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The Emerging of a Separatist Tactic of the South Korean Nationalists and Establishment of the ROK¹

The present paper focuses on the political processes in South Korea after the liberation from Japanese colonialism in August 1945 and before the establishment of the Republic of Korea in August 1948. Due to the division of Korea along the 38 parallel and dislocation of the US and USSR's occupation forces in South and North Korea respectively the US with support of UN contributed a lot to the establishment of an independent South Korean state but didn't prejudge the political situation completely. South Korean newspapers, documents on the American and Soviet foreign policy were used to determine a shift of the US strategy toward Korea and a political tactic of South Korean nationalists during transitional period (1945-1948). The preliminary results of the research show that the shift of the US strategy toward establishment a separatist government in South Korea coincided with the separatist tactic of South Korean right wing political groups. South Korean moderates developed a political movement for keeping national unity thus opposing to the rightists. The establishment of an independent South Korean state was a result of the joint efforts of the US and South Korean rightists and extreme right political groups.

Key words: South Korean state, separatism, political conflict, international relations, Korean nationalism.

Introduction

Today, South Korea is one of the most successful and rapidly growing states in the Asia-Pacific region. Emerging as an independent nation in 1948, South Korea went through a difficult course toward political development: from a martial and authoritarian regime toward a liberal-democratic one. The adoption of liberal-democratic values in the Republic of Korea at the turn of the 1980's and 90's allowed Korea to present itself to the world as an image in its own right for states that had a "democratic overturn" through liberal reforms lying ahead of them. Meanwhile in the legal system in South Korea, the state ideology still retains some vestiges of an "authoritarian past"—largely through its origins of the state's formation. South Korea emerged as a state when a government of the Republic of Korea was proclaimed on 15 August 1948. This government was established in separate

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ways as the result of elections held in the National Assembly, which were held exclusively in the American occupied zone. In its turn, In North Korea in September 1948, the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was declared. In reality the conditions in which the domestic policy of separate elections took place, and that which political powers ultimately brought to power in South Korea, played an enormous role in South Korea's subsequent political development.

Authoritarian regimes, which were the regimes of Rhee Syngman, Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, do not emerge out of a vacuum. For their appearance, and certainly support, certain circumstances and conditions are necessary. Having emerged through a separate path, the government of Rhee Syngman doomed itself to permanent opposition from the North, to "eternal" calls to legitimacy and instability in both domestic and foreign policy. Relations between South Korea and the DPRK today determine much—not only South Korea's foreign political strategy, but also its socioeconomic and political development. As history has shown, it is possible to overcome authoritarianism, but not possible to overcome the "duality of the Korean nation", something that will long influence the mind of the political elite of South Korea, and also will be reflected in the political culture and the legal framework of the state.

In this article I will make it my goal to answer the following questions: When, and in what circumstances, did the idea of a separate government emerge? Who was the first to propose it? And how did it so happen that it was ultimately implemented? From examining the history of the political processes in South Korea in the second half of the year 1945, one can conclude that there is as yet nothing to indicate that this idea will ever be actualized by any of the political leaders. This applies to the position of national forces in Korea as well as to the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK).²

The emerging of a separatist tactic of the South Korean nationalists

The year 1945 was marked by the achievement of an international compromise on the Korean question. Indeed, it is necessary to regard the agreement at the Moscow Conference on Korea precisely as an international compromise.³ True, it was the US, rather than the Soviet Union, that had a great vision of international trusteeship, but in general both countries allowed for the idea of trusteeship. The year 1946 went much more tensely for both sides, revealing the first signs of disagreement between the US and the USSR on the Ko-

² In American historiography, it's generally accepted that the idea of a separate government appeared already in the Fall of 1945. According to Bruce Cumings, American Intelligence data testifies to this. See "From the Korean war to a Unified Korea. Interview with Bruce Cumings" // Korea journal, vol. 32, no. 4, winter 1992, p. 12. I do not exclude the possibility that this idea was be discussed by the US State Department or War Ministry in the end of 1945; but it came to determine the US strategy toward Korea only since the mid of 1947.

³ The Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (16–26.12.1945) of the United States (James F. Byrnes), the United Kingdom (Ernest Bevin), and the Soviet Union (Vyacheslav Molotov) was held in Moscow to discuss the problems of occupation, establishing peace, and other Far East issues. In private, according to the Moscow agreement on Korea, there was a Joint US–Soviet Commission established whose main purpose was to assist to formation of the Interim Democratic Korean government. The Moscow agreement on Korea also provided for an establishment of the international trusteeship for Korea after the formation of Interim Democratic Korean government. The problem of trusteeship which arose out of the Moscow agreement divided South Korean political groups into opposing parties.

rean problem. Changes slowly took place, but were gradually accumulating and led, ultimately, to the drawing of an initiative by the US on the Korean problem for consideration by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 1947—and, consequently, to the end to bilateral negotiations between the US and the USSR on the Korean problem under the Joint Commission.

In the course of two years after the Moscow Conference (Dec. 1945) up to September 1947, the US State Department officially adopted the principles of cooperation and collaboration with the USSR in solving the Korean problem. Meanwhile several external changes took place which indicated a gradual departure from the earlier reached agreement with the USSR on Korea. Of great significance in this respect was the approval for a new approach toward relations with the Soviet Union under President Truman. An important detail in connection with Korea is how Truman responded to the outcomes of the Moscow Conference. Immediately after Secretary of State James Byrnes returned from the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers of the US, Great Britain, and the USSR, Truman turned to him with a prepared letter. In the letter, the US president made it clear that he did not intend to continue the foreign policy of Roosevelt toward the Soviet Union. “I don’t think we should continue to play out this compromise. . . . We must rebuild China and create a strong central government there. We must take the same measures in Korea as well.”⁴

After the Moscow Conference, the Truman administration began to stick to a very cautious stance with regard to any proposals on the Korean Peninsula initiated by the USSR. A statement published by TASS⁵ at the end of January 1946 was interpreted by many American authorities as a Soviet propaganda campaign aimed at fully discrediting the American foreign policy toward Korea. For the first time US authorities officially began to talk about the Soviet project on Korea accepted at the Moscow Conference that was actually submitted for an establishment in the country loyal to the Soviet Union Korean government—free from the influence of any other foreign power.⁶

Meanwhile, the USAMGIK in South Korea began fixedly scrutinizing the political activity of South Korean communists who boycotted the Democratic Assembly created in February, 1946 by the joint efforts of the military and rights groups. The mass strike of workers, beginning in September and October of that year, along with the peasant revolts, did not leave any chance for reconciliation between the two sides—the USAMGIK and the Communist Party. The USAMGIK has attributed the organization of this unrest in South Korea to the Communist Party. As political advisor Langdon wrote, “there is ample evidence that Park Hyon-young or “international” Communists, with financial and personnel assistance from the Communist Party in the north had planned and directed the upheaval in October 1946”.⁷

Parallel to the fluctuations in US foreign policy in Korea since the beginning of 1946, and to the USAMGIK’s tougher policy against the leftist movements in South Korea, ex-

⁴ Harry S. Truman. *Year of decisions*. Vol. 1. – N.Y., 1955. – P. 552.

⁵ TASS is a Russian abbreviation of the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union. For the text of TASS’s statement see *Po voprosu o Koree. Soobshchenie TASS. Vneshniaia Politika Sovetskogo Soyuz*a. (По вопросу о Коре. Сообщение ТАСС. Внешняя политика Советского Союза). 1946 – М., 1952. – С. 85 – 89.

⁶ The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State. 25.01.1946. FRUS, vol. 8. 1946. – P. 619–621.

⁷ The Political Adviser in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State, 01.11.1946, FRUS, p. 754.

treme right-wing groups gradually began to promote the idea of creating a separate government. I think that the main initiator of a separatist line among South Korean right-wing nationalists was Rhee Syngman.⁸ Rhee Syngman always adhered to tough anti-Communist and anti-Soviet views, making it virtually impossible to reach a political compromise with the leftist movement on Korean territory, which was focused on the Soviet Union.

In terms of realizing the idea of a separate government, I think the anti-trusteeship movement is especially significant, which was organized by right-wing bloc leaders Rhee Syngman, Kim Koo⁹, and Kim Sung-soo¹⁰.

Launched from the end of December 1945 to the beginning of January 1946 in South Korea, the anti-trusteeship movement saw as its main task the creation of a national government in Korea and the prevention of a regime of trusteeship, as stipulated by the resolution on Korea of the Moscow conference. This movement aimed to achieve “immediate independence” (*jeuksi doklip*), but it remains unclear through what means or ways this was to be achieved. In view of such an obscurity, right-wing groups in the midst of opposing trusteeship acted normally and as if playing by ear, relying on the conjecture of the day, constantly inventing new organizational structures that would serve the foundation of national governance.

The creation of a Democratic Assembly in February 1946 was considered by right-wing Korean groups to be an important step on the way to creating a national government of Korea. Although none of the right-wing groups had yet raised the question of creating a separate government in South Korea, in all probability such a discussion nonetheless took place. After the opening of the Democratic Assembly, Rhee Syngman issued a statement, saying,

“The Assembly is a body that represents the whole Korean people. Thus, we might say that a unification of the Korean nation took place and a Transitional Korean government will be created. After Allied powers recognize this government, it will begin negotiating with them to resolve the issue of the 38th parallel, as such is what the Korean people strongly wish. . .”¹¹

Rhee Syngman’s optimistic view of the Democratic Assembly was completely removed from reality: the Assembly was not only a representative body of the Korean people in general, but also not of that part of the people that lived in the south. Therefore, the idea of creating a government with a Democratic Assembly as its base became naturally obsolete—though the intention remained.

General John R. Hodge, and simultaneously P. Goodfellow, the close friend of Rhee Syngman, whose mission in South Korea was the creation of the Democratic Assembly,

⁸ Rhee Syngman (1875–1965) was a prominent Korean nationalist. He came back to Korea from the USA in October 1945, and since that time actively involved in the political struggle between South Korean leftists and rightists. In the end of October 1945 he initiated the creation of a right wing political organization Committee for Rapid Realization of Korean Independence (CRRKI). Rhee Syngman was elected a chairman of the CRRKI.

⁹ Kim Koo (1876–1926) was a prime-minister of the Provisional Government of Republic of Korea which was established in Shanghai, China, in 1919. It was a non-recognized Korean government-in-exile. The leaders of the Provisional Government came back to Korea in November 1945 as private persons.

¹⁰ Kim Sung-soo (1891–1955) was a right wing South Korean political figure, and a big businessman. Since December 1945 he was a chairman of the rightists’ Korean Democratic Party. In 1946–1947 he also was a deputy chairman of CRRKI and the Anti-Trusteeship committee.

¹¹ Jayu sinmun, 17.02.1946.

stated upon completing his work in May 1946 that the Koreans are ready for self-government, and therefore that it was necessary to hold elections on the ground and create a government as soon as possible. He added that, if the Soviets did not start negotiating within the Joint Soviet–American Commission again, then the US should boldly advance working on creating a separate government in South Korea.¹²

P. Goodfellow's statement was published in the New York Times on 23 May, 1946, and confounded the US State Department. Secretary of State Byrnes personally asked Langdon, the political advisor to Hodge, to clarify the situation. In order to dispel such rumors of the US's attempts to create a separate government in South Korea, the US State Department drafted a document describing the US's major objectives in Korea—which also aimed to emphasize the State Department's commitment to the Moscow Conference's resolution on Korea. In June 1946 this document was sent to General Douglas MacArthur for further carrying out his duties in South Korea in the USAMGIK. The State Department had made it clear that the establishment of a national government in Korea is only possible through an agreement with the Soviet Union and through the resumption of negotiations under the Joint US - Soviet Commission.¹³

The end of the meetings of the Joint Soviet–American Commission in May 1946 had imparted to Rhee Syngman greater confidence. Up to this point he did not recognize the legitimacy of the Moscow Agreement on Korea—and, as a consequence, did not want to cooperate with the Joint Commission. The absence of any constructive result out of the meetings of the Joint Commission once again convinced Rhee Syngman of the judiciousness of promptly establishing a separate government in South Korea. But the idea of a separate government was not supported either by the left-center bloc or by the USAMGIK in 1946.

Rhee Syngman and the idea of a separate government

In the scholarly history literature, it has become a generally accepted view that Rhee Syngman was the first to express the idea of a separate government while in the town of Jeongeup (North Cholla Province) on 3 June, 1946, when he made a tour of the provinces of South Korea for political purposes.¹⁴ It was here that he said that the establishment of an interim government in South Korea—or possibly a Parliament—will urge the world to withdraw Soviet troops from the North. Right-wing groups reacted negatively to Rhee Syngman's speech. The Urgent National Assembly¹⁵, the centrist New Korea National Party (*Sinhan minjokdang*) were opposed, whereas the Democratic Party and the Women's National Party supported Rhee Syngman.¹⁶

¹² The Secretary of State to the political adviser in Korea (Langdon), FRUS, 25.05.1946, p. 689.

¹³ Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas (Hilldring) to the Operations Division, War Department, FRUS, 6.06.1946, pp. 692-697.

¹⁴ Son Namheon. A history of the Korean movement for national unification (송 남헌의지음, 통일독립운동사) – Seoul, 2000. – P. 59. In Korean.

¹⁵ The Urgent National Assembly was opened on 1 February, 1946 in Seoul. It united rightists and centrists around it, but could not become a true National Assembly, because South Korean leftists ignored its establishment as a political organization of Korean collaborators and national traitors.

¹⁶ To Jinsun. Ibid., p. 87–89.

The lack of full support from the right-wing bloc parties for Rhee Syngman's policy for the creation of a separate government, and also his inconsistent relationship with the USAMGIK in connection with its promotion of coalition movement in South Korea, convinced the leader of CRRKI¹⁷ to go to the US.

In November 1946 Rhee Syngman decided to go to the United States, and also to visit the UNGA, in order to win support for the idea of creating a separate government in South Korea from the senior officials of the US State Department and other agencies. On 4 December 1946, Rhee Syngman flew from Tokyo to Washington on an American military plane. As the paper Taedong Sinmun wrote, this trip will be the first step of the diplomatic, international struggle on the issue of expediting the creation of an independent Korea.¹⁸ The so-called American lobby was to help Rhee Syngman promote the idea of a separate government—the lobby consisted of U.S. officials, businessmen, and representatives of academia: P. Goodfellow, John W. Stagers, Jay J. Williams, Robert T. Oliver, Harold Noble, Samuel Dolbear, Henry Deyoung, Harold Lady, Frederick B. Harris, Im Byung-jik, Im Young-shin. Relying on assistance of these individuals, Rhee Syngman planned to meet with the US Secretary of State George Marshall, and John H. Hilldring, Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas. In addition to this lobby, right-wing groups in South Korea by their own initiative established a special “Society in Support of the Representatives of the Korean People Abroad” (*Hanguk minjok taepye wegyo wiwonhoe*), which was chaired by Cho So Ang¹⁹. It must be said that Kim Koo in every way possible supported Rhee Syngman's mission in the US.

Upon arriving to the US, the first thing that Rhee Syngman did was a meeting with P. Goodfellow and others who were part of the American lobby. Discussing with them a modern foreign policy strategy of the US, Rhee Syngman proposed a plan to solve the Korean problem (in English, “A solution of the Korean problem”). Later this plan was passed to John K. Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs State Department, through his adviser Robert Oliver, and was also sent to the Secretary of State. The plan provided for the following:

1. An interim government should be elected for Southern Korea, to serve until the two halves of Korea can be re-united and a general election held immediately thereafter;
2. Without disturbing direct Russian-American consultations on Korea, this interim government should be allowed to negotiate directly with Russian and the United States concerning the occupation of Korea, and on other outstanding questions;
3. Koreans claims for reparations from Japan should be given early consideration, to aid in the rehabilitation for Korean economy;
4. Full commercial rights should be granted to Korea, on a basis of equality with other nations, and with no favoritism extended to any nation;
5. Korean currency should be stabilized and established on the international exchange;
6. United States troops should remain in southern Korea until the two foreign armies of occupation simultaneously withdraw.²⁰

¹⁷ Committee for Rapid Realization of Korean Independence was established in the end of October 1945 under the head of Rhee Syngman.

¹⁸ Daedon sinmun, 27.11.1946.

¹⁹ Cho So Ang (1887–1958) was a ministry of foreign affairs in the Provisional Government of Republic of Korea.

²⁰ A Solution of the Korean problem by Syngman Rhee, FRUS, 1946, p. 604–605.

The meeting of Oliver with Vincent took place in late January 1947. And in February, in a Special Inter-Departmental Committee on Korea, which was formed to prepare recommendations on the Korean problem for the US government, commissioned a report which among other things touched upon the creation of a separate government. In this report, the authors expressed strong doubts about the feasibility of establishing a separate government in South Korea. In their opinion, the declaration of an independent state now in the South, whether it will be accompanied by withdrawal of American troops or not, will create new challenges.

“Recognition of her [South Korea] political independence will not solve the economic problem of southern Korea. Only unification, and a program of outside aid in rehabilitation can do that. The U.S., the only practicable source for such aid, will be more likely to make grants to a people for which it has direct responsibility than to an independent country. No loaning agency could consider south Korea an acceptable risk”.²¹

After discussing the pros and cons of creating a government in South Korea, and the preservation of the occupying forces, the report concluded that the US needed to provide emergency financial assistance to South Korea (\$250 million in 1948), to continue cooperation with the Soviet Union for the implementing the Moscow Agreement on Korea, and to approve if necessary the Soviet proposal for the withdrawal of troops—but after already establishing a government.

Rhee Syngman was sure that the US State Department would necessarily support his policy. The main reason it will not turn out this way was, in his opinion, General Hodge. Rhee Syngman believed that Hodge drew the “wrong line” on South Korea, supposedly contrary to the official policy of the State Department. Attacks from Rhee Syngman on Hodge ceased only when the US State Department began actively lobbying on an official level to the international community the idea of holding separate elections and of the creation of an independent government in Korea, just south of the 38th parallel, since the end of the year 1947.

Rhee Syngman’s optimism about the possibility of creating a separate government in South Korea significantly grew firmer after Truman asked the US Congress in March 1947 to allocate funds for aid to Greece and Turkey.²² Other leaders of the South Korean right-wing bloc also welcomed and applauded Truman’s speech.

Returning from the US in April 1947, Rhee Syngman made clear when communicating to the press that he had achieved serious success in the area of foreign policy. “I am returning to Seoul,” said Rhee Syngman on the eve of his departure from the US, “feeling that Korea may soon become independent. Truman’s speech, which explained the US’s intention to resist communism, will have a positive impact on the expectations of Koreans seeking to organize their own government in South Korea. . . .”²³ Rhee Syngman had become heartily engaged in self-promotion wherever possible, and tried to show himself as a true patriot and fighter for Korean independence.

²¹ Draft report of Special Inter-Departmental committee on Korea, 25.02.1947, FRUS, p. 610–617.

²² Jungoe sinmun, 15.03.1947.

²³ Kyeonghyang sinmun, 02.04.1947.

A role of the Anti-Trusteeship Committee in strengthening of a separatist political course

From the perspective of organization, the policy of independent government was conducted by Rhee Syngman through the CRRKI and the Anti-Trusteeship Committee.²⁴ As I have already said, the idea of a separate government was conceived practically in the bosom of the right-wing groups' ideological struggle against the regime of trusteeship.

Hodge's announcement on 11 January 1947 of the intention to resume negotiations with the Joint Soviet–American Commission had led to increased political activity of the Committee in their activity against trusteeship. In the absence of Rhee Syngman, all questions relating to the organization of public campaigns against trusteeship, and therefore against the renewal of the Joint Commission, were decided by Kim Koo, the leader of the Provisional Government. At the meeting of 35 right-wing parties and public organizations, which took place on 16 January 1947, they accepted, first, the decision to withdraw their signatures from the Communiqué No. 5, which was signed with the goal of participating in the meetings of the Joint Commission; and, second, a clearly negative opinion regarding the operations of the Coalition Committee. I am just here recalling that the Coalition Committee was established in the mid of 1946 for uniting the rightists and leftists in South Korea.²⁵

The renewed anti-trusteeship movement since January 1947 was aimed, apparently, at a full and final defeat of the coalition movement, as well as at the strengthening of the political position of the Provisional Government headed by Kim Koo. In January 1947, Kim Koo was elected chairman of the Anti-Trusteeship Committee, while Kim Sung-soo and Cho So Ang were his delegates. Although Kim Koo and Cho So Ang, as representatives of the Provisional Government, were a huge help to Rhee Syngman in organizing his mission to the United States, it is clearly impossible to say that they fully agreed with his policy of creating a separate government in early 1947. Kim Koo criticized Rhee Syngman's idea of creating a separate government in South Korea, but at the same time did not actively oppose it, for the time being. Kim Koo was interested in having the political parties that were against trusteeship promote the idea of the leading role of the Provisional Government in a future independent Korea, whereas Rhee Syngman, of course, had his own political interests with respect to self-government, and did not at all plan to concede political leadership to Kim Koo. In other words, even for all of Kim Koo's and Rhee Syngman's solidarity in foreign policy, their relationship always had pitfalls and in this sense was not quite reliable and durable.

In late April 1947, when the question of resumption of meetings of the Joint Commission was actively being discussed, the propaganda department of the Anti-Trusteeship Committee made a statement: "30 million compatriots! Make no mistake about the resumption of meetings in the Joint Commission, but instead deploy a decisive campaign against trusteeship...South Korea, regardless of the resumption of meetings of the Joint Commission, should move toward the creation of a transitional government. Devote all powers to preparing the elections!"²⁶ On 22 May 1947 Rhee Syngman and Kim Koo together issued a statement of abstention from participation in the consultations with the Joint Commission.

²⁴ Anti-Trusteeship Committee (*Sintak tongchi pandae kunmin chongdongwon wiwonhoe*) was formed on December 28, 1945 in Seoul by united efforts of the South Korean right-wing nationalists.

²⁵ Seo Jungseok. *Ibid.*, p. 528.

²⁶ Hyendae Ilbo, 26.04.1947.

Later during the meetings of the Joint Commission, Rhee Syngman wrote Hodge a letter in which he directly stated that they will continue to work on holding general elections (bypassing the Joint Commission and the Moscow decision on Korea!). He noted that if the work of the Joint Commission will bring positive results to his group, then they can change their own plans.²⁷

Rhee Syngman's and Kim Koo's non-participation position in the second round of the meetings of the Joint US - Soviet Commission was not supported by a relatively large group of right-wing parties and organizations. In particular, the Democratic Party, the Workers' Union of Korea, the Korean Youth Association, the North-West Youth Association, the Women's Alliance for the Acceleration of Independence, etc., were in favor of the operations of the Joint Commission.²⁸ Some members of the right wing Independence Party also spoke in favor of participation in the Joint Commission, which caused a rift in the party.²⁹

At the height of the operations of the Joint Soviet-American Commission on the initiative of the CRRKI on 10 July 1947 in Seoul, the People's Representative Congress, or the National Congress (*Minjok taephyoja taehoe*), was opened. Speaking at a National Congress meeting, Rhee Syngman proposed the following: 1) to organize official general elections of the delegates of Congress, instead of the previously conducted interim elections; 2) to create an Interim Legislative Assembly from among the delegates that were elected in the general elections (bypassing the existing Interim Legislative Assembly³⁰, as it turns out). This Interim Legislative Assembly will have to draw up the Constitution, according to which the head of the government will be chosen.

In other words, by the summer of 1947, Rhee Syngman had not only a concrete plan of action to establish an independent government, but he also was able to create an agency—the People's Representative Congress—which would carry out this task.³¹ Note that this happened during the Joint Commission meetings and during the US and the USSR's discussion of the Korean question in accordance with the Resolution on Korea of the Moscow Conference.

The United Nations and the Korean issue

In September–October 1947, the events in the international arena surrounding the Korean peninsula evolved with great speed. 17 September 1947 the Acting Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett wrote to Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, a letter in which he stated the US's decision to pass the Korean question to the UNGA. Meanwhile the Soviet delegation in the Joint Soviet-American commission suggested a simultaneous withdrawal of the occupational troops from Korea.

²⁷ Daedong sinmun, 15.06.1947.

²⁸ Choseon ilbo, 13.06.1947.

²⁹ Members of the Seoul Committee of the Korean Independence Party expressed their intention to participate in the consultations with the Joint Commission, while the Central Committee of the Independence Party was against it. In private, the members of the Provisional Government of whom the Central Committee mainly consisted took a non-participation stance toward the Joint Commission. See Choseon Ilbo, 29.05.1947, Tonga Ilbo, 30.05.1947.

³⁰ Interim Legislative Assembly was a consulting organ functioning under control of the USAMGIK since November 1946. The members of the Interim Legislative Assembly were half elected and half appointed by the Military Governor.

³¹ Kadaen sinmun, 15.07.1947.

A week later, on 23 September, the UNGA voted in favor of introducing the Korean issue in their agenda, and on 14 November they adopted a resolution on Korea. According to UNGA resolution UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) was appointed to promote the elections of representatives to the National Assembly of Korea. The number of representatives from each zone had to be proportional to the population of the corresponding zones. The National Assembly had to approve a single national government of Korea.³²

The adoption of the UNGA resolution on Korea signaled, firstly, the final cessation of the operations of the Joint Soviet–American Commission, and, secondly, the refusal by the Foreign Ministers of the USSR, UK, and the USA of the corresponding resolution on Korea from the Moscow Conference. As early as September 1947 the Soviet Union opposed letting the UNGA give a decision on the Korean problem. Believing the decision on the Korean problem to be illegal within the UN, the Soviet delegation refused to participate in the plenary session of the UNGA in 14 November 1947, having adopted a resolution on Korea.³³

Left-wing parties, including the Democratic Independent Party (*Minju tonnip dang*), the New Progressive Party (*Sinchinbo dang*), the People's Workers' Party (*Keullo inmin dang*), made a joint statement in October 1947, in which they supported the proposal of the Soviet Union on the simultaneous withdrawal of troops. General elections should be immediately held following the withdrawal, but a single authority must first be created for the elections, to be composed of representatives of the political and social organizations of North and South Korea. Leftist forces thus suggested withdrawing the occupying troops and holding general elections without foreign intervention.³⁴ Later these ideas also received support from part of the right-wing camp from certain of the representatives of the Independence Party.³⁵

Radical right-wing groups, supporting the American, not the Soviet, initiative on the transferring of the Korean problem to the UN, directed all their political will to the discrediting of the leftists before the USAMGIK. Accusations of anti-nationalistic behavior were struck not only against the leftists, but also against the centrists, who allegedly carried out the “wrong policies” while collaborating with leftist and rightist forces. According to the rightists, resolving political tensions is only possible through “political cleansing.”

Meanwhile Rhee Syngman, feeling that a politically perfect situation had developed for lobbying the idea of a separate government after the Joint Commission had ceased, started widely speaking about the necessity to hold general elections only in South Korea if the operations of the UNTCOK fail. Speaking on 16 October, 1947, at a press conference in connection with the 2nd anniversary homecoming, Rhee Syngman said that “if we cannot hold a general election, then the US should insist that a government is formed by general election in South Korea. It will be a victory for the Korean people...”³⁶

³² Resolution Adopted at the Second Regular Session of the General Assembly. November 17, 1947. A decade of American foreign policy, 1941–1949. – P. 677–678.

³³ Vneshniaia Politika Sovetskogo Soyuza (Внешняя политика Советского Союза). 1947 – М., 1952. – С. 151–155, 184–191.

³⁴ Choseon jungang ilbo, 19.10.1945.

³⁵ Seoul Times, 6.11.1947.

³⁶ Dong-a ilbo, 17.10.1947.

Rhee Syngman, who up to this point had not hesitated to criticize Hodge for conniving with the Communists (!) in South Korea, this time had also blamed the Commander of the occupying forces for allegedly lingering and for not holding a general election immediately after the cessation of the Joint Commission. In this way, according to Rhee Syngman, Hodge supports the centrists and counteracts the transfer of political power directly to the Korean people. “Some will make noise,” said Rhee Syngman, “about how there is no need to hold general elections only in South Korea, until the elections are held throughout Korea, both North and South. This is empty talk which only impedes the implementation of state undertakings.”³⁷

By the time the UNGA resolution on Korea was already adopted, Rhee Syngman continued to emphasize the difference between the policy that he took and those that the US and the UN took. Despite his ideological loyalty to the US government, sought to conduct his own policy—to create a separate government in South Korea by elections, and only then decide whether to merge the North and the South. It is important to emphasize that Rhee Syngman considered implementing his goals through bypassing the Joint Commission or the UNGA. It is also necessary to point out that such political “boldness” no political figure has shown after the liberation of Korea. It is quite hard to imagine, for example, Kim Il Sung daring to criticize Chistyakov I.M.³⁸ or A.A. Romanenko³⁹ in his time, or even trying to “drive a wedge” between the commander of the Soviet occupying army and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, or not reckoning with the Soviet Union’s position in the Joint Commission. And yet Rhee Syngman carried out just such a policy since the end of 1946.

To what logic did Rhee Syngman adhere in openly insisting on urgent elections only in South Korea? According to him, “the thought of leaving Korea divided did not enter [in my plans].” “We want to hold general elections in South Korea with the aim of creating a government at least in South Korea, which will be able to win the right to act in the international arena and accelerate the unification of South and North Korea on their own. If there were a better way than this, we would have considered it. However, there is no better way than this...”⁴⁰

During the discussion of the UN Korean problem, Rhee Syngman suggested not to wait for any decision but instead to immediately hold elections in the National Assembly based on the draft law on elections already prepared by the Interim Legislative Assembly. In order to prepare for holding these separate elections in South Korea, Rhee Syngman called a meeting for the representatives of the right-wing parties on 15 October, 1947. From that point onward, the meetings of the right-wing parties were convened constantly and were named the National Assembly to promote the general election.⁴¹

On the whole, the UNGA resolution was received positively in the Korean nationalist camp. Only extreme leftist parties did not support it. Moderate groups represented by the Coalition Committee, headed by Kim Kyusik⁴², still reacted quite calmly to the adopted UN

³⁷ Daedon sinmun, 04.09.1947

³⁸ Chistyakov I.M. was a Commander of the 25th Soviet army dislocated in North Korea after the liberation.

³⁹ A.A. Romanenko was a head of the Office of the Soviet Civil Administration in North Korea (1945–1947).

⁴⁰ Kyeonghyang sinmun, 17.09.1947.

⁴¹ Seo Jungseok. South – North Korea negotiations: ways of Kim Kyu-sik and Kim Koo (서중석, 남북협상, 김 규식의길, 김 구의 길). – Seoul, 2000. – P. 86. In Korean.

⁴² Kim Kyusik (1881–1950) was a member of the Provisional Government of Republic of Korea. Due to political disagreements with the main course of the Provisional Government he decided to leave it in the beginning of 1946. Since the mid of 1946 he actively involved in the coalition movement in South Korea. In November of 1946 Kim Kyusik was elected a chairman of the Interim Legislative Assembly.

decision. The only thing that distinguished their position from right-wing groups was their cautious attitude. That is, unlike the rightists' enthusiasm, the centrists were concerned that the elections could lead to a division of the country because the USSR didn't approve the resolution on Korea of the UNGA. Meanwhile South Korean rightists sought to hold elections in the National Assembly at all costs, in particular through a separate way—for which the CRRKI headed by Rhee Syngman fought, for example.

A historical meaning of the Conference of North and South Korean leaders at Pyongyang

On February 26, 1948 the UN Interim Committee passed a resolution on Korea which obliged the UNTCOK to observe the elections of Korean representatives in such parts of Korea as were accessible to the Commission. As the USSR refused to accept the UNTCOK representatives in North Korea the adopted resolution on Korea meant a holding of elections exclusively in the American occupied zone.

Worried by the current trends of the country's divisions, the South Korean nationalists of the moderate persuasion decided to convene a joint meeting of political parties and social organizations of North and South Korea in order to create a single national government. In South Korean historiography, the initiative to convene a joint meeting of the political parties of North and South Korea is attributed to the South Korean nationalists. On February 16 Kim Koo and Kim Kyusik sent letters to North Korean political leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Du Bong with suggestion to hold a joint meeting of South-North Korea political leaders.⁴³

As a result of the negotiations between the leaders of the various parties, it was agreed to hold a conference for the leaders of political parties and social organizations of North and South Korea. At the conference on 30 April in Pyongyang a manifesto was drawn up containing a type of project for uniting the country: 1) the US and USSR occupying forces should be withdrawn immediately from Korean territory; 2) leaders of North and South Korean political parties and social organizations ensure that, after the removal of foreign troops there will not be a civil war breaking out, and that there will be no riots; 3) after removing foreign troops, it is necessary to convene a meeting of Korean political parties and immediately form an Interim Government representing all social strata; 4) all political parties and social organizations of North and South Korea are opposed to holding separate elections in South Korea.⁴⁴

A large number of leftist and centrist parties in South Korea signed the manifesto. Thus, for the first time since the liberation of Korea in August 1945, the political leaders of North and South Korea have agreed to stand together in the struggle for independence and the integrity of the Korean nation.⁴⁵ Meanwhile the radical right wing South Korean political leaders like Rhee Syngman, Kim Sung-soo criticized the Pyongyang manifesto as obstructive to general elections in South Korea and achieving a national unification.

⁴³ The texts of the letters sent by Kim Koo and Kim Kyu-sik to Kim Du Bong, Kim Il-sung see in the book of Sim Jiyeon. The development of the schemes of South-North Korea unification (심 지연, 남북한 통일방안의 전개와 수렴). – Seoul, 2001. – P. 105–107. In Korean; To Jinsun. Korean nationalism and South-North Korea relations (한국민족주의와 남북관계). – Seoul, 1998. – P. 361–369. In Korean.

⁴⁴ Sim Jiyeon. Ibid., p. 109–110.

⁴⁵ Son Namheon. Ibid., p. 156.

Pyongyang Conference and the US policy for separate elections in South Korea

The Conference in Pyongyang was held on the eve of the elections in the National Assembly, which was 10 May 1948.⁴⁶ It must be said that the occupational authorities in South Korea were not very upset by the meeting's convening in Pyongyang. Nevertheless, they could not completely ignore it, because the agenda for the discussion that was planned at the meeting, namely, the unification of the political forces of the South and the North in order to achieve national independence, was in stark contrast to the US policy to create a separate government. The meeting in Pyongyang was regarded by the American military authorities as an attempt by Korean nationalists and leaders of the leftist movement to challenge the need for elections in the National Assembly. Seeking to justify the appropriateness and importance of the upcoming elections in South Korea, the USAMGIK conference questioned the status of political parties in the South and the North in Pyongyang and whether this constituted a truly joint meeting.

In a speech General Hodge gave on Seoul radio on 5 April 1948, he noted with respect to the Pyongyang conference that it is not a truly representative assembly, insofar as invitations to the meeting were sent selectively to North Korean leadership, bypassing the leaders of major right bloc political parties. Moreover, according to Hodge, although among the guests were several well-known South Korean politicians, they are nevertheless first and foremost adherents of Communist ideology; and secondly, not being elected by the Korean people, they have no right to speak on their behalf at a conference that claims to be national in scope.⁴⁷ The North Korean leadership's proposal to hold a meeting in Pyongyang, according to Hodge, is nothing but an attempt to hype the entire Korean people, whereas the only true way to unification of North and South Korea is through elections. Hodge tried to prove in his speeches that Koreans should not succumb to the initiatives coming from the North Korean Communists, as their ultimate goal is to establish Communist control over all of Korea.

On the whole, the Pyongyang conference did not change any of the US's plans to hold separate elections in South Korea; thus, they continued to prepare for them. How did the elections in the National Assembly turn out, and with what results did they end?

From the 923 persons who were put forward as candidates—all from different political and social organizations—only 200 were elected. A majority of candidates were independents, 44% of the total. Candidates from the CRRKI consisted of 24.9%; the Democratic Party, 9.6%; the Korean Youth Union (*Taedong Chongnyeondang*), 9.2%; the National Youth Union of Korea (*Choseon minjok chongyeondang*), 2.1%; and others, with descending percentages.⁴⁸ As a result of this distribution of forces, the majority of seats went to independent candidates, and also to members of Rhee Syngman's CRRKI and to the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party and Rhee Syngman's CRRKI, both of which took active part in the elections, got 29 and 55 seats respectively out of the potential 200. 89

⁴⁶ Initially it was supposed to hold elections in the National Assembly on 9 May. But in the beginning of April, through an agreement with the UNTCOK, the election date was postponed by one day from 9 May to 10 May, to avoid elections on the day of a solar eclipse.

⁴⁷ The Political adviser in Korea (Jacobs) to the Secretary of State, FRUS, 6.04.1948, p. 1173.

⁴⁸ Yun Minjae. A national movement of South Korean centrists in the divided state (윤 민재, 중도파의 민족주의 운동과 분단 국가). – Seoul, 2005, p. 382.

seats went to independent candidates. Consequently, not one political party or social organization was able to predominate in the National Assembly. Because the leftists and the centrists boycotted the elections, this naturally led to the dominance of right-wing forces in the National Assembly. Although some centrists participated in the elections, contrary to the general decision of their parties, and ran as independent candidates, they did not affect the general rightward drift of the National Assembly which after adoption a Constitution officially declared of the government of the Republic of Korea (ROK) on 15 August 1948.

In conclusion

It should be noted that the establishment of a national government of the ROK took place under conditions of fierce political combat on three sides: between the right- and left-wing forces, between the right-wing and the centrists, and between the centrists and the leftists. But as history has shown, neither the coalition of centrist parties that formed against the separate elections, nor the right-wing parties which supported creating a separate government in South Korea, were noted for their high degree of solidarity.

Thus, as soon the elections were held in South Korea in the National Assembly, which thereby changing the political landscape, another split had emerged in the right-wing camp as well as within the centrist coalition. The main point yet regarding the subsequent development of the South Korean state lies in the fact that the centrists' and leftists' fateful decision not to participate in the National Assembly elections in May 1948 turned out to be their exclusion from any future decisions on the formation of government institutions for the independent Republic of Korea. Because of the tactic they were occupied with during the preparations for the general elections, the South Korean moderate right-wing and the leftist camps, without meaning to, bolstered Rhee Syngman's government, which turned anti-Communist and anti-North Korean rhetoric into the base for the Republic of Korea's state ideology.

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