.

## Conclusions

The first year of the occupation was a decisive moment in Korea's post-war trajectory. The United States faced the challenge, as Richard Johnston put it, "of building an entirely new political structure from the ground up" in Korea.<sup>130</sup> By the end of 1946, the political structure that had

---

<sup>127</sup> Goodfellow to Rhee, 27 September 1946, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>128</sup> Hodge to Goodfellow, October 1946, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>129</sup> Will Hamlin (pseudonym for Richard D. Robinson), 'Korea: An American Tragedy', *The Nation*, 1 March 1947.

<sup>130</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Eager Koreans help US to run their country', *The New York Times*, 29 September 1945.

emerged looked deeply flawed. The failure of the United States and the Soviet Union to establish a political framework for Korean independence inspired Koreans in both occupied zones to begin the process of political consolidation around fiercely polarised ideologies. This marked the first stage of the rise to power in the ROK of a fervently anti-communist political elite with no qualms about using repressive methods to silence opposition in South Korea.

American press coverage of these developments was very limited. A combination of lack of interest in Korea and widespread assumptions about the backwardness of the Koreans encouraged a fatalistic approach to the problems with the occupation. This fatalism was exacerbated by the effectiveness of the AMG in avoiding negative press coverage. Since the AMG appeared to be making the best of difficult circumstances, few observers saw a need for a change in policy. Only a small group of correspondents, with relatively unusual personal backgrounds and professional working conditions, offered dissenting views on the situation in South Korea but could not ultimately overcome the power of American military authorities to control the flow of information about the occupation back to the United States.

Although the apathy over Korea helped shield the AMG from controversy in its first year, it stored up trouble for the future. The lack of significant public debate about Korea meant that it was easy for the U.S. government, and in particular the State Department, to ignore the deteriorating situation on the ground. The indecision in Washington created a political vacuum into which Syngman Rhee and his U.S.-based supporters sought to seize the initiative. Although these efforts came to nothing in 1946, Rhee laid the foundations for a rather more successful campaign the following year.

## Chapter 2: Occupation 1947-48: Division and independence

A year into the occupation of southern Korea, the United States faced a rapidly deteriorating political and economic situation. While the superpowers still officially supported the idea of a joint trusteeship, increasingly powerful rightist groups in the American-occupied zone made it clear that they would not accept any new period of international control over Korea. With the situation deadlocked, the focus shifted to Washington, where, after months of rising diplomatic tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, it was finally decided to hand over the Korean situation to the UN. By the end of 1947, the die had been cast for UN-supervised elections which would lead to the establishment of an independent Korean state.

The growing complexity of the political situation in Korea made it an increasingly challenging story for journalists to explain to the American public. In the wake of President Truman's declaration of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, the negotiations with the Soviet Union over Korea's future emerged as a key Cold War flashpoint. Yet, the domestic political situation in Korea did not fit into the straightforward Cold War narrative of communist insurgents threatening a sovereign government. As many visitors to American-occupied Korea in the summer of 1947 discovered, both the Right and the Left were engaging in violence, including sabotage and targeted assassinations.

The situation was further complicated by the increasingly tangled web of relationships between the press and the different factions involved in deciding southern Korea's political future. During the early months of 1947, Syngman Rhee and General John Hodge battled for influence over policymakers and the press in the United States. Although Hodge was initially more successful, Rhee strengthened his relationships with key anti-communist press outlets including *Time* and the Hearst papers. After the arrival of the United Nations at the end of 1947, liberal foreign correspondents made a desperate bid to halt the momentum towards the independence of southern Korea.

By the time that elections were held in the American-occupied zone, the press was deeply ambivalent about the ROK's political future. While most reporters put a positive spin on Korea's first ever democratic elections, the damaging effects of the polarisation of Korea were difficult to ignore. Liberal and leftist correspondents feared that South Korea was on the path to political ruin.

### **Political deadlock**

In the wake of the failure to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, the AMG faced difficult questions over how to respond to the rising influence of Syngman Rhee and other rightist leaders.<sup>1</sup> In spite of American attempts to encourage the emergence of a moderate and pro-trusteeship coalition as an alternative to Rhee and Koo, the Korean population had fallen increasingly under the rightists sway through the course of 1946. In November pro-Rhee candidates won all but two of the seats in elections for an Interim Legislative Assembly. While the AMG avoided handing Rhee complete control of the Assembly by reserving half the seats in the Assembly for its own political appointees, this manoeuvre convinced Rhee that the AMG was more of an enemy than a friend in his campaign for Korean independence.

Both Rhee and Hodge recognised that some kind of intervention from the United States was needed to break the deadlock over the occupation's future. However, they faced an uphill struggle in generating either public or political interest in the Korean issue. The breakdown in negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union had taken Korea off the news agenda by the end of the summer of 1946. In September, the *Times* had recalled its correspondent, Richard Johnston, leaving southern Korea without a resident newspaper correspondent for the first time since the start of the occupation. When General MacArthur issued a report into the Autumn riots in mid-December, it received only a cursory press agency write-up in a few newspapers.<sup>2</sup> A scathing critique of the occupation by gossip columnist Drew Pearson in which he accused Hodge of gross incompetence

---

<sup>1</sup> Bunce to Atcheson, 23 January 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>2</sup> AP, 'September Trouble in Korea Described', *The New York Times*, 15 December 1946.



and claimed that much of the Korean public was on the brink of starvation, passed by with little editorial comment.<sup>3</sup>

Korea's lowly status as a news story stemmed, at least in part, from the lack of awareness of the occupation amongst both the policymaking and intellectual elite. In a letter to the *Times*, Robert T. Oliver wrote that responsible American officials he had encountered regarded Korea as a "backwash among nations" that "can be left until some convenient time for reform of conditions there".<sup>4</sup> As Richard Johnston awaited reassignment in the United States, he met with senior officials in Washington, including President Truman, to discuss Korea and was shocked by their "consistent lack of knowledge as to what the Korea question is all about or as to how it is to be solved".<sup>5</sup> Both Oliver and Johnston also criticised the influence that communist propaganda had on many leftists and liberal Americans. Johnston wrote that he had encountered a "phalanx of 'liberal' journalists, detractors and Soviet apologists" in the United States who "grotesquely overemphasised" the communist sympathies of the Korean people.

Johnston's "phalanx" probably referred to radical communist newspapers such as the *Daily Worker*. Established in the 1920s as the newspaper of the American Communist Party, the *Worker* often published stories based on press releases and propaganda articles published in Soviet newspapers which increasingly portrayed the American occupation in southern Korea in negative terms.<sup>6</sup> In October the *Worker* carried an article by James S. Allen which argued that U.S. attempts to install a "puppet regime" in Korea had led the AMG to encourage reactionary elements and repress "popular democratic forces".<sup>7</sup> Although the *Daily Worker* had a relatively small circulation, its

---

<sup>3</sup> Drew Pearson, 'The Washington Merry Go-Round', 3 December 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Robert T. Oliver, Letter 'Report on Korea', *The New York Times*, 10 November 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Johnston to Hodge, 27 January 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA. Johnston's meeting with the president was requested so that Johnston could deliver a historic Korean scroll as a gift from Rhee, although the Korean Desk at the State Department recommended that he not accept it; R.D. Muir to Woodward, 3 December 1946, Box 1453, Official File 471 Korea, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

<sup>6</sup> Goodfellow to Hodge, 6 September 1946, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>7</sup> 'Our Korean Colony?', *The Daily Worker*, 18 October 1946.

readership still included some of America's leading journalists and intellectuals- the kinds of people who Johnston would have met through his professional and social networks.

Yet, some members of the Rhee lobby did not share Johnston's pessimism. They were increasingly aware of the groundswell of anti-communist feeling emerging on the American right. If sympathetic Congressmen, officials and newsmen could be made aware of the policy vacuum in Korea and the danger posed by Soviet expansionism there, Rhee could turn Korea into an outlet for the frustration many of them felt regarding the apparent impotence of U.S. foreign policy. Between December 1946 and March 1947 the Korean Commission thus renewed and expanded its lobbying efforts, attempting to influence news coverage of Korea at a vital moment of Cold War escalation.

### **Washington lobby**

The decisive change in the Korean Commission's lobbying strategy came in November 1946, when Rhee, frustrated with the AMG's response to the Interim Assembly elections, decided to return to the United States. Although Hodge had reservations about Rhee's purpose in traveling to the United States, he seems to have hoped that it would raise Korea's profile to the AMG's benefit.<sup>8</sup> After setting off from Korea on December 3, Rhee stopped for several days in Tokyo for press interviews and an interview with General MacArthur. Although MacArthur was reluctant to see him, Rhee's persistent efforts to organise a meeting, including delaying his travel by an extra day, forced the General to grant him an audience for a few minutes. This was enough, however, for Rhee to

---

<sup>8</sup> There are conflicting accounts as to how Hodge felt about Rhee's trip to the United States. While Oliver claimed Hodge urged Rhee not to leave, Hodge told Preston Goodfellow that he thought Rhee's publicity campaign could do a lot to bring Korea to the attention of the U.S and "build up sympathy enough to get our people to demand action". By contrast, AMG intelligence officer Richard D Robinson claimed that Hodge wanted Rhee out of the country so that the initiative for developing the Interim Legislative Assembly would fall to a less polarising Korean political figure. Since the American military provided Rhee with transport from Korea to the U.S., his trip must have had some level of official endorsement: Hodge to Goodfellow, 28 January 1947, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University; Will Hamlin {Richard D Robinson}, 'Korea: An American Tragedy', *The Nation*, 1 March 1946; Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 55.

claim to have an inside scoop on the MacArthur's thinking on the Korea issue.<sup>9</sup> Later that day, he met with the *Times* Lindsey Parrott to set out his new strategy in public for the first time. In a major break from previous nationalist demands for the immediate reunification of the whole of Korea under an independent government, Rhee now called for an independent provisional government in the American-occupation zone only.<sup>10</sup> Such an arrangement, Rhee argued, would simply mirror the Korean-led regime established in Soviet-occupied Korea. While Rhee was careful not to directly criticise Hodge, AMG officials worried that his call for transforming the Interim Legislative Assembly into an independent South Korean government would be interpreted by all sides as the true intent of U.S. policy. In an attempt to counter Rhee's claims, General Hodge issued a lengthy press statement clarifying that the AMG would remain in southern Korea until a unified and democratic Korean regime was ready to take its place.<sup>11</sup>

Hodge could not, however, stop Rhee from recruiting supporters to his cause once he was in Washington. For the first month of his stay in Washington, Rhee sought out friendly newsmen, State Department officials and members of Congress. According to Robert T. Oliver, Rhee encountered a large pool of both reporters and officials who shared his belief that the United States needed to do more to stand up to the Soviet Union in Korea.<sup>12</sup> Crucially, many also agreed with Rhee that Hodge had "acted undemocratically, unfairly and unwisely" over the elections issue. However, very few of these supporters were people of influence. Most policymakers were bemused by Rhee's lobbying efforts. When Oliver presented John Carter Vincent, the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, with a copy of their six-point programme, Vincent curtly informed Oliver that the Americans shared identical goals with the Koreans.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> According to Hodge, Rhee used the meeting with MacArthur to falsely claim to journalists that Tokyo was not happy with the American occupation in Korea: Hodge to Goodfellow, 28 January 1947, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsey Parrott, 'Korean Now Urges Partition', *The New York Times*, 5 December 1946.

<sup>11</sup> Langdon to Acheson, 4 January 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: p. 567.

<sup>12</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Vincent to Hilldring, 27 January 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: p. 603.

The Rhee lobby also struggled to translate sympathy for their cause from individual journalists into actual press coverage. Without significant news coming out of Korea, newspapers were generally unwilling to give Rhee and his supporters' valuable column inches. It was clear that Rhee needed to piggyback his agenda on a major Korean news development. Throughout early January, Rhee and his allies discussed whether they could stimulate interest in Korea by organising a series of violent disturbances across the country. Although many of Rhee's supporters in Korea were keen on using uprisings to push Korea back into the global spotlight, U.S. officials believed that Rhee was concerned that they could create a negative backlash if they were perceived to be anti-American.<sup>14</sup> Tensions reached breaking point when the AMG found evidence that Rhee's supporters were hoping to use the mass protests as the prelude to a coup d'état against the occupation authority.<sup>15</sup> After Hodge issued a statement denouncing the Korean rightists for their scheming, Rhee jumped at the opportunity to issue his own statement accusing Hodge and the AMG of continuing "efforts to build up and foster the Korean communist party".<sup>16</sup>

Rhee's direct attack on Hodge marked the beginning of the second stage of Rhee's strategy to change U.S. policy in Korea. Unable to convince the State Department to accept his proposals directly, Rhee hoped that he could accomplish much the same result by orchestrating the removal of Hodge from Korea. With Hodge gone, Rhee believed that there would be no one left to stand in the way of the establishment of a southern Korean government. Rhee seems to have been influenced in his thinking by Drew Pearson's column which had suggested that a major cause of the disastrous administration of the country was the constant feuding between Hodge and AMG governor Archer L. Lerch.<sup>17</sup> Rhee developed this line of attack further, arguing that while he and Lerch agreed on the

---

<sup>14</sup> Langdon to Marshall, 17 January 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: p. 599.

<sup>15</sup> Hodge to Goodfellow, 28 January 1947, Box 1, Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>16</sup> 'Korean Assails Hodge', *The New York Times*, 24 January 1947.

<sup>17</sup> Lerch to Hodge, 16 December 1946, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

necessary programme for creating a Korean democracy, Hodge's obsession with appeasing the Soviets was effectively blocking this from happening.

The controversy over Rhee's comments prompted rumours that the United States was on the verge of withdrawing from Korea completely and put pressure on policymakers to publicly define and defend U.S. policy.<sup>18</sup> At the beginning of February, Secretary of War Robert Patterson ordered Hodge to return to Washington to brief a high-level State Department and War Department committee on the situation in Korea. Patterson also expected Hodge to testify before Congress on the importance of funding a new Korean aid bill, in part as a riposte to a Joint Strategic Survey Committee report which argued that the United States should reduce its military commitment to Korea as soon as possible.<sup>19</sup> Hodge's arrival in Washington and appearance in front of Congress received widespread press attention but his call for an economic rehabilitation programme as a way to undercut support for extremist elements in Korean society went largely unrecognised. Many newspapers sensationally focused on statements he made about the communist threat in North Korea, in particular his claim that Soviets were building an army in their zone of occupation which could be used to invade South Korea.<sup>20</sup>

Hodge's testimony helped to instigate a change in focus of Korea coverage from problems with the AMG to the growing crisis in U.S.-Soviet relations, a shift that became even more pronounced a few weeks later when President Truman made his famous 'Truman Doctrine' speech. Responding to a British request for U.S. aid in fighting the communist insurgency in Greece, Truman declared that the United States would not only come to Greece's aid but also resist communism anywhere it threatened to overthrow recognised governments. The speech was widely interpreted as the beginning of a global ideological and geostrategic confrontation between the United States

---

<sup>18</sup> UP, 'Plan to Quit Korea is Denied By Lerch', *The New York Times*, 8 February 1947.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the bureaucratic divisions over Korea policy see Millett, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, pp. 109–10.

<sup>20</sup> Sidney Shalett, 'Hodge says Soviet is Arming Koreans and Flouting Pact', *The New York Times*, 25 February 1947.; 'Korea- Danger Spot', *The New York Times*, 26 February 1947; 'Hodge Less Gloomy in Korean Outlook', *The New York Times*, 4 March 1947.

and Soviet Union. Many observers believed that this change in U.S. grand strategy would have a decisive impact on the situation in Korea.

Just a few days after Truman's speech, Rhee issued a press release claiming that Korea would be granted full independence within sixty days.<sup>21</sup> While the State Department told *AP* that Rhee's claims were nothing more than "suppositions", Secretary of State George Marshall further fuelled speculation when he publicly informed Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov that the United States was planning to take steps towards "establishing the eventual independence" of the American zone.<sup>22</sup> Anticipating that the United States was about to break all ties with the Soviet Union, Rhee left the United States for Korea in early April. Yet, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had not quite declined far enough for the Truman administration to give up on the Moscow agreement. American diplomats continued to push for a further round of talks, a request that the Soviets finally acceded to in late May. While the United States had finally made a decisive move on Korea, Rhee once again faced the nightmarish prospect of the United States doing a deal with the Soviets which could exclude Korean rightists from power.

### **Measuring Success**

While historians generally agree that Rhee's lobbying in Washington put pressure on U.S. policymakers to better define U.S. policy in Korea, it is far less clear whether he had a significant impact on press perceptions of the situation in Korea. Most stories relating to Rhee that appeared in mainstream newspapers were brief press agency news items. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this kind of coverage was the status it afforded Rhee as the leading spokesperson for the Korean

---

<sup>21</sup> It's not clear why Rhee published this statement. While Rhee may have been hoping to force the State Department's hand, Oliver claimed he was not consulted on the statement before its publication and thus it was most likely an attempt to boost Rhee's prestige back in Korea: Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, pp. 64–65.

<sup>22</sup> *AP*, 'Korean Shift Predicted', *The New York Times*, 22 March 1947; C.L. Sulzberger, 'U.S. to Act in Korea Now, Marshall Advises Molotov', *The New York Times*, 11 April 1947.

people in the United States, the *Times* went as far as to label Rhee the 'provisional president of Korea' - a title with no official standing- in some of its coverage.<sup>23</sup>

By far the most positive and important assessment of Rhee to appear in the press during this period was an article in a March edition of *Time* which framed developments in Korea around a speech given by General R. Hilldring, the newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Territories and one of the few State Departments officials that held Rhee in high regard. After sympathetically presenting Hilldring's case for supporting the development of the American-occupied zone of Korea, the article explained how Rhee was hoping to get Hodge's "heavy military hand lifted off the country's budding political life".<sup>24</sup> This favourable assessment of Rhee went against the views of *Time's* own Korea experts, who regarded him as a radical and supported Hodge's policy of limiting his influence over the Interim Legislative Assembly.<sup>25</sup> It also represented a significant change in editorial tone from just a few months before when Rhee had been cast as an elderly and out of touch reactionary. *Time's* editors were likely aware that their boss, Henry Luce, had reiterated his support for Rhee at a special executive dinner organised by him and Winthrop Aldrich, the president of Chase National Bank, in which Rhee and Louise Yim had been introduced to leading members of the East Coast establishment.<sup>26</sup> In any case, March 1947 represented the moment that Luce's press empire firmly endorsed Rhee's political goals- a crucial milestone in Rhee's drive to win American public support.<sup>27</sup>

The greatest threat to Rhee's lobbying campaign were press reports based on information obtained from American critics inside South Korea. When Tokyo-based correspondent Walter

---

<sup>23</sup> 'Korean Leader Urges Soviet And U.S. To Go', *The New York Times*, 29 January 1947.

<sup>24</sup> 'Digging In', *Time*, 17 March 1947.

<sup>25</sup> RTE to Hulburd, 7 March 1947, *Time*, inc. Dispatches from *Time* magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library; RTE to Hulburd, jr, 6 March 1947, *Time*, inc. Dispatches from *Time* magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>26</sup> Rhee to Luce, 1 March 1947, Box 1, Henry Luce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; A brief account of the dinner is given by Louise Yim in her memoir: Yim, pp. 266-67.

<sup>27</sup> Another Luce publication *Fortune* ran a lengthy article calling for a long-term U.S. commitment to Korea in June: 'Korea: The U.S. Gets to Work', *Fortune*, June 1947.

Simmons visited Korea in December 1946 he wrote an article highly sympathetic to the AMG which argued that the idea of a withdrawal from Korea was “incredibly naïve” given the scale of the Soviet threat.<sup>28</sup> Three months later, Simmons returned to Seoul to report that Rhee’s U.S. mission had not only caused major embarrassment for the Korean command but actually hurt the chances of his nation becoming independent. Underlining the damage done to Rhee’s credibility, Simmons wrote that Americans in Korea now saw him as an “ambitious and autocratic man who would like to be a dictator”.<sup>29</sup>

Simmons reportage ran sharply against the *Chicago Daily Tribune’s* reputation as a staunch advocate of both isolationism and anti-communism, a combination which in theory made it a natural ally in Rhee’s campaign for a rightist-oriented Korean regime to replace the U.S. occupation government. Rhee had in fact written several times to the *Tribune’s* publisher Colonel Robert McCormick asking him to dispatch correspondents to Korea to raise awareness of the situation there.<sup>30</sup> He failed to anticipate that the fierce patriotism and editorial freedom of the *Tribune’s* correspondents could turn against him. Walter Simmons was intensely loyal to the American military governments in the Far East- in once instance he asked for a meeting with MacArthur in order to ensure that none of his dispatches contained anything other than complete support for him and his policies.<sup>31</sup>

An even more scathing attack on Rhee in the *Nation*, a leading leftist-liberal political magazine, also appeared in March. An anonymous member of the occupation government, later revealed to be intelligence officer Richard D Robinson, described in detail Rhee’s outsized role in the January plot to overthrow the AMG as well as allegations that Rhee had been using his influence in Korea and the United States to enrich himself and his American supporters. While these claims had

---

<sup>28</sup> Walter Simmons, ‘Finds Rule by U.S. Fails to Win Over Koreans’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 December 1946.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Simmons, ‘See Freedom In Korea Injured By Acts’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 March 1947.

<sup>30</sup> Rhee to McCormick, 28 June 1946, 'Korea, 1946-1955, (Syngman Rhee)' Folder, Box 48, Papers of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, First Division Museum.

<sup>31</sup> LEB memo, 20 January 1948, Box 63, RG5, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives.



first appeared in the left-wing press in Korea the previous summer, this was the first time that Rhee was accused of seeking power for personal profit in the mainstream U.S. press, a claim which his supporters would dedicate much time trying to refute over the following years.

*The Nation* article did not, however, limit its criticism to Rhee alone. Robinson castigated the American command for keeping Japanese collaborators in office and emasculating the Interim Legislative Assembly as soon as it showed signs of becoming a functioning democratic institution under the “progressive leadership” of its State Department-backed Chairman Kim Kyu-sik. Rather than leaving the military government doing all it could to drive Korea into communism, Robinson argued that it would be better for the United States to cut its losses and leave, even if this resulted in civil war.

Although Robinson’s arguments were extreme, much of the serious analysis of Korea that appeared in the internationally-minded American press came to similar conclusions. Articles in *Harper’s* magazine and the *New York Herald Tribune* argued that a strong case could be made for the United States and Soviet Union to withdraw so that the Koreans could simply decide their own form of government.<sup>32</sup> Although, as *Herald Tribune* journalist Archibald Steele pointed out, American withdrawal would almost certainly favour the communists.

For Hodge, the growing apathy over the U.S. mission in Korea was deeply troubling. While back in the United States he met with Preston Goodfellow and other prominent citizens interested in the Korean issue to discuss ways of improving public awareness of the situation in Korea.<sup>33</sup> The most enthusiastic response came from Dr Harold Fisher, a Stanford University scholar of Soviet and Asian affairs, who had helped train officers for occupation duty during World War Two. Fisher hoped to establish an academic ‘Korean American Institute’ which would promote Korean affairs in the United

---

<sup>32</sup> Harold Sugg, ‘Watch Korea’, *Harper’s*, January 1947; Archibald T. Steel, ‘Search For a Middle Road in Korea’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 2 April 1947.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher to Evans, 25 March 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA; Hodge to Fisher, 3 May 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

States. Hodge and Lerch gave their backing to the plan but could not provide any financial support themselves. Instead Fisher had to seek out the backing of a major philanthropic organisation, such as the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, Hodge also sought War Department support for the establishment of a U.S.-based 'Korean Office of Information' staffed by representatives of the AMG. Hodge envisioned this as a significant organisation with headquarters in Washington and field offices in New York and San Francisco that would publicise the AMG's activities and encourage the right kind of press stories about Korea.<sup>35</sup> Hodge wrote that such an agency could provide leading columnists with the "facts and background" to enable them to interpret spot news as well as supply human-interest features for weekly newspapers and women's media outlets. Further suggestions included organising radio talks, film showings, exhibitions and public lectures on both the AMG and the Korean people.

Ultimately, neither project made it past the drawing board. At a time of significant retrenchment in military spending, and uncertainty over the future of Korea, the War Department had no desire to establish a grandiose Korea-specific public relations programme. Indeed, over the summer of 1947 the Army moved to a position of advocating for total U.S. withdrawal from Korea. Fisher similarly failed to find any support for his Institute at the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>36</sup>

Although neither Rhee nor Hodge achieved a really significant breakthrough in their efforts to influence public perceptions of Korea in the United States in early 1947, Rhee's prominence in the United States greatly increased the pressure on Hodge and the AMG to speed up the process of transition to a Korean-led government. During his time in the United States, Rhee also laid the foundations of his support amongst the right-wing press.

---

<sup>34</sup> Lerch to Hodge, 18 July 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge to Army, 14 April 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>36</sup> Fisher to Hodge, 19 April 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

## Rightists thrive amid confusion

Syngman Rhee's return to Korea in April 1947 signalled the beginning of a new phase of the Korean crisis. Rhee and his rightist allies ratcheted up the pressure on the Americans to suspend negotiations with the Soviets and declare full support for an independent Korean state through a series of demonstrations and violent attacks on leftists. By the end of July, U.S. policymakers were convinced that the deterioration in the political situation in Korea could only be halted through working with Rhee and establishing an independent Korean regime. However, the United States clung on the hope of a breakthrough with the Soviets.

Press coverage of Korea during this period was significantly more detailed than at any previous moment in the history of the occupation.<sup>37</sup> The Joint Commission was widely regarded as the last chance for a political solution to the Korea crisis. With public interest in Korea's future particularly acute in light of the burgeoning Cold War, the press focused much of its attention on the Soviet negotiation strategy. The brewing civil war between leftist and rightist Korean groups, however, received only sporadic and partisan analysis. Almost all of it indirectly endorsed the rightists as principled, if aggressive, critics of any deal with the Soviets. Thus, in spite of his intransigence and undermining of the AMG, Rhee's political stature grew ever stronger.

American newspaper coverage of Korea continued to rely on a small group of correspondents with close ties to the AMG. The press agencies followed the lead of AMG press officers in the stories they chose to publish, a cosy relationship that was reciprocated when Hodge fought to keep UP correspondent Stanley Rich in Korea in spite of problems caused by his many personal "peculiarities".<sup>38</sup> Another crucial weapon in Hodge's press armoury was Richard Johnston,

---

<sup>37</sup> The amount of material coming out of Korea compelled AP to ask correspondent Roy Roberts to reduce the size of his dispatches: Turnblad to Roberts, 20 May 1947, Korea, Foreign Bureau Correspondence 1946-1947, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>38</sup> In a letter to UP's Far East representative, Hodge argued that Rich had a good nose for news and expressed a degree of paternal concern for his career: Hodge to Vaughn, 24 January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

who had been reappointed to Korea following months of heavy lobbying by Rhee.<sup>39</sup> After getting reacquainted with his official friends in Seoul in early April, Johnston immediately resumed dispatching flattering accounts of the General's activities. When Hodge went on a tour of the American occupied zone, Johnston wrote that 120,000 Koreans in the city of Kwangju had taken a holiday in order to greet the general.<sup>40</sup> AP meanwhile reported that the morale of soldiers Hodge encountered on the tour was excellent, a major rebuke to widely reported allegations that U.S. soldiers were suffering from military neglect in Korea.<sup>41</sup>

The AMG also benefitted from the growing passivity and risk aversion of news editors in the United States. Joe Fromm, correspondent for the conservative *World Report*, complained that almost everything he wrote was being watered down by his editors.<sup>42</sup> In order for correspondents to get critical articles into print, they had to take a subtler approach. In June, *Time* and *Life* correspondent Carl Mydans wrote an account of visiting a Korean National Youth Movement camp which had worrying parallels to the Hitler Youth. Rather than explicitly drawing the link, Mydans simply quoted the school director: "I studied in Germany, 1930 to 1934. We base our instruction on the German youth movement, because the Germans are the only people who really know how to organize young men."<sup>43</sup>

The publication of even these mildly provocative stories became increasingly unusual as the AMG successfully convinced newspaper editors to give their full support to the AMG through War

---

<sup>39</sup> Rhee lobbied the *Times* to send Johnston back to Korea, although it's unclear if this decisively influenced the newspaper's decision: Johnston to Hodge, 27 January 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Johnston, 'More Aid to Korea Pledged by Hodge', *The New York Times*, 15 April 1947; Richard Johnston, 'Koreans Jubilant On Greeting Hodge', *The New York Times*, 24 April 1947; Richard Johnston, 'Morale Better in Korea', *The New York Times*, 29 April 1947.

<sup>41</sup> AP, 'Morale Better In Korea', *The New York Times*, 29 April 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Fromm to Mark and Sally Gayn, 3 August 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Mydans, 'A Scout Is Militant', *Time*, 30 June 1947. Mark Gayn also wrote about the Korean National Youth in an article for *PM* in November 1947 based on his 1946 reporting trip: Mark Gayn, 'Jap-Trained Police 'Pacify' South Korea', *PM*, 6 November 1947.

Department-sponsored tours of Japan and Korea.<sup>44</sup> According to Joe Fromm, as soon as the first group of representatives arrived in Tokyo, SCAP bombarded them with briefings about MacArthur's achievements and the irresponsible reporting of American journalists. Fromm was shocked by how quickly the editors fell under MacArthur's thrall—within 48 hours they were talking about the occupation with “the dogmatism of a Catholic priest discussing purgatory”.<sup>45</sup> When they reached Korea, Hodge gave them further briefings on the achievements of the AMG and hinted at stories he wanted covered by the press- including a major story about the build-up of a large army in Soviet-occupied Korea.<sup>46</sup>

The military regarded the tour as a spectacular success. Editors of the some of the most influential newspapers in the United States, including the *Chicago Sun's* Eli Dimitman and the *Christian Science Monitor's* Erwin Canham, were judged by the War Department to have become greatly more favourable to the Army and developed a much better understanding of the AMG's position.<sup>47</sup> The Department noted with satisfaction that several of these editors, including Canham, were due to speak to around 700 daily newspaper editors at a special session of the American Society of News Editors annual convention dedicated to Far Eastern problems and developments.

The tours also allowed occupation officials to rein in difficult and subversive correspondents through a direct appeal to their employers. SCAP officials regarded *Christian Science Monitor*

---

<sup>44</sup> Planning for the junket began in response to what the Army felt was “unwarranted criticisms of conditions and policies in Korea” as well as morale problems in the Philippines and foreign criticism of U.S. occupation policies. While the Army believed that editors on such tours secured “sound fundamental knowledge and write intelligently and objectively on occupation”, General MacArthur disagreed and called for certain newspapers to be excluded based on their history of publishing articles critical of the occupation. A minor controversy ensued when MacArthur's memo was described in detail by columnist Drew Pearson in his 3 December 1946 column. No newspapers were ultimately excluded: Army to MacArthur, 1 November 1946, Box 158, RG9, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives; Army to MacArthur, 9 December 1946, Box 158, RG9, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives; Drew Pearson, ‘The Washington Merry Go-Round’, 3 December 1946.

<sup>45</sup> Fromm to Mark and Sally Gayn, 14 February 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>46</sup> Brines to Gould, 12 February 1947, Korea, Foreign Bureau Records 1946-7, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>47</sup> War to MacArthur, 12 April 1947, Box 158, RG9, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives; Canham later wrote a highly positive magazine account regarding his experiences in Korea. Erwin D. Canham, ‘Between Two Worlds’, *The Rotarian*, June 1947.

correspondent Gordon Walker as one of the most active members of the leftist group of correspondents in Japan. After meeting with MacArthur, the *Monitor's* editor told Walker to take a more moderate line on the occupation and to no longer associate with the "communist" reporters in Tokyo- a group that supposedly included Fromm as well as later Korea correspondents Hugh Deane and Robert 'Pepper' Martin.<sup>48</sup> Armed with a letter from Walker attesting to his status as a reformed man, Canham convinced General Hodge to allow Walker back into the country for the first time since 1945.<sup>49</sup> When Walker returned to Korea to cover the Moscow agreement talks in May 1947 he held true to his word. Although he provided analysis of the political situation in Korea, his previously fierce denunciations of the AMG were nowhere to be found.

The AMG maintained significant influence over the way journalists framed their stories and much press coverage in this period reflected the AMG's ambivalent attitude towards both the talks and the nationalists. Few Americans in Korea wanted to see the Soviets successfully negotiate a role in governing southern Korea, yet at the same time they could not endorse the violent insubordination of the rightists. Richard Johnston tried to make the rightists behaviour understandable – noting that they had attacked the American command on the basis of their belief that the Joint Commission would result in the installation of a "virtually Communist-dominated, Soviet-controlled government".<sup>50</sup> Gordon Walker largely ignored the brewing conflict between leftists and rightists until his last dispatch from Korea at the start of August, when he suggested that the rightists were the main stumbling block to U.S. policy in Korea but admitted that neither of the main political camps could be called friendly to the United States or American ideas of democracy.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Fromm to Mark and Sally Gayn, 14 February 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>49</sup> Hodge to Parks, 8 March 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Korean Fighting Is Expected Soon', *The New York Times*, 26 July 1947.

<sup>51</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Koreans Dread Trusteeship, Blame U.S. For Blocking Independence', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 August 1947.

It thus fell to other visitors to Korea, operating free of direct AMG pressure, to draw attention to the worsening political situation in Korea over the summer of 1947. In May, Roger Baldwin, president of the American Civil Liberties Union, toured Japan and Korea at the invitation of Douglas MacArthur.<sup>52</sup> A veteran campaigner for civil liberties issues in the United States, Baldwin was horrified by the scale and degree of repression he witnessed in Korea. In a press conference after the trip Baldwin declared that American-occupied Korea had become a “police state”.<sup>53</sup> In an interview with the *Times* he declared that Korea’s problems primarily stemmed from the failure of the AMG to adequately democratise the country and protect the civil liberties of Korean citizens.<sup>54</sup> While he recognised that the rightists were part of the problem, he had a warm personal relationship with Rhee, who he regarded as a genuine democrat and liberal, and mentioned only in passing the threat they posed to Korea’s political stability.<sup>55</sup>

Just a few weeks after the Baldwin interview, the *Times* ran another interview with a recent returnee from Korea, activist and Rhee critic Yong-jeung Kim.<sup>56</sup> Kim was a California-born Korean nationalist who in 1943 had founded the Korean Affairs Institute, a small Washington D.C.-based organisation which published a monthly newsletter called *Voice of Korea*. While Kim had initially been friendly with Rhee, the purges against the Left in the first year of the occupation had soured the relationship. Several of Kim’s closest friends and supporters who had returned to Korea to organise a moderate leftist party found themselves victims of rightist persecution. Kim had cut short

---

<sup>52</sup> For more on the background of this trip see Samuel Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties: A History of the ACLU* (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 1999), p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Korea Is Police State’, Roger Baldwin Reports’, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 June 1947.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Democracy is Seen as Gaining in Japan’, *The New York Times*, 27 June 1947.

<sup>55</sup> Baldwin to Villard, 13 November 1947, Folder 22, Box 1167, American Civil Liberties Union Records, Princeton University.

<sup>56</sup> Baldwin wrote to Kim to inform him that their views were “almost identical”: Baldwin to Kim, 12 August 1947, Box 1, Yong-jeung Kim Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University; ‘Danger of Chaos is Seen’, *The New York Times*, 30 July 1947; Yong-jeung Kim, Letter ‘Conditions In Korea’, *The New York Times*, 12 August 1947.

his visit to Korea after his mentor, the popular leftist Lyuh Woon Hyung, had been assassinated just hours after they had met together in Seoul.<sup>57</sup>

In the interview, Kim identified many of the same problems as Baldwin but was far more explicit in his criticism of the growing influence of both the communists and “right-wing extremists” like Rhee and Koo. He warned that any future election could hand power to these two political opportunists who sought “personal power and position regardless of the nation’s interest”.<sup>58</sup>

Both Kim and Baldwin saw themselves as operating within the policymaking process rather than explicitly criticising it. Each wrote to Hodge after their trips to thank him for his assistance and offer advice on how he could reverse the damage in southern Korea.<sup>59</sup> While Baldwin focused on the importance of embedding democracy in Korean society, Kim discussed the command’s public relations problem. He advised the Americans to deny Koreans with dubious political views the right to visit the United States since the American public had become confused by the status of people like Louise Yim, Rhee’s quasi-diplomatic envoy to the United States. Neither the AMG nor U.S. policymakers expressed much interest in these recommendations. Instead U.S. advisers in Korea regarded Baldwin as a “misguided liberal” whose ability to conjure up a press controversy on civil liberties issues greatly limited the occupation’s capacity to control Rhee and his supporters.<sup>60</sup>

For American readers, it was increasingly difficult to tell who could be trusted in the debate on Korea, especially as the Soviets began to use the Joint Commission to issue their own propaganda attacks on the government in American-occupied Korea.<sup>61</sup> To add to the confusion, the U.S. military began strongly advocating for the United States to completely withdraw all of its forces from Korea.

---

<sup>57</sup> Marn J. Cha, *Koreans in Central California (1903-1957): A Study of Settlement and Transnational Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Kim found himself under public attack from Robert T. Oliver, who in a letter to the *Times* argued that Kim was simply lashing out at Rhee because of a decades-long personal feud: Robert T. Oliver, Letter ‘Program For Korea’, *The New York Times*, 15 August 1947.

<sup>59</sup> Kim to Hodge, 4 August 1947, Box 1, Yong-jeung Kim Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University; Baldwin to Hodge, 28 May 1947, Box 2, General Correspondence 1947, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>60</sup> Jacobs to Marshall, 12 August 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: p. 750.

<sup>61</sup> Jacobs to Marshall, 22 August 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: p. 762.



In September, Robert T. Oliver was told at a meeting with Hanson Baldwin, the *Times*' military affairs editor, that he should drop Rhee and withdraw his connections with Korean nationalist groups since the U.S. government was in the process of giving up on its Korean commitment.<sup>62</sup> The drift in U.S. policy once again left both the press and the public unsure about Korea's place on the foreign policy agenda.

### **Picking champions**

As the failure of the talks between the Soviets and Americans became starkly obvious in the autumn of 1947, the State Department concluded that the best chances of saving Korea from communist takeover was to hand over the issue to the United Nations with the recommendation that the south be allowed to carry out elections to establish its own independent government under UN auspices.<sup>63</sup> Although the Soviet Union objected to taking Korea to the UN, U.S. influence over the General Assembly ensured that it got its way in a decisive vote in mid-November.

The breakdown in Soviet-U.S. relations at the United Nations turned mainstream press outlets more hawkish on Korea. Editorials and columnists united in condemnation of Soviet attempts to block the UN from taking responsibility for Korea's future. While Rhee's anti-communism had once made him an extremist, his views increasingly matched the emerging anti-communist consensus. He was recognised as an astute observer of Soviet scheming. An editorial in the *Washington Post* suggested that Syngman Rhee had been "quick to see the gimmick" in a Soviet proposal for troop withdrawal from Korea.<sup>64</sup>

In September, the populist red-baiting Hearst chain dispatched correspondent Ray Richards to Korea with the mission to support Syngman Rhee in his bid to become post-occupation Korea's first leader. A China-based correspondent for the *Shanghai Star* during the 1930s, Richards had

---

<sup>62</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Interim Directive to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, 24 July 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: pp. 714-31; Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Korea, 4 August 1947, *FRUS* 1947, 6: pp. 738-41.

<sup>64</sup> 'Sham in Korea', *The Washington Post*, 5 October 1947.

become the Washington correspondent of the Hearst-owned *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1941.<sup>65</sup> In Washington he developed a close friendship with one of the country's most notorious anti-communist politicians, J. Parnell Thomas, the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities.<sup>66</sup> By 1947, the anti-communist owner of the Hearst chain, William Randolph Hearst, had become completely convinced that war with the Soviets was inevitable and sought to use his influence to push for a more anti-communist foreign policy.<sup>67</sup> Richards was thus dispatched to Korea to act, in the words of General Hodge, as the "personal press agent of Syngman Rhee in the Hearst paper's fight against communism".<sup>68</sup>

In his dispatches from Seoul, Richards portrayed Rhee as a determined Korean patriot who was caught in a desperate struggle against State Department backed "liberals" who were in fact nothing more than "fellow travellers and fifth columnists and Trojan horses like Henry Wallace of America".<sup>69</sup> Richards believed that Rhee was the only true proponent of American-style democracy in Korea and sought to convince his readership that Rhee wanted free elections as soon as possible so that his country could experience the kind of government that he had learned to love as a Ph.D. student at Princeton. Although Richards implied that Hodge shared these views, his dispatches in fact greatly irritated the General. In a letter to Hearst, Hodge warned that Rhee had become power mad and was using Roberts to spread false stories and rumours to discredit the command and satisfy his own "God complex".<sup>70</sup> True to his informal style of press management, however, Hodge never sent the letter and instead asked Major General Floyd Parks, the head of public relations for the

---

<sup>65</sup> 'INS Honors Two Writers Killed in Korea', *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 4 February 1951.

<sup>66</sup> Greg Robinson, *Larry and Guyo Tajiri and Japanese American Journalism in the World War II Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 147.

<sup>67</sup> Ian Mugridge, *View from Xanadu: William Randolph Hearst and United States Foreign Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), p. 142.

<sup>68</sup> Hodge to Hearst, January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA; Col. B. C. Limb to Hearst, 'Korean Leader Thanks Hearst Newspapers', *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 29 September 1947.

<sup>69</sup> Ray Richards, 'Fate and Ballots Made Korean President', *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 7 October 1947.

<sup>70</sup> Hodge to Hearst, January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

Department of the Army, to pass on the essence of the message to his contacts at the Hearst organisation.<sup>71</sup>

Another important, albeit indirect, endorsement for Rhee came from a more surprising source. In the summer of 1947, after months of solicitations from Rhee and other members of the Korean Commission, the *Chicago Daily Tribune's* Colonel McCormick decided to visit Korea as part of a tour of the Far East. Although he was wary of being used by Rhee as part of his campaign against Hodge, he was nonetheless impressed by the rightists' demand for Korean independence.<sup>72</sup> In an editorial published in the *Tribune* and broadcast over the Mutual Broadcasting System, McCormick claimed that the United States had no choice but to let the Koreans in the south set up their own government.<sup>73</sup> He noted, however, that the current U.S. administration was seeking to establish a "very leftist" government in the American-occupied zone of Korea. Although McCormick did not explicitly call for the United States to support Rhee, he argued that the only Koreans with any talent for administration were the handful of former U.S. exiles- a group within which Rhee was the leading political figure.

Enthusiasm for Rhee amongst conservatives was not balanced by concerted support for more moderate candidates in the liberal press. Few observers believed that the State Department's favoured "middle of the road" candidate Kim Kyu-Sik could win out against either the rightists or the leftists. In a visit to Korea in early December, *New York Post* correspondent Robert P. Martin wrote that middle-of-the-road leaders were practically non-existent since it was both safer and more productive for Koreans to be on the political extremes.<sup>74</sup> With Rhee's domination of South Korean

---

<sup>71</sup> Hodge to Parks, 17 January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>72</sup> McCormick to Simmons, 3 September 1947, Travel Folder, Box 31, Papers of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, First Division Museum.

<sup>73</sup> Col. Robert McCormick, 'Journey to Korea', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 November 1947.

<sup>74</sup> Robert P. Martin, 'Korean Police Denounced as Terrorists', *The New York Post*, 3 December 1947. Martin was the *Post's* China correspondent until 1949 and was regarded as a member of the leftist clique by authorities in Tokyo. Attempts by SCAP to stop him reporting from Japan in February 1947 caused an outcry amongst the Tokyo press corps: Fromm to Mark and Sally Gayn, 14 February 1947, Box 4, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

politics for the foreseeable future looking increasingly assured, liberal journalists shied away from attacking him directly.

Much more stinging criticism of Rhee appeared in newspapers associated with the far left but they too struggled to advocate for any alternative candidates. The assassination of Lyuh Woon Hyung in July 1947 had been widely mourned by those who had hoped that some kind of compromise could still be found between the Left and Right in Korea.<sup>75</sup> As the leader of the leftist Korean Provisional Government in the weeks between the Japanese surrender and the start of the U.S. occupation, Lyuh had symbolised the great lost hope of an independent Korea. His death marked the beginning of a wave of political violence which forced virtually the entire Korean left underground.

The only American journalist in Korea to write about these developments in any significant detail was Hugh Deane, a Tokyo-based reporter associated with a variety of left-leaning magazines and union newspapers. Deane had developed an interest in left-wing politics through his contact with the American correspondents covering Mao Tse-Tung's communist revolutionary movement, while living in China in the late 1930s on a Harvard exchange programme. He returned to China in 1940 as a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and wrote a ten-part series documenting the persecution of leftists and other dissidents by Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang regime.<sup>76</sup> Deane's self-confessed tendency to write a lot of "hot rhetoric" often got him into trouble with his editors, even at the liberal *Monitor*. After wartime stints working in the Office of War Information in Washington and as an intelligence officer in MacArthur's Pacific command, Deane became a

---

<sup>75</sup> Lyuh was assassinated by a North Korean with ties to right-wing nationalists. In his write-up of the assassination, however, Richard Johnston hinted that the murder was orchestrated by communist elements unhappy with Lyuh's failure to toe the party line. Richard Johnston, 'Lyuh, Leftist Chief is Killed in Korea', *The New York Times*, 20 July 1947.

<sup>76</sup> *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930's and 1940's*, ed. by Stephen R. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 104–5.

freelance writer in Tokyo with a passionate interest in the occupation government's battles with organised labour.

In July 1947, just days before Lyuh's murder, Deane arrived in South Korea to investigate reports of the widespread repression of leftist politicians and union members in the American-occupied zone. In a series of articles for the *China Weekly Review* and *The Nation*, Deane savaged the AMG for its tolerance of Rhee's political machine and its deployment of "terrorist youth associations" and even the U.S.-trained Korean police to intimidate and arrest leftists. Like much of the rest of the liberal press, he was pessimistic about South Korea's future. With the backing of a powerful alliance of "landlords, merchants, collaborators, adventurers and ultranationalist fanatics", Rhee had positioned himself as overwhelming favourite to win any elections in the south.<sup>77</sup>

Much of what Deane saw matched the contents of a scathingly critical report by Stewart Meacham, an American Labor Department official who had been sent to investigate the conditions of organised labour in Korea in late 1946. All such allegations were roundly rejected by the AMG. In a letter to MacArthur, Hodge claimed that the basic premises of Meacham's argument were false and based on an "idealistic humanitarian approach" which failed to recognise the reality of the communist threat in Korea.<sup>78</sup> In a detailed rebuttal to Meacham's claims, Hodge argued that the Left were responsible for a far greater share of political violence up until the middle of 1947 and that problems with the police were a product of their oriental psychology and the legacy of Japanese colonial rule. Hodge advised MacArthur that he did not need to read Meacham's report since it simply followed the "Roger Baldwin-Mark Gayn-Hugh Deane" line.<sup>79</sup>

## **UN Intervention**

---

<sup>77</sup> Hugh Deane, 'Moderates Hard Hit in U.S. Korea Zone', *The China Weekly Review*, 4 October 1947.

<sup>78</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, 8 January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>79</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, 9 January 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

In November 1947, the UN General Assembly had passed a resolution establishing the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) with a mandate to supervise free and open elections, assist in the withdrawal of all occupying forces, and guide the new Korean nation to full independence. The arrival of UNTCOK in Seoul in January 1948 provided the last opportunity for Rhee's opponents to block the elections that virtually all observers believed would usher in Syngman Rhee as the south's leader. This was possible because UNTCOK could, at least in theory, advise the General Assembly that the political environment was not sufficiently stable for national elections to be held. Leftists thus hoped to convince the commission's representatives that UN-sponsored elections without communist support would permanently divide the country in two. Furthermore, any election that did take place would be so distorted by the mounting violence and repression in the south that it would be impossible to claim a fair result.

The first attempts to influence the delegates began before they had even arrived in Korea. In Tokyo, Gordon Walker and Joe Fromm approached two of the Canadian and Australian delegates to brief them on the situation in Korea. According to reports received by General Hodge, Walker presented a picture of "enlightenment in North Korea and reaction in the South" and successfully convinced the Australian delegate, S.H. Jackson that there were serious problems in the American-occupied zone.<sup>80</sup> Once in Korea, Jackson continued to meet with Walker and demand that UNTCOK pay more attention to the repressive behaviour of the police in the American-occupied zone.

For American diplomats and the AMG, UNTCOK's scepticism towards the police regime in the south was a source of significant frustration. The Americans had expected the UN to quickly organise elections in the American-occupied zone. Instead three UNTCOK delegates, including Jackson, Canada's delegate George Patterson and Syria's Zeki Djabi, threatened to derail the process entirely. However, their public impact was limited. While UNTCOK's ambivalence on Korea received

---

<sup>80</sup> Hodge to MacArthur, 22 March 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

widespread coverage, most correspondents in Seoul continued to closely align their dispatches with the official position of the AMG, which regarded communist violence as a significantly greater problem than police abuses.<sup>81</sup> Gordon Walker was the lone correspondent to explicitly ignore the AMG's attempts to talk up the threat of communist violence and bring significant attention to the UN commission's concern over the police state in the American-occupied zone.<sup>82</sup> Although Hodge wrote to the *Monitor* to complain about Walker's work, the newspaper stood its ground and argued that Walker was fully within his rights to consult with anyone and write about anything he felt to be important.<sup>83</sup>

Ultimately UNTCOK and the UN were forced to accept that elections in southern Korea should go ahead. Jackson continued to cause problems, however, by looking for evidence of police abuses that would render Korea unsafe for an election. The AMG used every means at its disposal to gather insights into his plans. On occasion this included tapping journalists for information gathered during their reporting. Richard Johnston informed AMG officials that Jackson had told him that he was struggling to find anything wrong in Korea because "both Koreans and Americans have been too well rehearsed" and that he was sure "plain-clothes police were around the corner to take care of anyone who spilled the beans".<sup>84</sup> Although Jackson did not find the evidence he wanted, he managed to aggravate the United States even further by giving his support to a north-south conference in Pyongyang, which was expected to establish an alternative all-Korean political process.

---

<sup>81</sup> According to Mark Gayn, UP's Stanley Rich and AP's Roy Roberts were told to be "more patriotic" at a meeting with the occupation's G2 commander, Colonel Walter F. Choinski: Diary Entry for 20 March 1948, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>82</sup> Gordon Walker, 'Slight Outbreaks in Korea Fail to Shake UN Decision', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 February 1948; Gordon Walker, 'UN Inquiry: Answer Inside Jails?', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 January 1948.

<sup>83</sup> Hodge to Canham, 8 March 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA; Gratke to Hodge, 7 April 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.

<sup>84</sup> Jacobs to Marshall, 27 April 1948, *FRUS* 1948, 6: p. 1183.

Much to the shock of U.S. officials and the southern Korean press, the conference was attended by both of Rhee's main non-communist rivals. Rhee's once close rightist ally Kim Koo had turned on the idea of UN elections in January following months of simmering tensions with Rhee. Most troubling, however, was the defection of former Interim Legislative Assembly chairman and leader of the middle of the road camp Kim Kyu-Sik. In Pyongyang the two Kim's' agreed to a series of resolutions which condemned the UN elections and called for both the United States and the Soviet Union to withdraw their forces and leave the organisation of a government to the Koreans. Upon their return to Seoul in early May, they discovered that Rhee had declared his full support for the UN's election programme and unleashed an extensive publicity campaign for his party, the National Society for the Rapid Realization of Korean Independence. Kyu-Sik's anti-election stand effectively destroyed his political credibility both in Korea and in the eyes of the American press.<sup>85</sup> As the *Washington Post* editorialised, "If there is any essential difference between Dr Kim's approach and what the communists have been preaching- that south Korea cannot hold out against the north- it is hard to see".<sup>86</sup> The Pyongyang conference thus effectively eliminated the two remaining political rivals to Syngman Rhee. He went into the May 1948 elections as the dominant political force in southern Korea.

### **Rhee's triumph**

On May 10 1948, Koreans turned out in large numbers for the first general election in Korea history. News of the election made it into the front pages of dozens of American newspapers and even cinema newsreels. American journalists were not, however, so impressed with coverage of the election.<sup>87</sup> A post-election analysis by AP found that poor communications and the constant churn of

---

<sup>85</sup> Correspondents disagreed on how Kyu-Sik and Koo felt about the UN elections after they returned from Pyongyang. Richard Johnston wrote that Kyu-Sik was noticeably disillusioned by what he saw in North Korea and would not oppose elections in just the south. UP's correspondent wrote that Kyu-Sik was still fiercely opposed to elections. AMG sources suggest UP was correct.

<sup>86</sup> 'Korea's Leaders', *The Washington Post*, 9 May 1948.

<sup>87</sup> Hodge to Carty, 28 June 1948, Box 3, General Correspondence 1948, USAFIK Commandant's Office, RG554, NARA.



the rumour mill meant that false stories, including grossly exaggerated accounts of communist attacks on voting stations, regularly made it onto the press wires.<sup>88</sup> Much of the conservative press consequently framed the elections as a triumph against communist terrorism, a narrative endorsed by Robert T. Oliver in an editorial for the *Baltimore Sun*.<sup>89</sup>

Elsewhere, the election was praised as a triumph for democracy and a rejection of communism. Much of the press celebrated the apparent procedural effectiveness of the election. Gordon Walker wrote that “more than 90% per cent of the registered voters in South Korea- with all the freedoms of a secret balloting booth- elected a new National Assembly”.<sup>90</sup> The *New York Times* noted that the turnout surpassed that of many long-established democracies.<sup>91</sup> The focus on these general statistics hid from view the very real evidence of corruption. Several correspondents witnessed egregious corruption in Rhee’s own electoral district, where his only opponent, Seoul Chief Detective Choi Nung-Chin, had been disqualified just days before the election due to alleged irregularities in his application form.<sup>92</sup> Hugh Deane, who knew the American-born Choi from childhood, managed to get him registered following an intervention from the AMG.<sup>93</sup> Deane reported, however, that Choi’s supporters were nonetheless attacked by police and stopped from campaigning.<sup>94</sup> Rhee’s ability to get away with this kind of low visibility electoral repression set a crucial precedent for his approach to future elections. While UNTCOK caused some consternation by

---

<sup>88</sup> Turnblad to Brines, 13 May 1948, Korea, Foreign Bureau Correspondence 1946-1947, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Korea Tries Freedom’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 May 1948; Robert T. Oliver, ‘Korea Battles Communist Flood’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 May 1948.

<sup>90</sup> Gordon Walker, ‘U.S. Policy In Korea Faces Test As Rightists Win Election’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 May 1948.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Korea Votes’, *The New York Times*, 11 May 1948.

<sup>92</sup> *Life* magazine reporter Carl Mydans wrote about the incident in his dispatches home but the story was not used: Carl Mydans Picture Captions for Korea, 10 May 1948, LIFE Picture Collection Picture Captions, Time Corporate Archives.

<sup>93</sup> In his memoir Deane claimed he was almost denied entry when Hodge saw a pile of his clippings from 1947. He was granted a reprieve only when a former AP colleague and AMG official, James Stewart, suggested that his exclusion would be unwise: Deane, p. 29.

<sup>94</sup> Deane, pp. 67–70.

initially refusing to verify the results of the election, few observers believed that they could claim any legitimate grievances.<sup>95</sup>

Despite his party winning only 55 seats in the 208 seat Assembly, it was clear that Rhee also had the support of the majority of the 85 elected 'independents'. Rhee's traditional supporters in the press were cautiously optimistic about the idea of a Rhee-led government and highlighted Rhee's American background and anti-communist values as positive traits. In an analysis for the *Times*, Richard Johnston described Rhee as a rightist who nonetheless sought to establish a "representative democracy based on universal suffrage patterned closely after the American system".<sup>96</sup> Johnston also suggested that Rhee could be quite radical once in office, an argument also taken up in an article in *Time*:

Although....Dr. Rhee has been branded a "reactionary" by Korean Communists and a "rightist" by some U.S. journalists, his program would be too radical for most U.S. citizens. He has proposed: 1) nationalization of heavy industry, mines, forests, utilities, banks and transportation; 2) redistribution among small farmers of large estates and confiscated Japanese lands; 3) a planned economy; 4) a soak-the-rich tax program with total exemptions for poorer classes.<sup>97</sup>

The idea of Rhee as a radical liberal had been heavily pushed by the Korean Commission in the months running up to the election. In a letter to Robert T. Oliver in early March, Rhee had declared that his regime would be far more radical and less reactionary than journalists claimed; "When we have our government in hand all those who talk about Korean fascists, reactionaries and extreme rightists will be amazed to see far we can go in liberalizing our nation. The land reform bill will be about the first act and many more liberal movements will take one after another."<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Walter Simmons, 'U.N. Chief Calls Korea Election 'Too Efficient'', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 May 1948.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Election in South Korea is a Vote Against Russia', *The New York Times*, 15 May 1948.

<sup>97</sup> 'Problem in Division', *Time*, 24 May 1948.

<sup>98</sup> Rhee to Oliver, 20 March 1948, quoted in Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 152.

Oliver instantly recognised the potential of this public relations strategy. In the months before the election he tried to convince senior State Department officials to delay the planned sale of a substantial amount of farm land, previously owned by the Japanese, so that the new Korean government could take the credit for implementing land reform.<sup>99</sup> In his own writings and exchanges with American journalists, Oliver presented Rhee as a reformist-minded leader who would defeat communism through policy achievements rather than repression.

Amongst liberal and leftists, pessimism over South Korea's future was rife. The *Washington Post* argued that although Rhee was not an extremist, his fierce nationalism would make him a difficult for the Americans work with.<sup>100</sup> The most significant sceptic was the *Herald Tribune's* new Japan correspondent, Allen Raymond, who had become a regular visitor to Korea after taking up his position in Tokyo in November 1947. Raymond was a classic Cold War liberal. As a young journalist in New York, Raymond had helped establish the New York Newspaper Guild, one of the first labour unions for journalists, only to sever the relationship because of the Guild's insistence on what he described as its instance on turning the reporter into an "instrument of class warfare".<sup>101</sup> After serving as the *New York Times's* London Bureau chief before World War Two, he had moved to the *Tribune* to cover the war as a roving correspondent in South-East Asia and Europe. In Tokyo, he was regarded by military authorities as an honest and valuable correspondent.<sup>102</sup> Although he insightfully explored topics rarely of interest to other correspondents, his reporting from Korea generally privileged the AMG's position.<sup>103</sup> In a feature article after the end of the occupation he argued that the AMG had stopped a communist revolution, introduced land reform, greatly improved education

---

<sup>99</sup> The Americans ultimately decided to press ahead with reforms before the elections: Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 156.

<sup>100</sup> 'Rhee's Responsibility', *The Washington Post*, 13 June 1948.

<sup>101</sup> UP, 'Radio Is Called Big But Faulty Aid of Religion', *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3 September 1937.

<sup>102</sup> Baker to MacArthur, 19 February 1948, Box 63, RG 5, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives.

<sup>103</sup> Allen Raymond, 'Army in Korea Denies Political Prisoners Exist', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 14 January 1948.

and kept the country from starving: “Whatever remains of civilization in Korea”, he concluded, “is there by the grace of the American Army and the American people”.<sup>104</sup>

By contrast, Raymond found little to admire in Syngman Rhee or his regime. Like most of the reporters based in South Korea, Raymond was contemptuous of the Korean people: they lacked the political maturity to govern themselves by parliamentary compromise or protect the rights of minorities. But Raymond held a special contempt for Syngman Rhee and his close supporters. In April 1948, he wrote that the new independent Korean government was very likely to upset all the good work done by the Americans:

It seems very unlikely today that anything like democratic self-government along parliamentary lines of the West will emerge from the current strife between North and South Korea, regardless of the elections to be held May 10 under United Nations auspices. South Korea is obviously in the hands of Rightist groups bent on a rule as arbitrary as that of Generalissimo Francisco Franco’s Spain.<sup>105</sup>

The belief that the ROK regime would prove to be a disaster for both Korea and the United States was even more prominent amongst those journalists who had been critical of the AMG in the past. *The Nation* suggested that the elections had alienated a large section of the Korean population that had supported Koo and Kiu-Sik.<sup>106</sup> Many on the left suspected that Korea was going to end up in a state of civil war like Greece or North China.<sup>107</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Between the end of 1946 and the summer of 1948, southern Korea lurched from one political crisis to the next. Within this chaotic environment, the AMG and Korean rightist leaders

---

<sup>104</sup> Allen Raymond, ‘Korea... Tiger By The Tail’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1949.

<sup>105</sup> Allen Raymond, ‘Farm Reform Is Sped by U.S. In South Korea’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 5 May 1948.

<sup>106</sup> Stewart Maxwell, ‘Blunder in Korea’, *The Nation*, May 1948.

<sup>107</sup> Diary Entry, 20 March 1948, Box 98, Mark Gayn Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto; Deane, p. 61.

became increasingly practiced at using repression to stifle opposition and dissent. But both General Hodge and Syngman Rhee realised that the crisis could only be decisively solved through an intervention from Washington. Both hoped to use the press to bring Korea to the attention of the political elite. Although this did not directly lead to any significant policy changes, Rhee used this opportunity to cement his relationship with key right-wing press outlets. By the end of 1947, he had laid the first tentative foundations of a press following in the United States.

The end of the occupation of Korea was a deeply symbolic moment in the United States. For the Right, the establishment of South Korea was a sign that the United States was at last actively resisting Soviet expansionism. For the Left, the creation of the ROK appeared to confirm that the West and the communist world were falling into a protracted and potentially catastrophic state of conflict. However, South Korea occupied a curious position in this new Cold War environment. The new South Korean government was completely dependent on the beneficence of the U.S. government for its survival. However, aside from the capricious support of a handful of right-wing newspapers, it had no major constituency of support in the United States. After 1948, the future of the American commitment was far from assured.

## Chapter 3: The ROK Problem 1948-1950

On 15 August 1948 dignitaries from around East Asia gathered in Seoul to celebrate the official establishment of the Republic of Korea. At an elaborate ceremony at the National Capitol, General Douglas MacArthur reflected on the unfinished nature of the ROK and the country's political future. MacArthur declared that the border between North and South Korea- "one of the greatest tragedies of contemporary history"- must be torn down. Although Rhee apparently did not deliver a full speech, a copy of a speech he was due to give was widely shared in the official programme.<sup>1</sup> In these remarks, prepared by his U.S. adviser Robert T. Oliver, Rhee emphasised that the ROK could not simply conquer and reclaim the north. Instead it had to proceed slowly and carefully, in accord with the programme laid out by the United Nations. The best weapon against the tyranny of the north, he argued, was to establish a full democracy, which respected the rights of all its citizens.<sup>2</sup> The bombastic pageantry and high rhetoric of the event reflected the desire of the new ROK government and its international backers to convince the world of its democratic legitimacy.

This chapter shows how, like the occupation authorities before them, both the Rhee regime and the Truman administration struggled to sell a positive image of South Korea to the United States. While the ROK regime maintained close relationships with the press agency journalists based in Seoul, more liberal journalists railed against the ROK as an authoritarian police state which stood little chance of long-term survival. The collapse of the nationalist Chinese position in the Chinese civil war in 1949 turned Korea into a highly partisan political issue. The Republican Party blocked Truman's aid bills for Korea, arguing that the United States could not throw more aid dollars down

---

<sup>1</sup> Instead of delivering the speech prepared for him by Robert T. Oliver, Rhee opted to give extemporaneous thanks to the many allies and friends who had helped him over the previous decades: Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Syngman Rhee, Re-Establishment of Korean Nation Speech, 15 August 1948 quoted in KPP, *Korea's Fight For Freedom* (Washington D.C.: Korean Pacific Press, 1951), p. 8-10.

Asian “ratholes”. By the start of 1950, both the political and economic failures of the South Korean regime were being widely discussed in the American press.

The growing controversy over the authoritarianism of the ROK regime reflected both changes in the press corps in South Korea and the context in which they were reporting. The removal of military controls on journalists enabled more liberal correspondents to enter South Korea and criticise the regime. The Rhee government, keen to demonstrate its democratic credentials, did little to stop this critical reporting, and during the Yosu uprising actively enabled it. As support for rightist anti-communist regimes in Asia become more politically controversial in the United States, correspondents found that the sphere of legitimate controversy expanded, although criticism of the regime never became sufficient to create a major political controversy.

### **A democratic South Korea?**

In the speech that Syngman Rhee had been due to give at his presidential inauguration on 15 August, Rhee set out the six principles through which he would rule Korea; full trust and faith in democracy, the protection of civil liberties and freedom, the respect and protection of liberalism, generosity and co-operation in government, pursuit of the reunification of Korea and a foreign policy devoted to world peace.<sup>3</sup> The *New York Times*’ Richard Johnston nonetheless provided a detailed breakdown of a copy of the speech, concluding that Rhee had made clear his fundamental commitment to the “cause of freedom and democracy”.<sup>4</sup>

Amongst the small group of Rhee supporters in the American press, South Korean independence was regarded, as the *Times* put it, as a “great step forward toward a democracy”.<sup>5</sup> The fiercely pro-Rhee *Washington Daily Star* carried a long editorial by George Fox Mott, a former inspector general for USFIK, praising South Korea’s rebirth as a democracy and Syngman Rhee’s

---

<sup>3</sup> Syngman Rhee, Re-Establishment of Korean Nation Speech, 15 August 1948 quoted in KPP, *Korea’s Fight For Freedom* (Washington D.C.: Korean Pacific Press, 1951), p. 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Korea Set Up As Republic; MacArthur Predicts ‘Unity’’, *The New York Times*, 15 August 1948.

<sup>5</sup> ‘A Nation Is Reborn’, *The New York Times*, 15 August 1948.

Wilsonian democratic liberalism.<sup>6</sup> In his last press statement before heading back to the United States, the AMG's commander, General Hodge, told journalists that Korean democracy appeared to be working; "The assembly that they have elected will take nothing lying down. It is showing independence of thought. That is as much like democracy as anything that I have seen".<sup>7</sup>

The ROK's constitution certainly offered many of the features of a modern democratic state- including the separation of powers between three branches of government, the protection of citizens right and a two-term limit for the presidency.<sup>8</sup> Although AP worried about the increased difficulty of "impartial and sound reporting" following the end of the occupation government, editors believed that the ROK would roughly conform to the democratic norms they were used to back home.<sup>9</sup> The only note of caution came from the *Chicago Daily Tribune's* Tokyo correspondent Walter Simmons, a long-standing critic of Rhee's dictatorial tendencies.<sup>10</sup> After consulting with legal experts in Tokyo, Simmons claimed that the Korean constitution suffered by comparison with that of the United States, especially in its "failure to guarantee specific civil rights".<sup>11</sup> The constitution did not grant citizens the right to trial while other key rights, including the right to a speedy trial and freedom of speech, could be restricted for unspecified reasons. The president also held a noticeably broader range of powers- including, crucially, the ability to propose constitutional amendments.

For most of the press, however, the establishment of the ROK passed by with little note. The world's attention was glued on Europe following the Soviet blockade of West Berlin. With Cold War tensions at fever pitch, South Korea only mattered insofar as it was a potential target for Soviet aggression. Just weeks after the ROK's establishment, the Soviet Union had announced that its own

---

<sup>6</sup> George Fox Mott, 'Korea Is Reborn A Democracy Today', *The Sunday Star*, 15 August 1948.

<sup>7</sup> 'Democracy in Korea Praised by Hodge', *The New York Times*, 29 August 1948.

<sup>8</sup> 'The Korean Constitution', *The New York Times*, 14 July 1948; 'Korea's First Constitution', *The Buffalo Evening News*, 15 July 1948.

<sup>9</sup> Brines to Gould, 18 August 1948, Seoul Bureau, Foreign Bureau Records 1946-7, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Simmons, 'See Freedom In Korea Injured By Acts', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 March 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Simmons, 'Faults Found In Constitution Of South Korea', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 September 1948.



zone of occupation would become an independent state known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). With the division of Korea now formalised, the two Koreas faced off against each other over the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Richard Johnston emphasised the existential danger to the ROK posed by the North Korean communists, writing that the DPRK's leader, Kim Il Sung, was a Soviet puppet with ambitions to destroy the Korean Republic and unify Korea under communist control.<sup>12</sup>

Many policy experts wondered whether the United States had any business continuing to support South Korea in this bleak environment. The ROK was almost entirely dependent on American economic, diplomatic and military aid yet provided the United States with almost no political or strategic benefit in return. In late 1947, George Kennan, the Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff had called for the United States to abandon Korea:

As to Korea, there is no longer any real hope of a genuinely peaceful and free democratic development in that country. Its political life in the coining period is bound to be dominated by political immaturity, intolerance and violence. Where such conditions prevail, the communists are in their element. Therefore, we cannot count on native Korean forces to help us hold the line against Soviet expansion. Since the territory is not of decisive strategic importance to us, our main task is to extricate ourselves without too great a loss of prestige.<sup>13</sup>

In the autumn of 1948, such an outcome did not seem implausible. With the communist threat looking increasingly overwhelming, few Americans had the desire to make a major commitment to South Korea. The Korean issue was virtually ignored by the Republican Party in the run-up to the November 1948 Presidential elections. In spite of the growing criticism of Truman's handling of the Cold War, Republican candidate Thomas Dewey refused to attack Truman on specific foreign policy

---

<sup>12</sup> Richard Johnston, 'North Korea Gets Full Puppet Rule', *The New York Times*, 11 September 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Report by the Policy Planning Staff, 6 November 1947, FRUS 1947, 1: p. 327.

issues and provided few clues as to how he would change U.S. strategy in the Far East.<sup>14</sup> With the future of U.S. foreign policy uncertain, Washington's most influential press columnists, Joseph and Stewart Alsop, argued that Korea had effectively been lost already.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Rebellion Test**

When a communist-inspired military mutiny broke out in two remote Korean towns in October 1948, it was treated as a crucial test of the ROK's political and military strength. The crisis began when around forty soldiers operating as a communist cell within a newly formed Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) regiment seized control of their regimental headquarters in the coastal town of Yosu. After having seized large quantities of weapons and ammunition, the soldiers called for a general uprising and executed around 500 loyalist police officers, government officials and rightist militia members. Several hundred rebels then captured a train and set off for the nearby city of Suncheon. Following a brief battle with the police garrison in Suncheon, the rebels captured the city and began massacring both loyalists and other civilians.

When news of the uprising in Yosu and Suncheon broke on 20 October, Rhee and American officers planned an operation to pacify the towns with 6,000 Korean police troops led by U.S. advisers. The two sides disagreed over whether the American press should be allowed to cover the operation. Fearing that negative coverage could damage the credibility of the ROK regime, Major General John Coulter of the Army's 24<sup>th</sup> headquarters tried to prevent reporters from gaining access to the Yosu peninsula. Syngman Rhee, however, believed that the operation was an opportunity to show to the world that the ROK could handle internal security threats and invited four Tokyo-based correspondents to witness the operation as his personal guests.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. Divine, 'The Cold War and the Election of 1948', *The Journal of American History*, 59.1 (1972), 90–110.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph and Stewart Alsop, 'U.S. Decision Virtually Gives Korea to Russia', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 1 September 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Mydans Life story notes, 24 October 1948, Life Picture Collection Archives.; Keyes Beech, *Tokyo And Points East*, [1st ed. ] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1954), pp. 139–41.; Brines to Beale, 3 January 1949, Tokyo Bureau, Foreign Bureau Records 1949, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

The Yosu rebellion was a watershed moment in press coverage of South Korea. For six months a major insurgency on the island of Cheju-do had received little attention from American journalists. Apart from a brief U.S. Army-chaperoned visit to the island's capital city in late April, correspondents had been blocked from investigating conditions themselves, even as rumours swirled that South Koreans forces were engaged in a brutal pacification campaign against the civilian population of the island.<sup>17</sup> Rhee's offer to embed South Korean units thus offered the first opportunity for American journalists to judge the ROK's pacification strategies for themselves.

While the operation was ultimately successful, the embedded correspondents were shocked by the brutality they witnessed. AP's Tokyo correspondent Tom Lambert matter-of-factly reported that "loyal forces have recaptured the city and begun executing communists and communist-sympathisers. Twenty-two were shot a few hours ago and their bodies are lying at the edge of the plaza."<sup>18</sup> Carl Mydans, the only magazine journalist in the group, wrote a more detailed account of the brutality of the ROKA forces:

The national army, aided by a few police who had fled to the hills and come back, repaid brutality with brutality. We watched from the sidelines of a huge playground with the women and children of Sunchon while all of their men and boys were screened for loyalty. Four young men stripped to their shorts were on their knees begging. One had his hands up in a symbol of prayer. Suddenly these suppliant hands were crushed into his mouth and nose as a rifle butt smashed his teeth. Behind them stood men with clubs . . . who beat the kneeling group until the beaters, grinning, had to pause for breath.<sup>19</sup>

In dispatches back to *Life*, Mydans added more disturbing details which were not used. He explained that the young men had been taken to a local primary school and "shot with almost the same

---

<sup>17</sup> Allen Raymond, 'Police Brutality Held Cause of Cheju Civil War', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 30 April 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Tom Lambert, 'Korean Roads Strewn With Revolt's Victims', *The Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1948.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Mydans, 'Revolt in Korea', *Life*, 15 November 1948.

rapidity and lack of trial as that used by the rebels.... This was Korean against Korean and brother against brother. The city was sick and its fear infected us with fear.”<sup>20</sup>

For all the horrors witnessed by correspondents on the frontline, most of the coverage of the Yosu uprising proved beneficial for the Rhee regime. All coverage emphasised the brutality of the communist rebels above that of government forces. The *Herald Tribune's* Allen Raymond explained that all four of the correspondents reporting from Suncheon had been “urged strongly to point out that if the American troops are taken from the area in the discernible future, the whole country is sure to be conquered by organized communists”.<sup>21</sup>

Correspondents who remained in Seoul during the operation also reported sympathetically to the ROK regime. The *Times's* Richard Johnston faithfully relayed ROK-issued press releases that emphasised the professionalism and discipline of government forces.<sup>22</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor's* Gordon Walker asked whether it was now time for the United States to rethink its reluctance to provide the ROK with sufficient military resources to defend itself. Walter Simmons of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* suggested that most of the blame for the revolt rested with a U.S. military adviser who had refused to screen the constabulary for communist sympathisers.<sup>23</sup>

In the United States, the Yosu-Suncheon rebellion was widely seen as confirmation of the danger both Russia and communism posed to South Korea and other Asian nations. The *Christian Science Monitor* suggested that the uprising was a Russia-orchestrated test of South Korean stability.<sup>24</sup> The *Herald Tribune* regarded Allen Raymond's dispatches as unimpeachable evidence that

---

<sup>20</sup> Carl Mydans Life story notes, 24 October 1948, Life Picture Collection Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Allen Raymond, '560 Slain By Korean Mutineers', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 26 October 1948.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Korea Insurgents Continue to Resist', *The New York Times*, 24 October 1948.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Walker, 'South Korean Revolt Hints Prospect of Setting Up Full South Korean Army', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 30 October 1948.; Walter Simmons, 'Korean Revolt Looks Like Long Guerrilla War', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 October 1948.

<sup>24</sup> 'Showdown in Korea', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 October 1948.

“Red imperialism in Asia often is ruthless and despicable and as thoroughly evil as evil ever has been anywhere”.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, not all journalists saw the uprising in such black and white terms. For *Chicago Daily News* correspondent Keyes Beech, the Yosu uprising was a deeply unsettling experience. In his memoir, Beech recalled being deeply disturbed by the casual cruelty of virtually all the Koreans he had encountered.<sup>26</sup> In Suncheon, he witnessed hundreds of citizens being interviewed by the police with every question punctuated with a blow to the head or the back with a rifle butt or the edge of a sword. He suggested that most Koreans probably felt similar to an old woman he had encountered on a road near Suncheon who kept with her the flags of both the DPRK and the ROK. One was always kept hidden, depending on which side was in control of the village. For most Koreans, the distinction between communism and the Rhee regime was irrelevant- they had to side with whoever had the most guns.

### **Selling the ROK**

Rhee possessed many of the same strengths and weaknesses of the Hodge regime’s relationship with the press. Amongst the most significant advantages, Rhee inherited from General Hodge a press corps that was largely servile to authority and supportive of South Korea as a bastion of anti-communism. As had been the case under the occupation, Seoul-based journalists faithfully reported Korean affairs through official press briefings and handouts.<sup>27</sup> Rhee also continued to court the *Times*’ Richard Johnston as both a friend and a political ally- even occasionally turning to him for political advice in his dealings with American diplomats.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> ‘Peaceful Heaven’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 27 October 1948.

<sup>26</sup> Beech, pp. 139–41.

<sup>27</sup> AP’s Tokyo bureau chief Russell Brines wrote to AP in September 1948 to complain that “we are enmeshed in a heavy volume of routine, as a relay and news distribution point and through our necessary devotion to handout news”: Brines to Mickelson, 3 September 1948, Tokyo Bureau, Foreign Bureau Records 1948, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; King, p. 526.

<sup>28</sup> Jacobs to Marshall, 18 August 1948, *FRUS* 1948, 7: p. 1282.

Yet, like his American predecessors, Rhee could not easily overcome the sheer lack of interest in Korean news from editors in the United States. Although AP planned to provide more direct coverage of Korean activities produced by Koreans themselves, AP's Tokyo bureau chief recognised that in reality "week after week, carefully worked up stories return as two paragraph clips".<sup>29</sup> When Rhee's U.S. press adviser Robert T. Oliver asked Richard Johnston why he did not report more on the economic and social conditions in Korea, Johnston told him that if he wrote such stories his "editor would not print them, and if he did, no one would read them".<sup>30</sup> Oliver believed that only the most sensationally-minded critics of the Rhee government were an exception to this rule. In his memoir, he described an incident in which he was talking with Keyes Beech, Richard Johnston and a press agency stringer on a street in Seoul, when two policemen chased a young boy and emptied a bucket of water onto his head in a bid to quieten him following his arrest. Oliver alleged that without checking any of the details of the story Beech immediately rushed to the nearby press room to write a report that emphasised the brutality of the two policemen inflicting the "water treatment" on a small Korean boy.

Unlike Hodge, Rhee did not have the power to keep critical journalists out of Korea or to wield substantial influence over newspaper editors back in the United States. After the Yosu uprising, Rhee asked Oliver to hire an American public relations firm to create favourable press coverage for distribution by the major press agencies.<sup>31</sup> Oliver found, however, that such services were far beyond the budget of Oliver's new lobbying organisation, the Korean Pacific Press. Rhee instead approached other Washington friends for assistance, ultimately recruiting former newspaperman Jay Jerome Williams as a publicity adviser to the new Korean Embassy in Washington. Rhee quickly realised, however, that rumours about a Korean propaganda agency in the

---

<sup>29</sup> Brines to Gould, 18 August 1948, Seoul Bureau, Foreign Bureau Records 1948, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; Brines to Mickelson, 3 September 1948, Tokyo Bureau, Foreign Bureau Records 1948, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>30</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 481.

<sup>31</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 208.

United States would upset many Americans, including representatives of the Economic Co-operation Authority (ECA), the successor to the U.S. Army's economic rehabilitation programme in Korea.<sup>32</sup> The ECA was in the midst of negotiation with Rhee over the level of aid funding for Korea and feared that the perception that Koreans were using it to fund public relations activity in the United States could cause controversy. In January 1949, Rhee warned Oliver that he needed to keep the public relations programme "careful and slow".<sup>33</sup>

The programme that did eventually emerge was not influential. Oliver and Williams struggled to get published anywhere except the religious and special interest journals which they had traditionally worked with. Their most significant achievement was the publication of a run of pamphlets called 'Facts in Korea' which explained the basic history of Korea from a pro-Rhee standpoint. They might have achieved more if not for the personal conflict that erupted between his U.S. -based supporters over who was in charge of South Korea's presence in the United States. Oliver struggled to work with both Williams and the new Korean Ambassador to the United States, Chang Myon.

The impotence of the Rhee lobby's publicity efforts ensured that the U.S. government continued to exercise major responsibility over public perceptions of South Korea. Although Truman was wary of Rhee's status as a political reactionary, both he, and members of his administration, publicly claimed that the country had a great deal of democratic potential. While justifying negotiations over the future of the U.S. economic programme in South Korea in late 1948, ECA director Paul G. Hoffman called South Korea a potential "bastion of democracy".<sup>34</sup> President Truman adopted a similar theme in a message to Congress in June 1949 following a request for \$150 million in aid appropriations for South Korea. He argued that through its successful practice of democracy,

---

<sup>32</sup> Rhee to Goodfellow, 2 February 1949, Box 1, Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institute.

<sup>33</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, pp. 215–17.

<sup>34</sup> Chicago Tribune Service, 'Hoffman Seeks Aid For Korea', *The Spokesman Review*, 21 December 1948.

South Korea would “stand as a beacon to the people of northern Asia in resisting the control of the communist forces which have over-run them”.<sup>35</sup>

The administration’s efforts were undermined, however, by the increasing politicisation of U.S. Far East policy. In the wake of Dewey’s shock defeat in the 1948 election, the Republican Party had become more obstructionist and partisan. Republican Congressmen publicly blamed Truman for the disastrous series of defeats suffered by Chiang kai-Shek’s forces in the Chinese Civil War.<sup>36</sup> Many Republicans were increasingly worried that the administration would recognise the new communist regime and threatened to block a planned \$150 million aid bill for Korea if the administration refused to take a strong position against the communists in China.<sup>37</sup> When the House Foreign Affairs Committee met to discuss the bill in June, Congressman Lawrence H. Smith questioned how Korea would be any more resistant to communism’s advance than China. Walter Judd, a significant figure in the China lobby, warned that Korea would just be the “first of the ratholes” the United States would have to start pouring money into around China if didn’t plug up the “basic rathole in China itself”.<sup>38</sup>

The debate over the Korean aid bill dragged on throughout the summer and autumn of 1949. While many of the nation’s biggest newspapers, including the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Sun* and the *Washington Star* editorialised in favour of aid for Korea, they recognised that there were basic flaws with the U.S.’s Far East policy. Worries over South Korea’s stability also grew in the wake of the assassination of Rhee’s former nationalist Kim Koo and reports of heavy fighting along the border with the DPRK.

---

<sup>35</sup> Harry Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Regarding Continuation of Economic Assistance to Korea”, 7 June 1949, Public Papers: Truman, 1949, p. 276-78.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald J. Caridi, *The Korean War and American Politics: The Republican Party as a Case Study* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1968), p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> William S. White, ‘Vote Aid or Korea Will Fall In 3 Months, Acheson Says’, *The New York Times*, 2 July 1949.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Aid to Korea’, in *CQ Almanac 1949* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1950).



When Mao Tse-Tung's forces captured Beijing at the end of September, the U.S.'s entire programme in the Far East looked highly fragile.

### **Critical press voices**

While the debate over aid for Korea galvanised the Republican Party, the sharpest critiques of the Rhee regime came from liberals and leftists. Arguably the most influential of the Korea sceptics was Owen Lattimore, a leading expert on Asian affairs and adviser to the State Department. Lattimore had become an ardent critic of Chiang kai-Shek while working as his adviser during the Second World War. In an article in the left-wing newspaper *The Daily Compass* in July 1949, Lattimore argued that there were worrying similarities between the U.S. missions to Korea and China and, in a startlingly forthright conclusion that would later be used by Senator Joseph McCarthy as evidence that Lattimore was a communist agent, called for the United States to let Syngman Rhee's unpopular government collapse.<sup>39</sup>

Lattimore's views reflected a widespread belief amongst leftists that the United States was supporting reactionary governments as part of a global strategy to push back against Soviet expansionism. Rhee was an obvious target for this kind of conspiracy since he had spent much of his first year as president calling for the United States to bolster his meagre military capacity rather than focus on reforming the economy. While Rhee claimed these weapons would be used to defend the ROK from attack by the DPRK, many American observers suspected that Rhee might be trying to build his own invasion force. Rhee's leftist critics could thus paint him as both a power-hungry tyrant and puppet of American imperialistic scheming.

However, by the late 1940s, the American leftist press was teetering on the edge of oblivion. In 1947, the American public mood had turned increasingly paranoid over the threat of internal subversion by American communists. Newspaper owners and advertisers were increasingly wary of

---

<sup>39</sup> Owen Lattimore, 'South Korea- Another China', *The Daily Compass*, 17 July 1949.

the risk of reputational damage they faced from associating with anyone with suspected communist sympathies. In 1948, *Chicago Sun* publisher Marshall Field had shut down PM, one of the last remaining leftist papers. Although it was ultimately revived as the *Daily Compass*, it had nothing like the resources of its commercial rivals and coverage of foreign affairs issues, particularly on niche topics such as Korea, became highly irregular.<sup>40</sup> In Tokyo, SCAP refused entry for left-wing foreign correspondents such as *Nation* correspondent Andrew Roth.<sup>41</sup> In 1950, Hugh Deane, one of the last remaining leftist American reporters based in Japan, returned back to the United States to face a decade of blacklisting and destitution.

In spite of the Left's declining fortunes, many of the criticisms of the Rhee regime made by leftists were shared by Americans based in South Korea. While visiting Seoul in late 1949, Keyes Beech wrote a damning critique of Rhee's belligerent nationalism;

As for Syngman Rhee, who at 75 is by general consensus the only man who can hold the republic together, he publicly proclaims the threat of invasion from the north, while privately talking of invading himself. As some observers see it, Rhee may actually move north if he fails to get more United States military aid, because he will have nothing to lose in that case. Warnings of communist moves against the republic apparently seem the best method he can think of to induce American aid.<sup>42</sup>

Just as troubling was South Korea's shift towards a police state:

Meanwhile, the aged president, forced further and further to the right, keeps putting more and more people in jail. Latest reliable count showed 36,000 persons incarcerated, a third of whom are political prisoners. 16,000 more than South Korean jails were built to house. A

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Daily Compass* relied on the financial support of progressive philanthropist Anita McCormick Blaine, a relative of Colonel Robert McCormick, the owner of *The Chicago Daily Tribune*. At the end of 1949, Blaine also helped establish another weekly newspaper *The National Guardian* with strong links to Henry Wallace's Progressive Party.

<sup>41</sup> Message to CINCFE, 22 January 1950, Box 65, RG9, Douglas MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Keyes Beech, 'Korean Capital Friendlier to Americans Now', *The Daily Boston Globe*, 26 September 1949.

couple of dozen newspapermen, allegedly members of the South Korean Labor Party, a communist-front organization, are among the prisoners. At present writing, it seems, anybody who disagrees with Rhee is a communist.

Beech's friend and colleague Allen Raymond argued that South Korea had become a "tight little dictatorship run as a police state" as a result of the low level civil war with the north.<sup>43</sup> He explained how Rhee had used the Yosu rebellion as an excuse to jail tens of thousands of alleged conspirators and issue a series of laws heavily curbing civil liberties. As a result of the National Security Law, Rhee was able to arrest anyone for association with the communist party, including ten members of the National Assembly. In Raymond's judgement, in the fight for Korea's future, Russia had every advantage; "Once the American props are withdrawn, South Korea will fall beneath the weight of communist Asia. And this correspondent has yet to meet an American in Korea who is willing to fight for it".

Of all the Seoul-dated critics of the Rhee government, the most surprising and influential was the *Times'* Richard Johnston, whose reports underwent a subtle shift over the course of 1949. After nine months of dispatches focusing on the communist threat to the stability of South Korea, Johnston increasingly hinted that the future of liberal democracy in South Korea was under threat from its own social and military institutions. In an article in May he reported that liberal Koreans were alarmed by the rise of a social movement which, seemed to be on course to becoming a state religion, with "all the trappings of ultranationalistic jingoism".<sup>44</sup> Johnston caused consternation in Washington when he reported that U.S. military advisers in South Korea believed that due to the expanding influence of the ROK's army in the wake of the withdrawal of U.S. military forces, "there is a grave danger that Korea might become a military state with accompanying loss of the freedoms, limited as they are".<sup>45</sup> The reasons for Johnston's change of heart are not clear. Robert T. Oliver's

---

<sup>43</sup> Allen Raymond, 'Asia's Red Riddle', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 30 October 1949. The story was reprinted in several other newspapers including the *Daily Boston Globe* and the *Washington Post*.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Trend to Jingoism Indicated in Korea', *The New York Times*, 27 May 1949.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Johnston, 'Korean Army Seen as Assuming Control', *The New York Times*, 3 July 1949.

wife claimed that his attitude changed after he brought his family to live with him in South Korea. She believed that he had found it necessary to stop being co-operative in order to make life more comfortable for them, perhaps because his pro-Rhee views made them a subject of ridicule in the American community in Seoul.<sup>46</sup>

Johnston returned to New York in December to deliver a deeply pessimistic briefing to the newspaper's editorial staff. According to Robert T. Oliver, Johnston told his colleagues that the general political situation was extremely unstable and disorganised, that the economic situation was weak, and that the United States would be wholly unable to keep Russia from occupying Korea.<sup>47</sup> His final assessment was that the United States should not make any effort to keep Korea out of communist hands. Although many *Times* staff remained supportive of South Korea, including military editor Hanson Baldwin and editorial writer Robert Aura Smith, the paper decided to withdraw Johnston from Korea.

Johnston was briefly replaced by the paper's veteran China correspondent Walter Sullivan, who had been evacuated to Seoul after the fall of Beijing to the communists in late September. In stark contrast to Johnston's humble roots, Sullivan was a product of two of America's most elite educational institutions, Groton and Yale.<sup>48</sup> At Yale, Sullivan had worked on the *Yale Literary Magazine* alongside future national security adviser McGeorge Bundy and CIA Counterintelligence Chief James Jesus Angleton.<sup>49</sup> Sullivan's intellectual and liberal sensibilities and intimate awareness of the failings of the nationalist regime helped him produce some of the most penetrating stories ever written about the Rhee government. He observed that the practice of torture was not only widespread amongst both the Korean police and military authorities but also threatened to push the

---

<sup>46</sup> Mrs Oliver to Rhee, 12 November 1950, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

<sup>47</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 264.

<sup>48</sup> John Noble Wilford, 'Walter Sullivan, 78, Dies; Showed Science at Its Most Daring', *The New York Times*, 20 March 1996.

<sup>49</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), p. 238.

general population towards communism.<sup>50</sup> Most disturbingly, he found evidence that government authorities endorsed the routine use of torture and violence by the security services. He cited reports of a Korean assemblyman who had tried to publicise the shooting of the son of a farmer during an armed rice collection by the police. Korean reporters were told by the Government Information Office to not publish any account of the case or to challenge the official story.

In February 1950, Sullivan made a detailed survey of the impact of the government's conflict with communist guerrillas in isolated rural areas. In the most dramatic of these reports, Sullivan described how "large sections of South Korea are darkened today by a cloud of terror that is probably unparalleled in the world".<sup>51</sup> He blamed both the guerrillas and the government for the violence, noting that, "If a peasant cooperates with one side or the other he faces the threat of violent death at the hands of the opposition. If he does not cooperate he is regarded with suspicion and is endangered."

In the spring of 1950 Sullivan also came close to becoming the first mainstream American journalist to be allowed to report from inside North Korea.<sup>52</sup> According to Bruce Cumings, Sullivan received an invitation to visit the DPRK from the North Korean Interior Ministry after sending a request through a courier in South Korea.<sup>53</sup> Sullivan told the communists that he wanted to carry out an extended reporting trip of several months similar in ambition to Edgar Snow's famous visit to the Chinese communist headquarters in Bao'an in 1936.<sup>54</sup> In early April he left South Korea for Hong

---

<sup>50</sup> Walter Sullivan, 'Police Brutality in Korea Assailed', *The New York Times*, 1 February 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Sullivan, 'South Koreans In Grip of Terror; Even Police Fear Guerrilla Raids', *The New York Times*, 1 March 1950.

<sup>52</sup> Radical left-wing reporter Anna Louise Strong became the first American reporter to visit North Korea in 1947, although her account of the trip was highly propagandistic and not widely read: Anna Louise Strong, *In North Korea: First Eye-Witness Report* (New York: Soviet Russia Today, 1949).

<sup>53</sup> Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, pp. 442-43.

<sup>54</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Random House, 1937). Snow's account of his four months in Bao'an was the first major work on the Chinese communist movement and played a major role in bringing Mao's cause to the attention of the wider world. Snow continued to work as a journalist in subsequent decades in spite of professional difficulties caused by his links to communism. Although he never showed much interest in Korea, after the onset of the Korean War he wrote to the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post* to advise them against publishing articles by Harold Noble, a political adviser to U.S. Ambassador John Muccio, since together they were significantly responsible for "the shambles known as the Rhee government".

Kong, where he was told he could catch a Soviet freighter to the DPRK. The trip came to nothing when his North Korean contacts disappeared without providing him with any further instructions until the DPRK launched its invasion of the ROK at the end of June.

### **Ambivalence**

Throughout the first year and a half of the ROK's existence, the Korean National Assembly had vied with Syngman Rhee for supremacy over the country's political system. As Rhee grew impatient with the Assembly's blocking of his legislative agenda, he increasingly relied on intimidation and repression to force the Assembly into line. Rhee regularly turned to the National Security Law, passed in late 1948, to repress intransigent members of the Assembly. Thirteen assemblymen were arrested in June 1949, ostensibly for their links with a banned pro-communist party. As the economic situation deteriorated in late 1949, members of the Assembly became increasingly vocal in their criticism of the Rhee government.

The breakdown in relations between the National Assembly and Rhee came into full view in the spring of 1950. In early January, U.S. 'Ambassador-at-large' Philip Jessup visited South Korea as part of a 3-month fact-finding trip to the Far East on behalf of Dean Acheson. In a speech to the Korean Chamber of Commerce, Jessup urged the Koreans not to sit back and hope that the United States would cope with the situation alone. Instead he argued that South Korea's defence against communism depended on the strength of the economy and of a "fundamental policy of political freedom".<sup>55</sup> Just a few days later, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to reject the administration's Korean aid bill. As the first major foreign policy initiative of the Truman administration to be blocked by Congress, the news was received with shock in both the United States and South Korea. Although Congress had expressed little interest in South Korea's democratic problems, opposition members of the Korean National Assembly drew a direct link between Jessup's

---

Snow to Martin Summers, 23 July 1950, Correspondence 1950, Edgar Snow Papers, Missouri State Historical Society.

<sup>55</sup> Muccio to Acheson, 28 January 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: p. 18.

speech and the Congressional vote and launched a scathing attack of their own government for its lack of democratic legitimacy and failure to keep a “clean house”.<sup>56</sup>

Tensions escalated once again in March when the thirteen assemblymen arrested the previous June were found guilty of treason and given long jail sentences. At the same time, the Assembly attempted to pass a constitutional amendment which would have heavily restricted the powers of the president. Aware of his waning influence over the Assembly, Rhee called for the introduction of a bicameral parliament and indicated that legislative elections due to be held in May should be postponed.<sup>57</sup>

The growing tensions between the ROK government and the National Assembly alarmed American diplomats. Any breakdown in the country’s political system threatened any chance of putting the country’s runaway inflation under control, which in turn made Congress less likely to fund further appropriations for aid to the ROK.<sup>58</sup> American officials rebuked Rhee for his attempts to undermine the National Assembly and in early April, Dean Acheson threatened the ROK government with an ultimatum- if it did not help resolve the inflation problem and cancel the postponement of the general elections, the U.S. government would abandon its effort to pass a new Korean aid bill.<sup>59</sup>

Acheson’s intervention in the Korean crisis coincided with several other significant and controversial statements on the U.S.’s Korea policy. Upon his return to the United States at the end of March, Philip Jessup briefed the press, albeit without direct attribution, that the government of South Korea was dictatorial and incompetent.<sup>60</sup> Most dramatically, in response to being called in front of the Tydings subcommittee investigating Senator McCarthy’s accusations of communist

---

<sup>56</sup> Walter Sullivan, ‘South Korea Regime Is Told In Assembly To Clean House If It Expects U.S. Aid’, *The New York Times*, 12 January 1950.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Sullivan, ‘Two-House System Is Urged By Rhee’, *The New York Times*, 15 March 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Acheson to Muccio, 14 February 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: pp. 28-29.

<sup>59</sup> While Acheson’s first draft of his aide-memoire made reference only to the inflation issue, Ambassador Muccio requested that Rhee’s threat to suspend elections also be included: Muccio to Acheson, 31 March 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: pp. 39-40.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Foreign Relations: Traveller’s Tale’, *Time*, 3 April 1950.

infiltration of the highest levels of government, State Department adviser Owen Lattimore published a memorandum which he had sent to the U.S. government the previous summer which declared that South Korea was “more of a liability than asset to United States interest and policy”.<sup>61</sup> At the beginning of May, Senator John Connally, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told *U.S. News And World Report* that the United States was likely going to have to abandon South Korea following a communist invasion.<sup>62</sup>

This wave of criticism from the political establishment kept South Korea’s democratic failings in the limelight. In the first months of 1950, Sullivan had been almost alone in discussing the poor state of South Korean democracy, now U.S.-based editors and correspondents piled in with commentary.<sup>63</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor* suggested that Korean authorities had been decisively told that “the existence and growth of democratic institutions are a prerequisite for continuing American aid”.<sup>64</sup> The *Baltimore Sun* observed that the South Korean government “has been operating a terrific deficit, internal disorders are rife, Communists are constantly stirring up various turmoils and the police, still operating in some respects much as they did under the Japanese, are being called terrorists”. In a brutally pragmatic examination of the case for remaining in Korea, it concluded that the United States had been locked into supporting the Korean government by its “rash promise” to re-establish a free and independent Korea. Although the country had strategic value, it suggested that the U.S. foreign policy establishment might be on the verge of deciding that South Korea was no longer worth supporting.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> ‘Lattimore Bares His Memorandum On Far East Policy’, *The New York Times*, 3 April 1950.

<sup>62</sup> ‘World Policy and Bipartisanship’, *U.S. News And World Report*, 5 May 1950. While State Department officials privately complained about Connally’s “attitude of defeatism”, Dean Acheson declined to offer any public statement of support to the ROK in a press conference the next day: Rusk to Webb, 2 May 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: p. 64-65.

<sup>63</sup> In a story about Philip Jessup’s visit to South Korea in January, Sullivan had noted that fifteen members of the opposition could not attend the session due to either being in jail or on bail under the National Security law. Sullivan acknowledged that no one was sure if it was possible for the government to survive without such brutal measures: Walter Sullivan, ‘Jessup Addresses Korean Assembly’, *The New York Times*, 12 January 1950.

<sup>64</sup> Richard L. Strout, ‘Korea Feels Stiffer Hand At U.S. Reins’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 April 1950.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Take Korea, For Instance’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 April 1950.



A particularly lively debate over the repressiveness of the Korean government appeared in the editorial and letters pages of the *Washington Post*, which had long served as a forum for public debate on foreign policy issues, in part because the *Post* carried little in the way of its own foreign affairs reporting. In the wake of the sentencing of the thirteen assemblymen, the Korean Affairs Institute's Yong-jeung Kim wrote to the *Post* denouncing the Rhee regime for orchestrating something akin to a communist show-trial. In the harshest criticism he ever expressed of the ROK regime, he claimed that in the name of anticommunism Rhee had deprived the press of its freedom and allowed his police to "arrest, imprison, torture and kill anyone at will." He warned that if the United States continued to support "bloodthirsty opportunists" like Syngman Rhee the United States would contribute to the communization of Korea and the whole Far East.<sup>66</sup> Following the Acheson intervention, Korean Commission official Henry Chung fired back at Kim with a point-by-point critique of Kim's claims. Kim responded by quoting extracts of reports by Walter Sullivan and the United Nations Commission on Korea illustrating the repressiveness of the Rhee government.<sup>67</sup>

The *Post's* editorial writers, perhaps influenced by the activist liberal stewardship of publisher Phil Graham, issued their own harshly worded critique of the Rhee regime at the end of May.<sup>68</sup> Although Rhee had given in to American demands to cancel the postponement of the May elections, the *Post* argued the elections would be illusory anyway after the regime's violent persecution of the opposition. Reports of multiple Rhee candidates standing for a single seat and the inadequacy of United Nations observer teams were further reasons to doubt the credibility of the election result. With the United States' moral commitment to Korea fast running out, the *Post* warned that only a clear improvement in the effectiveness of the government could justify continued U.S. aid.<sup>69</sup> The strident nature of the editorial caused one former occupation official to

---

<sup>66</sup> Yong-jeung Kim, Letter 'Korea As a Police State', *The Washington Post*, 17 March 1950.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Chung, Letter 'No Police State In Korea', *The Washington Post*, 15 April 1950; Yong-jeung Kim, Letter 'Repression In Korea', *The Washington Post*, 23 April 1950.

<sup>68</sup> David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 160.; Carol Felsenthal, *Power, Privilege and The Post: The Katharine Graham Story* (New York: Putnam's, 1992), p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> 'Korean Prospect', *The Washington Post*, 25 May 1950.

write in and complain of the “general tone” of the paper’s editorials on Korea.<sup>70</sup> The letter argued that Rhee was clearly the people’s choice and that he had been exceedingly patient and tolerant with communist “traitors”.

### **Optimism returns**

While Rhee succumbed to international pressure to hold the elections on schedule, he still found new ways of provoking American ire. When diplomats got wind of a Korean plan to reassign all police chiefs just before the elections, political adviser Harold Noble called for Rhee to delay the change until after the election because of its potential impact on foreign public opinion.<sup>71</sup> In the run-up to the elections, police arrested hundreds of candidates alleged to be communist sympathisers.

A few visiting newspaper correspondents were anguished by these developments, but most reporting focused on the scrupulousness with which the Koreans had followed political procedure. The *Herald Tribune’s* new Tokyo correspondent Marguerite Higgins wrote that in light of the semi-war with the north, the “the orderliness and freedom of this election day were- with few exceptions- a tribute to the stability of the government” as well as the ROKA’s campaign against communist guerrillas. After touring a dozen voting places in Seoul, Higgins said she saw no evidence of fraud and heard no complaints from UN observers.<sup>72</sup> In a similarly upbeat assessment on the eve of the election, AP praised the quietness of the campaign and declared that there had only been a few instances of strong-arm tactics.<sup>73</sup> It quoted, apparently without irony, an unnamed American observer who claimed that “South Korea has taken to democracy because it was presented on a silver platter along with liberation from the Japanese”. Now, he claimed, “she is doing her best to earn it and to help hold back the tide of communism”.

---

<sup>70</sup> J. Earnest Fisher, Letter ‘Korean Prospects’, *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1950.

<sup>71</sup> Drumright to Acheson, 2 May 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: p. 62-63.

<sup>72</sup> Marguerite Higgins, ‘South Koreans Vote; Red Raid Is Sole Incident’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 30 May 1950.

<sup>73</sup> AP, ‘Quiet Election Expected in Korea’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May 1950.

When the results were announced, they did not clearly fit any narrative.<sup>74</sup> Less than thirty assembly members kept their seats while a majority of the newly elected candidates did not belong to any party or claim any political affiliation. The *Times* suggested that the result was a significant defeat for Rhee and a sign that South Korea was not even close to being a dictatorship.<sup>75</sup> Yet, in another editorial two days later, the *Times* admitted that Rhee had conducted “an intensive police campaign against anti-Government candidates”.<sup>76</sup> It referenced a report by correspondent Burton Crane which suggested that the Korean public had voted for candidates who had been victims of Korean police persecution as a protest against the authoritarian nature of the ruling regime.<sup>77</sup>

One correspondent took strong exception to criticisms of the authoritarian nature of the Rhee government. Despite having previously criticised Rhee for his apparent desire to be a dictator, Walter Simmons, the hyper-patriotic correspondent for the conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune*, accused other Tokyo-based reporters in South Korea of making the charge of dictatorship without spending adequate time in the country.<sup>78</sup> Simmons praised Rhee as a hard-working and dynamic executive with no patience for those responsible for the poor administration of his country. He quoted an American observer who suggested that the charges of dictatorship made on the floor of the National Assembly by political opponents were in fact a sign of the rude health of South Korean democracy.

Even those correspondents who criticised the regime for its authoritarian tendencies praised the ROK’s progress in other areas. Burton Crane described the ROK’s planned land reforms as “one of the most revolutionary economic experiments of all time”.<sup>79</sup> In an article which mostly highlighted

---

<sup>74</sup> Both Chung and Kim claimed that the election supported their position in letters to *The Washington Post*: Henry Chung, Letter ‘Democratic Struggle Of South Korea Cited’, *The Washington Post*, 26 June 1950; Yongjeung Kim, Letter ‘Dissatisfaction in Korea’s Election’, *The Washington Post*, 18 June 1950.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Election in Korea’, *The New York Times*, 2 June 1950.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Setback For Rhee’, *The New York Times*, 4 June 1950.

<sup>77</sup> Burton Crane, ‘Independents Win Korean Elections’, *The New York Times*, 1 June 1950.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Simmons, ‘Flames Of Zeal Burn In Korea’s President at 75’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 June 1950.

<sup>79</sup> Burton Crane, ‘Korea Transfers Farms, Industries’, *The New York Times*, 2 June 1950.

the ROK's economic and military progress in recent months, *Time's* Frank Gibney argued that there were positive signs in the country's turbulent political environment:

Shrewd, immovable Syngman Rhee has played an important role in taking a new nation through its difficult infancy. Rhee, however, is justly accused of dictatorial tendencies, and has repeatedly violated the constitution to suit his own convenience. The press does not dare to criticize him, but the rambunctious National Assembly delights in doing so. One of the major campaign issue in this week's election was a proposal for constitutional revision which would strip the President of much of his power.<sup>80</sup>

Like many American correspondents before him, Gibney rationalised the ROK's political failings by suggesting that "democracy comes slowly to a tradition bound largely rural people with a background of centuries of absolute rule". But he also made an unusual and intriguing comparison between the situation in the ROK and that in North Korea:

South Korea's occasional similarities to a police state fade in comparison to the situation north of the 38th parallel. North Korea is, for all practical purposes, a Russian colony. Even the Chinese Communists have no representation in North Korea, and Mao Tse-tung's visage is conspicuous by its absence. Said a refugee North Korean major recently: 'Russia, not Korea, is held up as the motherland. We don't even study Korean history in the schools there'.

South of the 38th parallel Koreans are flexing their muscles in a new nationalism. During 40 years of Japanese rule, the life of a conquered people had led the Koreans into venality, stealth and the habits of petty crockery. Said a Korean expatriate: 'I was amazed when I returned to my country in 1945. Living under the Japanese had made my people servile and

---

<sup>80</sup> Frank Gibney, 'Korea: Progress Report', *Time*, 5 June 1950.

corrupt. I wanted to leave again.’ But almost two years of independence have made South Koreans a proud people again.

As historian Charles Kraus has argued, the belief that North Korea was nothing more than a Russian satellite was widespread amongst Americans in the late 1940s.<sup>81</sup> But the flip side of this was the growing belief amongst American observers that, whatever its faults, South Korea was a genuine and legitimate manifestation of long repressed Korean nationalism.

## **Conclusion**

American coverage of South Korea between 1948 and 1950 was the most critical of any period covered in this thesis. For the liberal press, the first two years of the existence of the ROK were a remarkable change from the occupation era. Although Rhee inherited Hodge’s close relationships with the Seoul press corps, visiting correspondents were given the freedom to write about the ROK regime in very critical ways. Liberal correspondents such as Keyes Beech, Allen Raymond and Walter Sullivan took full advantage of this opportunity to highlight Rhee’s police state repression, anti-democratic methods and ineffectual rule.

Liberal criticism of the Rhee government coincided with a broader political controversy over American support for anti-communist regimes in East Asia in the wake of Chiang Kai-Shek’s defeat in the Chinese Civil War. To an extent, these controversies reinforced one another. The political debate over aid to South Korea created opportunities for correspondents such as Walter Sullivan to significantly impact opinion back in the United States.

However, authoritarianism never became the central issue in the controversy over the Rhee regime. The threat of communism was perceived to be too great and the Korean people perceived to be too politically backward for liberal democracy to function effectively in South Korea. Moreover, there were reasons for optimism. The outcome of the May 1950 elections appeared to confirm that

---

<sup>81</sup> Kraus, p. 150.

the regime was at least respecting the basic procedure of the election process. The Rhee government could also claim progress in fighting inflation, planning land reform, developing the ROKA and even the first stirrings of a sense of nationhood.

## Chapter 4: War 1950-1951

When the DPRK launched its invasion of the ROK in June 1950, it was one of the biggest international news stories since the Second World War. As an egregious violation of international law and the post-war spirit of global co-operation, the attack was condemned by virtually every nation outside of the communist bloc. When President Truman ordered American soldiers into combat in Korea he did so under the auspices of a United Nations 'police action'. Over the following months, the frontline shifted up and down the Korean peninsula, laying waste to much of the country and radically altering both global geopolitics and the nature of the U.S.-ROK relationship.

Despite the tremendous amount of scholarship on the Korean War, no study has ever explored American public perceptions of the ROK in this period in any depth. It has usually been argued that the press and the public rapidly fell into line behind the Truman administration on the necessity of the war to deter and punish communist militarism.<sup>1</sup> Within this context, few Americans ever demonstrated much interest in Korea itself; a situation perfectly captured by *Time* in July 1950 when a reporter asked the father of one of the first American casualties of the war what his son had died fighting for, he replied "against some kind of government".<sup>2</sup>

Yet, this is far from the whole story. As Marilyn Young has argued, significant numbers of Americans were both interested in and deeply alarmed by the war.<sup>3</sup> This chapter shows that doubts about the Rhee regime were raised in the press in both explicit and implicit ways. During the first weeks of the conflict, a variety of newspaper, columnists and reporters questioned whether the regime was too corrupt and unpopular to survive the invasion. Through the first six months of the conflict, reports from war correspondents in the field described South Korean security forces committing brutal mass executions of their own people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Brewer, *Why America Fights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> 'The 8 O'Clock Broadcast', *Time*, 17 July 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Young, 'Hard Sell: The Korean War', in *Selling War In A Media Age*, ed. by Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), pp. 113–39.

Although this coverage was substantial, it never became significant enough to derail public support for the war. Crucially, the press immediately interpreted the invasion as a Cold War crisis- a narrative that was bolstered, but not created, by the Truman administration's public messaging strategy. Once the ROK had proved it had the durability to survive the opening stages of the war, the press immediately moved its focus to the larger military and strategic aspects of the war. For war correspondents covering Korea, atrocities committed by the regime were regarded as an inevitable consequence of fighting, especially in Asia. Moreover, by 1951, journalists both in South Korea and the United States found themselves increasingly under the sway of Syngman Rhee's public relations officials.

### **Finding a narrative**

When news broke of the DPRK's invasion of the ROK on 25 June 1950, the American press reacted with both puzzlement and anxiety. After years of escalating tensions with the Soviet Union, many Americans had anticipated that the Soviets would make an aggressive move against the free world. However, such an attack had been expected in Europe rather than Asia. It was unclear why the Soviets, acting through their North Korean client regime, had initiated a major conflict over Korea. However, the mainstream press was certain of one thing during the first days of the war- South Korea was an innocent victim of communist aggression. After the communist-run *Daily Worker* claimed that the North Korean invasion was a response to an attack from the ROK, the *Christian Science Monitor* accused it of parroting the standard line of aggressor nations seeking to charge their victims with responsibility for violence.<sup>4</sup> In early July, the *New York Times'* foreign editor refused to reprint a story from the previous month regarding the jailing of thirteen people by the ROK government for opposing an attack on the DPRK. When the *Manchester Guardian* printed a

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Right Attack Repelled In Korea', *The Daily Worker*, 27 June 1950; 'Finding The Aggressor', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 29 June 1950.



letter quoting the story, an editor told publisher Arthur Hayes Sulzberger that they had to be “more patriotic than news-minded” and not mention the story again.<sup>5</sup>

The call for patriotism reflected the broad consensus amongst American journalists that the assault on South Korea was a major crisis for U.S. foreign policy. With its obvious parallels to both the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, and Hitler’s strategy of annexing small European countries in the late 1930s, the communist invasion appeared to be a direct challenge to the post-war international system, designed by the United States and its allies to deter exactly this kind of military adventurism. As a creation of the United Nations, the ROK was symbolic of the international community’s efforts to resolve political problems through legal and diplomatic mechanisms rather than violent confrontation. In the first days of the war, the press repeatedly emphasised these facts and portrayed the Rhee regime as dedicated to both democracy and international co-operation. In its first article examining the South Korean political situation after the invasion, AP reminded readers that South Koreans had twice voted in UN-supervised elections and even offered to accept assemblymen from North Korea under the same conditions.<sup>6</sup> In the *New York Times*, Richard Johnston praised the country’s recent history of representative elections and “enthusiasm for self-government”.<sup>7</sup>

Just days after the start of the invasion of the ROK, President Truman ordered troops to Korea in what he vaguely defined as an UN-led international ‘police action’. Although Truman’s decision received almost unanimous endorsement from the mainstream American press, at least some of Rhee’s critics continued to ask awkward questions about the regime the United States had committed itself to save.<sup>8</sup> In *U.S. News and World Report*, Joe Fromm savaged Rhee for his dictatorial tendencies: “He lived in a sumptuous palace, ringed with armed guards. A rigid rightist, he

---

<sup>5</sup> Sulzberger to James, 7 July 1950, Box 192, New York Times Company Records. Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>6</sup> AP, ‘South Korea Free Only Two Years’, *The Los Angeles Times*, 25 June 1950.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Johnston, ‘Misfortune Beset Regime in Seoul’, *The New York Times*, 27 June 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Only two major newspapers opposed the war, the isolationist *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Daily Worker*: AP, ‘Reds Back Combat With Propaganda’, *The Hartford Courant*, 26 July 1950.

fought not only Communist elements but also more moderate leaders. His secret police became a feared and reviled body. They had been trained by the Japanese and behaved in much the same old way.”<sup>9</sup> The *Chicago Daily News’s* Ernie Hill, one of a small circle of liberal critics of the Rhee regime based in the United States, argued that the UN was downplaying Rhee in its war aims because of his terrible public image in Asia.<sup>10</sup> According to Hill, “Asiatic and Arab countries are much better informed about President Rhee’s dictatorial record, his liquidation of opposition and his threat to launch a war himself than are most people in this country”.<sup>11</sup>

By far the strongest criticisms of the Rhee regime appeared in the American communist media, most notably the *Daily Worker*, which depicted the invasion of the ROK as a ‘war of liberation’ against a reactionary, unpopular and militarily aggressive government.<sup>12</sup> Although the *Worker’s* attempts to cast the ROK as the instigator of the war made little headway elsewhere, many liberals shared its belief that the South Korean people were on the verge of rising up against Rhee’s autocratic rule.<sup>13</sup> The total collapse of the ROK’s army in the first week of the war hinted that his regime did not have the loyalty of ordinary Koreans.<sup>14</sup> A small but influential group of journalists working for liberal magazines such as the *New Republic* and the *Nation* argued that few South Koreans were willing to fight for such a “corrupt” and “politically rotten” police state, particularly

---

<sup>9</sup> ‘Syngman Rhee, Symbol of Korea’s Plight, Faces Crisis In Homeland After His 50-Year Fight for Liberation’, *U.S. News And World Report*, 7 July 1950.

<sup>10</sup> Hill’s interlocutors included Stewart Meacham, the Labor Department adviser who had denounced the occupation government for conniving with Syngman Rhee in 1947, Roger Baldwin, the head of the ACLU and Ernest A. Gross, a U.S. diplomat who was at the time the acting head of the American delegation to the UN: Hill to Kim, 27 February 1951, Box 1, Yong-jeung Kim Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University.

<sup>11</sup> Ernie Hill, ‘Rhee played down in U.N. war aims’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 17 July 1950.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Liberation Forces At Gates Of Seoul As Rhee Support Fades’, *The Daily Worker*, 27 June 1950. The *Daily Worker* was the official newspaper of the American Communist Party.

<sup>13</sup> The possibility that the ROK had attacked first was taken more seriously in Europe, where American investigative journalist Izzy Stone was working as a foreign correspondent. Sceptical French newspaper reports inspired Stone to write a contrarian account of the Korean War which suggested that the war might have been planned by the ROK and the United States. Although the book had very little impact when it was published, these allegations were given new life by Bruce Cumings in the 1980s: Isidor Feinstein Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1952).

<sup>14</sup> Richard L. Strout, ‘Success of U.S. Line Pinned To Verve of South Koreans’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 June 1950.

when Rhee's policies were contrasted with the "hopeful" political programme put forward by the North Korea communists.<sup>15</sup>

Although no mainstream journalists joined the *Daily Worker* in praising the DPRK, there were scattered calls for the United States to depose Rhee and replace his regime with a U.S.-sponsored trusteeship or military government. *Hartford Courant* reporter and former AMG official Siegbert Kaufmann argued that the United States needed to go back to trusteeship so that new elections could be held in a neutral political environment.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to the *Washington Post*, long-Rhee critic Yong-jeung Kim argued that that his government had been discredited in the May elections and was now incapable of rallying public support.<sup>17</sup> In order to encourage the ROK population to stand up to the communists, he argued it was necessary for the United States to take over the civil administration of the ROK for the duration of the conflict.

Such attacks on the Rhee government dissipated through the course of July as it became increasingly clear that the ROK had survived the initial onslaught of the North Korean invasion. Editorials writers and columnists jumped on reports that the army's collapse had resulted from a lack of heavy weaponry with which to resist North Korean tanks as evidence that the United States had failed to adequately prepare the ROK to defend itself.<sup>18</sup> At a press briefing on 15 July, Secretary of State Dean Acheson indicated that there had been no popular uprising in South Korea and that the South Korean military had successfully regrouped and begun fighting effectively.<sup>19</sup>

The good news out of South Korea coincided with increasingly pro-ROK rhetoric from the U.S. political establishment. On 19 July, President Truman gave his first strong affirmation of support

---

<sup>15</sup> 'The Shape of Things', *The Nation*, 22 July 1950. For an overview of how political opinion journals wrote about Rhee during the first six months of the war see Dane J. Cash, *The Forgotten Debate: American Political Opinion Journals and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Boston University, 2012), p. 21-26.

<sup>16</sup> Siegbert Kaufmann, 'Korea's political problems', *The Hartford Courant*, 29 June 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Yong-jeung Kim, Letter 'Korea Under The UN', *The Washington Post*, 5 July 1950.

<sup>18</sup> 'The "Will To Fight"', *The New York Times*, 8 July 1950; Carl W. McCardle, 'Was It Another Pearl Harbor?', *The Boston Globe*, 6 July 1950.

<sup>19</sup> Paul W. Ward, 'South Koreans Keep Up Fight', *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 July 1950.

for the ROK regime in a 'fire side chat' broadcast on national radio.<sup>20</sup> Truman angrily denounced the DPRK's invasion as a "direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build the kind of world in which men can live in freedom and peace" and praised the Korean defenders for their "brave fight for their liberty".

The strongest public defence of the Rhee government was mounted by John Foster Dulles, President Truman's recently appointed envoy to Japan. A leading figure in both the Republican Party and foreign policy establishment, Dulles was widely regarded as the main foreign policy spokesman for the moderate wing of the party. Just days before the onset of the war, Dulles had visited South Korea on a diplomatic goodwill mission during which he had reassured the Korean public of the U.S. commitment to the future of their country. After returning to the United States at the end of June, Dulles made a series of public speeches praising the regime. During a speech to several hundred thousand Americans gathered in Washington for Independence Day celebrations, he declared that "the society was so wholesome that it could not be overthrown from within". A few weeks later, Dulles was solicited by the *New York Times* for a major magazine article outlining his thoughts on the Rhee government.<sup>21</sup> In the article, Dulles described his admiration for the country's "healthy society" in which the existence of vigorous electoral competition and the independence of most elected representatives from Rhee's party machine proved the reality of political freedom.<sup>22</sup> Korea's democracy was so strong, Dulles argued, that it had become a matter of urgency for the communists to destroy it.

---

<sup>20</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Public Papers of The Presidents, 1950-1953*, 19 July 1950. This address was President Truman's first major statement on the war.

<sup>21</sup> Dulles to McWilliams, 18 July 1950, Box 285, John Foster Dulles Papers, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

<sup>22</sup> John Foster Dulles, 'To Save Humanity From the Deep Abyss', *The New York Times*, 30 July 1950. Dulles sent a memo containing many of the same observations to Dean Acheson at the end of June and which formed the basis of a statement to the press on 1 July: Dulles to Acheson, 29 June 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: p. 237; Press Release No. 705, 1 July 1950, Box 301, John Foster Dulles Papers, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

With both senior administration officials and Republican leaders united behind the ROK government, Rhee's critics lost their best chance of framing public debate over the Korean War around the stability and legitimacy of the Rhee government. Although criticism of the Rhee regime did re-emerge in the mainstream press during the course of the war, it never fundamentally challenged the American policy of support for the ROK.

Perhaps the best summary of mainstream views of the ROK regime was provided by Pulitzer Prize winning war reporter Marguerite Higgins in her 1951 memoir: "There is no doubt that the three-year-old ROK, when measured by Western standards, had much to learn about making democracy work. The police had been trained by Japanese masters and were brutal in the extreme. In the general elections in 1950 there were numerous charges of police pressure, and I am sure some of them were true."<sup>23</sup> Higgins drew a sharp distinction, however, between the rough and tumble nature of politics in South Korea and the horrifying totalitarianism she had witnessed as a reporter in Eastern Europe during the late 1940s. She argued that while the margin of individual freedom may have been increasing too slowly in South Korea to suit most Americans, it was at least improving- unlike in communist Poland.

### **War Correspondents and South Korean atrocities**

Higgins was one of around two hundred American war correspondents who reported from Korea during the summer of 1950. Between the start of the war in June and the belated imposition of mandatory censorship in December, American correspondents operated under a system of voluntary censorship. Although the U.S. military authorities and the press came to blows several times over the extent of permissible criticism of U.S. military performance, the press was largely free to write about other aspects of the war.<sup>24</sup> Bruce Cumings has written that war coverage in the period

---

<sup>23</sup> Higgins, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> For a full account of the clash between U.S. authorities and the press see Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, pp. 41-66.

before the imposition of mandatory censorship was “fascinating and instructive, revealing its essential nature, its *civil* nature” (italics in original).<sup>25</sup>

Other recent scholars have been less favourable. Much criticism has focused on the perceived failure of the press to report on the impact of the war on the civilian population, particularly in light of the discovery, in 1999, of evidence of an alleged massacre of hundreds of Korean civilians by American soldiers near the village of No Gun Ri in July 1950.<sup>26</sup> Following interviews with eyewitnesses and examination of U.S. government archives, AP published a sensational report suggesting that the soldiers at No Gun Ri had been following orders from senior military commanders to shoot civilians suspected of being communist insurgents.<sup>27</sup> While the details of what happened are still heavily contested, the dearth of contemporary coverage of these atrocities, or even the general impact of the war, on the civilian population of Korea was brought into the spotlight.<sup>28</sup>

In the wake of the No Gun Ri revelations, increased attention has also been paid to allegations of mass executions carried out by South Korean forces. Over 100,000 people may have been executed in the early stages of the war- many of them members of the Bodo League, an organisation created by the Rhee government in 1949 with the official purpose of rehabilitating leftists but in practice used as a mechanism for monitoring critics of the regime.<sup>29</sup> While no

---

<sup>25</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, p. 78.

<sup>26</sup> Tirman, pp. 115–16.

<sup>27</sup> Hanley, Mendoza and Choe.

<sup>28</sup> The U.S. government claimed that there had been no high level orders to shoot on civilians at No Gun Ri following its own investigation: Office of the Inspector General, *No Gun Ri Review* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 2001). Military historian Robert Bateman revealed that one of AP’s main witnesses had lied about being at No Gun Ri and alleged that the AP investigation had misrepresented much of the evidence: Robert L. Bateman, *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002). Historian Sahr Conway-Lanz later discovered a letter by U.S. Ambassador John Muccio which suggested that the policy of shooting on civilians had been endorsed at the highest levels: Sahr Conway-Lanz, ‘Beyond No Gun Ri: Refugees and the United States Military in the Korean War’, *Diplomatic History*, 29.1 (2005), 49–81.

<sup>29</sup> The number of South Koreans who were killed by ROK forces during this period remains highly contentious. In 1968, former U.S. diplomat Gregory Henderson claimed that South Korean forces executed tens of thousands- and probably over 100,000- suspected communist during the early stages of the war but did not provide substantive evidence. In 2008, the findings of the South Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggested that Henderson’s numbers were plausible based on excavations at execution sites, eyewitness

correspondents captured the full scale of this systematic repression, Philip Knightley argued that reporters from the United Kingdom and Australia did much more to bring these atrocities to the attention of the public.<sup>30</sup> Americans correspondents, he suggested, had merely got “on side” with the United States military’s view of how the war should be reported.<sup>31</sup>

The distinction Knightley drew between different nationalities of correspondents was not entirely fair. On many occasions during the first six months of the war, American reporters wrote about the extrajudicial killing and abuse of prisoners by South Korean forces.<sup>32</sup> The first significant atrocity report appeared roughly two weeks into the war when UP correspondent Rutherford Poats was travelling with an Australian United Nations Military Observer and witnessed South Korean soldiers breaking the backs of suspected communist guerrillas with their rifle butts:

SOMEWHERE IN KOREA, 10 July, 1950 - The South Koreans deal out quick punishment to suspected Communist guerrillas behind their lines. They break their backs, then execute them. United Nations Military Observer R. J. Rankin of Australia and I discovered this today when we came upon two open trucks parked in front of a grove overlooking a river.

Some 40 persons were crouched on all fours in the back of one of the trucks. A Korean policeman stood in the middle of this mass and crashed the butt of his American rifle into

---

accounts from witnesses and perpetrators and photographic records found in U.S. government archives: Henderson, p. 167.; Do Khiem and Kim Sung-soo, ‘Crimes, Concealment and South Korea’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 6.8 (2008). For an account of ROK atrocities during the liberation phase of the war see Callum MacDonald, “‘So Terrible a Liberation’-The UN Occupation of North Korea’, *Bulletin Of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 23.2 (1991), 3–19.

<sup>30</sup> Knightley, pp. 374–76. British reporters who witnessed and wrote about the brutality of South Korean executions included the *Picture Post*’s James Cameron and the London *Times* Louis Heren. The *Daily Telegraph*’s Reginald Thompson has often been commended for the sympathetic and disturbing account of the impact of the war on Korean civilians given in his book *Cry Korea*, yet his actual dispatches from Korea were remarkably conventional and made no mention of South Korean atrocities. *Melbourne Herald* correspondent Alan Dower reportedly intervened in the execution of a group of Korean women and children by threatening to kill the jail’s governor. When United Nations officials pleaded with him not to publish the story, he agreed on the proviso that no further executions occurred: James Cameron, *Point of Departure (Experiment in Biography)* (London: Panther Books, 1967); Reginald Thompson, *Cry Korea: The Korean War: A Reporter’s Notebook* (London: Reportage Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Knightley, p. 389.

<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Young wrote about several of these dispatches, albeit not in the context of a study of American journalism. Young, pp. 127–30.

the back of one after another of the kneeling men. Their backs broke with a sickening crunch which could be heard 100 yards away. Rankin hunted up an English-speaking policeman and asked an explanation. 'Guerrillas,' said the policeman with a gesture at their backs.

He indicated that the prisoners would be taken to nearby woods and executed. But it seemed unlikely that many would live long enough for the formal execution.<sup>33</sup>

Although Poats did not give the location of the incident in his report, Australian records place Rankin in the vicinity of Taejon around that date.<sup>34</sup> It is thus likely that Poats was describing a small part of the Taejon massacre, the systematic execution of between 3,000 and 7,000 suspected communists and inmates of Taejon prison.<sup>35</sup> Although no further coverage relating specifically to Taejon appeared in the American press, the brutal treatment of civilians at the hands of South Koreans was commented upon in more general terms. In a dispatch for the *Chicago Daily News* a few days after Poats report, Keyes Beech wrote that, between the South Korean army firing-squads and American troops inclined to shoot any Korean on sight, it was a very bad time to be a Korean.<sup>36</sup> In August, *Time's* John Osborne wrote a first-hand account of the brutality of the war with the subheading the "ugly story of an ugly war". Osborne described how South Korean police and marines "murder to save themselves the trouble of escorting prisoners to the rear; they murder civilians simply to get them out of the way or to avoid the trouble of searching and cross-examining them. And they extort

---

<sup>33</sup> Rutherford Poats, 'Rifle butts break backs of guerrillas', *The Chicago Daily News*, 10 July 1950. The story appeared amidst a flurry of reports about communist atrocities against American troops, which were generally given much greater prominence by newspapers. Nonetheless, at least two other UP articles about atrocities referenced Poats story: UP, 'Korean Reds Who Executed Yanks Are Promised Trials', *The Tuscaloosa News*, 11 July 1950.; UP, 'End Atrocities, U.N. Appeals To Both Sides', *The Gazette and Daily*, 13 July 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Stewart Lone and Gavin McCormack, *Korea Since 1850* (New York: St Martin Press, 1993), p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> Communist correspondent Alan Winnington claimed that KMAG officials had supervised the execution of around 7,000 people near Taejon in a story for the British *Daily Worker* in August 1950. Although the allegations were dismissed as communist propaganda at the time, recent studies have demonstrated that U.S. military authorities were at least aware of the massacre: Alan Winnington, 'U.S. Belsen In Korea', *The Daily Worker* (UK), 9 August 1950; Bruce Cumings, 'The South Korean Massacre at Taejon: New Evidence on US Responsibility and Coverup', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 6.7 (2008).

<sup>36</sup> Keyes Beech, '1,200 Red Spies Shot In S. Korea', *The Chicago Daily News*, 13 July 1950.



information- information our forces need and require of the South Korean interrogators- by means so brutal that they cannot be described.”<sup>37</sup>

More atrocity stories emerged in November and December as South Korean forces purged Seoul of communist collaborators. The *New York Times*' Charles Grutzner wrote a harrowing account of the execution of 27 suspected collaborators in a cemetery outside the city.<sup>38</sup> Grutzner humanised the victims, focusing in particular on a 'Kiisang girl' who had been the mistress of the Seoul communist police chief during the North Korean occupation. Grutzner described the callous brutality of the South Korean officials who had failed to remove her eight-month old child strapped to her back before lifting her, hands bound, to the truck ready for transportation to the execution site. After finally taking the baby away from her, the executioners described the grisly scene of the executions amidst desperate cries of innocence.

A few days after Grutzner's story, ROK military authorities issued a ban on correspondents attending mass executions.<sup>39</sup> But this did not bring a halt to reporting on the executions. As Koreans prepared to flee the city ahead of its capture by communist forces in mid-December, UP's Peter Kalischer reported that two Catholic priests had tried and failed to gain an audience with Syngman Rhee in order to bring a halt to mass executions which had claimed the lives of at least 800 men, women and children in just five days. Kalischer provided an extensive analysis of the background to the executions and why they had not received attention before now:

---

<sup>37</sup> John Osborne, 'The Ugly War', *Time*, 21 August 1950.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Grutzner, '27 Executed in Seoul Cemetery For Collaboration With Red Foe', *The New York Times*, 3 November 1950. It has been suggested that Grutzner may have also been the only correspondent to mention the alleged American massacre of Korean civilians at No Gun Ri in July 1950 when he claimed that a senior officer had criticised the 'panicky' shooting of many civilians by one United States regiment: Charles Grutzner, 'Stranded Enemy Soldiers Merge With Refugee Crowds in Korea', *The New York Times*, 30 September 1950; Sweeney, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> The order was mentioned at the end of an account of a mass execution witnessed by AP's Bill Shinn, who suggested that it could be the last story of its kind: Bill Shinn, 'Writer Sees 20 Koreans Put To Death By Squad', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1950. The *Tribune* called for the Army to revoke the order in an editorial a few days later: 'Mass Executions In Korea', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 November 1950.

A wave of disgust and anger swept through American and British troops who either have witnessed or heard the firing squads in action in the Seoul area during the last two days. The executions have been going on almost since the liberation of Seoul in September. United States military authorities were reluctant to interfere because it was doubtful if they have authority since the executions are being carried out under sentences imposed by Korean courts against Korean civilians. It was believed women and children were executed as members of the families of condemned men and that military police shooting them had no authority from government officials. They were not brought to public notice until American and British units happened to move into an area bordering the execution ground about a mile north of the city. British troops said they would not permit any more shootings in their area.<sup>40</sup>

The accounts of executions shocked and horrified many Americans. When a reader incorrectly complained that the *Daily News* had referred to the Poats incident as an example of 'speedy justice' and not an extrajudicial killing, the *Daily News* responded that it was shocked by the atrocious brutality ascribed to America's ally.<sup>41</sup> *Time* wrote that the South Korean approach to executions had "disgraced the Korean government and disgusted its allies".<sup>42</sup> Yet, no outcry appeared comparable to that in Britain, where the atrocity issue was raised in both Houses of Parliament and in a session of Cabinet.<sup>43</sup> Although a handful of American readers wrote to newspapers to criticise the lack of public response, many others felt that atrocities were an inevitable part of war, especially when the other side were engaging in equally heinous acts.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to the *Chicago Daily News* a reader

---

<sup>40</sup> Peter Kalischer, '2 U.S. Priests Protest As S. Koreans Kill Prisoners By Hundreds', *The Washington Post*, 17 December 1950. Another UP story on the same topic appeared the next day: UP, 'British Troops Bar Executions', *The New York Times*, 18 December 1950.

<sup>41</sup> Charles B. Marshall, Letter 'Holds War Reports Reflect Lack of Censorship, Not Inaccuracy', *The Chicago Daily News*, 19 July 1950.

<sup>42</sup> 'A Matter of Convenience', *Time*, 25 December 1950.

<sup>43</sup> Ernest Bevin to Sir Oliver Franks, 27 October 1950, No. 68. DBPO, Series II, Vol. 4, Korea, June 1950-April 1951.

<sup>44</sup> Marius Livingston, Letter 'Korean Executions Protested', *The New York Times*, 28 December 1950; Allen Neave, Letter 'Korean Massacres', *The Washington Post*, 21 December 1950; Dewitt Mackenzie, 'Mass Execution Reminds War Demands Are Harsh', *The Spokane Daily Chronicle*, 13 November 1950. This was

suggested that these kinds of atrocities were simply the “facts of war” which were now being revealed for the first time because of MacArthur’s decision not to impose censorship.<sup>45</sup> The *Washington Post* argued that it was the very nature of modern warfare that ordinary people should be the chief victims.<sup>46</sup> Korea was particularly ripe for this kind of conflict because of its fraternal nature.

Some observers rationalised the brutality of the war as a consequence of its Asian context. In a letter responding to Poats account of the treatment of suspected communists, Telford Taylor, the former Chief Counsel to the Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal, explained that individual lives were not valued so highly in Eastern mores and warned Americans to not rush to condemn either Korean side for committing atrocities.<sup>47</sup> *Time’s* John Osborne argued that wars that were “alien to the American tradition and shocking to the American mind” were inevitable in Asia. In a revival of orientalisng stereotypes common both during World War Two and the post-war occupation period, many correspondents believed that the Koreans were an inherently cold and cruel people.<sup>48</sup> *New Yorker* correspondent E.J. Kahn wrote that “most Koreans, whether in or out of the Army, are uncommonly indifferent to suffering especially other people's and accept as normal what Americans would consider outright brutality”.<sup>49</sup>

This kind of thinking even effected those who regarded themselves as sympathetic towards the Korean people. The *New York Times* military affairs editor Hanson Baldwin, one of the few reporters to remain friendly with Robert T. Oliver after December 1949, used one of his columns to

---

similar to the view laid out by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Dean Rusk in a meeting with the British Ambassador in late October: “Under war conditions, particularly where extremely bitter fighting has taken place, there might be instances of atrocities committed by members of any of the armed forces engaged.... it is not easy to curb troops who find their comrades tied together and shot”: Memorandum of Conversation, Assistant Sec of State (Rusk), 28 October 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 7: p. 1004-5.

<sup>45</sup> Richard B. Joyce, Letter ‘Holds War Reports Reflect Lack of Censorship, Not Inaccuracy’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 19 July 1950.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Terror In Korea’, *The Washington Post*, 20 December 1950.

<sup>47</sup> Telford Taylor, Letter ‘Atrocities in Korea’, *The New York Times*, 16 July 1950.

<sup>48</sup> For more on how the concept of Asian brutality became a mainstay of World War Two propaganda see John Dower, *War without Mercy: Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> E.J. Kahn, *The Peculiar War: Impressions Of A Reporter In Korea* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 116.

warn about the damage being done to perceptions of the United States by the strategic bombing of civilian areas, pointedly asking if the readers of his newspaper would “not be equally indignant against Americans if our women and children were slain by American bombs?”<sup>50</sup> Yet, just a few paragraphs later he described Koreans as one of the “simple, primitive and sometimes barbaric peoples” targeted by communist propaganda.

These insidious racial and cultural prejudices interconnected with the basic reality of how Americans perceived the war. Only a minority were interested in stories about South Korean civilians or their abusive government at a time when American soldiers were dying in large numbers on the frontline. The public wanted dramatic, stirring and moving accounts of the lives and deaths of American men at arms. The performance of war reporters was judged almost exclusively on their ability to help readers understand how American forces were faring in the struggle against communism.<sup>51</sup> This pressure was much less intense for European and Australian reporters due to the relatively small number of troops deployed by their governments and the rather defensive attitude of their military public relations officials- according to London *Times* reporter Louis Heren, British brigades in Korea kept correspondents at a far remove for much of the war.<sup>52</sup>

Irrespective of nationality, all correspondents in Korea faced extraordinary challenges in their capacity to do even routine reporting. The constant movement of the frontline, coupled with the limited access to reliable transportation, made travelling around Korea extraordinarily dangerous and time consuming. With only sporadic access to teletype and telephone circuits, it could take hours of effort for a reporter to deliver one short story to their editors in Tokyo.

---

<sup>50</sup> Hanson Baldwin, ‘Spirit As A War Factor’, *The New York Times*, 21 August 1950.

<sup>51</sup> In the first months of the war, AP was praised for “keeping dramatic frontline reactions in focus”, although some editors asked for even more human-oriented coverage in the style of Ernie Pyle, a Second World War reporter famous for his folksy American soldier-centric stories: Gould to Brines, 17 July 1950, Korean War Coverage Reaction, August 1950, Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; Sutton to Gould, 21 July 1950, Korean War Coverage Reaction, August 1950, Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Heren, *Memories of Times Past* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1988), p. 138. Around 40,000 British, 26,000 Canadian and 17,000 Australian troops served in Korea, compared to around 1.8 million Americans. For more details see Gordon L. Rottman, *Korean War Order of Battle: United States, United Nations, and Communist Ground, Naval, and Air Forces, 1950-1953* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

Moreover, not a single American correspondent spoke Korean and only a handful had anything more than token knowledge of the social and political situation in the country.<sup>53</sup>

The reporters who witnessed and wrote about atrocities were generally those who were not so tightly bounded by these difficult working conditions. Rutherford Poats serendipitously witnessed a mass execution because his role as a rewrite man kept him far behind the front line and he happened to be travelling with a UN observer. Keyes Beech was almost alone amongst war correspondents in having both access to his own jeep, borrowed from the U.S. army during the evacuation of Seoul, and pre-existing close relationships with Koreans. As a famed correspondent for the prestigious *Chicago Daily News*, Beech also had much greater editorial freedom than most reporters, an advantage shared by the *Times'* Charles Grutzner and *Time's* John Osborne.<sup>54</sup>

Sensitivity to atrocities was also highly influenced by the political and professional perspectives of reporters. Poats had more exposure to Korean affairs than most correspondents, as a result of his previous experience at SCAP supervising the production of cultural awareness pamphlets for American soldiers in the Far East.<sup>55</sup> Grutzner was a former communist party member known for his deeply researched investigative reporting into organised crime in New York. As a correspondent in South Korea, he explored topics which few other correspondents ever discussed, including American attacks on Korean refugee columns and looting and violence against Koreans in Seoul by U.S. servicemen.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, the *Herald Tribune's* famed war correspondent Marguerite

---

<sup>53</sup>: Frank Gibney, 'The First Three Months of War: A Journalist's Reminiscences of Korea', *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 2.1 (1993), p. 104. See also King, p. 100.

<sup>54</sup> Beech's credibility as a reporter was regularly used to promote *The Chicago Daily News'* war coverage. 'Beech lauded by U.S. aide from Japan', *The Chicago Daily News*, 14 July 1950. The *Times* was well known in this period for almost never editing the dispatches of its correspondents: James Reston, *Deadline: A Memoir* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1992), p. 223. Osborne was highly respected by his colleagues, although notorious for demanding that his editors print his stories verbatim or not print them at all: Gottfried to Osborne, 12 August 1950, Journalism File, Box 2, John Osborne Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>55</sup> Rutherford Poats Oral History by W. Haven North, 13 January 1999, United States Foreign Assistance Oral History Program Foreign Assistance, Oral History Collection Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Grutzner, 'Stranded Enemy Soldiers Merge With Refugee Crowds In Korea', *The New York Times*, 30 September 1950.; Charles Grutzner, 'A Few G.I.'s Abuse Koreans In Seoul', *The New York Times*, 20 December 1950. This latter story, along with a report on a new kind of fighter jet being used in Korea, led to Grutzner being called in front of a Senate inquiry in 1955 to defend himself from accusations that he had aided the

Higgins did not regard mass executions of communists as particularly disturbing. To her, Rhee seemed to be a “man of autocratic temperament but sincere democratic convictions. He believed in the democratic way for the Korean people, but every so often he has taken undemocratic short cuts to achieve immediate aims.”<sup>57</sup> In her dispatches from Korea, Higgins emphasised the regime’s perspective on the atrocity problem. Following an interview with South Korean police chief Kim Tau Sun, she explained that many Communists had been caught trying to attack UN command posts while masquerading as South Korean civilians.<sup>58</sup> American soldiers faced a nightmarish situation where white-garbed farmers to their rear in daytime transformed into gun-toting guerrillas at night.

Despite having the largest staff of any news organisation in Korea, AP also published relatively little on South Korean atrocities.<sup>59</sup> In part this reflected AP’s position as the most prestigious and professionally respected of the American press agencies, which made it sensitive to accusations of sensationalism and leftist bias. Yet, in spite of this reputation for objectivity, much of AP’s South Korean coverage was handled by two fervently pro-Rhee journalists, Seoul bureau chief Oliver H.P. King and his assistant Bill Shinn, an American-educated Korean who had been hired by AP in early 1950. Both King and Shinn were admirers of Syngman Rhee. In his memoirs, King repeatedly spoke of his support for Rhee’s stand against communism and the unfairness of press criticism of his regime. His devotion to Rhee’s cause led him to return to South Korea to work as a public relations adviser after the war.<sup>60</sup> While Shinn was clearly not unaware of the brutality of the South Korean regime- in November he wrote one of AP’s only accounts of a South Korean mass execution- he did not regard these killings as an indictment of the regime.<sup>61</sup> Following the United Nations offensive

---

communists. Allen Drury, ‘Times Man Accused of Aid To Reds In Copy, Denies It’, *The New York Times*, 1 July 1955.

<sup>57</sup> Higgins, p. 193.

<sup>58</sup> Marguerite Higgins, ‘Reply to spies in South Korea: Firing squads’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 14 July 1950.

<sup>59</sup> For a full list of reporters assigned to Korea by each press agency see ‘News Services Had 129 Men In Korea’, *Editor & Publisher*, 22 August 1953.

<sup>60</sup> King, pp. 532–33.

<sup>61</sup> Bill Shinn, ‘Writer Sees 20 Koreans Put To Death By Squad’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1950.; Bill Shinn, *The Forgotten War Remembered, Korea: 1950-1953* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International, 1995), pp. 136–39.

into North Korea, Shinn was the lone reporter invited to cover Rhee's trip to Pyongyang, where he remembered being deeply moved by the sight of 50,000 citizens waving ROK flags to greet the South Korean leader.<sup>62</sup>

Shinn was not alone in his failure to draw broader links between mass executions and the repressiveness of the Rhee regime. No correspondent explicitly questioned support for the Rhee regime. While the government clearly had its flaws, virtually all Americans believed that the international community's intervention against communism was fundamentally justified, especially when the other side had been held responsible for conducting brutal massacres of their own.

Correspondents also were exposed to pressure from U.S. authorities and their editors back home to focus on positive aspects of the ROK. While there is no evidence that U.S. authorities actively suppressed atrocity stories, the Americans were keen to paint the ROK in as positive a light as possible. In August 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson asked the U.S. Ambassador in Korea to use every opportunity to stress positive aspects of the ROK and to not let correspondents fall for the communist propaganda line that the ROK was a reactionary government which had not done anything for its people.<sup>63</sup> Acheson suggested that the Ambassador brief correspondents with factual information detailing the government's achievements in public education, its successful organisation of two general elections and the existence of a representative National Assembly. In response to Charles Grutzner's execution story in November, Acheson asked the Embassy to put pressure on the regime to change the way it carried out executions in order to avoid further sensational press coverage.<sup>64</sup>

A more confrontational approach to reporting ROK atrocities could bring correspondents into conflict with their editors. An instructive case was the experience of John Colless, a Reuters-Australian Associated Press correspondent who became obsessed with South Korean atrocity stories

---

<sup>62</sup> Shinn, p. 147.

<sup>63</sup> Acheson to Muccio, 22 August 1950, *FRUS 1950*, 7: p. 630-631.

<sup>64</sup> Callum A. Macdonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 60–61.

and claimed that one British officer had even told him that “these people here have no democratic rights and liberties, and I am no longer prepared to encourage my men to risk their lives to champion a cause which, to say the least, is highly doubtful”.<sup>65</sup> When Colless admonished a company executive for not publishing more of his atrocity stories, he was subsequently withdrawn to Japan.<sup>66</sup>

Another aspect of the war that few correspondents wrote about was the experience of ordinary life for Koreans under the Rhee government. Amongst all the American foreign correspondents who served in South Korea during the first year of the war, only one, George Barrett of *The New York Times*, wrote about this aspect of the conflict in detail. In a series of articles in the spring of 1951, Barrett conveyed a powerful sense of the horror of the war and the experience of being governed by the Rhee regime.<sup>67</sup> In striking opposition to American claims about defending ‘free Korea’, Barrett repeatedly suggested that most Koreans perceived little difference between being ruled by Syngman Rhee or the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung.<sup>68</sup>

Barrett’s biography provides few clues as to why he dedicated so much effort to reporting these otherwise ignored aspects of the war. Unlike many of his fellow *Times* correspondents, he never attended university and did not have a notably liberal background. After working as a seaman on tankers following high school, he had joined the *Times* as a copyboy and later worked as an assistant to military editor Hanson Baldwin.<sup>69</sup> When World War Two broke out in 1941, he enlisted in the Army and wrote for military newspapers. The almost literary quality of his dispatches from Italy for *Yank* magazine hinted at a curious and sympathetic intellect.<sup>70</sup> After the war he returned to the *Times* as a diplomatic correspondent and was sent to replace Charles Grutzner in Korea at the

---

<sup>65</sup> Paul Colless, ‘U.N. Intervenes In S. Korean Atrocities’, *The Canberra Times*, 18 December 1950.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Gifford, ‘Aspects Of Australian Journalism And The Cold War, 1945-1956’ (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Murdoch University, 1997), p. 165.

<sup>67</sup> Barrett was the first reporter to ever describe the effects of a napalm strike on a village. George Barrett, ‘Radio Hams in U.S. Discuss Girls, So Shelling of Seoul Is Held Up’, *The New York Times*, 9 February 1951.

<sup>68</sup> George Barrett, ‘Keeping Alive Is Main Concern Of Koreans Disillusioned by War’, *The New York Times*, 21 February 1951.

<sup>69</sup> Eric Pace, ‘George Barrett Of The Times, Cited For War Coverage, Dies’, *The New York Times*, 22 November 1984.

<sup>70</sup> George Barrett, ‘Night Patrol In Italy’, *Yank*, 16 March 1945.



beginning of 1951.<sup>71</sup> Although his dispatches from Korea won him accolades from other reporters, he spent much of the rest of his career working as an overnight rewrite man and teaching journalism at Columbia Journalism School.<sup>72</sup>

Barrett's arrival in Korea coincided with a significant moment of change in Korean War journalism. The number of newspaper correspondents in South Korea rapidly shrank following the evacuation of U.S. forces from North Korea in December 1950.<sup>73</sup> Correspondents also faced tough new censorship regulations which made it extremely difficult to publish analytical articles on military and political topics. At least one article by Barrett, on the massacre of Korean civilians in the village of Kochang by the ROK army, was censored by MacArthur's Press Advisory Commission in Tokyo.<sup>74</sup>

While it is correct to say that war journalists in Korea were circumscribed in what they could write about South Korean atrocities, it is necessary to modify Knightley's thesis that correspondents were too driven by patriotism and anti-communism. The individual biographies of correspondents, and the interconnected intellectual and professional constraints, greatly impacted the extent and form of coverage. At least some of the correspondents for American newspapers were willing to write about atrocities. While Knightley was right to note that correspondents did not ask deeper questions, such as whether the intervention was justified or whether any long-term gains were worth the terrible short-term cost, this failure reflected in part the deeper ideological and social assumptions of American society.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> George Barrett file, Box 4, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, NYPL.

<sup>72</sup> Gay Talese, *The Kingdom and the Power* (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 249.

<sup>73</sup> Prominent reporters who left during this period included Homer Bigart, Marguerite Higgins, Hal Boyle, Don Whitehead and Tom Lambert. January 1951 also saw the final departure of the *New York Times*' veteran Korea correspondent Richard Johnston. While having Christmas dinner with the Rhee's, a shaken and bitter Johnston told them that he had asked the newspaper for long-term leave and requested "to be on the plane which delivers the first atom bomb": Francesca Rhee Diary Entry for 25 December 1950, Personal Papers of Syngman Rhee and Francesca Rhee, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>74</sup> George Barrett file, Box 4, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, NYPL. A version of the report was still published by the *Times*: George Barrett, 'Village Massacre Stirs South Korea', *The New York Times*, 11 April 1951.

<sup>75</sup> Knightley, p. 389.

## On the defensive

One further aspect of the coverage of the Rhee regime has been almost totally ignored by historians- the rapid improvement in the media management practices of Rhee and his press advisers. As shown in the previous chapter, for the first two years of its existence the ROK regime had unsuccessfully sought to win the support of the American public through the public relations activities of its diplomats and the Washington D.C.-based lobbying organisation the Korea Pacific Press. This situation fundamentally changed in the wake of the DPRK's invasion of the ROK. Although the regime had little influence over journalists during the dramatic first months of the war, new strategies were deployed to generate more positive press coverage. By 1951, this included the careful targeting of key American reporters and newspapers to bring them 'on side' to the South Korean cause.

The ROK's wartime media strategy made little progress in the first months of the war. Although the ROK's future looked increasingly assured by the end of July, Rhee was desperate for international support for a UN campaign to forever end the threat from its northern neighbour and liberate the DPRK from communist rule. Worried that the American press could turn against South Korea if the war came to a rapid end, Rhee asked Robert T. Oliver to establish contacts with friendly news organisations and influential individuals who could help make the ROK's case to the American public.<sup>76</sup> Oliver wrote back that the most urgent public relations issues were to sell the ROK to the world as a democratic success, to demonstrate that South Korean morale was good and that Korea should be reunified.<sup>77</sup> Only once these had been achieved, argued Oliver, could the allied nations be persuaded to agree to the policy of reunification. However, for most of the summer of 1950, the

---

<sup>76</sup> Rhee to Oliver, 20 July 1950 quoted in Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 301.

<sup>77</sup> Oliver to Rhee, 25 July 1950 quoted in Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 302.

press remained fixated on the UN's desperate battle to hold on to a small sliver of territory around the city of Pusan.

The situation changed dramatically on 18 September, when the UN command launched a daring amphibious assault on the port of Inchon and, within a week, recaptured Seoul and much of the rest of the ROK. On 28 September, MacArthur joined Rhee in the pockmarked but otherwise intact National Assembly building in Seoul for a ceremony to mark the recapture of the capital during which Rhee declared that he would seek national reconciliation with no further unlawful arrests or executions.<sup>78</sup> Following the dramatic collapse of the DPRK's army, ROK forces pursued fleeing remnants across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. As UN forces surged into North Korea in the first weeks of October, the allied nations faced a serious dilemma- what to do with areas of the country liberated from communist rule. Rhee made clear that he expected immediate Korean reunification under ROK rule and began sending ROK officials across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to begin administering liberated areas. The United Nations vocally opposed these plans. U.S. allies, in particular Australia, objected to the DPRK falling under ROK control without international supervision, fearing that Rhee planned to subject liberated areas to brutal political retribution and authoritarian rule.<sup>79</sup> After a series of emergency meetings in early October, the General Assembly announced the establishment of a new commission, the United Nations Commission for the Reunification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK), to take responsibility for the administration and reunification of occupied areas. Just as Oliver and Rhee had feared, many foreign governments and newspapers strongly endorsed the UN's stand, especially in light of both British and communist reports of the mass execution of civilians.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> In private, Rhee was not feeling so magnanimous. Just before setting off for Seoul, he told UP's President, Hugh Baillie, that he planned to remove all trace of communists from South Korea: "I can handle the Communists. The Reds can bury their guns and bum their uniforms, but we know how to find them. With bulldozers we will dig huge excavations and trenches, and fill them with Communists. Then cover them over. And they will really be underground." Baillie, a hawkish anti-communist and loyal supporter of Douglas MacArthur, wrote that Rhee may have been a terrorist but he was "our terrorist": Hugh Baillie, *High Tension: The Recollections of Hugh Baillie* (London: Laurie, 1960), pp. 267–68.

<sup>79</sup> Walter Sullivan, 'Australia Raises Rhee Issue In UN', *The New York Times*, 4 October 1950.

<sup>80</sup> Communist press outlets across the world published propagandistic accounts of South Korean and American atrocities in Korea, many authored by British *Daily Worker* correspondent Alan Winnington, who reported the

While the backlash against Rhee in the United States was significantly weaker than elsewhere, many internationally-minded newspapers shared the UN's unease about Syngman Rhee annexing the DPRK. The *Washington Post* condemned Rhee for sending civil governors into North Korea in defiance of the declarations of the UN interim commission.<sup>81</sup> Although the *Post* argued that no one could question Rhee's legal authority in the south, it declared that the UN had to protect the interests of North Koreans, ideally through the organisation of general elections. The *Baltimore Sun* warned that the Rhee regime had to avoid any hint of high-handedness if it was to avoid giving more weight to the communist propaganda campaign against it.<sup>82</sup> At the start of November, Charles Grutzner's account of the execution of 27 alleged communists, widely syndicated through a special AP report, prompted even greater concern over the possibility of large-scale retribution against the civilian population of North Korea.<sup>83</sup>

Many of Rhee's traditional press allies also came to his defence in these crucial months. The *New York Times* gave prominent placement to an interview with Maurice Williams, a leading expert on Asia and Rhee intimate, in which he argued that Rhee would receive 80% of the votes cast in an all-Korean free election.<sup>84</sup> Rhee's sympathisers, most notably columnist David Lawrence, accused Rhee's U.S.-based political enemies of spreading false propaganda regarding the regime's unsavoury nature.<sup>85</sup> In a detailed profile of Rhee, based on briefings from State Department officials, *Time*

---

war from the North Korean side. Although most governments and mainstream newspapers treated these stories with scepticism, they were given plausibility by an eyewitness account of mass executions in the *London Times* at the end of October and reports by James Cameron for *The Picture Post*, one of which was blocked from publication by the paper's publisher as a result of its sensational content. The full text of Cameron's article was published by the British *Daily Worker* on 1 November: 'Seoul After Victory', *The Times*, 25 October 1950.; James Cameron, 'We Follow The Road To Hell', *The Picture Post*, 16 September 1950; 'Picture Post Editor is sacked', *The Daily Worker* (UK), 1 November 1950. For more on British anxieties over the impact of these stories on public opinion see Memorandum of Conversation, Assistant Sec of State (Rusk), 28 October 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 7: p. 1004-5.

<sup>81</sup> 'Rhee's Governors', *The Washington Post*, 19 October 1950.

<sup>82</sup> 'Time For Harmony On The Future Of North Korea', *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 October 1950.

<sup>83</sup> AP, 'Execution of S. Koreans Draws Blast From Reporter', *The Washington Post*, 4 November 1950. Grutzner was criticised for failing to include basic background facts about the executions- such as what crimes they might have been accused of and whether they had been granted trials prior to their executions. Charles Maines, Letter 'Korean Executions', *The Washington Post*, 7 November 1950.

<sup>84</sup> 'American Says Rhee Would Win Election', *The New York Times*, 10 October 1950.

<sup>85</sup> 'What's Ahead in Korea: A Telephone Interview with Syngman Rhee', *U.S. News and World Report*, 27 October 1950. *U.S. News and World Report's* publisher David Lawrence was also an influential conservative

suggested that Rhee had become a natural target for communist propaganda and a liberal smear campaign of the kind which had been used to turn Americans against Chiang Kai-Shek.<sup>86</sup> Although *Time* admitted that Rhee was often arbitrary and sometimes ran roughshod over the civil rights of his opponents, it argued he was democratically elected and had kept South Korea together during the most difficult of circumstances. In its conclusion, the article suggested the war had provided Rhee, the “father of his country”, the opportunity to finally make it whole.

On 7 November, in an episode of the DuMont television network’s news debate show *Court of Current Issues*, Robert T. Oliver and writer and loyal Rhee supporter Geraldine Fitch squared off against former Korea occupation adviser Stewart Meacham, in a discussion over North Korea’s fate.<sup>87</sup> Although there is no surviving record of the debate itself, Fitch wrote that she supported Rhee taking control of the north on the basis that the ROK was a democratic government which had already set aside 100 seats in its National Assembly for representatives from the north. Meacham, on the other hand, believed that South Korea was a tyrannical police state with close parallels to Fascist Germany.<sup>88</sup> Such polarised views of the Rhee regime created a strong demand for hard facts and information from those with direct knowledge of the situation. Desmond Fitzgerald, a well-connected lawyer recently recruited by the fledgling Central Intelligence Agency, wrote to columnist Joseph Alsop following his long visit to the battlefield to ask for his views on the accomplishments of the Rhee regime.<sup>89</sup> Although Fitzgerald thought the criticisms of the Rhee government sounded like communist propaganda, he was struck by the ‘cache of honesty’ possessed by many of Rhee’s critics.

---

syndicated columnist and wrote about the campaign against Rhee in a column a few days after the interview. David Lawrence, ‘Attempts to Discredit Syngman Rhee Are Seen’, *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, 31 October 1950.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Father of his country?’, *Time*, 16 October 1950; Shea to Birmingham, 6 October 1950, *Time*, inc. Dispatches from *Time* magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>87</sup> Sulds to Fitch, 2 November 1950, Box 10, George and Geraldine Fitch Papers, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. The former commander of the Korea occupation government General John Hodge provided Fitch with some general background material on Meacham after the debate aired: Hodge to Fitch, 8 November 1950, Box 10, George and Geraldine Fitch Papers, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

<sup>88</sup> Meacham to Wilson, 14 November 1950, Box 10, George and Geraldine Fitch Papers, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

<sup>89</sup> Fitzgerald to Alsop, 17 October 1950, Box 5, Joseph and Stewart Alsop Papers, LOC. Fitzgerald was the father of Vietnam War correspondent and critic Frances Fitzgerald.

Following the Chinese intervention into the war in November, the debate over the future of the DPRK faded.<sup>90</sup> With UN forces caught in a headlong retreat under the twin pressures of Chinese wave attacks and extreme winter weather, the American commitment to South Korea was once again questioned. Amidst fears that the Chinese intervention could signal the start of a superpower conflict, American strategists doubted the wisdom of keeping the bulk of the U.S.'s effective military force tied up in Korea.<sup>91</sup> According to public opinion polls, almost two thirds of Americans wanted the United States to withdraw from Korea.<sup>92</sup> To make matters worse, rumours began to spread that the ROK government was engaging in the systematic mass execution of suspected communists in advance of another communist invasion of the ROK.<sup>93</sup>

Rhee's first instinct was to deny that the executions were brutal or unfair. He believed that that American reporters in Seoul were turning to communist whisper campaigns for stories as a result of the dearth of information about combat operations.<sup>94</sup> In a rather tone deaf first statement to the press, he criticised journalists for publishing "erroneous reports" that children had been amongst the victims and, in a comment which was widely interpreted as a sign of the ROK's abandonment of judicial fairness, indicated that he wanted the process of trials and executions to be sped up.<sup>95</sup> In a meeting with foreign correspondents the next day, Rhee doubled down on his criticism of the press and explained that the execution process was legal, fair and overseen by prison doctors and prosecutors.<sup>96</sup> He added that he had personally visited the prison facilities and had

---

<sup>90</sup> Geraldine Fitch to Van Deusen, 14 November 1950, Box 10, George and Geraldine Fitch Papers, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

<sup>91</sup> Harlan Trott, 'Pentagon Hears Rumor UN Will Evacuate Korea', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 December 1950.

<sup>92</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1972), p. 961.

<sup>93</sup> The first allegations appeared in communist media outlets, and were then given more credence by the eyewitness reports of Peter Kalischer and other correspondents in South Korea: Peter Kalischer, '2 U.S. Priests Protest As S. Koreans Kill Prisoners By Hundreds', *The Washington Post*, 17 December 1950.

<sup>94</sup> Francesca Rhee Diary Entry for 12 December 1950, Personal Papers of Syngman Rhee and Francesca Rhee, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>95</sup> AP, 'Rhee Denies Execution of Korean Boy', *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 December 1950; AP, 'Rhee Orders Executions In Seoul Speeded', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 December 1950.

<sup>96</sup> 'Rhee Terms News Of Killings Untrue', *The New York Times*, 19 December 1950.

urged for trials to be sped up to avoid long period of uncomfortable confinement for prisoners. While the U.S. Ambassador endorsed Rhee's arguments in private, the UNCURK put heavy pressure on Rhee to rein in executions.<sup>97</sup> As a result, on 21 December the ROK government announced that the execution of all political prisoners was to be suspended and sentences reviewed with a view to mitigating punishments.<sup>98</sup> On 28 December, Rhee issued a presidential decree which commuted all life sentences to fifteen years and halved all sentences over ten years. Although it is not clear if this brought a permanent end to political executions, the regime's public climb-down placated its severest critics. No more South Korean atrocities stories appeared in any significant number for the rest of the war.

The crisis over mass executions was a stark reminder of the tensions between Rhee and his press advisers. Rhee was rarely willing to restrain his rhetoric or actions for the good of public relations. He remained convinced that his critics could be hounded out of existence, as he told Oliver in one letter, "you have to be able to guide the public opinion in America. Some of our friends should counteract unfriendly stories and if you keep on pounding on anyone who says something unfavourable, people will think it over twice before they make bad remarks again."<sup>99</sup>

Oliver and the staff at the KPP shied away from such aggressive tactics. One of the only major American papers that refused to cover the atrocity issue was the *Christian Science Monitor*, a development that Rhee's American press advisers chalked up to the "good work that our friends have done in clearing up their viewpoint"- a particularly remarkable feat in light of the *Monitor's*

---

<sup>97</sup> Muccio pointed out that exhumation of the bodies of the executed had proven 'wholly false' accusations that children had been executed. He also noted that correspondents had misunderstood Rhee's comment on speeding up trials and had mistakenly identified the national police as being involved in the execution: Muccio to Acheson, 20 December 1950, *FRUS* 1950, 7: p. 1579-1581. An account of UNCURK's role in the crisis can be found in UNCURK, Annual Report 1951 (New York, 1951): p. 21-22.

<sup>98</sup> UP, 'Seoul Halts Execution Of Political Prisoners', *The New York Times*, 21 December 1950; Richard Johnston, 'Seoul To Mitigate Prisoners' Terms', *The New York Times*, 22 December 1950.

<sup>99</sup> Letter to Richmond, 19 April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

tradition of liberal humanitarianism.<sup>100</sup> Robert T. Oliver dedicated much of his time to doing publicity for the ROK regimes by giving talks, making radio broadcasts and, most crucially, meeting with newspaper editorial staff. After one such meeting, *New York Times* editorial writer Robert Aura Smith told Oliver that he was going to write an editorial pointing out that the abandonment of Seoul was a major tragedy for Korea.<sup>101</sup>

Other meetings were more challenging. Liberal editors at newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Providence Journal* interrogated Oliver on topics such as land reform, the arrests of assemblymen, the extent of popular support in Korea for Syngman Rhee, the integrity of ROK officials and ROK plans for ending the war.<sup>102</sup> Following these interviews, Oliver warned Rhee that these were the issues on which he was being judged and that he should not press too hard for an invasion of North Korea, but wait for events to dictate such a result.

Although Rhee made virtually no effort to rein in his controversial statements, Oliver still found that these meetings achieved results. As thirst grew for factual information about Korea, Oliver's newspaper contacts often came to the Korean Pacific Press. Robert T. Oliver's wife wrote that the greatest value of the KPP was to be instructive and educational- as long as the facts were right.<sup>103</sup> Most of this information took the form of general background briefings on subject of controversy such as land reform, or developments which demonstrated South Korea's "dramatic self-help and determination", such as a programme of open air schools for refugees.<sup>104</sup> Oliver and other members of the Korean lobby in Washington wrote hundreds of letters to American newspapers seeking to persuade readers that the ROK was worth their support. In one notable letter

---

<sup>100</sup> Richmond to Mrs Rhee, 28 December 1950, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>101</sup> Oliver to Rhee, 19 April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>102</sup> Oliver to Rhee, 1 April 1950, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>103</sup> Mrs Oliver to Mrs Rhee, 28 April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson Center.

<sup>104</sup> Oliver to Rhee, 21 April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.



published in the *New York Times*, Hyunki J. Lew, the acting bishop of Seoul's Methodist Church, argued that while their government was not perfect, it was doing as good a job as could be expected after only two years of existence.<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps the most important targets of the Rhee lobby were foreign correspondents reporting from the ROK. In January 1951, Rhee hired Wayne Geissinger to act as his media adviser in South Korea. A lawyer by profession, Geissinger had served as a U.S. Army officer in Asia during World War Two and then as a political adviser to the AMG during the first years of the occupation.<sup>106</sup> Although Geissinger carried out a variety of public relations tasks for the Rhee government, by far the most important was the time he spent helping newspaper correspondents write more 'constructive' stories about ROK issues.<sup>107</sup> Oliver and his assistants suggested that Geissinger 'work' on key journalists by giving them more background material, and explaining the Korean viewpoint.<sup>108</sup> Oliver expressed extreme satisfaction with Geissinger's work, so much so that by May 1951 Rhee regarded George Barrett as the only difficult foreign correspondent in South Korea.<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusions

The Korean War was both a major challenge and an opportunity for the Rhee regime. At first, the sudden collapse of the ROKA appeared to confirm many of the claims about the weakness of South Korea that been made in the winter and spring of 1950. The arrival of hundreds of journalists into the chaotic wartime political environment exposed the regime to vastly more scrutiny just as its ability to manage negative press coverage was at its lowest ebb. Yet, the regime not only clung on but actually gained legitimacy. The survival of the ROK through the summer of

---

<sup>105</sup> Hyunki J. Lew, Letter 'Conditions in Korea', *The New York Times*, 7 April 1951.

<sup>106</sup> 'Geissinger in Korea', *The Buckeye Barrister*, September 1951.

<sup>107</sup> Oliver to Rhee, 9 April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>108</sup> Richmond to Mrs Rhee, April 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

<sup>109</sup> Office Of The Korean President to Charlotte Richmond, 17 May 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars.

1950 proved that pre-war claims about the ROK's internal weakness were far off the mark. Instead, the ROK became a symbol of resilience in the face of military conquest.

The onset of the Korean War thus marked the start of a long-term shift in American perceptions of the ROK. A grand narrative began to emerge of the ROK as first and foremost an ally in the war against communism. This, combined with assumptions about the nature of war in the 'Orient', prevented journalists from questioning U.S. support for the regime even after they had witnessed it brutally mistreat its own citizens. By 1951, virtually the entire press corps in South Korea accepted the idea that Korea was, in the words of correspondent Frank Gibney, "a war that had to be fought".<sup>110</sup>

Bruce Cumings has suggested that the reporting and then forgetting of atrocities represented the construction of a false narrative of the war.<sup>111</sup> While ascribing truth and falsity to particular narratives is too pejorative, it is fair to say that the press chose to support a narrative in which the ROK's more unsavoury characteristics were disconnected from the fundamental nature of the war. Without broader context, stories about atrocities and ROK abuses simply faded from the memory of the public and the press.

---

<sup>110</sup> Gibney, p. 109.

<sup>111</sup> Cumings, 'American Orientalism at War in Korea and the United States', p. 49.

## Chapter 5: The 1952 Crisis: Rhee's Takeover

In the summer of 1952, two years into the Korean War, the ROK experienced a new kind of political crisis. After four years in power, Syngman Rhee's presidential term was due to expire. Under the 1948 constitution, the responsibility for deciding the next president rested with the National Assembly. After years of feuding with the Assembly, Rhee knew that he stood little chance of re-election. As the deadline for the end of his term approached, Rhee unleashed an unprecedented campaign of arrests and police intimidation designed to force the Assembly into accepting a modification of the constitution establishing election of the president by popular vote. Rhee's flagrant disregard for constitutional democracy marked an important turning point in South Korean history. Not only did the crisis effectively destroy the last remaining checks on Rhee's power in the ROK's political system, it also represented the moment when the United States abandoned democracy promotion as a significant goal in its relationship with the ROK. Rhee's unconstitutional takeover of the political system established a pattern of dictatorship which defined South Korean politics for decades to come.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the crisis' major influence on the history of South Korea's political development, only three journal articles have explored it in any depth.<sup>2</sup> Edward C. Keefer showed how U.S. officials were deeply conflicted on how to respond to Rhee's provocations. While State Department officials warned that allowing Rhee to get his way would signal an end to Korean democracy, the Truman administration had little appetite for risking the political destabilisation of the country. Plans to remove Rhee in a coup were developed and then shelved. The United States watched helplessly as Rhee used national police forces to take his own National Assembly hostage and force a vote in

---

<sup>1</sup> Palais, pp. 324–25; Oh, pp. 39–46.

<sup>2</sup> Garry Woodward, 'The Politics of Intervention: James Plimsoll in the South Korean Constitutional Crisis of 1952', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 56.3 (2002); Keefer; Jong Yil Ra, 'Political Crisis in Korea, 1952: The Administration, Legislature, Military and Foreign Powers', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27.2 (1992).

favour of his constitutional amendment. Keefer concluded that the crisis was a troubling reminder that democracies sometimes make decisions which produce far from ideal outcomes.

One aspect of the crisis that Keefer did not address was the role of the American press. At the start of 1952, U.S. Ambassador to South Korea John Muccio warned Rhee that he should be careful in his behaviour because his country was a “goldfish bowl” full of journalists looking for sensational stories.<sup>3</sup> However, when Rhee actually imposed martial law in the area surrounding Pusan, the wartime capital, and began arresting his opponents in the National Assembly at the end of May, most of the press offered only a dispassionate account of events, punctuated with the occasional mild rebuke to his police state methods. After members of the Assembly went into hiding, awaiting an intervention by the United States that never came, the press gave the story very limited space. Rhee’s constitutional coup was completed with only the slightest murmur of editorial criticism back in the United States.

This chapter argues that several factors can help explain the lack of press interest in the crisis. Firstly, and most importantly, was the lack of interest in South Korean politics amongst most American journalists, virtually all of whom saw the Korean War through a narrow Cold War lens. Before the crisis, most reporters showed little interest in reporting on the political situation in South Korea and relied on the propagandistic assessments of American and UN observers who had a strong interest in presenting the ROK as a strong democracy. Thus, even as tensions between Rhee and the National Assembly escalated in 1951, the press gave little indication that a major political crisis was brewing. Following the onset of the crisis in late May, the most influential establishment newspapers, most importantly the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, took their editorial cues from the cautious statements of concern emanating from American and UN diplomats.

Coverage was further constrained by the pro-Rhee sympathies of many newspaper publishers and the confluence of dramatic developments that struck South Korea in the spring of

---

<sup>3</sup> Muccio to DOS, 12 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 48.

1952. The Kojé riots in particular provided a major distraction from the South Korean political situation. Few news organisations had either the manpower or the motivation to cover several major stories from South Korea simultaneously. Without strong editorial backing for the story, coverage was largely fleeting.

Finally, the Rhee regime also won the battle of narratives. While a small number of liberal journalists and newspaper sensationallly reported the crisis from the perspective of the Korean opposition, Rhee's supporters were more successful in presenting his narrative to the press. By its end, many newspapers portrayed Rhee's attack on the Assembly as a victory for the United Nations Command and even as a triumph of democracy.

### **The press and the ROK**

By the summer of 1952, the Korean War had become a source of deep frustration and confusion for both the American public and the press. After it had become clear that the Chinese intervention was not going to lead to either a new world war or UN forces being pushed off the Korean peninsula, public interest in the war had faded. In an October 1951 article headlined 'Korea: The 'Forgotten' War', *U.S. News and World Report* argued that the American public paid little attention to the conflict other than as an 'experimental war' where new weapons, tactics and methods could be tried out to prepare the United States for future conflicts.<sup>4</sup> *Chicago Daily News* correspondent Fred Sparks told a convention of young photographers that the war depressed reporters and soldiers alike because they could not understand its objectives nor could the press find ways of making the conflict interesting to readers back in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The decline in coverage of the war had begun almost immediately in the wake of the Chinese intervention, when many correspondents made clear that they had seen enough of the conflict. One reporter wrote that the war had left his colleagues feeling more exhausted after two

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Korea: The "Forgotten" War', *U.S. News and World Report*, 5 October 1951.

<sup>5</sup> 'Sparks Hits K-War Coverage At Home', *Editor & Publisher*, 22 March 1952.

months than three years of reporting during World War Two.<sup>6</sup> After six months of battlefield reporting, many of the biggest journalistic names, including five of the six winners of the Pulitzer Prize for war coverage in 1950, left Korea. Press agencies, which had not expected the war to last more than six months, replaced their older veterans with young and generally inexperienced correspondents who were more willing and able to handle the difficult working conditions.<sup>7</sup>

For the correspondents who remained in South Korea, their primary role was to report on combat operations along the frontline and, after June 1951, the peace talks at Kaesong and Panmunjom. As shown in the previous chapter, virtually all American correspondents in Korea wrote about the war within the Cold War framework established in the summer of 1950. The United States was in South Korea to save the country from communist annexation, not to enforce good government. The domestic political situation was regarded as outside of the domain of U.S. interests unless it posed a direct threat to the war effort, a point made by the *New York Times*' Murray Schumach in May 1951 when the ROK's Vice-President resigned in a protest against Rhee's authoritarianism; "more important for Americans than the possibility that the bickering may lead to political crisis is the danger that it may create disharmony in the South Korean Army and thereby lessen the military strength of the United Nations in Korea".<sup>8</sup>

The *Times* was one of the few newspapers to dedicate any significant attention to the South Korean politics, yet by looking at it through the prism of the UN war effort, it relied on briefings from American and UN officials to form the basis of its reporting. These officials were far from neutral in their perspective. Both the United States and the UN had a vested interest in avoiding embarrassing scandals that could undermine international support for the war effort or damage relations with the

---

<sup>6</sup> Relman Morin, 'Press Does A Job In Korea But It's War Nobody Liked', *The Quill*, October 1950.

<sup>7</sup> Gould to Brines, 12 July 1950, October BD. Korean War Coverage: staff, manpower, etc., Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; 'Farris Assigns Young Staffers To Korean War', *Editor & Publisher*, 24 March 1951.

<sup>8</sup> Murray Schumach, 'Bickering In Korea Hinders Aim of U.S.', *The New York Times*, 12 May 1951.

mercurial Rhee regime.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when Schumach reported on the growing tensions between President Rhee and the National Assembly in May 1951, he relayed a sympathetic account of the situation based on briefings by U.S. diplomats:

United States diplomats here think that despite acceptance today of the Resignation of the Korean Vice President, Lee Si Yung, and the continuing legislative bickering, there is still no serious revolt against President Syngman Rhee. Vice President Lee's resignation was accepted by the Korean Assembly after it had overwhelmingly refused to permit the 82-year-old Government official to leave office last week. United States representatives have felt that this reversal by the legislators indicated neither a growing nor a shrinking of anti-Rhee feeling but merely a concession to an old man desirous of retiring from public life.<sup>10</sup>

One optimistic official told Schumach that "Korean legislators were behaving more like United States Congressmen every day" and pointed out that there had been calls for sweeping investigation following charges of political corruption. Further evidence of the orderly and constitutional nature of Korean government was also found in Rhee's hints that he was not planning to stand again for election unless asked to do so.

Only one journalist adopted a more critical approach to reporting South Korean politics prior to the crisis, Schumach's fellow *New York Times* correspondent George Barrett. On the same day that the *Times* published Schumach's article, the *Reporter* carried a report by Barrett which offered a far less sanguine assessment of the political situation in South Korea:

To be anti-Rhee today in Korea is to be immediately branded a Communist. Even to be non-Rhee involves considerable risk. Assemblymen will talk frankly only behind closed doors and after being assured that their names will not be revealed. Tradespeople and editors will

---

<sup>9</sup> Ambassador John Muccio told Rhee that he had been carefully to report as favourably as possible back to Washington on scandals involving ROK atrocities and political corruption: Memo by Muccio, 12 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Murray Schumach, 'Experts Doubt Anti-Rhee Revolt', *The New York Times*, 15 May 1951.

sometimes talk friendly, but always 'Somewhere else', in a secluded tea room or an out-of-the-way wine house.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Schumach's American-centric account, Barrett based his article on conversations with assemblymen and young Korean dissidents who were deeply concerned about Rhee's use of "arbitrary police action" to silence dissidents. While Barrett was not entirely uncritical of the Assembly- he admitted that many members had a poor understanding of parliamentary procedure and spent their time drafting silly questions to the government- he argued that Rhee had failed as a leader:

[The Rhee] Administration has tried to make a political program of nothing more than anti-Communism and to rally the people around a vague ideal of 'democracy'. One assemblyman declared: 'We are told to hate Communism. Any of us who have had experiences with the Communists don't have to be told to hate them. But to be told in effect that because Communism is so bad we must automatically like democracy is a back-handed way of getting support. We want democracy for itself.'

This was the last article Barrett wrote critical of the Rhee government. Rhee and his advisers were deeply angered by Barrett's critical reporting and accused him of being a "quickie expert" under the influence of "some English speaking politicians who are out to drive a wedge between the President and our Assembly".<sup>12</sup> While it is not clear if the Rhee lobby put pressure on the *Times* to rein Barrett in, his reporting after May 1951 did shift away from Korean aspects of the war. When Barrett finally

---

<sup>11</sup> George Barrett, 'Syngman Rhee and the Korean Assembly', *The Reporter*, 15 May 1951.

<sup>12</sup> Richmond to Mrs Rhee, 15 May 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. See also Office of the President to Richmond, 17 May 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Richmond to Mrs Rhee, 8 May 1951, President Rhee Correspondence (Unofficial), Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.



returned to the subject of democracy in the ROK in early 1952, it was to praise the UN command for its democracy-building projects in South Korea.<sup>13</sup>

In the eyes of many Western observers, the fact that South Korea had any form of functional government following the invasion was a miracle. In a report published in late 1951, the United Nations Mission on the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) remarked that, in contrast to many other countries in wartime, the Korean National Assembly had remained an active and respected force within Korean politics. Public criticism of the government had been permitted and major scandals, most notably the Kuhchang executions in late 1950, had been exposed in the Assembly and the South Korean press. Although the ROK faced great developmental challenges, UNCURK believed that Korea would “continue to develop the institutions of democracy”.<sup>14</sup>

Filled with such ebullient optimism, few observers recognised the existential threat to Korean democracy posed by the brewing political crisis in Pusan. With Rhee’s presidential term due to expire in June 1952, the National Assembly had the power to decide whether Rhee would stay in office. After years of being sidelined by Rhee, the National Assembly had little desire to re-elect him without being offered significant power-sharing concessions.<sup>15</sup> Unwilling to compromise his monopoly on power, Rhee began calling for an amendment to South Korea’s constitution to make the president directly elected by the public. Although this was presented as a democratising measure, few observers of Korean politics believed that Rhee intended to allow opposition parties to run serious political campaigns. Through his control of both the Korean police and the press, Rhee could manage virtually every aspect of the electoral process and guarantee his own re-election. The only obstacle that stood in his way was the Assembly. With little hope of securing a vote in favour of

---

<sup>13</sup> George Barrett, ‘Democratic Ideal Is Pushed In Korea’, *The New York Times*, 12 January 1952; George Barrett, ‘North Koreans Grasp Democracy Enthusiastically in a Freed Area’, *The New York Times*, 17 February 1952.

<sup>14</sup> UNCURK, Annual report 1951 (New York, 1951), p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Keefer, p. 151.; Henderson, pp. 291–94.

the amendment in the Assembly through conventional political means, in the first months of 1952 Rhee began a campaign of increasingly violent political intimidation.

### Spring Crises

Between February and May 1952, Rhee gradually stepped up his campaign of repression against the National Assembly, culminating in the imposition of martial law and the mass arrest of assemblymen at the end of May. The first signs of trouble came during by-elections in February, when both the national police and militia groups affiliated with Rhee's supporters used threats of violence and propaganda posters to intimidate voters. Rhee accused several leading opposition assembly members of being communist agents. Although Ambassador Muccio warned him that the proliferation of journalists, intelligence operatives and political representatives in Korea meant this kind of behaviour would cause international outrage, these developments received virtually no attention in the American press.<sup>16</sup> When AP interviewed Rhee about his difficult relationship with the Assembly at the end of February, the story received little mention in American newspapers.<sup>17</sup> In other press conferences with Rhee, reporters only asked Rhee soft ball questions about his future plans.<sup>18</sup> Coverage of these press conferences amounted to little more than a few sentences in a handful of newspapers. In one of the only analytical articles on the crisis, the *New York Herald Tribune's* Mac Johnson wrote that the National Assembly was likely to re-elect Rhee because there were no other viable candidates.<sup>19</sup>

Until late May, the situation in Pusan was overshadowed by a series of dramatic riots at the UN prisoner of war camp on the island of Koje-Do. During 1951 a resistance movement had gained a foothold in the sprawling and loosely policed camp system, while the negotiators at Panmunjom

---

<sup>16</sup> Muccio to DOS, 12 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> AP's William Jordan interviewed Rhee on the ROK's domestic political problems on 29 February 1952: Seymour Murray Vinocour, *Syngman Rhee: Spokesman For Korea (June 23, 1951 - October 8, 1952): A Case Study In International Speaking'* (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Pennsylvania State University, 1953), p. 327.

<sup>18</sup> Vinocour, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Mac Johnson, 'Lack Of A Rival Due To Re-Elect Rhee President', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 22 April 1952.

argued over whether prisoners had the right to be repatriated to the country of their choosing.<sup>20</sup> In order to embarrass the UN and undermine its negotiating position, the Communists had ordered undercover agents into the camps to ferment a major uprising against the camp guards. Although the uprising failed, the understrength UN forces struggled to fully secure the camp. On 7 May 1952 a group of prisoners sensationally kidnapped the commandant of the prison camp, General Francis Dodd, and forced UN authorities to issue a document apologising for the poor treatment of the prisoners.

Just as the communists had hoped, Dodd's kidnapping was regarded as a deep humiliation for the UN and the United States. Members of the press who had been barred from Kojoe during Dodd's kidnapping, flooded onto the island, where they discovered that the UN had been secretly tackling riots and a state of "civil war" between prisoners for eight months.<sup>21</sup> The problems with Kojoe continued to dominate headlines for much of the rest of May and June until the new commandant Haydon L. Boatner ordered troops supported by tanks to take full control of the remaining rebellious compound on 10 June. For the press, the story of the UN's inability to control rioting prisoners was a powerful illustration of the absurdity of the entire conflict.

With almost every correspondent in South Korea focused on reporting the Kojoe uprising, allegations of political skulduggery by Rhee were unlikely to draw their attention. Nor were correspondents likely to receive any tip offs on the issue from diplomatic sources. Americans diplomats were deeply concerned about jeopardising Korea's support at the UN and the image of the ROK globally.<sup>22</sup> Although Muccio had tried to use the threat of press scrutiny to convince Rhee to back down, American diplomats knew that Rhee's extreme defensiveness and tendency to wilfully

---

<sup>20</sup> For more on the background of the Kojoe uprising see Allan R. Millett, 'War Behind the Wire', *Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 21.2 (2009).

<sup>21</sup> Mark Clark, *From The Danube To The Yalu* (London: George G. Harrap, 1954), p. 53. Communist correspondents Wilfred Burchett and Alan Winnington published a propagandistic account of press coverage of the Kojoe crisis in 1953 which omitted any mention of the Pusan crisis, perhaps because the existence of any kind of functioning opposition in South Korea undermined communist claims that the ROK was a fascist dictatorship: Alan Winnington and Wilfred Burchett, *Koje Unscreened* (London: Britain-China Friendship, 1953).

<sup>22</sup> Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in Korea, 26 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 61.

misrepresent events made him almost invulnerable to the usual soft pressure tactics.<sup>23</sup> Turning the crisis into a major media scandal risked permanently damaging the already strained U.S.-ROK relationship for no appreciable benefit.<sup>24</sup>

### **International crisis**

On 24 May 1952, with just one month of Rhee's term remaining, his newly appointed home minister Lee Bum Suk, the infamous founder of the paramilitary Youth Corps, imposed martial law in the capital Pusan and 22 surrounding counties. Over the next two days, police arrested several members of the National Assembly and detained another 50 for more than a day when they tried to enter the Assembly building. Ultimately, twelve opposition assemblymen were arrested under suspicion of supporting a communist plot to seize control of government, assassinate Rhee and appoint their own 'gangster president'.<sup>25</sup> Rumours spread throughout the country that Rhee planned to dissolve the Assembly and call a new election. Rhee's actions caught both American diplomats and the press off guard. On the day that martial law was imposed, Ambassador Muccio left Korea for a two week trip back to the United States, despite being told by Rhee in their final meeting that he was planning to impose martial law in several areas including Pusan.<sup>26</sup> Apparently missing the potential significance of this development, Muccio had simply reminded Rhee that the eyes of the world were on South Korea.

In spite of Muccio's warning, remarkably few detailed or analytical stories appeared during the first week of the crisis in Pusan. Coverage was dominated by short press agency stories which privileged the South Korean government's perspective and offered little context for events:

---

<sup>23</sup> Muccio questioned whether Rhee "realizes and is capable of checking up on the methods used in carrying out his orders": 'Muccio to Johnson', 27 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Muccio to Allison, 15 February 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Lightner to DOS, 27 May 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 254.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 23 May 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 228.

Pusan, Korea, 25 May (UP) – Martial law was reinforced in Pusan at midnight yesterday in an effort to stem pre-election political disturbances.

The military control, lifted a month ago, was restored in certain areas for the purpose of ‘rooting out communists \*\*\* who show growing activities in taking advantage of the lifting of martial law’.

The proclamation was issued by the Defense Ministry of the South Korean Government.

Thirty persons were injured Tuesday when 1,500 demonstrators surrounded the Capitol compound for three hours and attempted to break in. Police, reinforced by several hundred South Korean troops, finally broke up the riot.<sup>27</sup>

The *Times* carried its first and only eyewitness report from an unnamed correspondent on 29 May. The correspondent claimed that observers outside of South Korean politics were “deeply disturbed” by the “absurd” charge by Rhee that funds have been funnelled into the pockets of assemblymen through international Communist agencies.<sup>28</sup> The correspondent also made clear links between the arrest of the assemblymen and Rhee’s “long campaign to whittle down the power of the legislative body”- a detail missed in most of the press agency reporting.

Most of the *Times*’ coverage, and that of much of the rest of the press, dutifully reported on the American and international diplomatic response to the crisis. In the wake of the arrest of the assemblymen, senior American and UN figures had put pressure on Rhee with a series of high profile meetings and statements to the press. On 27 May General James Van Fleet, commander of the Eighth Army in Korea, visited Rhee to discuss the crisis.<sup>29</sup> The next day, UNCURK issued a public statement in which it called on Rhee to end martial law and release the detained assemblymen.

---

<sup>27</sup> UP, ‘Pusan Tightens Control’, *The New York Times*, 25 May 1950.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Pusan Assembly Hits At Rhee’, *The New York Times*, 29 May 1952.

<sup>29</sup> Murray Schumach, ‘Van Fleet Confers With Rhee On Acts’, *The New York Times*, 28 May 1952.

In private, policymakers were deeply conflicted on how to respond to Rhee's provocation. UN Commander Mark Clark felt that the United States might have to swallow its pride and "go on working with Rhee even after watching him overthrow democracy".<sup>30</sup> Military leaders were primarily concerned with the impact of Rhee's machinations on the ROK's Army. In his meeting with General Van Fleet on 27 May, Rhee threatened to remove from office the ROK Army Chief of Staff General Lee Chong Chan, a talented military leader who had a close relationship with the Americans. While Van Fleet forced Rhee to keep Lee in position, the military leadership feared that Rhee could withdraw troops from the frontline to enforce martial law, opening up critical gaps in the UN defensive line. Both Van Fleet and General Clark thus repeatedly sought a commitment from Rhee not to allow the political crisis to undermine the war effort.

While the military leadership fretted over the impact of the crisis on the war effort, U.S. and UNCURK diplomats worried most about the political implications of the crisis. Acting in Muccio's absence, the American charge d'affaires, Allen Lightner, warned Rhee that South Korea faced severe repercussions when the world's democracies learned of the ROK's drastic police measures.<sup>31</sup> In his dispatches back to Washington, Lightner argued that if the democratic process was allowed to be violated in Korea, where the UN had a special position of influence on political matters, the United States would give "the impression to the new governments of the Far East and to the world in general that we are unwilling [to] fully back the system and ideology we profess".<sup>32</sup> Lightner highlighted the impossibility of compromise; either Rhee could get his way or be swept from power. Washington had to decide which option it preferred.

On 30 May, Muccio met with Secretary of State Dean Acheson and his Far East advisers in Washington to discuss their options. At the top of the agenda was an offer made by a group of South Korean army officers to stage a military coup with the promise of a rapid transition back to

---

<sup>30</sup> Lightner to DOS, 3 June 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 287.

<sup>31</sup> Lightner to DOS, 27 May 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 255.

<sup>32</sup> Lightner to DOS, 28 May 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 264.

constitutional rule.<sup>33</sup> The participants, however, failed to come to a firm decision. Washington had no preferred candidate to push towards power. Without strong leadership from the Korean opposition it was all too easy for the military to cling onto power- creating even more of a propaganda problem than Rhee's abrogation of the constitution. Although the potential domestic ramifications of the crisis were not discussed, Rhee also had key allies in Washington who could turn his removal into a major controversy in the run up to the 1952 President election.<sup>34</sup>

As policymakers vacillated over what to do about Rhee in private, they were also careful to not denounce him in public. In a memo to the U.S. Embassy in South Korea in early June, Acheson wrote: "The U.S. has consistently supported and defended the ROK against its detractors upon the basis of ROK performance under a democratic constitution and legal system. The U.S. government so far has, despite strong pressure, not made public its attitude toward recent events in the ROK." <sup>35</sup> Instead of criticising Rhee directly, U.S. officials piled pressure on Rhee through public statements of concern, including a letter from President Truman the content of which was only made available to the press in summary form. Newspapers built their coverage of the crisis around these statements, usually without any assessment of the veracity of Rhee's claims or why Rhee had wanted the constitution changed in the first place.<sup>36</sup> The *Times* first editorial on the crisis simply outlined the course of events and ended with a mild rebuke;

As a result of a double-barrelled intervention by President Truman and the British government, President Rhee of (South) Korea appears to be reconsidering the arbitrary and

---

<sup>33</sup> E. Allan Lightner, Jr. Oral History by Richard D. McKinzie, 26 October 1973, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

<sup>34</sup> Edward C. Keefer argued that Rhee's powerful allies in Congress, including such ultraconservatives as Senator William Jenner, Representative Earl Wilson and Senator William F. Knowland, were a powerful deterrent against removing Rhee. They admired Rhee's anti-communism and accepted his argument that Korean communists pulled the strings in the national assembly just as they believed that Kremlin agents had burrowed into key positions in Dean Acheson's State Department: Keefer, p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> Dean Acheson to U.S. Embassy Korea, 4 June 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 303.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, while the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* each ran between 35 and 40 stories related to the crisis, the vast majority were press agency reports simply describing a statement by a senior Western military or diplomatic official.

unconstitutional policy he has pursued in his feud with the Assembly...In any case, if Korean democracy is to prevail it must learn to handle such situations by regular judicial processes. There can be little excuse for resort to unconstitutional practices which compromise not only the South Korean Government but also the cause of the United Nations, thereby tending to encourage Communist truculence at Panmunjom and Kojé, and to prolong the war.<sup>37</sup>

In the most extensive analysis of the crisis to appear in the *Times*, Tokyo bureau chief Lindsey Parrott revealed the pragmatic logic which underlay the newspaper's position on the crisis. He argued that the United States was only interested in this issue of "internal politics" because any political disruption would have serious effects on the ability of the United Nations forces to support frontline forces.<sup>38</sup>

However, other factors also shaped the *Times'* coverage of the crisis. Although the paper had two correspondents in South Korea at the time, Murray Schumach was mostly confined to the truce talks site at Panmunjom in readiness for any unexpected diplomatic developments.<sup>39</sup> George Barrett spent much of the period of the crisis on Kojé, writing daily updates on the security situation and preparing a lengthy article for the *Reporter*.<sup>40</sup> Both reporters may also have been discouraged from covering the crisis by the *New York Times'* publisher Arthur Hayes Sulzberger, who happened to be visiting South Korea on an inspection trip at the end of May. While enjoying 'five star general' treatment by Eighth Army staff during his extensive tour of the country, Sulzberger took a very diplomatic approach to the crisis, meeting with Rhee to discuss the response of the American press.<sup>41</sup> Although Sulzberger gave an account of his time with Rhee to American diplomats, he chose

---

<sup>37</sup> 'New Trouble in Korea', *The New York Times*, 5 June 1952.

<sup>38</sup> Lindsey Parrott, 'South Korean Politics Poses Problem for U.N.', *The New York Times*, 8 June 1952.

<sup>39</sup> Freeman to Catledge, 1 July 1952, Box 156, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>40</sup> George Barrett, 'Why Our Red Prisoners Refuse To Go Home', *The Reporter*, 5 August 1952.

<sup>41</sup> Turnblad to Gould, 28 May 1952, SF, 1952, S-Writing Criticism, New Box 102, Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; Vinocour, p. 309.



not to publish anything about the experience in the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Sulzberger came away from Korea favourably impressed by Rhee- he later wrote that his findings from the trip “pretty well” lined up with the views of Rhee’s American publicist Robert T. Oliver.<sup>43</sup> In the weeks after the visit, Sulzberger maintained correspondence with senior figures in the Korean government but did not mention the political crisis until 16 June, when he wrote to Rhee to call for an end to censorship and for steps to be taken to restore the confidence of South Korea’s allies.<sup>44</sup>

Once it became clear that Rhee was not going to dissolve the Assembly, coverage of the crisis began to dissipate. Apart from an outcry over Rhee’s decision to block broadcasts of the Voice of America after they quoted American newspaper editorials critical of Rhee, the attention of journalists in Korea shifted back to Koje and a visit by British Defence Minister Viscount Alexander.<sup>45</sup> George Barrett travelled to Seoul to write a lengthy report on the state of the ROK army. The article heavily praised the ROK army for the great progress it had made under General Van Fleet’s training regime and quoted a letter sent home by a ROK officer training in the United States; after seeing America, the Korean declared, “I know that there can be, and we can have, the same freedom of religion, speech and press in our own country”. No connection was made to Rhee’s suppression of these civil liberties.<sup>46</sup>

The crisis received similarly marginal attention in the *Times*’ main establishment rival, the *Herald Tribune*. Korea correspondent Mac Johnson spent the first weeks of the crisis in Koje, only returning to cover the situation in Pusan for a handful of articles in mid and late June. In his first article on the crisis on 8 June, Johnson argued that Rhee had “turned from democratic means to the dictatorial methods he despises. He has decreed martial law, threatened dissolution of the nation’s

---

<sup>42</sup> Lightner to Young, 5 June 1952, *FRUS* 1952-54, 15: p. 308.

<sup>43</sup> Sulzberger to Catledge, 31 December 1952, Box 134, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>44</sup> Sulzberger to Rhee, 16 June 1952, Box 192, New York Times Company Records. Foreign Desk Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>45</sup> UP, ‘Rhee Rebuffs U.S. On ‘Voice’ Ban And Extends Censorship On Press’, *The New York Times*, 14 June 1952.

<sup>46</sup> George Barrett, ‘The ROK’s Learn To Be An Army’, *The New York Times*, 22 June 1952.

unicameral legislature, the National Assembly, arrested twelve assemblymen and frightened another thirty or forty into hiding as he used the ROK Army in Latin-American fashion to achieve his ends".<sup>47</sup> Yet, Johnson's attention once again slipped away until the last week of June, as Rhee's supporters increased pressure on the Assembly to vote in favour of a constitutional amendment. In his dispatches from Pusan, Johnson suggested that the Assembly had been "embarrassed and discredited" by government demonstrators holding them captive inside their meeting hall for five hours.<sup>48</sup> Like Arthur Hayes Sulzberger, the *Tribune's* publisher Helen Ogden Reid was also a friendly acquaintance of members of the Rhee lobby and a strong advocate for an anti-communist foreign policy.<sup>49</sup> It was thus unsurprising when, at the end of June, the *Tribune* published a belated and rather meek editorial raising concern over Rhee's methods: "Syngman Rhee's desire to remain President of South Korea is understandable and perhaps praiseworthy, but there is little to praise in the steps he has recently taken to fulfil it... It is distressing that the cause of popular government in South, which Rhee promises to uphold, is being seriously jeopardised by the methods with which he has chosen to defend it."<sup>50</sup>

### **Backlash against Rhee**

While the most influential New York newspapers avoided directly criticising Rhee, journalists for other publications were far more scathing in their criticism. Amongst the most aggressive was the *Chicago Daily News's* star reporter Keyes Beech.<sup>51</sup> As the Tokyo bureau chief for a newspaper renowned for its open-minded editorial policy and proud tradition of foreign affairs journalism, Beech was unusually well placed to offer forthright analysis on the crisis. A veteran Far East correspondent, Beech had developed a strong disdain for authoritarianism of any kind, whether it be the SCAP regime in Japan, Chiang Kai'shek's dying nationalist government or Syngman Rhee's

---

<sup>47</sup> Mac Johnson, 'Rhee's Total Democracy', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 8 June 1952.

<sup>48</sup> Mac Johnson, 'Pro-Rhee Mob Holds Assembly Captive For 5 Hours', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 29 June 1952.

<sup>49</sup> Reid to Yim, 29 December 1951, Box D104, Reid Family Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>50</sup> 'Syngman Rhee's Solution', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 27 June 1952.

<sup>51</sup> Keyes Beech, 'Rhee defies UN, Remains Dictator', *The Chicago Daily News*, 29 May 1952.

police state.<sup>52</sup> His experiences in China had convinced him that the United States had erred in its support for reactionary regimes which did not offer the hope of revolutionary change for repressed postcolonial peoples.<sup>53</sup> Although initially sympathetic to the South Korean cause in the first months of the war, by 1951 he was publicly in favour of the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea.<sup>54</sup>

Like many Americans in South Korea his views of the regime began to improve in late 1951 and early 1952. While covering local elections in April 1952, he claimed that “despite communist aggression and infiltration, democracy still functions in South Korea”.<sup>55</sup> After the Pusan crisis erupted in late May, Beech argued that democracy could only continue to survive if Rhee respected the democratic constitutional order: “When Rhee says nobody wants more than he to see his country put on a sound democratic basis, he means it. Yet the methods he has employed are the very antithesis of democracy. Rhee deplors dictatorships and advocates constitutional government. Yet he is in fact the dictator of South Korea and the constitution is what Rhee says it is.”<sup>56</sup> In Beech’s rendition, the Assemblymen opposing Rhee, Shin Icky and Kim Dong Sung, the speaker and vice-speaker of the South Korean National Assembly, were now the torch bearers for South Korean democracy.<sup>57</sup>

As the crisis wore on, however, Beech became increasingly despondent about the lack of international support for these noble men. He quoted Kim Dong Sung; “We are like men drowning. You sit with arms folded and watch us. You ask why we don’t do something- why don’t these Koreans do something if they’re so interested in democracy? What can you do against the police? We have no power except the constitution and the constitution is no more. We have no police and no army.”<sup>58</sup> By the end of June, Beech judged that in “four weeks of dictatorial rule he has

---

<sup>52</sup> Beech was one reporters had who had witnessed the brutal killing of civilians by ROKA forces during the Yosu uprising in October 1948. See Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> Beech, p. 97.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Korea Of No Value To Us, Keyes Beech Declares’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 19 April 1951.

<sup>55</sup> Keyes Beech, ‘South Koreans Hold 1<sup>st</sup> Local Elections’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 25 April 1952.

<sup>56</sup> Keyes Beech, ‘4 Weeks Blacken 40-Year Reputation Of Korea’s Rhee’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 23 June 1952.

<sup>57</sup> Keyes Beech, ‘2 S. Koreans Defy Rhee’s Power Grab’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 6 June 1952.

<sup>58</sup> Keyes Beech, ‘Rhee Foes Brace To Bar Dictatorship’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 17 June 1952.

blackened the reputation it took him 40 years to build as a fighter for Korean independence and champion of democracy".<sup>59</sup>

The *Monitor's* Henry S. Hayward adopted a much more analytical perspective on Korea's political crisis. A Harvard graduate and expert commentator on international affairs, Hayward was one of the most intellectual foreign correspondents in South Korea.<sup>60</sup> After five years on the foreign desk, the *Monitor* sent Hayward to Japan in early 1952 to provide his trademark magazine-style analysis of the end of the occupation. Like Beech, Hayward was staunchly liberal and often expressed concern over the dangers of excessive anti-communism; in one article in 1949, he warned that 'fear of communism might well drive a liberated Japan into communism's opposite- a reactionary regime along fascist lines'.<sup>61</sup>

Hayward believed that the conflict in South Korea reflected two manifestations of democratic forces- one elected in democratic elections in 1950, and another Rhee's constructed 'people's will'.<sup>62</sup> Hayward argued that both sides paid lip service to the "people" but only when it ran in their favour. Hayward was not particularly impressed by members of the National Assembly who opposed Rhee, arguing that they probably had taken bribe money from communists, even if they had not recognised it as such. But Hayward did see the bigger threat that the crisis posed to South Korea. It could turn South Korea into a "banana republic"- a Latin-American style regime where it would be "relatively easy for a strong man to seize power, swing the police behind him and take control into his own hands".<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Keyes Beech, '4 Weeks Blacken 40-Year Reputation Of Korea's Rhee', *The Chicago Daily News*, 23 June 1952.

<sup>60</sup> 'Henry Hayward, Unflappable Global Reporter And Editor', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 April 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Henry S. Hayward, 'This World...Red Tinge Over Japan- Bright and Dim', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 November 1949.

<sup>62</sup> Henry S. Hayward, 'Rhee's One-Man Revolution Shakes Korean Democracy', *The Cristian Science Monitor*, 17 June 1952.

<sup>63</sup> The term "banana Republic" was in wide use amongst Americans in South Korea at the time: Keyes Beech, 'Rhee Wins Extension of Korea Rule', *The Chicago Daily News*, 23 June 1952.

The impact of Beech's and Hayward's critical coverage of Rhee was limited. Although their newspapers had given them the editorial freedom to write about the crisis, neither gave their reporters strong editorial backing. While the *Monitor* initially argued that this was "hardly the sort of government that UN soldiers have given their lives to defend", by the end of June it accepted that authoritarian tendencies in a politically inexperienced country like Korea could be excused.<sup>64</sup> The *Daily News* made no editorial comment during the crisis. The closest it came was an analytical article written by Peter Lisagor based on an interview with Rhee's U.S.-based critic, Yong-jeung Kim, in which he called on the United States to respond to Rhee's provocations.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, the most severe editorial criticism of Rhee appeared only in smaller regional and city newspapers. The *Hartford Courant*, Connecticut's biggest-selling newspaper, called for the United States to drop Syngman Rhee entirely, arguing that he was the kind of feudal politician that hurt the image of the United States in the postcolonial world.<sup>66</sup> These scattered calls for Rhee's removal in second and third tier newspapers had little impact on the broader debate.

### **Assessing the crisis**

The crisis reached a climax at the end of June when Rhee deployed police units to round up members of the Assembly who had gone into hiding. After several days of effectively being held hostage in the Assembly building, assembly members finally passed the constitutional amendment on 4 July. Once elections were hurriedly organised for 10 August, Rhee won in a landslide with 74.6% of the vote and even managed to orchestrate the defeat of his own official vice-presidential candidate Lee Bum Suk, after becoming paranoid that Lee was too ambitious for power.

Rhee's refusal to back down put the press in a difficult position. In an off-the-record briefing to a *Time* reporter, State Department officials explained that there had been no indication that the

---

<sup>64</sup> 'Korean Politics', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 June 1952; 'Constitutional Crises', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 June 1952.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Lisagor, 'Rhee Crisis May Compel U.S. to Act', *The Chicago Daily News*, 3 June 1952.

<sup>66</sup> 'Complex Korea', *The Boston Globe*, 31 May 1952; 'Can't we drop Syngman Rhee?', 30 May 1952, *The Hartford Courant*.

U.S. response to Rhee's undemocratic and "utterly unpalatable" tactics had had any influence on his behaviour.<sup>67</sup> How could journalists explain this major diplomatic defeat inflicted on the United States by its own ally?

The answer was to focus instead on the positives of the end of the crisis; the stabilisation of the political situation and Rhee's promises of delivering full democracy. In this, the press was greatly aided by Rhee's clever manipulation of the news narrative. At the end of June, Rhee had allowed the Voice of America to resume broadcasting and distanced himself from accusations of press censorship, declaring that, "such practices, if they exist, must be abolished immediately". These de-escalatory steps coincided with a strong effort by Rhee and his supporters to present Rhee's side of the argument to American journalists. According to Robert T. Oliver's aide Seymour Vinocour, Rhee dramatically improved the way he dealt with the press in the last weeks of the crisis.<sup>68</sup> During Rhee's first press conference on 29 May, Rhee's highly emotional remarks had provided far more interesting and controversial copy for the assembled reporters than the pre-prepared hand-out which had coherently and clearly set out Rhee's reasons for arresting members of the Assembly.<sup>69</sup> For three weeks, Rhee then gave no further comments to the press, effectively removing his voice from the debate. Only at the end of June, as Rhee realised the damage that was being done to his image abroad, did he abandon this aloof approach and grant four interviews with the press agencies between 23 June and 27 June.<sup>70</sup>

Rhee was a master of press interviews. George Barrett observed how during one interview Rhee had talked so eloquently about democracy that even he, an ardent critic of the president, had

---

<sup>67</sup> Caturani to Visson, 27 June 1952, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>68</sup> Seymour Murray Vinocour, *Syngman Rhee: Spokesman For Korea (June 23, 1951 - October 8, 1952): A Case Study In International Speaking'* (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Pennsylvania State University, 1953), p. 327.

<sup>69</sup> The handout is reprinted in Vinocour, p. 83-85.

<sup>70</sup> These four interviews were conducted by four different journalists with the three main press agencies: Bill Shinn, AP, 23 June 1952; William Jordan, AP, 24 June 1952; Robert Shaekne, INS, 27 June 1952; Warren Franklin, UP, 27 June 1952.

wondered whether he was actually being honest.<sup>71</sup> Rhee's expert knowledge of American history and ability to recite the American constitution word for word left a deep impression on many of those he spoke to.<sup>72</sup> Rhee also ensured that he had journalists at an advantage by demanding that reporters supply questions in advance so that he could work out an answer which, in the words of his adviser Seymour Vinocour, "would present his case in the best light possible".<sup>73</sup> These answers were provided to the journalist before the beginning of the interview with the expectation that they should not ask about any topics that were not mentioned in this manuscript.

In his interviews with AP's William Jordan and INS' Robert Schakne, Rhee emphasised the communist threat to the country. He told Jordan that his opponents, "bought off by Japanese and communists funds", were hoping to install another leader who would open reunification negotiations with the north.<sup>74</sup> While he admitted that his actions against the Assembly were technically illegal, he claimed that all legal routes had been blocked and that he could not allow a tiny minority in the Assembly to use the imperfections of the constitution to deliver South Korea to its enemies. In his interview with Schakne, Rhee argued that the crisis was just the latest manifestation of a lifelong campaign of character assassination by his enemies in both the United States and Korea.<sup>75</sup>

In both interviews, Rhee claimed that he was being bombarded with letters and petitions from the Korean population demanding the dissolution of the Assembly. This tallied with the growing number of demonstrations that had occurred outside the Assembly building over the course of June, including a hunger strike by 500 provincial council members demanding the introduction of popular elections for the presidency.<sup>76</sup> Although Rhee claimed that these protests were an

---

<sup>71</sup> George Barrett, 'Syngman Rhee and the Korean Assembly, *The Reporter*, 15 May 1951. Some U.S. diplomats were also convinced that Rhee was being manipulated by a group of politically ambitious officials, most notably Lee Bum-Suk: 'Lightner to Young', 5 June 1952, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15 (1): p. 308

<sup>72</sup> Clark, p. 148.

<sup>73</sup> Vinocour, p. 85.

<sup>74</sup> A copy of Jordan's dispatch can be found in Vinocour, pp. 439-445.

<sup>75</sup> A copy of Schakne's dispatch can be found in Vinocour, pp. 446-453.

<sup>76</sup> AP, 'Rhee Group Stages A Hunger Sitdown', *The New York Times*, 24 June 1952.

impromptu and authentic mobilisation of popular feeling, most observers suspected that the protests were organised by the regime. Rhee had used such tactics regularly during the occupation period and did so again during the armistice crisis in 1953. However, no journalist attempted to publicly challenge the legitimacy of the protesters.

Rhee's American lobbyists and propaganda agents also managed to persuade elements of the right-wing press that Rhee had been acting in the interests of Korean democracy.<sup>77</sup> In mid-June the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published an editorial which argued that the decision to change the constitution "in accordance with American principles" should receive no censure from the U.S. government.<sup>78</sup> The *Washington Evening Star*, then the leading newspaper in Washington, published a letter, by Robert T. Oliver, which argued that Rhee's violation of the constitution stemmed not from authoritarianism but a desire to avoid bargaining with the Assembly through corrupt horse-trading and political patronage.<sup>79</sup> Oliver suggested that it was only natural for Rhee's pursuit of greater democracy to have priority over the constitution. In San Francisco, the Korean consul convinced the *San Francisco Chronicle* to run an editorial entitled 'Rhee's side of the story', which likewise argued that it was more democratic to let Rhee, with his solid backing by the Korean people, to revise the constitution in his own way.<sup>80</sup> In late June, the *New York Times* published a letter by writer and strong Rhee sympathiser Geraldine Fitch which criticised the "over-simplified" coverage of Rhee's constitutional reforms.<sup>81</sup> She repeated Rhee's rhetoric about the existence of a communist

---

<sup>77</sup> Rhee's U.S.-based lobbyists didn't publish anything significant during the first two weeks of the crisis beyond Robert T. Oliver's biweekly newsletter, *Periscope on Asia*, which carried a series of articles praising the ROK's fledgling democracy. In the 2 June issue, Vinocour examined the 'new epoch in Korea's democratic development' following the success of the April local elections: Seymour Murray Vinocour, 'Koreans Elect Local Officials', *Periscope on Asia*, 2 June 1952.

<sup>78</sup> 'Korean Crisis', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 June 1952.

<sup>79</sup> Robert T. Oliver, Letter, *The Washington Evening Star*, 10 June 1952.

<sup>80</sup> 'Rhee's Side of the Story', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 June 1952.

<sup>81</sup> Geraldine Fitch, Letter 'Rhee's Actions Upheld', *The New York Times*, 24 June 1952.



conspiracy within the Assembly and disingenuously argued that Rhee had no intention of using the constitutional amendment to secure his own re-election.<sup>82</sup>

Rhee's most influential American supporters publicly declared that he was too important to the anti-communist cause to be sacrificed over an internal political issue. Senator William Knowland, often jokingly referred to as the 'Senator from Formosa' due to close ties with Chiang Kai-Shek, called on the Senate to suspend judgement on the political situation in South Korea, arguing that while Rhee had faults, his uncompromising opposition to communism earned him the benefit of the doubt.<sup>83</sup> Senator William E. Jenner warned the Senate that attacks on Rhee might be a communist plot and disputed the right of the UN to intervene in his re-election plans.<sup>84</sup> At least one McCarthy-inspired Republican Congressman even accused the State Department of trying to use the crisis as a means of replacing Rhee with a communist leader.<sup>85</sup>

Rhee's charges of a conspiracy appeared to be sensationally vindicated on 26 June when news broke of an assassination attempt at a rally commemorating the second anniversary of the Korean War. The Korean police identified the alleged assassin as a member of a Chinese terrorist group and claimed that he had been ordered to carry out the hit by a member of the Assembly. Many historians now regard the entire episode as a hoax perpetrated by Rhee, although this remains speculative.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, the State Department briefed reporters at the time that the incident might have been staged.<sup>87</sup> In an article published once the crisis was over, *Time* wondered how news of the

---

<sup>82</sup> Rhee's American press advisers were not always helpful to his cause. Paul Douglass, a former president of American University who worked as a press adviser to Rhee from 1952 to 1955, adopted the peculiar strategy of admitting that Rhee's charges against the assemblymen were largely fictitious. He told correspondents that Rhee's behaviour was justified because he was leading a revolution on behalf of the Korean people. This attempt to cloak Rhee's fraudulent actions in the progressive rhetoric of 'revolutionary' reform was criticised by Henry S. Hayward: Henry S. Hayward, 'Pusan Plot': Rhee Charged With Inventing Conspiracy As Stratagem in Power', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 18 June 1952.

<sup>83</sup> AP, 'Knowland Defends Rhee', *The New York Times*, 10 June 1952.

<sup>84</sup> AP, 'Senator Jenner Upholds Rhee', *The New York Times*, 26 June 1952.

<sup>85</sup> 'U.S. Denies It Sought Rhee Election Defeat', *The New York Times*, 21 September 1952.

<sup>86</sup> *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, ed. by James I. Matray and Jr. Donald W. Boose (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Caturani to Visson, 27 June 1952, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

assassination attempt made it into pro-Rhee Korean newspapers in less than 30 minutes.<sup>88</sup> Whether or not the incident was fabricated, it undoubtedly helped Rhee justify his repressive tactics.

When the Assembly finally voted in favour of the constitutional amendment on 4 July, the *Times* welcomed the clearing of the air so that that all sides could renew their focus on the war.<sup>89</sup> Rhee had made clear that he truly desired “a wider and firmer democracy”. Rhee had also offered some significant compromises by giving the Assembly the right to remove the cabinet through a vote of no confidence.<sup>90</sup> In another editorial after Rhee’s re-election, the *Times* argued that Rhee had clearly accomplished his goal of creating a more vigorous democracy.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, Rhee’s large victory confirmed his symbolic status as defender of national independence and opponent of communism in any form.

More liberal newspapers also looked to find the positive in the crisis. The *Chicago Daily News* wrote that it was understandable, if not excusable, that Rhee had resorted to dictatorial methods to bring order.<sup>92</sup> Ultimately, Rhee’s tactics had resolved a difficult situation in a manner which should not displease his democratic allies. Only the *Washington Post*, historically one of the greatest press sceptics of the Rhee regime, struck a lonely note of concern in an editorial which argued that while Rhee may have been acting out of patriotism, it was plain that he had “used an iron hand to re-establish himself as Korea’s strong man”.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

The Pusan crisis was an unusual moment in American coverage of South Korea. For the first and only time, newspaper headlines and editorials throughout the press drew attention to Rhee’s anti-democratic practices. Unlike previous episodes of electoral corruption or police repression,

---

<sup>88</sup> ‘The Allies: Rhee’s Round’, *Time*, 7 July 1952.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Compromise At Pusan’, *The New York Times*, 6 July 1952.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Korea’s Constitutional Problem’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 15 July 1952.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Dr Rhee as a symbol’, *The New York Times*, 8 August 1952.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Support For Rhee’, *The Chicago Daily News*, 7 July 1952.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Korean “Harmony”’, *The Washington Post*, 13 July 1952.

Rhee's blatant violation of constitutional order in the summer of 1952 was highly visible and impossible to deny. U.S. diplomats and administration officials were as disturbed by the conduct of the Rhee regime as liberal journalists.

However, the unusual context of the crisis did not change the fundamental pattern of coverage of authoritarianism in South Korea. The majority of foreign correspondents either did not report on the crisis or took a position sympathetic to the ROK government. Very few newspapers condemned Rhee outright. Once the crisis was resolved, the press sought to rationalise what had happened and not dwell on its disturbing long-term ramifications.

As Wada Haruki has argued, the Syngman Rhee regime emerged from the crisis "stronger than ever".<sup>94</sup> Rhee had shown that the United States had very little leverage with Rhee when it came to forcing him to respect the ROK's constitution. Thus, it laid the groundwork for Rhee to establish complete control of the ROK's political system over the following two years. It also set a precedent for many of the developments which consigned South Korea to another forty years of dictatorial rule, "It was... the first time that the man in power attempted successfully to prolong his tenure of office by means of constitutional revision, the first time a power crisis was controlled by martial law, and the first time the military, or part of it, seriously considered intervening in politics".<sup>95</sup>

While the press did not know of these future consequences in 1952, it was clear from the egregiousness of Rhee's acts that this was a crucial moment in South Korea's political development. Although it is difficult to believe that the UN could have removed Rhee from power without causing a much greater crisis, Edward C. Keefer has argued that plausible alternative approaches were available. In one plan, devised by British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn Lloyd, the United States and UK would have offered a compromise ultimatum to Rhee demanding that he

---

<sup>94</sup> Wada Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), p. 234.

<sup>95</sup> Ra, p. 301.

share power with the National Assembly in return for agreeing to the constitutional amendment.<sup>96</sup> Another plan mooted by U.S. officials suggested putting UN soldiers around the National Assembly to protect assemblymen from the police while both sides worked on a compromise. Although these particular plans were secret, the press could have put more pressure on the U.S. government to take action. If major newspapers, most crucially the *New York Times*, had sent correspondents to cover the crisis from the perspective of Korean assembly members, U.S. policymakers might have come under much greater pressure to forcibly intervene in the crisis.

---

<sup>96</sup> Keefer, p. 165.

## Chapter 6: The Rise of the ROKA

Amongst the most remarkable aspects of the Korean War was the revival of the ROK's Army (ROKA) following its near total collapse in the summer of 1950. After coming close to disaster once again in the spring of 1951, the ROKA was fundamentally rebuilt and reformed by the U.S. military. After the election of Dwight Eisenhower to the presidency in November 1952, the rapid expansion in the size and capability of the ROKA became the foundation for the 'Koreanisation' of the war effort. This transformation in the ROKA played a major role in the shift of American perceptions of the ROK- where once it had been seen as little more than a helpless victim, by 1953 it was a powerful military ally in the fight against communism.

This chapter shows how this change in perception occurred. It argues that press coverage of the ROKA developed in line with the changing perceptions of the ROKA amongst American military officials and the political elite. Aside from the moments of near collapse in July 1950 and May 1951, the press showed only sporadic interest in the ROKA during the first two years of the war. Although the ROKA began a dramatic programme of improvement in mid-1951, it was not until the summer of 1952, as the possibility of ROKA forces replacing U.S. forces on the front line became a political issue, that coverage significantly changed. As a result of the political activism of the Eighth Army's popular Commander, General James Van Fleet, and the Eisenhower administration's desire to justify the U.S. commitment to South Korea, a new narrative took hold, which established the ROKA as a world-class fighting force. When the last Chinese offensive of the war in July 1953 threatened to once again cripple ROK forces, U.S. military officials kept the story secret in order to preserve the image of the ROKA as a force ready to stand toe to toe against their communist foe.

This chapter is the first scholarly analysis of American press coverage of the ROKA. Several works have explored strategic and military aspects of the ROKA's combat performance and

rebuilding during the war without any discussion of public affairs issues.<sup>1</sup> This chapter instead frames the ROKA's expansion in terms of its positive impact on public perceptions of the ROK and shows how this narrative displaced concerns about the rising authoritarianism of the Rhee regime.

### **First Impressions**

When the DPRK launched its invasion of the ROK in June 1950, accounts of the catastrophic collapse of the ROK's armed forces headlined almost every newspaper- for many Americans, the first news story they had ever read about Korea. Within days of North Korean tanks crossing the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, much of the ROK's armed forces had fallen into a disorganised retreat.<sup>2</sup> Three reporters were almost killed when South Korean forces blew up a bridge over the Han River in a premature effort to stop communist forces from pursuing retreating South Korean forces south of Seoul. Although the correspondents survived, hundreds of soldiers and civilian refugees died in the blast.<sup>3</sup> The American public watched in astonishment as a country which had received all the benefits of American military guidance and preparation verged on the brink of a violent communist takeover.

The shock of the ROKA's poor performance was exacerbated by the complacent attitude of the press towards South Korean security issues prior to June 1950. After South Korea had become independent in 1948, the ROK's armed forces had faced a series of confrontations on its border with the DPRK as well as a major insurgency in the south of the country. These conflicts received only fleeting mentions in the press. When hundreds of Korean soldiers mutinied and tried to organise an uprising against the government in the autumn of 1948, it was treated as an isolated, albeit

---

<sup>1</sup> Two of the best accounts look at the ROKA through the experiences of the American military advisory mission: Bryan R. Gibby, *The Will To Win: American Military Advisers in Korea, 1946-1953* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2012); Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAC in Peace and War* (Washington D.C.: Office of Military History, Department of the Army, 1963). See also Jongnam Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers: The Americanization of the South Korean Army 1945-1955' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive historiography looking at the causes of the military collapse of the ROKA. See Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1961). Allan R. Millett, *The War For Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From The North* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Burton Crane, 'South Koreans kill own troops by dynamiting a bridge too soon', *The New York Times*, 28 June 1950.

ominous, incident and did not lead to longer-term scrutiny of the ROK's military capabilities.<sup>4</sup> Over the following year and a half, most correspondents simply repeated official endorsements of South Korean military capabilities.<sup>5</sup> As became all too apparent in June 1950, these officials were often guilty of wishful thinking- none more so than the commanding officer of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), General William L. Roberts, who was convinced that Korea's mountainous terrain made it completely unsuited to tank warfare. When responding to rumours that the Soviets had outfitted North Korean forces with heavy weapons, General Roberts told AP correspondent Oliver King that there "was not a tank in all of Asia, much less nearly two hundred just across the parallel".<sup>6</sup> In his memoir, King bitterly remembered that like many other correspondents, he chose to rely on the word of officials he believed had no reason to misrepresent the situation.

American press coverage reflected what Jongnam Na described as the "almost delusional" belief in the ROKA's capability amongst Americans in the Far East.<sup>7</sup> KMAG officials, American diplomats and MacArthur's Command in Tokyo all shared in the collective fantasy that the South Korean Army was a sterling success and that the 'Americanisation' programme was not suffering from serious problems. *The Times'* Walter Sullivan, a Seoul-based correspondent in early 1950, wrote that the ROKA was the most Americanised of all foreign troops trained by the Americans, so much so that "a visitor to Korea is startled into thinking American forces are still in occupation".<sup>8</sup> In early June 1950, just weeks before the North Korean invasion, *Time* correspondent Frank Gibney enthusiastically praised the growing capabilities of South Korea's armed forces. After meeting with senior KMAG officers, Gibney argued that the successful Americanisation of ROKA made it a force to be reckoned with. One observer even told him that it was "the best army of its size in Asia".<sup>9</sup> In an article written long after the war, Gibney recalled that he had not expected the ROKA to be tested

---

<sup>4</sup> Coverage of the Cholla uprising is looked at in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>5</sup> UP, 'Korean Troops Said Capable', *Eugene Register-Guard*, 16 April 1949.

<sup>6</sup> King, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Jongnam Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers: The Americanization of the South Korean Army 1945-1955' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Sullivan, 'Soviet, US models for Korean armies', *The New York Times*, 26 June 1950.

<sup>9</sup> 'Korea: Progress Report', *Time*, 5 June 1950.

for a long time because the U.S. Intelligence headquarters in Tokyo had persistently downplayed the idea of an imminent invasion.<sup>10</sup>

It took just a few days for the South Koreans to dispel any optimism about their capabilities. Reports from the frontline revealed that South Korean forces were no match for the heavily armed North Koreans. As ROKA forces fell back in an almost totally disorganised manner, large gaps opened up in their lines through which North Koreans poured in soldiers and heavy armour. American officials were quick to give reporters their honest and damning assessment of the situation. The head of MacArthur's advance survey team, General John H. Church, told the *Herald Tribune's* Marguerite Higgins that U.S. advisers had been having many problems with the South Koreans: "We can't put backbone into them. What are you going to do with troops that won't stay where they're put? We have no way of knowing whether the South Korean reports are accurate or just wild rumour."<sup>11</sup> A KMAC officer told another reporter that "South Koreans fight with 25% ferocity, when they actually fight, and there has been no report that they have taken prisoners on a mass scale. If World War III broke out, South Korea would be safer than New York state."<sup>12</sup>

The publication of such quotes by newspapers reflected the unprecedented nature of the Korean conflict. The ambiguous role of the United States in the first days of the war gave both U.S. officials and journalists a window in which they felt free to tell the unvarnished truth about the chaos of the South Korean defence efforts. Even after President Truman made it clear that the United States was intervening on behalf of the ROK, General MacArthur refused to impose full censorship and instead put forward a system of 'voluntary censorship' in which reporters promised to avoid giving away militarily sensitive information. Although the relationship with military

---

<sup>10</sup> Gibney, p. 102. Following several weeks of reporting together during the Korean War, *Time* correspondent John Osborne believed that Gibney had "a very poor sense of military events, especially for the shape of things to come" as well as a stubbornness that made it impossible for to realise he had been wrong: Osborne to Roy, 23 August 1950, Journalism File, Box 2, John Osborne Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup> Higgins, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> AP, 'South's Soldiers Walk Away After Enemy Armor Breaks Defense Line On Han River', *The Washington Post*, 1 July 1950.



authorities was not easy, correspondents felt free to criticise the South Korean military in a way that was unimaginable during World War Two.

Such coverage had a dramatic impact on perceptions of the ROKA back in the United States. According to an editorial in the *Times*, weeks of shocking reports from Korea had convinced most Americans that the ROKA was a “routed, disorganized and demoralized mob which could be discounted as a fighting force”.<sup>13</sup> Newspapers published editorials questioning whether the ROKA’s lack of fighting spirit reflected wider disenchantment with the Rhee regime. Several newspapers published a letter from Rhee critic Yong-jeung Kim in which argued that the ROKA’s disintegration stemmed from “misrule and a lack of incentive for the soldiers to fight.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Mixed response**

The arrival of American reinforcements in the second week of July marked a crucial turning point for the ROKA. With time to regroup and establish defensive position, South Korean forces began to push back against the North Korean advance. Following MacArthur’s appointment as United Nations commander, ROKA forces were brought under American leadership, both at the strategic and tactical levels. With ROK forces now part of a joint UN war effort, U.S. military officials sought to bolster the shattered reputation of their allies. Eighth Army commander Walton Walker praised the South Koreans for their “magnificent stand” against the North Koreans after they scored a number of minor tactical victories.<sup>15</sup> In his 18 July communique General MacArthur even claimed that the South Koreans had delivered “two of the most conclusive setbacks administered to the North Koreans since they crossed the Thirty-Eighth Parallel”.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> ‘A South Korean Victory’, *The New York Times*, 18 July 1950.

<sup>14</sup> Yongjeung Kim, Letter ‘Korea Under the U.N.’, *The Washington Post*, 5 July 1950.

<sup>15</sup> Rhee’s supporters quoted Walker in their attempts to persuade newspaper publishers to ignore the ‘unpatriotic’ Yongjeung Kim: John M. Chang to Robert R. McCormick, 19 July 1950, ‘Korea, 1946-1955, (Syngman Rhee)’ Folder, Box 48, Papers of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, First Division Museum.

<sup>16</sup> ‘A South Korean Victory’, *The New York Times*, 18 July 1950.

KMAG officials also tried to undo some of the damage done to the ROKA's reputation. In a press conference on 6 July, a KMAG official told journalists that mass sabotage of the ROKA's weapons by communist agents had been a major factor in their disastrous performance.<sup>17</sup> In the field, KMAG officials praised the fighting spirit of their men. One KMAG officer told a correspondent that he'd "never seen troops of any nationality hold as these men are doing, even with half their casualties".<sup>18</sup> Six weeks into the war, an official declared that the Koreans were a far cry from the army of the first days of the war: "Under good leadership these men have been whipped into a fighting force to be reckoned with and their morale is extremely high".<sup>19</sup>

The physical toughness of Korean troops compared to 'green' American soldiers was a recurring theme for reporters covering the struggle to hold on to the Pusan perimeter.<sup>20</sup> Gordon Walker claimed that South Korean regiments were so good that almost all American soldiers he had spoken to wanted South Korean troops attached to their units.<sup>21</sup> Marguerite Higgins, one of the few reporters to visit ROK troops fighting on the frontline, marvelled at the capacity of the South Koreans to defend their section of the frontline without the logistical and artillery support enjoyed by American forces.<sup>22</sup>

However, these accounts of South Koreans bravery were more of the exception than the rule. Even though ROK troops constituted the majority of forces under the UN's command, most war reportage narrowly focused on American soldiers on the frontline. Correspondents knew that newspapers back home were desperate for dramatic combat stories and news about American units. Few editors sought out stories about South Korean units beyond general assessments of their contribution to the bigger strategic picture.<sup>23</sup> When one newspaper editor wrote to complain that

---

<sup>17</sup> 'Officers baffled by retreats', *The Chicago Daily News*, 6 July 1950.

<sup>18</sup> UP, 'South Korean Army Tough, Battle Wise', *The Boston Globe*, 30 Jul 1950.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Johnston, 'South Korean Welded To Toughness', *The New York Times*, 8 August 1950.

<sup>20</sup> 'Time For A New Estimate Of The South Korean Army', *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 August 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon Walker, 'South Korean Regiment Plays Star Role', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 7 August 1950.

<sup>22</sup> Marguerite Higgins, 'South Korea's Tattered Forces Use 'Indian Warfare' To Kill Reds', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 2 August 1950.

<sup>23</sup> King, p. 492.

news updates from Korea had almost completely overlooked the great job being done by ROKA, AP admitted that it simply could not justify dedicating its limited manpower to cover the story.<sup>24</sup>

One correspondent who did recognise the potential importance of the ROKA to the future war effort was *Time's* John Osborne. In a lengthy article for *Time* in August, Osborne suggested that the bravery and effectiveness of the South Korean Army as one of few positives of the first months of the war.<sup>25</sup> In a memo to *Time* editors in early October, Osborne argued that the decision to integrate small numbers of South Korean soldiers into U.S. military units had been the most meaningful single event of the war.<sup>26</sup> Osborne believed that this programme, known as Korean Augmentation to The United States Army (KATUSA), had been a great success.<sup>27</sup> U.S. officers and enlisted men greatly appreciated these South Korean soldiers, in spite of teething problems related to differences in language, culture and training. Osborne called for less critical coverage of South Korean military performance, even if this required a certain conditioning of the “the facts”.

A major obstacle to more positive reporting on the ROKA was in fact the U.S. military itself. While KMAG officials were often willing to praise the Koreans for their tenaciousness and fighting spirit, it was readily apparent that most U.S. military authorities had little interest in the South Koreans. When a *Time* reporter visited Eighth Army headquarters to find out more about the ROKA commanders operating in North Korea after the breakout from the Pusan perimeter, he was told that U.S. commanders knew nothing more than the brief summary already sent out on the press wire.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the first year of the war, U.S. military commanders were highly dismissive of the

---

<sup>24</sup> Parker to Gould, 10 August 1950, Korean War Coverage Reaction, August 1950, Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives; Mickelson to Parker, 14 August 1950, Korean War Coverage Reaction, August 1950, Subject Files, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>25</sup> John Osborne, ‘The Ugly War’, *Time*, 21 August 1950.

<sup>26</sup> Osborne to Billings, Thompson and Alexander, 6 October 1950, Journalism File, Box 2, John Osborne Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the background to the KATUSA programme see David Curtis Skaggs, ‘The Katusa Experiment: The Integration Of Korean Nationals Into The U.S. Army, 1950-1965’, *Military Affairs*, 38.2 (1974), 53–58. In practice, the KATUSA programme was unpopular with some officers and was briefly suspended in the wake of the Chinese intervention: Hal Boyle, ‘Buddy System Gets Shelved’, *The Tuscaloosa News*, 7 December 1950.

<sup>28</sup> South Koreans in action, Moffett, 22 October 1950, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

value of the South Korean army.<sup>29</sup> Most regarded it as dangerously fragile and unreliable. When American and ROK forces were forced to fall back to south of Seoul in the face of the Chinese intervention, Major General Frank Lowe, President Truman's personal adviser in Korea, told him that ROK troops were "useless" and "cowardly".<sup>30</sup>

The press became even more beholden to U.S. military sources when MacArthur belatedly imposed full censorship in late December 1950. Although the guidelines were vague, correspondents came to understand that the Army treated criticism of the performance of the South Korean army as a security violation. Colonel Melvin B. Voorhees, the Army official in charge of censorship in Korea, believed that criticism of the South Korean Army was ill-advised since "far too much has been expected of the Koreans".<sup>31</sup> Rather than criticism, Voorhees suggested that such a backward people needed a lot more time and training to improve their fighting capability and root out corruption.

While the tough censorship restrictions infuriated correspondents, they had little choice but to follow the stories leads provided by military authorities. Eighth Army spokesmen emphasised how ROK units and U.S. troops were working together to fight the Chinese, with South Koreans often leading the way to battle and wiping out large numbers of enemy troops.<sup>32</sup> The new positive narrative on occasion bordered on the absurd. After talking with officials at Eighth Army headquarters, Gordon Walker wrote that the South Koreans could not be blamed for their defeat in June 1950 since they had never been expected to fight a well-equipped army. He praised the hard work done by KMAC to develop the South Korean army both before and during the war, claiming it had had a virtually "unbroken record of success".<sup>33</sup> Stories critical of the ROKA were either ignored or given marginal coverage. The press ignored early reports of the mass starvation of tens of

---

<sup>29</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From The North*, p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From The North*, p. 380.

<sup>31</sup> Melvin B. Voorhees, *Korean Tales* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), p. 142.

<sup>32</sup> AP, 'Allies Near 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 19 March 1951; AP, 'Thousands Killed By ROK Units', *The Daily Boston Globe*, 10 May 1951.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon Walker, 'U.S. Advisory Unit Takes Bow in Korea: Outequipped but Not Outfought Danger and Heroism', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 February 1951.

thousands of Korean soldiers recruited by the ROK's National Defense Corps even though it was not censored by either American or Korean authorities.<sup>34</sup> When the story did belatedly make it into the American press, reporters framed it around the success of the Korean judicial system in punishing those it believed to be responsible rather than the causes and consequences of the incident itself.<sup>35</sup>

The changes in coverage of the ROKA over the first nine months of the ROKA thus primarily reflected the influence of U.S. military authorities on the press. While coverage during the first months of the war reflected the ambivalent attitudes of military officials, by the spring of 1951, a more coherent and comprehensive American public relations programme helped to boost the ROKA's public image. Yet, there were limits to how far military leaders were willing to go with this positive message. None seriously believed that the ROKA could play a decisive role in the ROK's military security in the near future. It would take new U.S. military leadership in Korea for the potential of the ROKA to be recognised.

### **New leadership**

The ROKA's rebirth as an effective fighting force is usually dated to the summer of 1951, when General James Van Fleet replaced General Matthew Ridgway as Eighth Army Commander in the wake of the recall of Douglas MacArthur. General Van Fleet was a highly respected soldier selected for the post by President Truman following his successful stint as head of the U.S. military advisory mission during the Greek civil war.<sup>36</sup> Once in Korea, Van Fleet immediately set about planning for a radical new programme of training and development for ROKA forces to bring them closer to the standards of American units.

Van Fleet's arrival in Korea was a baptism of fire as he immediately faced a major offensive by Chinese forces. In a bid to stop the UN advance to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the Chinese purposefully

---

<sup>34</sup> King was one of the few to write about the scandal after a tip off from a U.S. embassy official.

<sup>35</sup> '50,000 Koreans Die In Camps In South; Government Inquiry Confirms Abuse of Draftees--General Held for Malfeasance', *The New York Times*, 13 June 1951.

<sup>36</sup> Paul F. Braim, *The Will To Win: The Life of General James A. Van Fleet* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), p. 239.

focused their attacks on ROKA units that they regarded to be the most vulnerable forces on the UN frontline. The gambit proved highly successful- the ROK'S III Corps totally collapsed and U.S. forces were forced to plug the gap. The ROKA's disastrous performance was widely reported on.<sup>37</sup> In a frontpage opinion piece, *The Chicago Daily News* correspondent Fred Sparks declared that "our native allies have broken and fled in utter rout".<sup>38</sup> U.S. military officials struggled to formulate a response to the outcry. An American corps commander told AP that the soldiers of the South Korean Army were simply not first class troops.<sup>39</sup>

The revival of the ROKA collapse narrative posed serious problems for the U.S. command. General Mathew Ridgway's public relations adviser James T. Quirk warned that negative coverage was damaging ROKA morale and called into question why the United States allowed any Korean forces on the frontline at all.<sup>40</sup> Yet, he also argued that military leaders should not defend the ROKA too effusively. If U.S. officials went too far in their endorsement of the ROKA, they risked legitimising Rhee's demands for a large expansion and arming of ROK forces and creating the perception that U.S. forces could be easily replaced with Korean units.

Van Fleet resolved the dilemma by preparing for a transformation of the ROKA itself. In a public statement, General Van Fleet paid tribute to ROKA soldiers and declared that they were now ready "to make a major contribution to the war efforts".<sup>41</sup> He adopted the conclusion of a report by KMAG into the ROKA's failings as the basis for a programme of reform designed to address problems such as poor leadership and lack of access to adequate levels of logistical support and weapons. At the heart of this plan was a complete overhaul of the training regime for Korean soldiers, including the re-opening of training schools that had been disestablished during the communist invasion as well as the creation of a new officer academy modelled on West Point. In a briefing to

---

<sup>37</sup> UP, 'Foe's Losses Terrible', *The Chicago Daily News*, 24 April 1951; 'Battle of Korea', *Time*, 28 May 1951.

<sup>38</sup> Fred Sparks, 'It's Another Stalemate in Korea: Sparks', *The Chicago Daily News*, 8 May 1951.

<sup>39</sup> AP dispatch, 21 May 1951, Box 1, James T. Quirk Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

<sup>40</sup> Quirk to Ridgway, 22 May 1951, Box 1, James T. Quirk Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

<sup>41</sup> AP, 'Van Fleet Cites Gain in the South Koreans', *The New York Times*, 13 May 1951.

correspondents in August, Van Fleet announced as a result of these changes South Korean divisions would be improved “at least 100 per cent as battle units”.<sup>42</sup>

Although warmly welcomed by both the South Korean government and military leaders in Washington, Van Fleet’s reform programme didn’t initially make much of an impression on the press. After the war entered its stalemate phase along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in June 1951, the Korean War faded from newspaper headlines. Much of the press corps in South Korea was assigned to cover the armistice negotiations at Panmunjom, where it was widely anticipated an armistice agreement would be imminent. When the Army tried to publicise ROKA operations, newspapers rarely bothered to print stories about them. In one significant case, military authorities ran a complex public affairs operation for the ROKA’s pacification programme in Cholla province in November 1951, the same location as the 1948 rebellion that had greatly disturbed American reporters.<sup>43</sup> The Army provided numerous background briefings for journalists at its headquarters in Seoul and embedded nine journalists with the ROKA forces in the field. While the military regarded the combat mission as a great success, in which ROK ground forces deployed sophisticated blocking and envelopment tactics to kill or capture rebels, only a handful of small articles about the operation appeared in the press.<sup>44</sup>

Only one high profile American journalist, Jim Lucas of Scripps-Howard press, published anything significant about the ROKA in the latter half of 1951. As a prize-winning war correspondent with a reputation for conducting penetrating interviews with troops on the frontline, Lucas was one of the few ‘big gun’ reporters with the freedom to write at length about topics of interest to him.<sup>45</sup> His boss at Scripps-Howard, Roy Howard, had a strong interest in Korea and, according to Syngman

---

<sup>42</sup> George Barrett, ‘U.S. Is Retraining South Korea Army’, *The New York Times*, 12 August 1951.

<sup>43</sup> Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, p. 351.

<sup>44</sup> Gibby, pp. 213–14.

<sup>45</sup> Another renowned reporter, photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White, used her considerable clout to persuade *Life* to let her spend three months roaming around Korea for a story on the guerrilla threat in South Korea in late 1952. She asked Editor Ed Thompson for permission to produce an article focusing on South Korean aspects of the conflict because she felt it had been neglected by the rest of the press: Margaret Bourke-White, ‘The Savage, Secret War in Korea’, *Life*, 1 December 1952, p. 25; Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 330.

Rhee, was one of the earliest supporters of the build-up of the ROKA.<sup>46</sup> In November and December 1951 Lucas sent a series of dispatches commending the ROKA's progress under Van Fleet based on interviews with both soldiers on the frontline and military and civilian officials.<sup>47</sup>

Van Fleet's radical reform programme for the ROKA demonstrated the limits of what military public relations could achieve. While the ROKA was making impressive progress as a fighting force, the press had little interest in pursuing the story when many observers anticipated that the war could end in just a few months. Yet, as the war dragged on through 1952 and 1953, the ROKA's growing political and military strength became increasingly intersected with the biggest political stories of the war.

### **The ROKA's growing strength**

In June 1952, *The New York Times'* magazine carried a story in which George Barrett waxed lyrical about the capabilities of the new Korean army: "There is a new army shaping up in the Far East, an Oriental force with Western fire power fused with the ancient faith of the Korean people in their own fighting qualities."<sup>48</sup> Barrett claimed young Korean recruits were so absorbed by their military training they took no interest in the country's political crisis. Yet, Barrett implied this might change in the future as a result of the sociological changes wrought by Americanisation of the ROKA. He quoted a letter from a Korean officer on a military exchange programme in the U.S; "Until I saw America and talked and associated with Americans I doubted if what I heard about America was true; I know that there can be, and we can have, the same freedom of religion, speech and press in our country and in this whole human world". *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent Ansel E.

---

<sup>46</sup> Rhee to Van Fleet, 28 December 1953, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>47</sup> The articles were so well received by the ROK regime that Robert T. Oliver, who attended some of the interviews, compiled them into a pamphlet that was published by the Korean Pacific Press. Jim Lucas, *Our Fighting Heart: The Story of the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, as Published in a Series of Articles in the Scripps-Howard Newspapers, November-December, 1951* (Washington D.C.: Korean Pacific Press, 1951).

<sup>48</sup> George Barrett, 'The ROK's Learn To Be An Army', *The New York Times*, 22 June 1952.



Talbert also found evidence that the ROKA was Americanising effectively.<sup>49</sup> Whereas at the beginning of the war Americans soldiers would refer to the ROK's indiscriminately as 'gooks', he found Americans now exclusively referred to them as the 'rocks' or 'Korean joes'.

The articles came at an important time for the ROK. Just weeks before, Syngman Rhee had imposed martial law around the temporary capital of Pusan as part of his campaign to force the National Assembly to agree to major constitutional reforms. Western diplomats had feared that Rhee might try to use the ROKA to enforce his will on his opponents. Van Fleet and other military leaders made representations to Rhee, demanding that the ROKA be kept out of domestic politics. Although the military did not become involved in the 1952 crisis, it was clear that the ROKA was now perceived as almost as important a political institution as the ROK government itself. Barrett's and Talbert's articles implied that the ROKA's exceptionally close ties with the United States could act as a moderating and Americanising force in Korean society.

The 1952 crisis coincided with growing demands from both the American public and political leaders for the United States to bring the conflict to some kind of resolution. In early 1952, negotiations between the United Nations and the communists had broken down over the question of what to do with the tens of thousands of communist prisoners that had refused to be repatriated back to the DPRK or the People's Republic of China. As the prospects for an armistice agreement in the near future faded, many Americans wondered if the ROK could take over more of the burden of fighting. In March, the U.S. Army's Chief of Public Affairs wrote to General Van Fleet to inform him that he had had many queries from "both civilians and Congressional circles" about the ROKA's progress.<sup>50</sup> Public polling expert George Gallup revealed that many Americans wanted to know why

---

<sup>49</sup> Ansel E. Talbert, 'South Korea's New Army Is Vastly Larger, More Efficient', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 2 June 1952.

<sup>50</sup> General F.L. Parks to Van Fleet, 20 March 1952, Box 71, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

the ROKA was not doing more, with fifty seven percent of those polled indicating they would support an expansion of the ROKA to two million men.<sup>51</sup>

The call to expand the ROKA had first appeared in the press in early 1951, when the South Korean government argued for it to be expanded to twenty divisions and equipped with weapons intended for Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalist regime in Formosa. In his interview with Jim Lucas at the end of 1951, Rhee had made clear that the end goal of an expanded ROKA would be to enable South Koreans to launch a decisive and, if necessary, unilateral assault on the DPRK. Such talk alarmed American officials and the idea of significant expansion was not seriously discussed for the first two years of the war. However, two developments in 1952 helped to fundamentally alter the situation—the 1952 Presidential elections and the lobbying activities of General James Van Fleet.

### **Van Fleet and the ROKA**

During his first months in Korea, Van Fleet had developed an unusually close bond with the ROK. Unlike almost every other military leader who served in Korea, Van Fleet had established a close and warm friendship with Syngman Rhee and had spoken publicly of his commitment to reunifying Korea.<sup>52</sup> He believed that an opportunity to decisively defeat the communists during his first months as Eighth Army Commander had been tragically missed by UN forces.<sup>53</sup> In spite of the start of armistice negotiations, he still saw it as the job of the UN to do everything it could to enable military victory. Even if the UN did not decide to go on an all-out offensive, he believed that the ROK's future security depended on the expansion of the ROKA.

Without the authority to alter the ROKA's size himself, Van Fleet found other ways to lobby for a change of policy in Washington. In March 1952, Van Fleet briefed a reporter for the *U.S. News and World Report* that he hoped to see a ROK army consisting of twenty divisions.<sup>54</sup> The publication

---

<sup>51</sup> 'Voters Favor U.S.-Trained Korean Army', *The Washington Post*, 29 February 1952.

<sup>52</sup> Van Fleet to Rhee, 1 February 1953, Box 74, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>53</sup> James Van Fleet, 'The Truth About Korea' Part I, *Life*, 11 May 1953.

<sup>54</sup> 'Interview with General James Van Fleet', *U.S. News and World Report*, 28 March 1952.

of the article caught Army officials in Washington off guard and led to urgent inquiries being sent to General Ridgway in Tokyo as to whether the United States should shift its position on expansion. Ridgway was dismissive of the idea, arguing that the Korean economy could not sustain an army bigger than ten divisions and that Japan should remain the priority for any military expansion programme.<sup>55</sup> Yet, observers could not help but note the peculiarity of the gap in size between the 10 division ROK and the 25 divisions of its North Korean counterpart. With the ROKA's dramatic improvement clear for all to see, journalists asked why the United States was not supporting expansion.<sup>56</sup>

In May 1952, General Mark Clark replaced Ridgway as UN commander and immediately began a review of the options for ROK expansion. Clark was so impressed with the ROKA's progress that he gave his backing to Van Fleet's plans to expand the Army from ten to twenty divisions. In a report submitted to the Department of the Army in October, Clark argued that by adding ten extra ROKA divisions the United States could bring home more than 70% of its forces by mid-1954.<sup>57</sup>

While the Pentagon gave its backing to Clark's plan, the major expenditures it entailed required presidential authorisation. When the plan went in front of President Truman in October 1952, his approval was not forthcoming. The cost of the programme threatened to undermine other crucial military projects in Europe and South East Asia. There also remained a great deal of scepticism over the reliability of the ROKA. Many military experts still believed that it would be many years before the South Koreans could wage war independently of the United States.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Ridgway to Army, 10 April 1952, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation. See also Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front: The United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1992), pp. 211–12.

<sup>56</sup> George Barrett was told by KMAG officials that the reason the ROKA had not been expanded was out of fear that Rhee planned to use an expanded force to launch an attack on the DPRK: George Barrett, 'The ROK's Learn To Be An Army', *The New York Times*, 22 June 1952.

<sup>57</sup> Jongnam Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers: The Americanization of the South Korean Army 1945-1955' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), p. 127-130.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Millis, 'Arms and Men', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 13 October 1952.

Truman failed to reckon with the growing sentiment that the ROKA was ready to take on a significant amount more responsibility for the war effort. In late September, George Barrett had written that authorities at the United Nations command were convinced that the ROKA was rapidly reaching the stage where its own army could take over the bulk of the country's defence if Chinese forces were withdrawn.<sup>59</sup> In the second week of October, the press gave significant prominence to the battle of White Horse Mountain, during which ROK and Chinese forces exchanged control of a hill twenty-four times over the course of ten days. When the ROK's took final control of the hill, General Van Fleet declared it a "tremendous victory" against "overwhelming odds and manpower".<sup>60</sup>

The debate over the future of the ROKA became even more significant on 2 October when Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower called for the South Koreans to be prepared to defend their own frontline. Eisenhower shrewdly understood that Korea was the biggest weakness for the Democrats and that expanding the ROKA was an intrinsically appealing option for Americans frustrated with the burden of war fighting that had fallen on the United States. After both Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson and President Truman criticised Eisenhower for creating false hope over the possibility of withdrawing U.S. forces from Korea, Eisenhower fought back by revealing the incendiary contents of a letter that General Van Fleet had written to his Chief of Staff and wife criticising the administration's failure to support the expansion of the ROKA:

You know that I have felt all the time that we should be preparing strenuously all during the past year for what may eventually be required, and that my plans include doubling the size of the ROK Army- twenty divisions instead of ten. I said, "Give me six and I would release

---

<sup>59</sup> George Barrett, 'South Korea Army Grows In Strength', *The New York Times*, 23 September 1952.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Udick, 'White Horse Mountain Back In Hands Of South Koreans', *The Bulletin*, 13 October 1952.

two United States divisions; or, give me four and I would release one United States division”.

It finally got down to a two-division increase, but still no approval to this date.<sup>61</sup>

The resulting press furore put the administration on the defensive.<sup>62</sup> Just a few days later, Truman gave his backing to the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation to expand the ROKA up to 14 divisions.

When Eisenhower won the election a few days later, the press filled with speculation as to whether the new president would go through with a ‘Koreanisation’ of the war effort. Although Eisenhower refused to divulge his plans for Korea before taking power in January 1953, at the end of November he fulfilled a campaign pledge to go to Korea, where he dedicated part of his visit to watching ROKA units in action.<sup>63</sup> After briefings by U.S. military commanders, including General Van Fleet, Eisenhower’s press secretary James Hagerty thought that the prospect of improving the fighting ability of the ROKA in order to save the lives of American soldiers would be a “pretty convincing argument” for the American public. To the large press contingent following Eisenhower, it was clear that he had been deeply impressed by the skill and dedication of the South Korean forces. *Times* correspondent Robert Alden declared that the president-elect was now convinced that any amount of aid or money supplied to the South Korean army would be a wise investment.<sup>64</sup>

Eisenhower’s election victory did not bring a halt to Van Fleet’s efforts to publicise the ROKA. A week before his trip to Korea, Van Fleet published a major article in the *New York Herald Tribune* explaining how the ROKs were not only the equal of American soldiers on the frontline, but were already doing a majority of the fighting on the frontline.<sup>65</sup> After reaching mandatory retirement

---

<sup>61</sup> Russell Porter, ‘Eisenhower Quote Van Fleet To Back Position On Korea’, *The New York Times*, 30 October 1952. For a full account of how the letter was leaked see Draft of Two Letters to an Army Wife by James C. McNamara, Box 14, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Lovett Denies Van Fleet’s Charge Of Delay In Training Korean Troops’, *The New York Times*, 31 October 1952.

<sup>63</sup> Diary entry for 1952 Korea trip, 2<sup>nd</sup> Day, Box 11, James C. Hagerty Papers, Dwight Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Alden, ‘Korea: R.O.K’s As Replacements’, *The New York Times*, 7 December 1952.

<sup>65</sup> James Van Fleet, ‘Who Says They Won’t Fight?’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 23 November 1952.

age, Van Fleet returned to the United States in February 1953, where he redoubled his efforts to sell the ROKA to the American public. In widely reported on appearances in front of several Congressional committees, Van Fleet declared that victory was the only solution in Korea and that a major offensive, involving an expanded ROKA, could leave both the United States and the ROK in a much better position.<sup>66</sup> After his appearances in Washington, Van Fleet began a busy schedule of meetings and briefings in which he consulted with leading figures in politics, journalism and business, often in collusion with Rhee's public relations adviser Robert T. Oliver.<sup>67</sup> Korea war correspondent turned star columnist Marguerite Higgins offered her assistance and best wishes in their mutual campaign to energise the American people in the fight against communism.<sup>68</sup>

Van Fleet was a popular figure with the American public. His earnest and straightforward devotion to defeating the enemy instinctively appealed to the many Americans who did not understand why the United States seemed to be making only a half-hearted effort in Korea. His popularity amongst his men was often commented on; after visiting Korea in mid-1951 Republican Party leader Thomas Dewey wrote that it was clear Van Fleet did not drive his men, they followed him.<sup>69</sup> Such gushing praise was common in newspaper profiles, which generally depicted him as a rugged and heroic frontline commander.<sup>70</sup> His public relations team, led by James C. McNamara, a respected former radio reporter, won great plaudits from journalists for his willingness to go far beyond the call of duty in their efforts to provide logistical support and usable information.<sup>71</sup> Although many correspondents in South Korea regarded Van Fleet as a "political ignoramus" for his unstinting support for Syngman Rhee, even his critics accepted that his military accomplishments

---

<sup>66</sup> Harold B. Hinton, 'Victory Is The Only Solution In Korea, Van Fleet Testifies', *The New York Times*, 5 March 1953.

<sup>67</sup> Van Fleet to Oliver, 11 March 1953, Box 74, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>68</sup> Higgins to Van Fleet, 18 March 1953, Box 74, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Dewey, *Journey To The Far Pacific* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1952), pp. 71–72.

<sup>70</sup> Murry Schumach, 'Van Fleet: Mud-and-Foxhole General', *The New York Times*, 29 April 1951. The head of the U.S. Army's Office of Information, General Floyd Parks wrote to Van Fleet in July 1951 to express his satisfaction over the universal praise he had received in the press: Parks to Van Fleet, 3 July 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Box 71, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>71</sup> *Herald Tribune* reporter Mac R. Johnson wrote a glowing assessment of Van Fleet's relationship with the press; Johnson to Van Fleet, 6 October 1952, Box 69, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

were beyond reproach.<sup>72</sup> In January 1953, *Time* correspondent John Osborne told his editors that in spite of Van Fleet's obtuseness on many issues of politics and propaganda, Van Fleet had successfully tackled the greatest command problem ever faced by an American commander.<sup>73</sup>

As the American public waited expectantly for the new administration to bring an end to the war, Van Fleet's professional commentary was highly sought after. In articles for magazines *Life* and *Reader's Digest*, Van Fleet made the case that the ROKA was reliable and effective enough to replace U.S. forces fighting on the frontline.<sup>74</sup> While many journalists entertained doubts about Van Fleet's claims, they declined to make them public. In a lengthy memorandum to the editors of *Time*, John Osborne expressed major scepticism about the ROKA: "The best and biggest ROK army that can be envisioned would still require massive air, artillery and logistical support. It would require extensive command supervision. And, for any assurance of US and UN security, we would have to maintain substantial reserves of ground troops in Korea... a ROK division is not the equivalent of an American or other UN division".<sup>75</sup> Osborne suggested that Van Fleet had been in fact been talking for "morale effect" when he spoke of withdrawing U.S. forces following the activation of ROKA units. Yet, Osborne instructed *Time* to not state this openly. Instead, *Time's* coverage lavished praise on the ROKA. In one article, *Time* recounted how communist attacks had targeted ROKA forces, nicknamed 'Van Fleet's Bootleg Division', expecting an easy victory. Instead, the division held on, killing 94 Korean attackers to only 24 ROK dead.<sup>76</sup> The article ended with the observation that the ROKA,

---

<sup>72</sup> Osborne to Beshoar, 12 January 1953, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. Van Fleet developed close relationships with many American members of the Rhee lobby and in late 1953 became the chairman of the American-Korean Foundation, an organisation which sought to boost the public profile of the ROK in the United States and raise funds for American humanitarian projects in South Korea: J.H.R. Cromwell to Van Fleet, 3 May 1953, Box 68, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>73</sup> Osborne to Beshoar, 12 January 1953, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>74</sup> James Van Fleet, 'Who Says Our Allies Won't Fight?', *Reader's Digest*, February 1953; James Van Fleet, 'The Truth About Korea' Part 1, *Life*, 11 May 1953 and Part 2, *Life*, 18 May 1953.

<sup>75</sup> Osborne to Beshoar, 2 January 1953, Time magazine correspondence, Time, inc. Dispatches from Time magazine correspondents: First Series, 1942-1955, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.

<sup>76</sup> 'Victory For The Bootleggers', *Time*, 26 January 1953.

which had begun seven years before as a constabulary of just 600 men, was now holding 70% of the UN line in Korea, doing most of the fighting and taking the brunt of the casualties.

Another powerful endorsement of the ROKA came from Homer Bigart in an article for the *New York Herald Tribune*.<sup>77</sup> Bigart wrote that the rebirth of the ROKA was the one bright spot in the whole grim Korea picture as its expansion offered the only realistic basis for hope that the United States could eventually withdraw any, or even all, of its troops from the peninsula. Although Bigart identified a few niggling problems with ROKA forces, in particular their lack of senior leadership and their limited experience with advanced weaponry, he recognised that they were a very different army to the one that had collapsed in the first year of the war.

By the spring of 1953 Van Fleet's campaign to draw attention to the capabilities of the ROKA had accomplished a great deal. Not only had he pushed the issue of expansion into the public debate, but he had also helped transform the image of the ROKA into a modern and effective fighting force. Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea John Muccio wrote to Van Fleet to praise him for dispelling the public's confusion about the poor fighting ability of the ROKA.<sup>78</sup>

### **A new power**

Over the course of the first six months of 1953, five ROKA divisions were activated and made combat ready. In mid-May, Eisenhower authorised the final expansion up to a full twenty divisions. By July, the *New York Times*'s Lindesay Parrott could convincingly argue that the ROKA was the strongest anti-communist army in Asia.<sup>79</sup> The rebuilding of the image of the ROKA was complete; "Almost every high United Nations officer has spoken well of the Republic of Korea troops. The days are gone when the South Koreans advanced fast and retreated fast when confronted with hard opposition. The motto of the Republic of Korea army has become 'stand and fight'."

---

<sup>77</sup> Homer Bigart, 'Bigart's Report On Korean War, *The New York Herald Tribune*, 21 January 1953.

<sup>78</sup> Muccio to Van Fleet, 26 November 1952, Box 71, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>79</sup> Lindesay Parrott, 'R.O.K.'s Are Good Army But Cannot Go It Alone', *The New York Times*, 4 July 1953.



But just as important as the ROKA's increased military capability was its increasingly important political role within the ROK. After the resumption of armistice talks in April, American officials became increasingly concerned that Syngman Rhee would try to use the ROKA to unilaterally continue fighting the war and breach the armistice. American officials desperately sought to remind senior ROKA leaders of their ties to the United States and the impossibility of the ROK sustaining a long-term military operations against the combined weight of communist forces.<sup>80</sup> After it became clear that ROK generals were prepared to launch a suicidal attack on the north if Rhee ordered it, American officials sought to do everything else possible to avoid giving Rhee an excuse to launch a unilateral attack. In July, just weeks before the armistice was signed, the Eighth Army suppressed negative coverage of the very mixed performance of the ROKA during one of the biggest Chinese offensives of the war. The Chinese had focused a large-scale attack on what they still perceived to be the United Nations forces weakest point- the ROK units responsible for defending a protrusion in the UN line known as the Kumsong salient.<sup>81</sup> The ROKA initially fell back under the pressure of the Chinese assault, reigniting fears that it was once again on the verge of collapse. The Eighth Army responded to the offensive by imposing tight censorship on all critical coverage of the ROKA.<sup>82</sup> After several days of heavy fighting, ROK forces managed to stand their ground, earning rapturous coverage in the press. One allied officer told an AP correspondent that "this is one of the greatest achievements of the Republic of Korea Army and justifies the great faith it took to create it".<sup>83</sup>

The importance of the ROKA to the United States would continue to develop through the 1950s. Gregg Brazinsky has noted how after the Korean War the United States worked to boost the "reputation and prestige" of the ROKA, due to its vital importance in maintaining both South Korean

---

<sup>80</sup> Robert Alden, 'Rhee's Army Chief Vows to Back Him', *The New York Times*, 4 July 1953.

<sup>81</sup> General Mark Clark wrote that "There is no doubt in my mind that one of the principal reasons- if not the one reason- for the Communist offensive was to give the ROK's a 'bloody nose,' to show them and the world that 'PUK CHIN'- Go North- was easier said than done." General Mark W. Clark, 'The Truth About Korea', *Collier's*, 5 March 1954. For a full account of the battle and the Chinese decision to target ROK forces see Gibby, pp. 232-60.

<sup>82</sup> Copy of report from Lt. Gn. Maxwell Taylor to Mark Clark, 6 November 1953, Censorship, Subject File 1954 A-G, General Files, AP Corporate Archives.

<sup>83</sup> AP, 'Korea Foe Checked After 4 Mile Push', *The New York Times*, 15 July 1953.

stability and the “entire strategic balance in the Pacific”.<sup>84</sup> The ROKA became the core foundation of the entire U.S.-ROK alliance.

## Conclusions

By the end of the Korean War, the ROK had finally developed an army which matched KMAG’s rhetoric in the months before the DPRK’s invasion in 1950. Like other aspects of the South Korean experience of the war, the press rarely paid attention to the ROKA unless it had a direct impact on U.S. involvement in the conflict. In 1952, General James Van Fleet masterfully turned the ROKA into a U.S. political story and in doing so helped usher in a new image of the ROKA as a modern, highly competent fighting force.

The positive media portrayal of the ROKA helped the ROK consolidate its image as a crucial ally in the global struggle against communism. It also helped to mitigate the fear that Rhee’s authoritarianism could threaten the stability of the country. The ROKA’s growing military and political strength, as well as its close links with the United States, offered hope that Rhee would be contained if his behaviour began to threaten the country’s future. In the crucial summer months of 1952, when Syngman Rhee was effectively launching an authoritarian coup against the Korean National Assembly, the ROKA was portrayed in the press as a stabilising and Americanising force of greater significance than South Korea’s democratic institutions.

The positive image of the ROKA established during the Korean War laid the groundwork for American perceptions of the military regimes that would come to dominate South Korea after Park Chung-hee’s military coup in 1961.<sup>85</sup> In the wake of the coup, Van Fleet wrote to one of the military junta’s leaders to praise it for seizing power. In his opinion, Van Fleet wrote, “any leadership must

---

<sup>84</sup> Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 97.

<sup>85</sup> ‘President Park Of South Korea Greeted Here As Firm U.S. Ally’, *The New York Times*, 20 May 1965; Roscoe Drummond, ‘South Korea Provides a Brilliant Justification of our Effort There’, *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 1966.

include the military as well as civilians, because after all, the military have proven to be the best citizens".<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Van Fleet to Chang, 1 June 1961, Box 76, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

## Chapter 7: Legacies of war

On 27 July 1953, all combat operations on the Korean peninsula finally came to an end. After months of difficult negotiations, the United Nations and communist forces agreed to withdraw their forces to either side of a demilitarised zone based on the line of control. For Syngman Rhee, the end of the Korean War represented a devastating blow to his dreams of liberating North Korea. In the last months of the war he had shocked the world with his desperate attempt to disrupt the negotiations and keep the United Nations in the war. Even once the armistice was signed, Rhee continued to threaten to go it alone against the DPRK. Much less visibly, Rhee also consolidated his control over the South Korean political system through a constitutional amendment, passed in November 1954, which removed the constraint of term limits. By the end of 1954, Rhee effectively became president for life.

Historians of U.S.-ROK relations during this period have almost exclusively focused on the diplomatic ramifications of Rhee's opposition to the armistice.<sup>1</sup> Popular perceptions of the ROK and Rhee are much less well understood. William Stueck has argued that the sense of shared sacrifice during the war helped the American public develop a much stronger attachment to the ROK.<sup>2</sup> Although this natural groundswell of sympathy was undermined by Rhee's difficult behaviour, it clearly did not evaporate.<sup>3</sup> In the years after the end of the war, Rhee's impassioned refusal to give up on liberating North Korea became a key part of his appeal to the populist Right, many of whom were frustrated with the soft approach of the Eisenhower administration to fighting communism.

---

<sup>1</sup> William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Henry W. Brands, 'The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, Syngman Rhee, and the "Other" Geneva Conference of 1954', *Pacific Historical Review*, 56.1 (1987).

<sup>2</sup> Stueck and Yi, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*, pp. 352-54.

This chapter argues that Rhee became a central fixture of press coverage of the ROK in the post-armistice period. By refusing to clarify his position on resuming war with North Korea, Rhee kept the press focused on his anti-communist stand and American attempts to placate him rather than the increasingly authoritarian nature of his rule. At the same time, Rhee successfully courted those Americans attached to the idea of 'rollback', culminating in his controversial and era-defining visit to the United States in the summer of 1954.

The American press rarely scrutinised South Korean democracy after the end of the war. Although most of the journalists working in South Korea disliked Rhee, they faced many of the same impediments as reporters working during the occupation period. Press numbers were depleted as other areas of the world, particularly Indochina, became bigger news stories. Those that remained were beholden both to a Cold War narrative in which South Korean politics was largely irrelevant, and to a South Korean government which was far more confident in repressing foreign journalists. The handful of journalists who wrote about the democratic flaws of the Rhee regime revived a modified form of the fatalistic narrative of the occupation years; while Koreans were too politically immature for democracy in the near future, things might change as the country modernised under Syngman Rhee.

### **The Post-Armistice Narrative**

After spending much of the war out of the limelight, Syngman Rhee re-emerged as a central figure during the armistice talks between April and July 1953. As negotiators at Panmunjom edged closer to an armistice agreement, Rhee made clear his fierce rejection of the prospect of any deal with the communists in which they retained control of North Korea.<sup>4</sup> On 18 June Rhee stunned both the communists and his own allies when he released 25,000 anti-communist North Korean POWs in direct violation of communist demands for the repatriation of all prisoners. Throughout the last

---

<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive historiography dealing with diplomatic and military aspects of the armistice negotiations: See Foot; Hermes; Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, pp. 204–347.

weeks of armistice negotiations, American policymakers and the press worried that Rhee would denounce the armistice and order the Korean military to continue fighting alone.

During the early stages of the armistice talks, senior members of the Eisenhower administration had given serious consideration to implementing Operation Eveready, a plan for a coup d'état first developed during the 1952 constitutional crisis.<sup>5</sup> The Americans recognised that launching such a coup would have been tremendously risky. An influential group of conservative senators, congressmen and columnists regarded Rhee as a patriotic Korean who wanted nothing more than to stop the loss of half of his country to communism.<sup>6</sup> Even Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had publicly defended the Rhee regime in the past. Equally important were the potential propaganda implications of removing Rhee from power. Rhee was one of the United States' few solidly anti-communist allies. Ousting Rhee risked alienating anti-communists on a global scale. Moreover, such a move could cast doubt on the justification for the American intervention in June 1950 and, perhaps most seriously of all, play straight into the hands of communist propaganda which depicted South Korea as a puppet of American imperialism.

With these arguments in mind, Dulles advised Eisenhower to take a cooperative approach to dealing with the ROK. In exchange for Rhee's acquiescence to the armistice, Eisenhower agreed to sign a bilateral mutual defence treaty, which committed the United States to intervene in case of any further communist attacks. In public statements in the summer and autumn of 1953, Dulles made clear that the ROK deserved American protection following its tremendous sacrifices for the anti-communist cause. In a widely reported speech to the American Legion, Dulles pointedly declared that the ROK was not a puppet and that the world had to recognise the will of a government which could claim the loyalty of 75% of all Koreans.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Eddleman memo, 1 June 1953, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15 (1): pp. 1126-1128.

<sup>6</sup> 'Rhee Called Great Patriot By Knowland', *The Washington Post*, 28 June 1953.

<sup>7</sup> 'Text of the Dulles Address to the American Legion Convention', *The New York Times*, 3 September 1953.

Policymakers also sought to humanise U.S.-ROK relations by emphasising humanitarian aspects of the relationship. Eisenhower had been greatly impressed by the work of General James Van Fleet's American-Korean Foundation, which aimed to strengthen ties between the United States and South Korea through humanitarian and social welfare projects.<sup>8</sup> In a memo to his senior advisers, Eisenhower called for a large-scale reconstruction project to be led by the U.S. military which would show the world that "America and her allies are engaged in helping humans, not merely in asserting and supporting any particular system or policy".<sup>9</sup> However, when Secretary of State Dulles publicly announced the programme in early August, critics accused him of implying American soldiers would be used as "labour battalions".<sup>10</sup>

Howard A Rusk, an associate editor at the *New York Times* and Chairman of the AFK's Korean Health and Welfare Mission, came to Dulles' defence in his regular column. Rusk argued that the Koreans were dedicated to rebuilding their country themselves and only needed American technical and logistical support. He used the opportunity to tell an anecdote about how on his last trip to the ROK he had witnessed Syngman Rhee himself intervene in a construction project to make sure that it was Koreans rather than Americans doing physical labour.<sup>11</sup> Howard and his colleague Leonard W. Mayo wrote a series of articles for the *Times* which stressed the vital importance of American aid to the ROK.<sup>12</sup> Similar points of view regularly appeared in *Korean Survey*, Robert T. Oliver's magazine, which, as a result of a large budget increase, was now printed in a full colour edition. The magazine

---

<sup>8</sup> The AFK's first chairman was the President's brother, Milton Eisenhower. President Eisenhower publicly supported the AFK's fundraising campaigns, and in April 1954, invited Rusk and senior industrialists for an AKF press event at the White House in support of their 'Help Korea Trains' project: Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President on the Fund- Raising Campaign of the American-Korean Foundation," 5 May 1953, Public Papers of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, The American Presidency Project, online <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9835>; Memo for the president, 8 April 1954, Box 2, Anne Whitman Diary Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers (Ann Whitman File), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>9</sup> Draft of Eisenhower to Dulles, 31 July 1953, Box 1, Anne Whitman Diary Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers (Ann Whitman File), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Hearst, 'White House Denies Plan to Use G.I. Labour In Korea', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 August 1953.

<sup>11</sup> Howard A. Rusk, 'G.I.'s Termed Glad to Help In Reconstruction Of Korea', *The New York Times*, 9 August 1953; Eric Pace, 'Howard Rusk, 88, Dies; Medical Pioneer', *The New York Times*, 5 November 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard W. Mayo, '2,000,000 Reasons To Help South Korea', *The New York Times*, 2 August 1953.

carried articles highlighting many of the relief projects being undertaken by the United States in South Korea as well as profiles of and interviews with individuals supportive of the Rhee government.

While the two frameworks of military partnership and humanitarian relief were the dominant frames through which policymakers presented South Korea to the American public, they generated only limited press coverage. As development expert John P. Lewis noted in his 1955 book on reconstruction and development in South Korea, these issues did not excite the attention of the public.<sup>13</sup> It was increasingly clear that Indo-China, where the French were facing a desperate struggle to stop the communist Vietminh from seizing control of large parts of the country, had become the most significant Cold War hotspot. By the start of 1954, only one aspect of the ROK's relationship with the United States still merited sustained coverage- Syngman Rhee and his threats to restart the Korean War.

### **Rhee and the Anti-Communist Right**

Although the Eisenhower administration had forced Rhee to publicly accept the armistice agreement in the summer of 1953, Rhee strongly hinted in the autumn of 1953 and spring of 1954 that he would resume fighting if he did not secure the reunification of Korea on his terms. Rhee remained coy as to whether the ROK would even attend the peace talks scheduled to begin in Geneva at the end of April. This obstreperous approach to diplomacy reflected more than just opposition to doing a deal with the communists. Rhee was determined to boost his negotiating position with the United States.<sup>14</sup> In return for South Korea's presence at Geneva, Rhee wanted American support for the training and equipping of a further fifteen to twenty ROKA divisions, which could potentially be used in an all-out attack on North Korea.

---

<sup>13</sup> John P. Lewis, *Reconstruction and Development in South Korea* (Washington D.C.: National Planning Association, 1955), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> For more on U.S.-ROK diplomacy and the Geneva Conference see Brands.



Yet, Rhee recognised that even with an expanded army, the success of any attack would depend on the political and military support of the United States. The idea that the United States under Eisenhower could support an aggressive Cold War liberation strategy was not unreasonable. In order to establish his credibility with the Republican Right during the election campaign, Eisenhower had made 'liberation' a central plank of his foreign policy agenda.<sup>15</sup> In the GOP platform drawn up at the Republican convention in July, the party had rebuked the Truman administration for abandoning countless human beings to a "despotic and godless terrorism" and suggested that a Republican administration would "revive the contagious, liberating influences which are inherent in freedom" and seek "genuine independence" for the world's captive peoples.<sup>16</sup> Even Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was a vocal supporter for a liberation-oriented Cold War strategy. For Rhee and a great many Republicans, the Eisenhower administration offered the promise of the start of a fightback in the Cold War.

Convinced that American public opinion could be aroused in support of reunifying Korea, Rhee and his supporters began a public relations campaign to raise awareness of South Korea's situation and create sympathy for Rhee's determination to reunify his country. Just how this reunification would be accomplished was left purposefully vague- although on occasion Rhee suggested that it would occur if the Chinese were forced to withdraw from Korea.<sup>17</sup> In his correspondence with General James Van Fleet, the former Eighth Army commander and chairman of the American-Korean Foundation, Rhee obsessed over winning the support of key press allies. He was deeply concerned that his old friend Henry Luce had been fed negative views of the ROK by his *Time* colleagues.<sup>18</sup> He also expressed a growing level of paranoia towards the Japan lobby in the United States and warned that the only way to fight the growing Japanese influence on U.S. policy

---

<sup>15</sup> For more on Eisenhower and rollback see Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 76–77.

<sup>16</sup> *National Party Platforms, Vol. I: 1840-1956*, ed. by Donald Bruce Johnson (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 497–99.

<sup>17</sup> Rhee to Oliver, 25 February 1954, The Korean Pacific Press, Public Relations, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

<sup>18</sup> Rhee to Van Fleet, 16 April 1953, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

was to start spending money on convincing patriotic Americans that building up Japan would lead to another war.<sup>19</sup>

While Van Fleet did not share Rhee's fear of Japan, he fully supported the further expansion of the ROKA and the launch of a new offensive against the communists. In February 1954 he published an article in the popular magazine *Readers Digest* arguing that the creation of 25 South Korean divisions could be achieved for the same cost as just one American division.<sup>20</sup> He also met with senior military and press figures, including conservative columnist and *U.S. News and World Report* publisher David Lawrence, to discuss the viability of Rhee's plans.<sup>21</sup> Although Lawrence was sympathetic to Rhee's plight, he told Van Fleet that he did not think the American public could be convinced to resume the war and that he did not want to see the ROK go it alone and lose.<sup>22</sup>

Rhee's publicity efforts were not confined to influencing journalists in the United States. Having learned the lessons of the 1952 constitutional crisis, Rhee effectively used one-on-one interviews and briefings with American journalists in South Korea to secure sympathetic press coverage. In an interview with *The New York Times*' William J. Jordan, Rhee made it clear he wanted a larger ROKA army so that he could, if necessary, reunify his country without having to ask for more military support from the United States.<sup>23</sup> In the run-up to Geneva, Rhee also gave a major interview to AP's Relman Morin, a reporter selected by Rhee on the basis that he was "objective and fair-minded" in presenting South Korea's problems and aware of the threat posed by communism to the entire world.<sup>24</sup> In his article, Morin portrayed Rhee as an impassioned advocate of Korean unification. Although Morin noted that Rhee was often at loggerheads with U.S. diplomats and had

---

<sup>19</sup> Rhee to Van Fleet, 28 December 1953, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>20</sup> James Van Fleet, '25 Divisions for the Cost of One', *Reader's Digest*, February 1954.

<sup>21</sup> Van Fleet to Rhee, 21 January 1954, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

<sup>22</sup> Rhee continued to believe that journalists like David Lawrence and Roy Howard should be convinced to come to South Korea to see the situation for themselves: Rhee to Van Fleet, 15 March 1954, Official Correspondence, President Rhee's Correspondence, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

<sup>23</sup> William J. Jordan, 'Complex Issues Still Face Rhee', *The New York Times*, 13 April 1954.

<sup>24</sup> Rhee to Morin, 3 March 1954, Press Relations, Public Relations, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

been criticised for suppressing political opponents, the article largely focused on Rhee's background as a "revolutionary preaching liberty and democracy" and his "tough, crafty and eminently practical" approach to politics.<sup>25</sup>

In April, Robert T. Oliver triggered a further round of press discussion over Rhee's merits with the release of *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind The Myth*, the first major biography of Rhee to appear in the United States. Adopting a highly partisan approach to his subject, Oliver presented Rhee as a heroic figure who had been the victim of a grossly unfair campaign of communist vilification.<sup>26</sup> In a conclusion perfectly calibrated to appeal to Middle American sensibilities, Oliver argued that Rhee was a simple Christian man who had fought all his life to modernise and democratise his country.<sup>27</sup> His willingness to make tough choices had earned him many enemies, a quality which Oliver argued he shared with some of America's greatest leaders including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>28</sup>

Reaction to Oliver's book revealed how different parts of the press perceived Rhee. In a review for the *New York Times*, editorial writer Robert Aura Smith argued that the book revealed a warm and human side to Rhee which was the opposite of the caricatured version of him which had obtained wide currency.<sup>29</sup> Smith was so taken with Oliver's defence of Rhee that he concluded that a

---

<sup>25</sup> Relman Morin, 'Blue-blooded Rhee Remains a Revolutionary', *The Washington Post*, 7 March 1954.

<sup>26</sup> While Oliver reached out to some of Rhee's critics during the early stages of writing the book, the final version was carefully checked and edited by Rhee; Oliver to Yong-jeung Kim, 21 March 1949, Box 1, Yong-jeung Kim Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University; Chapter Manuscripts for *Syngman Rhee: The Man behind the Myth*, Box 1, Robert T. Oliver Papers, 1949-1970, Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>27</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind The Myth*, pp. 321-30. The South Korean government also published a compendium of essays by Rhee's American supporter celebrating his life and devotion to fighting communism: *Syngman Rhee Through Western Eyes*, ed. by Taehan Min'guk Kongbusil (Seoul: Office of Public Information, 1954).

<sup>28</sup> South Korean publicity materials often compared Rhee to historic American presidents. As early as 1950 it had been common for the press to describe Rhee as the "George Washington of Korea": AP, 'Rhee Expected To Keep Grip On Korea Congress', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 June 1950. Rhee often referred to Abraham Lincoln's declaration that a nation cannot survive "half slave and half free" in speeches prepared for American audiences: Text of speech read out at launch of the America-Korea Foundation's ten million dollar campaign, Press Relations, Public Relations, Syngman Rhee papers, Woodrow Wilson Centre.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Aura Smith, 'His Life is Korea', *The New York Times*, 25 April 1954. A second review in the *Times* by the paper's book review editor was much more sceptical, arguing that "no politician ever had a less critical or more fervently admiring biographer than Syngman Rhee has in Mr Oliver": Orville Prescott, 'Books Of The Times', *The New York Times*, 27 April 1954.

strong case could be made for Rhee as one of the great leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. While reviews in other newspapers and magazines were generally more critical of Rhee's belligerent behaviour, they generally agreed with Oliver's conclusion that Rhee was first and foremost a vital ally against communism in the Far East.<sup>30</sup> The only reviews that discussed Rhee's authoritarian tendencies at any significant length were produced by foreign correspondents who had worked in South Korea. Walter Simmons, the *Chicago Daily Tribune's* long-serving Far East correspondent, argued that Rhee's "fatherly dictatorship" was preferable to the chaos that would ensue if one-man rule was to end yet he also criticised Rhee for his complete lack of concern for American interests.<sup>31</sup> In *The Nation*, former Far East correspondent Mark Gayn used his review as an opportunity to denounce Rhee's despotism.<sup>32</sup>

While most American journalists expressed pragmatic optimism about the future of the ROK under Rhee, much of the foreign media continued to heap abuse and criticism on him. The Rhee regime's authoritarian nature and desire to renew the war were a public relations nightmare for the United Nations. The communist press persistently attacked the ROK regime as a borderline fascist regime which was seeking to plunge the world into a new world war. When the Geneva Conference finally got underway on 26 April, with a delegation from the ROK coaxed into attendance, UN negotiators hoped to placate critics of the Rhee government by suggesting a plan in which both the ROK and DPRK would hold general elections as part of a reunification deal. Although no one believed that the communists would have accepted the deal, Rhee immediately rejected the plan on the supposed basis that any extra-constitutional elections in the south would be a gross violation of the ROK's existing constitutional order.

The inability of any of the parties to agree on meaningful compromises quickly drained the conference of political momentum. Diplomacy gave way to propagandistic grandstanding, in which

---

<sup>30</sup> Thomas E. J. Keena, 'Korea and Syngman Rhee', *The Hartford Courant*, 9 May 1954; Harold T. Fisher, 'Korea's Selfless Fanatic', *The Saturday Review*, 5 June 1954.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Simmons, 'Rough And Ready Rhee, Korea's Boss', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 June 1954.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Gayn, 'What Price Rhee? Profile Of A Despot', *The Nation*, 13 March 1954.

all sides vied to present their case to the global press. South Korean Foreign Minister, Pyun Yung Tai, the highest-ranked South Korean at the conference, declared that the ROK sought a peaceful transition to a unified and democratic Korea under the existing framework of the ROK constitution.<sup>33</sup> In a statement to the press, Pyun accused the communists of distorting the meaning of democracy in their propaganda attacks on the ROK- only South Korea, he argued, exercised rule by the majority of the people, with the presentation of issues and candidates before all the voters, in a fair and open campaign. This rhetoric rarely received much attention in the American press, which was far more interested in the deliberations over the future of Indochina.<sup>34</sup> Rhee's narrow win in the South Korean National Assembly elections at the end of May nonetheless bolstered the ROK's claims to democratic legitimacy. Despite reports of police interference in voting, the press accepted the close result as a sign that democracy in South Korea was still alive and well.<sup>35</sup>

When the Geneva Conference came to an end in July 1954, Rhee could also argue that his anti-communist rhetoric had been strongly vindicated. Just as he had predicted, negotiation with the communists over the future of Korea had produced a great deal of propaganda and no agreement. Even more alarmingly, the communists appeared to be on the verge of capturing another strategically important Asian nation- the French colony of Indochina. At the start of May, French forces in Vietnam had been decisively defeated by the communist Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu. With France unwilling to maintain its military commitment to Indochina, the French delegation to Geneva had sought to negotiate an end to the conflict with the communists. After two months of talks, the different sides agreed to the de facto partition of Vietnam into a communist north and French-backed south.

---

<sup>33</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, pp. 438-41.

<sup>34</sup> For more on how Indochina came to dominate the conference see Frederick Logevall, *Embers of War* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 549-613.

<sup>35</sup> William J. Jordan, 'Police 'Pressure' in Korea Charged', *The New York Times*, 17 May 1954; 'Election in Korea', *The New York Times*, 22 May 1954.

Although the Eisenhower administration perceived the Geneva accords as one of the better possible outcomes of a bad situation, senior political figures in the United States fiercely criticised the deal. Senator William Knowland called Geneva a “Far Eastern Munich”. For these frustrated conservatives, Syngman Rhee’s straightforward anti-communist rhetoric offered a satisfying and hopeful alternative to the compromises and disappointments of international realpolitik. In this context, Syngman Rhee gained a powerful symbolic status- a development that he would take full advantage of when he came to the United States for his first and only state visit.

### **Rhee in America**

Rhee’s visit to the United States between 26 and 31 July 1954 was arguably the most significant public relations event of Syngman Rhee’s entire presidency. Although Eisenhower had serious concerns about giving Rhee a platform to attack U.S. foreign policy, the ambiguous end to the Geneva Conference made it necessary for the United States and the ROK to clarify, both in private and in public, their next steps.<sup>36</sup> Rhee was thus invited to consultations at the White House and to deliver a speech to a joint session of Congress. Although Rhee was initially reluctant to come to the United States, he changed his mind when the Korean Ambassador told him that Dulles had suggested there would be advantages in dealing with “pending matters” through personal conversations.<sup>37</sup>

When news of the visit was released to the American press, many commentators reacted positively. Liberals described it as a vital opportunity for the United States to learn whether Rhee would follow through on his threats to reunify his country by force.<sup>38</sup> Amongst conservatives, Rhee’s trip had a more symbolic importance. Walter Trohan of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* called the visit a

---

<sup>36</sup> Dulles to Rhee, 18 June 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15 (1): p. 1854.

<sup>37</sup> Briggs to Dulles, 10 July 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15 (2): p. 1054.

<sup>38</sup> ‘President Rhee’s Visit’, *The Washington Post*, 17 July 1954; ‘Dr. Syngman Rhee Visits The President’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 July 1954.

triumphal return for a man who had dedicated his life to fighting for the freedom of the Korean people.<sup>39</sup>

For the Eisenhower administration, Rhee's visit was primarily an exercise in damage limitation. It began inauspiciously when, after being met off his plane by Vice President Nixon, Rhee delivered an impromptu 15 minute speech in front of reporters in which he blamed American "cold feet" for the ongoing division of his country. After the ceremony at the airport, Rhee immediately set off for the White House, where he was greeted by an estimated crowd of 60,000.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the normal protocols, the press was prohibited from making sound recordings of Rhee and Eisenhower's official meeting so as to avoid any embarrassing comments from Rhee in Eisenhower's presence.

In a private meeting with Eisenhower and his senior advisers the following morning, Rhee confirmed their worst fears. He sought nothing less than a worldwide military campaign to push back against communism. Eisenhower and Dulles warned that such a hard-line policy, even one limited to Korea, would almost certainly lead to atomic war and the total destruction of modern civilisation. But Rhee could not be dissuaded. After the meeting, Rhee continued his preparations for his address to a joint session of Congress in which he would make public his call for a global war against communism. Although Robert T. Oliver warned him that an aggressive speech could put at risk all the international goodwill that the ROK had worked to obtain, Rhee was in a "fighting mood": "His aim was not conciliation or apology but a sweeping and full-scale attack against U.S. global policies that he considered little short of surrender to communist imperialism. What he undertook was a fighting campaign to influence American public opinion over the heads of President Eisenhower and Dulles."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Walter Trohan, 'Rhee Returns to Capital, Site of Exile', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 July 1954.

<sup>40</sup> Edward T. Folliard, 'Rhee Welcomed To Washington, Minces No Words On Korea', *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1954.

<sup>41</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 447.

When Rhee gave his speech in front of Congress on 27 July, he took square aim at Eisenhower's goal of 'peaceful co-existence' and argued that by not taking a hard line against communism, the United States was being lulled into the "sleep of death" by the Soviet Union. At some point the Soviets would launch an apocalyptic sneak attack against the United States: "Yet death is scarcely closer to Seoul than to Washington, for the destruction of the United States is the prime objective of the conspirators in the Kremlin. The Soviet Union's hydrogen bombs may well be dropped on the great cities of America even before they are dropped on our shattered towns."<sup>42</sup> The only way to avoid such a fate, Rhee claimed, was for the ROK to launch a major offensive against both the DPRK and communist China. The ROKA, in co-operation with Chinese forces from Formosa, could take on the communists with a limited commitment of American air and naval support.

Although several parts of Rhee's speech drew ovations from the crowd, his call for war was met with silence. In comments to the press afterwards, senators made clear their admiration for the man but refused to discuss the substance of the speech.<sup>43</sup> Over the following days, a slew of editorials in major newspapers declared that Rhee's rhetoric had crossed a political Rubicon. Both the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times* condemned his assault on the doctrine of peaceful co-existence. The *Times* complained that his words would "alarm the free world and provide fresh grist for communist propaganda mills".<sup>44</sup>

Yet, Rhee's remarks struck a chord with many Americans who felt that the United States had failed to stand up to communist aggression. The *Los Angeles Times*, then heavily under the influence of its fiercely anti-communist political correspondent Kyle Palmer, suggested that Rhee was probably right, even if it was unlikely that the United States would ever initiate such a military confrontation.<sup>45</sup> The conservative columnists David Lawrence and Constantine Brown argued that Rhee had simply

---

<sup>42</sup> AP, 'Text of Rhee's Address to Congress', *The New York Times*, 28 July 1954.

<sup>43</sup> AP, 'Rhee Urges U.S. Attack Red China', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 1954.

<sup>44</sup> 'President Rhee's Speech', *The New York Times*, 29 July 1954.

<sup>45</sup> Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, pp. 256–59.



told the truth and that history might well one day prove him right.<sup>46</sup> The speech did little to dampen public support for Rhee during the remainder of his trip to the United States. On 2 August, around 150,000 New Yorkers lined Broadway to catch a sight of Rhee in a parade organised in his honour.<sup>47</sup> In Chicago, Kansas City, Los Angeles and San Francisco, Rhee was treated to a whirl of public celebrations and social events in which he was able to repeat his call for the United States to join South Korea in a renewed military struggle against communism.

The only significant public opposition to Rhee mentioned in the press came from small pro-communist groups picketing Rhee's hotel and a handful of social functions. During one event at Los Angeles city hall, members of the Committee For Peaceful Unification of Korea handed out pamphlets accusing Rhee of being a warmonger and a dictator.<sup>48</sup> The city's chief of police ominously told a reporter that they were taking no risks with Rhee's safety since police intelligence knew of people who were not in sympathy with his views. Opposition to Rhee was thus associated with a tiny extremist fringe.

Rhee's trip to the United States confirmed that he had been correct in his assessment that he could call on strong rhetorical support from a large segment of the American public. He misjudged, however, the political mood in both the United States and Washington. After the Korean War, only the most extreme anti-communists had the stomach for more fighting. As John Foster Dulles noted after Rhee left Washington, he had arrived believing that he could convince Congress to support his war plan and left with the understanding that the country was against it.<sup>49</sup> According to

---

<sup>46</sup> Constantine Brown, 'Merits of Rhee Talk', *The Washington Evening Star*, 30 July 1954.; David Lawrence, 'History May Prove Rhee Right In His Grave Warning', *The New York Herald Tribune*, 30 July 1954.

<sup>47</sup> Murray Schumach, 'Rhee Hailed and Honored Here, Begs Free World To Fight Reds', *The New York Times*, 3 August 1954.

<sup>48</sup> 'Rhee Calls For Shooting War With Communism', *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1954.

<sup>49</sup> Dulles to Robinson, 31 July 1954, Box 8, John Foster Dulles Papers 1951-1959, JFD Chronological Series, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Oliver, Rhee regarded the speech in front of Congress as the worst mistake of his life since it irrevocably branded him as a political extremist in the eyes of American policymakers.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, in terms of public relations, the speech did serve several useful purposes. Firstly, it helped Rhee reach out to a key constituency of support who felt frustrated by Eisenhower's constrained diplomatic approach to the Cold War. The speech solidified Rhee's status as an exceptional figure in the Cold War- an authentic anti-communist nationalist. Secondly, as *The Wall Street Journal* recognised, the speech made it more difficult for Rhee's opponents to allege that he was a puppet of American imperialism.<sup>51</sup> Instead it became clear that the United States would have to maintain its commitment to South Korea in order to restrain it from triggering a new conflict. These issues became the dominant lens through which the ROK was perceived and discussed in the American press.

### **Rhee's Silent Revolution**

While Rhee worked to improve his image in the United States, he also completed his authoritarian takeover of the South Korean political system. Rhee used the police to ensure victory in the National Assembly elections in May 1954, clearing the path for sweeping constitutional changes, most crucially the removal of term limits. According to the U.S. Embassy, the elections represented clear "evidence of the resurgence of old authoritarian traditions coupled with the development of a oneparty system".<sup>52</sup>

None of this was apparent in the vast majority of American newspaper coverage of the election or its aftermath. While newspapers did carry basic news stories about Rhee's narrow victory in May, and a handful of articles reported incidents of police repression before the election, most of this coverage missed the wider significance of the elections in terms of the future of South Korean

---

<sup>50</sup> Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960*, p. 450.

<sup>51</sup> 'The Singular Syngman Rhee', *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 1954.

<sup>52</sup> Calhoun to DOS, 22 July 1954, *FRUS 1952-1954*, 15 (2): pp. 1797-1799.

democracy.<sup>53</sup> Only Henry S. Hayward of *The Christian Science Monitor* provided a detailed explanation of the amendments Rhee hoped to use to “eliminate all internal opposition to his policies”.<sup>54</sup> Even in November 1954, when physical fighting broke out in the National Assembly after Rhee’s supporters forced through the constitutional amendment granting him the right to hold the presidency for life, newspapers carried only brief narrative accounts of what had happened.<sup>55</sup>

These deficiencies in coverage reflected some of the same problems that had plagued reporting in South Korea since the days of occupation. Editors rarely gave space to South Korean political news, particularly as public interest in Korea declined in the wake of the armistice. As had been the case in 1945 and 1951, most of the big name reporters stopped visiting the country as other stories developed greater prominence. Korean coverage was left to junior press agency journalists who were rarely allowed to provide interpretative analysis of political developments.

Reporters were also increasingly subject to repression by the ROK government. Although Rhee claimed to be a supporter of the free press, he maintained that good correspondents had to be strongly anti-communist.<sup>56</sup> He interpreted virtually all criticism as an attack on the wider cause of anti-communism and believed it necessary to take all steps necessary to silence correspondents who did not fall into line. In at least one case, Rhee had a difficult magazine correspondent removed from South Korea after he published several stories critical of the regime.<sup>57</sup> More often, correspondents were exposed to intimidation by national and military police. In April 1954, Korean police came to visit the AP office to ensure they were writing “good stories” about the National Assembly

---

<sup>53</sup> See for instance AP, ‘So. Korean Police Alerted As Nation Goes to The Polls’, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 May 1954.

<sup>54</sup> Henry S. Hayward, ‘Rhee Swings Whip Hand Over Korea Elections’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 7 May 1954.

<sup>55</sup> AP, ‘Korea Argues Enabling Vote’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 November 1954; ‘Rhee Forces Win Assembly Battle’, *The New York Times*, 29 November 1954.

<sup>56</sup> Rhee Address to New York Times Luncheon, 3 August 1954, Public Relations, Syngman Rhee Papers, Woodrow Wilson Center.

<sup>57</sup> Rhee to Van Fleet, 16 April 1953, Box 77, James Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Foundation.

elections.<sup>58</sup> In the summer of 1953, the ROK government organised public demonstrations against the armistice negotiations, including one incident where 150 schoolgirls were brought to the Seoul press billets to aggressively chant and sing in front of the foreign correspondents. *Life* correspondent Donald Wilson wrote that although he felt pity for the girls and knew they were being manipulated by their government, he felt he had no choice but to report on the event.<sup>59</sup>

The ROK government's influence over the foreign press was a major concern for correspondents as South Korea transitioned back to peacetime. After the armistice, American reporters continued to receive accreditation from the United Nations Command (UNC), granting them not only significant logistical and administrative support but also immunity from South Korean censorship. Since virtually all American newsmen in South Korea believed that the ROK would censor anything critical or unfavourable to Rhee and his government if given the opportunity, they quietly lobbied for the UN to maintain its censorship apparatus in South Korea.<sup>60</sup> But they could not indefinitely postpone the end of the censorship system. In April 1954, an editorial in *Editor and Publisher* attacked military censorship in South Korea following a tip-off from someone who AP correspondents believed was working for the Rhee government.<sup>61</sup> The UNC gradually began winding down its press operations until the U.S. Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson ordered the end of military censorship in South Korea in November. The announcement came just days after the *Times'* James Reston wrote that American correspondents in South Korea had been threatened with expulsion by the ROK government if they printed stories embarrassing to it.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> John Randolph to Alan Gould, 26 August 1954, Seoul, Foreign Bureau Correspondence 1954, AP Archives. The story was reported in an AP dispatch: Jim Becker, 'With ROK Politics', 27 April 1954, copy in Seoul, Foreign Bureau Correspondence 1954, AP Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Donald M. Wilson, *The First 78 Years* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp, 2004), p. 93.; 'One Old Man Against The Truce', *Life*, 22 June 1953.

<sup>60</sup> Randolph to Gould, 26 August 1954, Seoul, Foreign Bureau Correspondence 1954, AP Archives.

<sup>61</sup> 'Censorship Idiocy', *Editor & Publisher*, 17 April 1954.

<sup>62</sup> 'Korea Censorship Ends', *The New York Times*, 2 November 1954; James Reston, 'Rhee Curbs U.S. Radio', *The New York Times*, 25 October 1954.

The confrontational relationship between journalists and the ROK government was one of several factors that had turned correspondents deeply hostile to Rhee over the course of the Korean War. According to *Time* editor John Osborne, in January 1953 the Seoul press corps habitually referred to Rhee as “that bastard”.<sup>63</sup> Osborne speculated that Rhee was particularly disturbing to the liberal sensibilities of both American correspondents and the diplomats they relied on for stories because of his perception of the Cold War as an all-out, decisive conflict. This not only reduced the chances of the Western and communist blocs finding some kind of compromise, but also greatly undermined U.S. credibility overseas. In an article for *Harper’s* magazine, *Time’s* Frank Gibney argued that Rhee was a reminder of the U.S. failure to ensure “real democracy” in the non-Communist world.<sup>64</sup> In his view Rhee’s authoritarian tactics did more to damage the cause of the United States than the expansion of the Soviet military.

However, Gibney accepted that Rhee’s authoritarianism was going to be a fixture of South Korean politics for the foreseeable future:

In Syngman Rhee’s case, we must recognise that this believing democrat who rules as an autocrat is a passing- and possibly a necessary- phenomenon in the history of new modern states. He may be succeeded by despotism: or he may give way to a progressively more relaxed and democratic government... at the best, the United States can recreate a climate in which forces for good government can grow- the only abiding solution to a stable Korean-American relationship. The maddening thing for Americans is that the good and the stable in any country must do their own growing- and the growth is never swift.

A similar conclusion was reached by *Time’s* Dwight Martin in a front cover feature on Rhee for its 9 March 1953 edition.<sup>65</sup> Martin argued that South Korea’s political stability was due, in almost every respect, to the dominance of Rhee within the South Korean political system. In an interview with

---

<sup>63</sup> John Osborne to Beshoar, 12 January 1953, *Time* magazine correspondence, Harvard University.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Gibney, ‘Free Man’s Burden’, *Harper’s*, 1 February 1954.

<sup>65</sup> ‘The Walnut’, *Time*, 9 March 1953.

South Korean Paik Chung Muk, Martin revealed how even the intellectuals who had once castigated Rhee for his authoritarianism, now accepted that he was a necessary step on the path of development. Muk told Martin that he had once believed in the need for democratic socialism, but had since returned to “solid ground”:

‘Many of my former friends are now with the Communists in the north. I almost went with them. Now I know why they—and very nearly myself—were wrong. It is the same reason so many of you, the Americans, are wrong about us. You want, and we wanted, too much too quickly. Now I know and my friends know that our crime was impatience. Some people turn this around and call it a lack of trust. But it was not that. It was impatience, a grinding desire to achieve our hearts' desires overnight.’... ‘I have talked with more Americans in the last two years than I thought I would see in my lifetime. Now I know that your greatest crime, in terms of political expectations from us, is impatience. You want too much too quickly. ‘Every time I meet a foreigner, the first question I am usually asked is something about freedom of speech, or freedom of the press. At first I used to try and explain that, compared with some of my friends who went north, the answer was definitely yes. Now, when I hear these questions, I would like to slap these people's stupid faces . . . Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of this, freedom of that. Here in Korea, now, such questions are idiotic. Freedom, my friend, is a very relative thing. Now we have a little—more than the Communists, but still not much. But we have enough to start with. Meantime, don't push us too hard, don't ask too much too soon.’ Paik added: ‘You will be here for a long time. You will see.’

In a revival of the fatalistic narrative that had emerged during the occupation era, these correspondents asserted that too much was being expected of the South Korean people. Koreans were simply too primitive to build a fully functioning democracy and the United States could do little

to improve the situation. As long as the Rhee regime avoided a descent into the totalitarianism of its northern neighbour, the United States could live with it.

One of the biggest differences with the pre-Korean War era was the decline in coverage of South Korea in the few remaining leftist press outlets.<sup>66</sup> Rhee's brand of independent-minded anti-communist nationalism did not fit into any standard frameworks for interpreting the Cold War. Contrary to communist propaganda, Rhee was clearly not an American puppet, nor a traditional dictator simply using fear to keep the Korean population under control. Rhee was supported by a significant portion of the Korean population, and in some ways represented exactly the kind of pro-Western third world nationalism that many on the Left had argued the United States needed to encourage as the most plausible alternative to communism. With the Left increasingly focusing on leftist anti-colonial struggles in the Third World, Rhee's rightist post-colonial regime was quietly forgotten.

## **Conclusion**

1954 marked the high water mark of American perceptions of the Rhee regime. Rhee's unpredictable diplomatic strategy was exceptionally successful in keeping the ROK's anti-communism in the public eye and reinforcing Rhee's reputation as an important, if overzealous, Cold War ally. However, Rhee's appeal to the American public was time limited. With every year that passed, the idea of a major confrontation between the communist world and the West looked less and less likely or desirable. As popular support for rollback faded, the Rhee regime looked increasingly like a relic from an antiquated political era.

The dearth of coverage of Rhee's constitutional reforms in 1954 confirmed that virtually all the structural and ideological impediments to reporting on South Korean authoritarianism had

---

<sup>66</sup> Apart from Mark Gayn's review of Rhee's biography, *The Nation* published just three articles related to South Korea between 1954 and 1959. Izzy Stone, noted author of the fiercely anti-Rhee *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1952), published only one article related to South Korea in his influential left-wing newsletter *I.F. Stone's Weekly* during this same period.

continued and even expanded through the course of the Korean War. Press coverage continued to be dominated by superficial and compliant press agency reporting. The attention of the press shifted to new areas of confrontation. Even liberal reporters began to doubt the suitability of their own ideals in the Korean context:

The urge to introduce democracy is almost a moral compulsion for Americans: and where it has been introduced, Americans are quick to observe and make their moral judgments. This is the great difficulty in our relationship with Syngman Rhee. Helped by his mastery of American slogans, he has become virtually an American to many people in the United States, and his acts are judged almost the way we would judge those of a contemporary American politician.<sup>67</sup>

For the rest of the 1950s, these standards were rarely applied to the Syngman Rhee regime.

Although a few liberal newspapers occasionally criticised the Rhee regime for its political corruption and repressiveness, the issue of authoritarianism gained little traction elsewhere.<sup>68</sup> In the *Chicago Daily News*, Keyes Beech remained, in the word of one Korean-American journalist, a lone voice that “repeatedly warned the American people of the explosive undercurrents of the Korean political situation”.<sup>69</sup> In March 1960, the *New York Times* welcomed the start of Rhee’s fourth term as president with an editorial which reminded readers that he was one of the “most determined anti-Communist leaders in the Far East” who commands “the overwhelming support of his country”, in spite of evidence of widespread vote rigging and election violence.<sup>70</sup> However, the regime could not suppress the growing anger within South Korea. Vice-presidential candidate Chang Myon accused

---

<sup>67</sup> Frank Gibney, ‘Free Man’s Burden’, *Harper’s*, 1 February 1954.

<sup>68</sup> In 1959, two liberal newspapers, the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* published editorials criticising the Rhee regime for its repression of journalists and members of the opposition: ‘One-Party Korea?’, *The Washington Post*, 9 January 1959; ‘Struggle In Korea’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 January 1959.

<sup>69</sup> In 1960, Korean American journalist K.W. Lee wrote to the *Chicago Daily News* to praise him for his role in bringing the attention of the American public to the dark side of the Rhee regime: K. W. Lee to the editor, 25 April 1960, Box 24, Chicago Daily News, Field Enterprises Collection, Newberry Library. Beech’s editors at the *Chicago Daily News* referred to the April Revolution as Beech’s revolution: Marsh to Beech, 10 March 1961, Box 24, Chicago Daily News, Field Enterprises Collection, Newberry Library.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Two Presidents Re-elected’, *The New York Times*, 22 March 1960.



the regime of falsifying the results of the vice-presidential elections. In mid-April, tens of thousands of students took to the streets to demand major democratic reforms, prompting a violent crackdown by the ROK government. As the last remnants of his political support in the ROK and the United States evaporated, Rhee finally ran out of options. On 26 April, he resigned and once again returned to exile in the United States. However, his authoritarian legacy could not be so easily dismissed. Just nine months after Rhee's overthrow, the democratic government of Chang Myon was overthrown by the ROKA.<sup>71</sup> For another thirty years, the ROK continued to suffer under authoritarian military rule.

---

<sup>71</sup> For more on the background of the April revolution and the failure of the Chang Myon government see Han.

## Conclusions

The growing authoritarianism of the political system in South Korea between 1945 and 1954 never became a major controversy in the United States. While much of the literature on journalism in this period asserts that the press never had serious interest in South Korea, this was not always the case. The growth in authoritarianism under both the American occupation regime and the Rhee government was written about and criticised by journalists. However, such criticism never became extensive enough to fundamentally re-shape popular perceptions of the regime or influence American policy. Looking more broadly, this thesis has identified five major factors which influenced press coverage of South Korean authoritarianism during this period:

### *1) Press Narratives*

Throughout almost the entire period examined in this study, the press framed the situation in South Korea around two major narratives. The first narrative emerged during World War Two and the first year of the occupation and involved negative assessments of the nature and potential of Korean society. Korea was virtually unknown to most Americans when the United States began its occupation of the southern half of the peninsula in 1945. Most journalists accepted the views of American experts who claimed that the Korean people were too primitive and politically backward to rule themselves. Instead, the Koreans needed a period of trusteeship and foreign tutelage in order to be prepared for self-rule. Many of the journalists who passed through Seoul in the first decade after World War Two were inculcated with similar racial and social prejudices regarding Korean backwardness and the need for American paternal help.

Assumptions about Korean backwardness played a key role in the emergence of a deeply fatalistic narrative about Korea's future prospects. During the early occupation period, few Americans could see a way forward in which South Korea could emerge from the occupation as a functional independent nation. In late 1947, this fatalistic narrative began to shift. While liberals

became ever more despondent about the division of Korea into two ideologically hostile states, the anti-communist Right saw the rise to power of Syngman Rhee as a significant victory for the United States in the struggle against Soviet expansionism.

During the Korean War, the second major narrative emerged framed around the Cold War nature of the conflict. The North Korean invasion of the ROK was widely interpreted as a Soviet-orchestrated challenge to the West. After surviving the first months of the conflict intact, the ROK became a symbol of resilience to communist militarism. The perception that the Korean War was primarily a Cold War struggle relegated South Korean political affairs to marginal status. Although the war was ostensibly fought in defence of freedom, the growing authoritarianism of the South Korean government was considered an issue of concern to the United States only if it threatened U.S. strategic interests. As Murray Schumach wrote in relation to the growing dispute between the Rhee regime and the National Assembly in May 1951: "More important for Americans than the possibility that the bickering may lead to political crisis is the danger that it may create disharmony in the South Korean Army and thereby lessen the military strength of the United Nations in Korea".<sup>1</sup> When the war ended, this Cold War narrative remained largely in place. On the few occasions when the ROK's authoritarianism was discussed, journalists revived the fatalistic perspective of the occupation era- the Korean people were simply not ready for democracy.

Other aspects of press coverage also served to reinforce these press narratives. One key issue was the problem of complexity. During the occupation period, the dynamics of the Korea story was extremely difficult to explain for readers. The press inevitably framed the story in a simplistic way so that readers stood a chance of understanding the basic features of the situation. This problem was especially acute because of the inherently fleeting nature of press coverage. The attention of the press often shifted from one crisis to another in rapid succession. Readers had little

---

<sup>1</sup> Murray Schumach, 'Bickering In Korea Hinders Aim of U.S.', *The New York Times*, 12 May 1951.

chance of developing a deeper understanding of events and relied on the broader press narrative to frame new developments.

## 2) *Press limitations*

The American press corps based in South Korea was small and deferential to authority. Only three press agency reporters and one newspaper reporter were permanently based in the country between 1945 and 1950. Although the number of American reporters greatly increased after the onset of the Korean War, little changed in terms of reporting on South Korean affairs. Most Seoul-based reporters were heavily influenced and constrained by the ethic of objectivity. By treating government sources as the main source of legitimate news, journalists became conduits for official briefings, reports and statements.

By far the most insightful journalism was produced by visiting newspaper correspondents who had both a sceptical approach to authority and the freedom to report and write about what they saw- journalists such as Gordon Walker, Mark Gayn, Keyes Beech, Walter Sullivan, George Barrett and Henry S. Hayward. These journalists came from dissimilar backgrounds and shared few common characteristics. All had wildly different levels of education, journalistic experience, knowledge of Asia and professional status. Much of Walker's early critical coverage, and to a lesser extent Mark Gayn's, was fuelled by a personal animus against military authorities, which was completely absent amongst later correspondents. However, they all shared a concern for and curiosity about the indirect social impacts of U.S. foreign policy. Crucially, they also all worked for the handful of newspaper outlets which valued independent and interpretative analysis.

Unfortunately, none of these reporters, bar perhaps Walter Sullivan, had the status to make a significant impact back home. Only reporters with the most prestigious bylines could be sure of a major reaction to a sensational story. A clear instance of this was *New York Herald Tribune's* Homer Bigart criticism of the occupation in September 1945, which helped prompt a direct intervention from the White House. Few prominent journalists visited South Korea before the onset of the

Korean War and the big names of this war- including Bigart, Marguerite Higgins, Hal Boyle and Don Whitehead- did not stay beyond December 1950.

Even if these more prestigious reporters had made more regular visits to South Korea, the authoritarianism issue was not a story that could be covered quickly. Police repression and political corruption required slow and methodical reporting, as well as supportive editors willing to give their writers license to cover difficult and controversial topics. This kind of investigative journalism was exceptionally rare in the decade after World War Two, and even rarer in Korea- only two American reporters, Mark Gayn in 1946 and *Life's* Margaret Bourke-White in 1952, were provided with the opportunity to spend a lengthy period of time investigating conditions in the country.

### 3) *Military influence*

During the occupation of Korea, American military officials wielded tremendous influence over journalists. General John Hodge used his powers as commander of the occupation government to keep press agency reporters based in South Korea 'on message' and prevent critical newspaper journalists visiting from Japan and the United States. In Tokyo, General Douglas MacArthur isolated the handful of liberal and leftist newspaper and magazine correspondents suspected of communist leanings. American newspapers came under pressure from authorities in both Seoul and Tokyo to rein in or even let go those correspondents critical of U.S. policy.

The military played a very different role in the Korean War. With no direct stake in public perceptions of the ROK regime, the military avoided interfering in political reporting. Instead, the military's primary contribution to coverage of the ROK during the Korean War was shaping perceptions of the ROKA. During the early stages of the war, the U.S. military contributed a great deal to the negativity surrounding the ROKA's collapse. After some limited attempts to salvage the ROKA's reputation in the spring of 1951, General James Van Fleet introduced a sweeping reform programme which allowed the ROKA to re-establish itself as a modern and effective fighting force.

Van Fleet played a crucial role in promoting these new capabilities in the United States, and in doing so, helped cement a new narrative for the ROK as a strong military ally in the Cold War.

#### 4) *The Rhee regime's influence*

One of the most intriguing figures in the history of this period is South Korea's leader and first president, Syngman Rhee. With a Ph.D. from Princeton and forty years of experience living in the United States, Rhee was almost as American as he was South Korean. He demonstrated a consistent, and often perplexing, attachment to the idea that American public opinion could be harnessed to help him win the support of the United States in his bid for South Korean independence and reunification with the north. His close relationship with his U.S. press adviser Robert T. Oliver has few parallels in the history of foreign lobbying in the United States. In the years after World War Two, Rhee and his supporters successfully established him as virtually the only Korean political figure known to anyone in the United States.

The regime's great public relations breakthrough came after the onset of the Korean War. The survival of the ROK through the devastation of the first months of the war helped to convince many sceptics that the ROK was in fact a viable state. Rhee and his press advisers took full advantage of the many journalistic doors that suddenly opened to them in both South Korea and the United States. Although the regime made some significant mistakes in the first weeks of the 1952 crisis, the regime successfully contrived a face-saving narrative to preserve the regime's legitimacy in the eyes of the American press. After 1952, the Rhee government's hard-line position against peace talks with the communists helped Rhee to establish an image as a martyr to the anti-communist cause.

#### 5) *U.S. Political influence*

Before the Korean War, South Korea received only sporadic attention from President Truman. While the administration battled with Congress to fund a series of aid bills to Korea in 1949 and 1950, the President played only a minimal role in the Korea policy debate. After the onset of the

Korean War, Truman was careful to frame the conflict as a Cold War struggle and made only limited efforts to praise or even acknowledge the ROK. The advent of the Eisenhower administration and the pursuit of an armistice agreement significantly altered this relationship. In 1953 and 1954, almost all coverage of the ROK was seen through the prism of top level interactions between President or other senior administration officials and Syngman Rhee.

-----

It is clear from this analysis that previous attempts to explain the poor coverage of South Korea as a straightforward consequence of anti-Korean prejudice or Cold War thinking have missed the complex ways in which these frameworks influenced journalists and the structures in which they operated.<sup>2</sup> Prejudice against Koreans was certainly an important and insidious factor in the way Americans thought about South Korea, but its impact was greatly exacerbated by the routines of American journalism. Pack journalism and the pursuit of 'objectivity' ensured that the vast majority of journalists never challenged the racialised assumptions of American policymakers. While the Cold War added to the pressure on journalists to be seen as supporting U.S. foreign policy, the military's suppression of critical journalism reflected an innate institutional hostility to criticism as much as a fear of communism.

A small number of journalists tried to break through these institutional and ideological constraints and draw attention to the growing problem of authoritarianism in South Korea. Although they operated in very different ways, they all exemplified the function of watchdog journalism. However, these efforts were overwhelmed by the broader cultural and political narratives which regarded Koreans as too politically immature and too imperilled by the threat of communism to manage a functioning liberal democracy.

---

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Deane, p. 23; Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, p. 701.

The authoritarianism issue came to prominence only in those moments when other political forces aligned behind it. This occurred in the period 1949-1950, when the policy of American aid for the Rhee regime was challenged by the Republican Party. As South Korea became increasingly politicised, criticisms of the authoritarian nature of the regime in the press became more prominent, most notably through Walter Sullivan's articles in the *New York Times*. However, the authoritarian issue did not become central to the debate over American support for the regime as long as Rhee maintained his fidelity to the country's constitutional order. The United States put heavy pressure on Rhee in 1950 to ensure that he kept to the schedule of elections as proscribed by the constitution. During the constitutional crisis two years later, in the midst of the Korean War, the United States failed to maintain this pressure and helped Rhee deliver a deathblow to South Korean democracy. It is quite possible to imagine that, if it were not for the Korean War, a much greater controversy would have erupted over Rhee's gross violation of constitutional order. Without a Cold War narrative in which to frame the crisis, the press would have been significantly freer to condemn Rhee.

This thesis thus joins a growing body of literature which argues that the Korean War was a significant moment of change in world history. While Robert Jervis has suggested that the Korean War defined the basic parameters for the American Cold War- including high defence budgets, the globalisation of American commitments and the militarisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation- the war also had a crucial impact on the way the United States perceived authoritarianism in its allies.<sup>3</sup> After 1950, interest in the status of Korean democracy faded as concerns about political and military stability came to dominate most public discussion of South Korea. This remained the case even after the war ended. Arguably, the Korean War marked a

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Jervis, 'The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24.4 (1980), 563-92. See also Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).



'Rubicon moment' when the American political elite accepted that the United States could put its full support behind authoritarian regimes as part of its Cold War strategy.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis also reveals more about the way the press conceived of issues such as democracy promotion and human rights advocacy at the start of the Cold War era. It has demonstrated that even in the wake of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the press expressed very limited interest in what would now be described as human rights abuses in South Korea. This raises intriguing questions as to how and when these issues began to be taken more seriously. Patrick Chung has shown that human rights had become a major issue in American coverage of South Korea by the 1970s in response to the rise of NGOs and a Congressional committee dedicated to the investigation of human rights abuses.<sup>5</sup> How this transition occurred is a topic that deserves more scholarly attention.

The study of this transition might also shed light on the Korean War's long-term legacy in the United States. Until the 1990s the Korean War was widely regarded as the 'Forgotten War'.<sup>6</sup> Korea made little imprint on popular culture or public memory. Often this is explained as a reflection of the war's remoteness and ambiguous conclusion.<sup>7</sup> In an essay on the American memory of the Korean War, Steven I. Levine argued that Americans have generally struggled to categorise Korea because of how enmeshed the United States was in both the causes and controversies of the war.<sup>8</sup> The United

---

<sup>4</sup> After the start of the Korean War, the United States greatly strengthened ties with several authoritarian regimes which had previously been diplomatically isolated, including Spain, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua: Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-65*, pp. 144–67.

<sup>5</sup> See Chung, p. 1137.

<sup>6</sup> The term the 'Forgotten War' was first used by *U.S. News and World Report* in 1951 and was given greater prominence by Matthew Ridgway's memoir of the war in the 1960s: 'Korea: The "Forgotten" War', *U.S. News and World Report*, 5 October 1951; Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the American memory of the Korean War see Philip West, Suh Ji-moon and Donald Gregg, *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Korean War Through Literature and Art* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Melinda L. Pash, *In the Shadows of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Paul M. Edwards, *To Acknowledge a War: The Korean War in American Memory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Steven I. Levine, 'Some Reflections on the Korean War', in *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Korean War Through Literature and Art* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 3–4.

States role in occupying and dividing Korea, as well as its support for a series of authoritarian regimes in the south, have left a bitter legacy in both countries. While a vocal populist right-wing minority sang Rhee's praises in the 1950s, in the longer-term his regime never escaped its chequered history.

-----

This thesis has explored a largely untold story about the struggle by journalists, lobbyists, political leaders and military officials to influence the way Americans perceived South Korea. However, the focus on the production process has limitations. Perhaps the single most significant question left unresolved by this thesis is what would have happened if the press had paid greater attention to South Korean authoritarianism. Could the press have re-shaped the way that the public and policymakers thought about South Korea? Was a different approach possible?

It certainly seems plausible that the press could have influenced public attitudes towards the Rhee regime, at least amongst the 40% of Americans who claimed to have either mild or substantial interest in news from Korea even before the Korean War.<sup>9</sup> If the press had put more emphasis on the police state that operated in South Korea both before and after independence, more Americans might have called for a political intervention of some kind. On the other hand, it is not clear exactly what kind of coverage would have galvanised the public in this way. Reports of atrocities during the Korean War only elicited a response from a small number of concerned citizens. In order to puncture the complacency of most Americans towards what was going in South Korea would probably have required a vast campaign of exposure by the press. In 1960, Korean-American journalist K.W. Lee

---

<sup>9</sup> An opinion poll in October 1948 showed that 28% of respondents regarded themselves as mildly interested and 10% greatly interested in news of U.S. policy towards Korea: National Opinion Research Center [NORC]. NORC Survey: Foreign Affairs, Oct, 1948 [dataset]. USNORC1948-0161, Version 3. National Opinion Research Center [NORC] [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, RoperExpress [distributor], accessed 25 September 2016.

wrote that the horrors the Rhee regime inflicted on its citizens might have been avoided if the American press had had ten Keyes Beech's doing perceptive and forthright reporting.<sup>10</sup>

However, such arguments rely on inherently unknowable counterfactuals. It is not clear if U.S. policymakers could have made different choices or whether such choices would have led to a better outcome for South Korea. Allen Lightner, the chargé d'affaires in South Korea during the 1952 constitutional crisis told an interviewer in 1973 that the United States should have removed Rhee from power:

During those eight years from 1952 to 1960 when Rhee continued to be the strong man of the ROK, we could have had a useful influence over the development of, and the education of, a younger President and other leaders who might have been amenable to some American guidance....But Rhee was an autocrat leading the country straight to military dictatorship; whereas under any one of the alternative candidates the ROK might have developed toward a democratic system. This was at a time when they might have been receptive to ideas and help from the American side, which was already providing fantastic amounts of economic assistance.<sup>11</sup>

Lightner ignored the possibility that ousting Rhee could have led to the destabilisation of South Korea or the military simply establishing a new kind of authoritarian government at an earlier stage. Similarly, claims that the United States could have adopted a radically different approach during the occupation period have to be treated with caution. Many of the alternative options available to policymakers carried a high chance of leading to the establishment of a pro-Soviet authoritarian regime over the entire of the Korean peninsula.

---

<sup>10</sup> K.W. Lee to the editor, 25 April 1960, Box 24, Chicago Daily News, Field Enterprises Collection, Newberry Library.

<sup>11</sup> E. Allan Lightner, Jr. Oral History by Richard D. McKinzie, 26 October 1973, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

Such options should, however, have at least been discussed. The main argument of this thesis is that the press did not produce an adequate independent assessment of the basic conditions in South Korea or a full consideration of the range of possible policy approaches. This represented a basic failure of the press to fulfil its duty to scrutinise U.S. foreign policy and hold the U.S. government to account. By not learning the lessons of its support for authoritarianism in South Korea, the United States set itself on a long and dark road in which many of the same mistakes would be repeated again and again.

## Epilogue: Prelude to Vietnam?

When the Korean War ended in 1953, the attention of the world rapidly shifted to the communist insurgency in the French colony of Indochina. After the communists won a major military victory against French forces at Dien Bien Phu, France agreed to partition the largest part of the colony, Vietnam. In a striking parallel to Korea, Vietnam became two separate states, the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the U.S.-backed Republic of Vietnam. Like the ROK, the Republic of Vietnam emerged as an authoritarian state led by a pro-Western nationalist president, Ngo Dinh Diem.

In 1963, the press helped turn Diem's repressive rule into a major scandal in the United States. In a series of dispatches for the *New York Times*, Saigon correspondent David Halberstam revealed the regime's manifold military and political failures. The most sensational stories came in August when Halberstam, working closely with AP reporters Malcolm Browne, Horst Faas and Peter Arnett, as well as UP's Neil Sheehan, detailed the brutal repression of the country's Buddhist minority. The critical coverage of Diem helped to turn the political climate in the United States against the Diem regime, creating the conditions in which President John F. Kennedy made the decision to replace Diem with someone more amenable to U.S. goals.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact role of the United States in Diem's removal and murder in November 1963 remains controversial, there is no doubt that the American press, and Halberstam in particular, played a major role in the way the crisis unfolded.

How did such critical coverage emerge just ten years after the end of the Korean War? In part, the controversy over Diem reflected the inability of U.S. authorities and the regime in power to build strong relationships with the Saigon-based press. The Saigon Embassy persistently provoked journalistic ire with its excessive secrecy and disingenuous public statements. Ngo Dinh Diem and his

---

<sup>1</sup> Gary C. Tallman and Joseph P. McKerns, "'Press Mess': David Halberstam, the Buddhist Crisis, and U.S. Policy in Vietnam, 1963", *Journalism and Communication Monographs*, 2.3 (2000).

brother Nhu fought a relentless campaign to expel critical reporters and, in July 1963, even went as far as sending secret police to physically attack a group of reporters covering the Buddhist protests. But for all the public relations failures of the authorities in South Vietnam, an even more significant factor was the nature of the Saigon press corps. By 1963, all of the correspondents covering Vietnam were under 35. They had begun their working lives as McCarthyism entered its terminal decline. All too aware of the damage that unsubstantiated accusations had inflicted on a generation of Americans, these younger journalists were more committed to verifying news before reporting it.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, this change in style of reporting was also supported by a new generation of publishers and editors in the United States- in particular, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger at the *Times* and Wes Gallagher at AP.<sup>3</sup>

Vietnam in 1963 was thus in many ways the inverse of the situation in South Korea in the period examined by this thesis. However, one correspondent acted as a bridge between the dissenters of Korea and Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> In 1961, sixteen years after he had caused a scandal with his critical coverage of the first days of the American occupation of Korea, Homer Bigart became the first permanent newspaper correspondent based in Saigon. In his dispatches for the *New York Times*, Bigart provided the first major critical assessment of the Vietnam War. Convinced that the corrupt and incompetent Diem regime stood little chance of long-term survival, he opted to return to the United States after just six months. In that time, however, the Saigon press corps was transformed by his influence. Sheehan reverently referred to Bigart as the “the professor” of a very special school of journalism.<sup>5</sup> Sheehan, Mal Browne and Bigart’s replacement David Halberstam made Bigart’s sceptical approach the basis for a brave new era in the history of American journalism.

---

<sup>2</sup> James Boylan, ‘Declarations of Independence,’ *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov. /Dec. 1986.

<sup>3</sup> David Halberstam, ‘Foreward’, in *Breaking News: How the Associated Press Has Covered War, Peace, and Everything Else* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Notable Korea veterans who criticised the Saigon press corps included Marguerite Higgins, Joseph Alsop and, most surprisingly, Keyes Beech: Prochnau, pp. 268–69.

<sup>5</sup> Prochnau, pp. 84–85.

## Bibliography

### **Archival Collections:**

American University, Washington D.C.

Douglass, Paul. Papers

Associated Press Corporate Archives, New York

General Files

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts

Halberstam, David. Papers

Columbia University, New York

Kim, Yong-jeung. Papers

Douglas MacArthur Papers, Norfolk, Virginia

MacArthur, Douglas. Papers

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas

Cochran, Jacqueline. Papers

Dulles, John Foster. Papers

Eisenhower, Dwight D. Presidential Papers

Ann Whitman File

White House Central File

Hagerty, James C. Papers

Jackson, C. D. Papers and Records

McCardle, Carl W. Papers

First Division Museum, Cantigny, Illinois

Mccormick, Robert R. Papers

George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia

Van Fleet, James. Papers

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri

Johnson, Edgar. Papers

Else, George M. Papers

Quirk, James T. Papers

Truman, Harry S. Papers

President's Secretary's Files

Staff Member and Office Files

White House Central Files

Confidential File

Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Harvard-Yenching Library

George and Geraldine Fitch. Papers

Hausman, James H. Papers

Houghton Library

Time Inc. Dispatches from Time Magazine Correspondents

Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Alsop, Joseph and Stewart. Papers

Luce, Henry. Papers

Reid Family. Papers

Taft, Robert A. Papers

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (NARA)

Record Group (RG) 59. Department of State

Record Group (RG) 84. Records Of Foreign Service Posts

Record Group (RG) 306. Records of the United States Information Agency

Record Group (RG) 319. Army Staff

Record Group (RG) 330. Office of Secretary of Defense

Record Group (RG) 338. Eighth Army

Record Group (RG) 554. Records of General Headquarters, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command

National Archives, Kew Gardens, London

Foreign Office

Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois

Field Enterprises Records

New York Public Library

New York Times Company Records

Pennsylvania State University, State College



Oliver, Robert T. Papers  
Princeton University, New Jersey  
American Civil Liberties Union Records  
Dulles, John Foster. Papers  
Lawrence, David. Papers  
South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia  
Billings, John Shaw. Papers  
Stanford University, California  
Green Library  
Skouras, Spyros P. Papers  
Hoover Institution  
Evans, Henry S. Papers  
Goodfellow, Millard Preston, Papers  
Jacobs, Joseph Earle. Papers  
Mott, George Fox. Papers  
Utley, Freda. Papers  
State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City  
Deane, Hugh. Papers  
Snow, Edgar. Papers  
Time Corporate Archives, New York  
LIFE Picture Collection Picture Captions  
University of Syracuse, New York  
Higgins, Marguerite. Papers  
University of Toronto, Ontario  
Gayn, Mark. Papers  
Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison  
Bigart, Homer. Papers  
Boyle, Harold V. Papers  
University of Wyoming, Laramie  
Lambert, Tom. Papers  
Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington D.C.

Rhee, Syngman Papers

**Interviews:**

Charles J. Hanley

Leon Gordenker

Rutherford Poats

**News Sources:**

*The Baltimore Sun*

*The Boston Globe*

*The Buckeye Barrister*

*The Buffalo Evening News*

*The Canberra Times*

*The Chicago Daily News*

*The Chicago Daily Tribune*

*The Chicago Sun*

*The China Weekly Review*

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*Collier's*

*The Daily Compass*

*The Daily Worker (UK)*

*The Daily Worker (U.S.)*

*Editor & Publisher*

*Free World*

*Harper's*

*The Hartford Courant*

*I. F. Stone's Weekly*

*Korean Survey*

*Korea Times online*

*Life*

*The Los Angeles Times*

*The Manchester Guardian*  
*The Milwaukee Sentinel*  
*The Nation*  
*The New Leader*  
*The New Republic*  
*Newsweek*  
*The New Yorker*  
*The New York Herald Tribune*  
*The New York Post*  
*The New York Times*  
*The Observer*  
*Periscope*  
*The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
*PM*  
*The Reporter*  
*The San Francisco Chronicle*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*  
*The Spokesman Review*  
*Time*  
*The Times*  
*The Tuscaloosa News*  
*U.S. News and World Report*  
*The Wall Street Journal*  
*The Washington Evening Star*  
*The Washington Post*  
*World Report*  
*Yank*

**Oral Histories:**

E. Allen Lightner

Rutherford Poats

**Published primary sources:**

- Baillie, Hugh, *High Tension: The Recollections of Hugh Baillie* (London: Laurie, 1960)
- Beech, Keyes, *Tokyo And Points East*, [1st ed. ] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1954)
- Bourke-White, Margaret, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963)
- Cameron, James, *Point of Departure (Experiment in Biography)* (London: Panther Books, 1967)
- Clark, Mark, *From The Danube To The Yalu* (London: George G. Harrap, 1954)
- Cutforth, Rene, *Korean Reporter* (London: Allan Wingate, 1952)
- Deane, Hugh, *The Korean War: 1945-1953* (San Francisco, CA: China Books & Periodicals, 1999)
- Dewey, Thomas, *Journey To The Far Pacific* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1952)
- Ebener, Charlotte, *No Facilities For Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954)
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Public Papers of the President, 1953-1954*, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php)
- Gallup, George H.. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1972)
- Gayn, Mark, *Japan Diary* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948)
- , *Journey From The East* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944)
- Gibney, Frank, 'The First Three Months of War: A Journalist's Reminiscences of Korea', *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 2 (1993)
- Heren, Louis, *Memories of Times Past* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1988)
- Higgins, Marguerite, *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1951)
- Hoberecht, Earnest, *Asia Is My Beat* (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1961)
- Johnson, Donald Bruce, ed., *National Party Platforms, Vol. I: 1840-1956* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978)
- Kahn, E.J., *The Peculiar War: Impressions Of A Reporter In Korea* (New York: Random House, 1951)
- Kelley, Frank, and Cornelius Ryan, *Star-Spangled Mikado* (New York: R. M. McBride, 1947)
- King, O. H. P., *Tail of the Paper Tiger* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1961)
- Korean Pacific Press, *Korea's Fight For Freedom* (Washington D.C.: Korean Pacific Press, 1951)
- Lucas, Jim, *Our Fighting Heart: The Story of the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, as Published in a Series of Articles in the Scripps-Howard Newspapers, November-December, 1951* (Washington D.C.: Korean Pacific Press, 1951)
- Oliver, Robert T., 'My Life As a Korean Ghost', *Korean Journal*, 33 (1995)

———, Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea; 1942-1960 (Seoul: Panmun Book Company, 1978)

———, Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind The Myth (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1954)

———, 'Transition and Continuity in Korean-American Relations in the Postwar Period', in Korean-American Relations 1866-1997, ed. by Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999)

Min'guk Kongbusil, Taehan, Syngman Rhee Through Western Eyes (Seoul: Office of Public Information, 1954)

National Opinion Research Center

NORC Survey: Foreign Affairs, Oct, 1948 [dataset]. USNORC1948-0161, Version 3. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, RoperExpress [distributor],

Reston, James, Deadline: A Memoir (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1992)

Ridgway, Matthew B., The Korean War (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967)

Robinson, Richard D., 'A Personal Journey Through Time and Space', Journal Of International Business Studies, 25 (1994)

Shinn, Bill, The Forgotten War Remembered, Korea: 1950-1953 (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International, 1995)

Snow, Edgar, Red Star Over China (New York: Random House, 1937)

Strong, Anna Louise, In North Korea: First Eye-Witness Report (New York: Soviet Russia Today, 1949)

Thompson, Reginald, Cry Korea: The Korean War: A Reporter's Notebook (London: Reportage Press, 2009)

Truman, Harry S., Volume One: Year of Decisions (New York: Doubleday, 1955)

Truman, Harry S., Volume Two: Years of Trial And Hope (New York: Doubleday, 1956)

Truman, Harry S. Public Papers of the Presidents, 1950–1953. [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php)

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Documents on British Policy Overseas, 1950. H.M. London: Stationery Office, 1984

UN General Assembly

UNCURK Report to General Assembly, 1951 (A/1881)

U.S. Congress.

Congressional Quarterly Almanac. Washington, D.C.: CQ News Features, 1949–53

Congressional Record. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1945–54

U.S. Department of State.

Department of State Bulletin. Volumes 13–28, Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1950–53

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1954. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969–84

Voorhees, Melvin B, *Korean Tales* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952)

Yim, Louise, *My Forty Year Fight For Korea* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1951)

Wilson, Donald M., *The First 78 Years* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp, 2004)

Winnington, Alan, and Wilfred Burchett, *Koje Unscreened* (London: Britain-China Friendship, 1953)

#### **Unpublished manuscripts:**

Cash, Dane J., 'The Forgotten Debate: American Political Opinion Journals And The Korean War, 1950-1953' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Boston University, 2012)

Gifford, Peter, 'Aspects Of Australian Journalism And The Cold War, 1945-1956' (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Murdoch University, 1997)

Horrell, Mason Edward, Reporting the 'Forgotten War': Military-Press Relations in Korea 1950-1954 (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of Kentucky, 2002)

Kim, Jimin, Representing The Invisible: The American Perceptions Of Colonial Korea (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2011)

Kim, Sun-A, Life And War In Korea: Photographic Portrayals Of The Korean War In Life Magazine, July 1950-August 1953, (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of Missouri-Colombia, 2008)

Na, Jongnam, Making Cold War Soldiers: The Americanization of the South Korean Army 1945-1955 (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006)

Robinson, Richard D., *Betrayal Of A Nation* (Unpublished manuscript: Georgetown University Library, 1950)

Vinocour, Seymour Murray, Syngman Rhee: Spokesman For Korea (June 23, 1951 - October 8, 1952) A Case Study In International Speaking (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss.: Pennsylvania State University, 1953)

#### **Secondary sources:**

'Aid to Korea', in *CQ Almanac 1949* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1950)

Allen, Richard C., *Korea's Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait* (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1960)

Alpers, Benjamin, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

Appleman, Roy E., *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1961)

Aronson, James, *Press and the Cold War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970)

- Aucoin, James L., *The Evolution Of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2005)
- Bateman, Robert L., *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002)
- Bayley, Edwin R., *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1981)
- Bennett, W. Lance, 'Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States', *Journal of Communication*, 40 (1990), 103–27
- Bernhard, Nancy E., *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Berry, Nicholas, *Foreign Policy And The Press: An Analysis Of The New York Times Coverage Of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990)
- Bowie, Robert R., and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Bradley, Mark Philip, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000)
- Braestrup, Peter, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington, Volume 1* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977)
- Braim, Paul F., *The Will To Win: The Life of General James A. Van Fleet* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001)
- Brands, Henry W., 'The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, Syngman Rhee, and the "Other" Geneva Conference of 1954', *Pacific Historical Review*, 56 (1987)
- Brazinsky, Gregg A., *Nation Building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009)
- Brewer, Susan, *Why America Fights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Canham, Erwin B., *Commitment to Freedom, the Story of the Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958)
- Caridi, Ronald J., *The Korean War and American Politics: The Republican Party as a Case Study* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1968)
- Carpenter, Ted Galen, *The Captive Press: Foreign Policy Crises and the First Amendment* (Washington D.C.: Cato Institute, 1995)
- Carruthers, Susan, *Cold War Captives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008)
- , *The Media at War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
- Casey, Steven, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- , 'Wilfred Burchett and the UN Command's Media Relations during the Korean War, 1951-52', *Journal of Military History*, 74 (2010)
- Cha, Marn J., *Koreans in Central California (1903-1957): A Study of Settlement and Transnational Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010)

- Chang, Tsan-Kuo, *The Press And China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations 1950-1984* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1993)
- Chay, Jongsuk, *Unequal Partners in Peace And War: The Republic of Korea and the United States, 1948-1953* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002)
- Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Vintage, 1995)
- Chung, Patrick, "'The Pictures in Our Heads": Journalists, Human Rights, and U.S.-South Korean Relations, 1970-1976.', *Diplomatic History*, 38 (2014), 1136–55
- Cohen, Bernard C., *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963)
- Conway-Lanz, Sahr, 'Beyond No Gun Ri: Refugees and the United States Military in the Korean War', *Diplomatic History*, 29 (2005), 49–81
- , *Collateral Damage: Americans, Noncombatant Immunity, and Atrocity after World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2006)
- Coughlin, William J., *Conquered Press: The MacArthur Era in Japanese Journalism* (Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1952)
- Cumings, Bruce, 'American Orientalism at War in Korea and the United States', in *Orientalism and War*, ed. by Tarak Barkawi and Ketih Stanski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- , ed., *Child Of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983)
- , *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011)
- , *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981)
- , *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981)
- , 'The South Korean Massacre at Taejon: New Evidence on US Responsibility and Coverup', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 6 (2008)
- Curtis Skaggs, David, 'The Katusa Experiment: The Integration Of Korean Nationals Into The U.S. Army, 1950-1965', *Military Affairs*, 38 (1974), 53–58
- Daly, Chris, 'The Historiography of Journalism History: Part 1: "An Overview"', *American Journalism*, 26 (2009), 141–47
- Davies, David Randall, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945–1965* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006)
- Divine, Robert A., 'The Cold War and the Election of 1948', *The Journal of American History*, 59 (1972), 90–110
- Dobbs, Charles M., *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981)
- Douglass, Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959)



- Dower, John, *War without Mercy: Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987)
- Edwards, Paul M., *To Acknowledge a War: The Korean War in American Memory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000)
- Elegant, Robert S., *How to Lose a War: The Press and Viet Nam* (Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982)
- Emery, Michael, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* (9th Edition) (New York: Pearson, 1997)
- Engelhardt, Tom, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007)
- Engerman, David, 'Modernization from the Other Shore: American Observers and the Costs of Soviet Economic Development', *The American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 383–416
- Felsenthal, Carol, *Power, Privilege and The Post: The Katharine Graham Story* (New York: Putnam's, 1992)
- Fisher, James T., 'A World Made Safe for Diversity: The Vietnam Lobby and the Politics of Pluralism, 1945-1963', in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945–1966*, ed. by Christian G. Appy (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000)
- Foot, Rosemary, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990)
- Gauthier, Brandon K., 'A Tortured Relic: The Lasting Legacy of the Korean War and Portrayals of "North Korea" in the U.S. Media, 1953–1962', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22 (2015), 343–67
- Gibby, Bryan R., *The Will To Win: American Military Advisers in Korea , 1946-1953* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2012)
- Gilman, Nils, *Mandarins Of The Future* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003)
- Hajimu, Masuda, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015)
- Hakanen, Ernest, and Alexander Nikolaev, eds., *Leading to the 2003 Iraq War: The Global Media Debate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)
- Halberstam, David, 'Foreward', in *Breaking News: How the Associated Press Has Covered War, Peace, and Everything Else* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007)
- , *The Powers That Be* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000)
- Hallin, Daniel C., *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Hamilton, John Maxwell, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge, LO: Louisiana State University Press, 2009)
- Han, Sŭng-ju, *The Failure of Democracy in South Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974)

Hanley, Charles J., Martha Mendoza, and Sang-hun Choe, *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001)

Haruki, Wada, *The Korean War: An International History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013)

Hee-Kyung, Suh, 'Atrocities Before And During The Korean War', *Critical Asian Studies*, 42 (2010)

Heiferman, Ronald Ian, *The Cairo Conference of 1943: Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang Kai-Shek and Madame Chiang* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011)

Henderson, Gregory, *The Politics Of The Vortex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968)

Hermes, Walter G., *Truce Tent and Fighting Front: The United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1992)

Herzstein, Robert E., Henry R. Luce, *Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Hohenberg, John, *Foreign Correspondence: Great Reporters and Their Times* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995)

Huebner, Andrew J., *Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008)

Hwang, Su-kyoung, *Korea's Grievous War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016)

Irwin, Robert, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2006)

Isidor Feinstein Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1952)

Jacobs, Seth, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2004)

Jenks, John, 'Consorting with the Enemy: American Reporters and "Red Sources" at the Korean Truce Talks, 1951-1953', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 22 (2002)

Jervis, Robert, 'The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24 (1980), 563-92

Jones, Matthew, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race, and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Joyce Kolko, and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972)

Keefer, Edward C., 'South Korean Political Crisis of 1952: Democracy's Failure?', *Pacific Historical Review*, 60 (1991)

Kelly, Charles J., *Tex McCrary: Wars-Women-Politics, An Adventurous Life Across The American Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2009)

Khiem, Do, and Kim Sung-soo, 'Crimes, Concealment and South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 6 (2008)

- Kim, Jinwung, *A History of Korea: From 'Land of the Morning Calm' to States in Conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012)
- Kim, Stephen Jin-Woo, *Master of Manipulation: Syngman Rhee and the Seoul-Washington Alliance 1953-1960* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001)
- Kim, Tae-woo, *Bombing: Reading the Korean War through the Aerial Bombing Records of the United States Air Force* (Seoul: Changbi Books, 2013)
- Kirkpatrick, Jeane J., *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982)
- Klehr, Harvey, *The Amerasia Spy Case: Prelude to McCarthyism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)
- Klein, Christina, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003)
- Kluger, Richard, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986)
- Knightley, Phillip, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)
- Kraus, Charles, 'American Orientalism in Korea', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22 (2015)
- Kuzmarov, Jeremy, 'Police Training, "Nation-Building," and Political Repression in Postcolonial South Korea', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 10 (2012)
- Kwak, Tae-Hwan, John Chay, Soon Sung Cho, and Shannon McCune, eds., *U.S.-Korean Relations 1882-1982* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1982)
- Lee, Chong-Sik, *Syngman Rhee: The Prison Years of a Young Radical* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001)
- Lee, Sang-Dawn, *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002)
- Levine, Steven I., 'Some Reflections on the Korean War', in *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Korean War Through Literature and Art* (New York: Routledge, 2015)
- Lew, Young Ick, *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014)
- Lewis, John P., *Reconstruction and Development in South Korea* (Washington D.C.: National Planning Association, 1955)
- Liebovich, Louis W., *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1947* (New York: Praeger, 1988)
- Lipstadt, Deborah, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986)
- Livingston, Steven, *When The Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007)

- Logevall, Frederick, 'Domestic Politics', in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Third Edition), ed. by Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016)
- , *Embers of War* (New York: Random House, 2012)
- Lone, Stewart, and Gavin McCormack, *Korea Since 1850* (New York: St Martin Press, 1993)
- MacDonald, Callum, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1987)
- , "'So Terrible a Liberation'-The UN Occupation of North Korea', *Bulletin Of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 23 (1991)
- MacDonald, J. Fred, *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1985)
- Macintyre, Donald A.L., Daniel C. Sneider, and Gi-Wook Shin, eds., *First Drafts Of Korea: The U.S. Media And Perceptions Of The Last Cold War Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center Books, 2009)
- MacKenzie, John M., 'Edward Said and the Historians', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18 (1994)
- MacKinnon, Stephen R., and Oris Friesen, eds., *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930's and 1940's* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987)
- Manela, Erez, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Matray, James I., *Reluctant Crusade: American Policy in Korea, 1941-50* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986)
- Matray, James I., and Jr. Donald W. Boose, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014)
- Miller, Edward, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)
- Millett, Allan R., *The War For Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2005)
- , *The War For Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From The North* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2010)
- , 'War Behind the Wire', *Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 21 (2009)
- Montague, Kern, W. Patricia Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983)
- Mugridge, Ian, *View from Xanadu: William Randolph Hearst and United States Foreign Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995)
- Office of the Inspector General, *No Gun Ri Review* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 2001)
- Oh, John Kie-Chiang, *Korea: Democracy on Trial* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968)
- Oliver, Kendrick, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)

- Palais, J.B., "'Democracy' in South Korea, 1948–1972', in *Without Parallel: The American–Korean Relationship Since 1945*, ed. by Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon, 1974)
- Pash, Melinda L., *In the Shadows of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012)
- Prochnau, William, *Once Upon a Distant War* (New York: Vintage, 1996)
- Ra, Jong Yil, 'Political Crisis in Korea, 1952: The Administration, Legislature, Military and Foreign Powers', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992)
- Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism's Colliding Traditions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990)
- Robinson, Greg, Larry and Guyo Tajiri and *Japanese American Journalism in the World War II Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012)
- Rose, Lisle A., *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1999)
- Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974)
- Rosten, Leo C., *The Washington Correspondents* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937)
- Rottman, Gordon L., *Korean War Order of Battle: United States, United Nations, and Communist Ground, Naval, and Air Forces, 1950-1953* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002)
- Said, Edward, *Covering Islam: How The Media and The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World* (New York: Pantheon, 1981)
- , *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003)
- Saunders, Frances Stonor, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999)
- Sawyer, Robert K., *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAC in Peace and War* (Washington D.C.: Office of Military History, Department of the Army, 1963)
- Schmitz, David F., *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-65* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999)
- , *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Smith, Richard Norton, *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick, 1880-1955* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003)
- Smith, Tony, 'New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 24 (2000), 567–91
- Steinberg, David I., ed., *Korean Attitudes Toward The United States* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2005)
- Stueck, William, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004)
- , 'Revisionism and the Korean War', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 22 (2002)

- , *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995)
- Stueck, William, and Boram Yi, “‘An Alliance Forged in Blood’: The American Occupation of Korea, the Korean War, and the US–South Korean Alliance”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33 (2010)
- Sweeney, Michael S., *The Military and the Press: An Uneasy Truce* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006)
- Talese, Gay, *The Kingdom and the Power* (New York: Random House, 2007)
- Tallman, Gary C., and Joseph P. McKerns, “‘Press Mess’: David Halberstam, the Buddhist Crisis, and U.S. Policy in Vietnam, 1963”, *Journalism and Communication Monographs*, 2 (2000)
- Taylor, Philip M., *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)
- Tirman, John, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America’s Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Torney-Parlicki, Prue, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia’s Neighbours 1941-75* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000)
- Trembath, Richard and Fay Anderson, *Witnesses To War: The History Of Australian Conflict Reporting* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2011)
- Walker, Samuel, *In Defense of American Liberties: A History of the ACLU* (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 1999)
- West, Philip, Suh Ji-moon, and Donald Gregg, *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Korean War Through Literature and Art* (New York: Routledge, 2015)
- Woodward, Garry, ‘The Politics of Intervention: James Plimsoll in the South Korean Constitutional Crisis of 1952’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 56 (2002)
- Yew, Young Ick, Byong-kie Song, Ho-min Yang, and Hy-sop Lim, eds., *Korean Perceptions of the United States* (Seoul: Asan Foundation, 2006)
- Young, Marilyn, ‘Hard Sell: The Korean War’, in *Selling War In A Media Age*, ed. by Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010)
- Zelizer, Barbie, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004)