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VIETNAM AND KOREA, 1945-1949:
US GOVERNMENT RESISTANCE TO
ASIAN SELF-DETERMINATION

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INTRODUCTION

In the five years immediately following the end of World War II, the US government pursued policies which placed its own security interests above the democratic aspirations of the people of both Vietnam and Korea in an attempt to contain what it saw as Soviet-inspired Communism. The language used in statements of policy by the State Department in Washington, the US embassies in Vietnam and Korea, and other policymakers spoke of Asian self-determination and prosperity. The resulting political realities in both countries, however, differed markedly from the conditions which the policies sought to create. The US government actively participated in the suppression of the political freedoms of the Korean left which was nationalist with Communist undertones; and the US knowingly assisted the French who were doing the same to the Vietnamese. This suppression was executed militarily and politically.

Though fresh from its victory over totalitarianism in World War II, the US did not account for the possiblity that either Korea or Vietnam viewing US-sponsored regimes as nothing more than governments reminiscent of another form of totalitarianism: imperialism. By working to hinder the efforts of the anti-colonial leftist majority in Korea and by aiding the French in their reconquest of Vietnam, the US was promulgating principles it had fought against in World War II.

After the Allied victory in World War II, State Department officials were concerned about the spread of Soviet-inspired Communism. The Soviets were working to establish a buffer zone of satellite countries in Eastern Europe, a point which FDR had conceded

to Stalin at the Yalta Conference in 1945 in order to foster a post-war system of cooperation among the superpowers. This concession made it nearly impossible for Truman to limit Soviet hegemonic advances. Truman and his policymakers did not want the Soviet hegemony to extend to Asia, however, and this concern prompted the US to establish its own buffer zone of countries in East Asia friendly to the US. As a means of doing just this, the US believed that it was necessary to sponsor developing nations in their efforts to resist Soviet expansionism, thereby helping those nations achieve political independence. In and of itself, this was a noble ideal.

The US government used this fear of totalitarian Moscow-driven Communism as its justification for actions designed to suppress the anti-imperialist left in Korea and Vietnam. Two two revealing historical facts shall become clear in this paper: 1) the US knew at an early date the lack of popular support enjoyed by those Koreans and Vietnamese friendly to American objectives, and 2) the US knowingly suppressed oppostion to these pro-US Asians in order seek the establishment of regimes palatable to the US government.

Even though diplomats were aware of the unrepresentative nature of the Koreans and Vietnamese whom they sponsored, the US continued to suppress the anti-imperialist parties in opposition to the pro-US Asians. The US thereby perpetuated authoritarian systems in East Asia, the very thing US intervention in the region had sought to prevent the Soviets from doing. This paper will analyze US government policy in Vietnam and Korea, including US responses to the actions of European powers in Korea and Vietnam, and the

reactions of indigenous peoples in both countries to foreign political influence in the years 1945-1949.

VIETNAM, 1945-1949

The five years immediately following the end of World War II saw the US government pursue a policy which placed its own interests above those of the Indochinese people, despite government rhetoric to the contrary. The language which was used in statements of policy by the State Department in Washington, the US embassy in Saigon and other policymakers spoke of Asian self-determination and prosperity. The practices differed remarkably from the policies, however. Though the US government did not, in this period, actively participate in the suppression of Vietnamese who were both nationalist and Communist, it did assist the French who were doing so. This assistance came in the form of economic and military aid provided to the French with full knowledge of its intended use.

In the final years of World War II, President Roosevelt began his consideration of the post-war fate of Indochina. FDR had pushed throughout the war for discussion on what was to be done with the colonial holdings of the countries involved in the war, Allied and Axis. His efforts met with resistance from both the British and French. Both countries desperately hoped to retain their colonial territories for reasons of economic strength and national pride. FDR would have no part of these aspirations, as he was working to fulfill a dream of an international community without colonies. In his estimate, a democracy could not, in good conscience, allow nations to be subjugated by dictators or invasion. Colonialism sponsored the former of these two evils, if not the latter.

FDR had been opposed to colonialism throughout the war, vehemently so in the case of France and her holdings abroad. Upon his first serious consideration of the situation in Indochina in January

of 1943, the President addressed many weaknesses in the French government, pointing to the failure of the French resistance in Indochina in 1940 as a sign of the "decadent" nature of the colonial regime.[1] The French had allowed the Japanese to build air and naval bases in Indochina, demonstrating military weakness, and they had also neglected considerably the Vietnamese people. On this issue FDR said, "France has had the country--thirty million inhabitants--for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning."[2]

In March 1943, FDR proposed to British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden that Vietnam and Korea be placed under international trusteeship. The President felt that a trusteeship would benefit Vietnam not only by removing the French from power, but by also providing some sort of stability in the turbulent post-war years. Eden objected to the interference in the French empire. Eden's objections stemmed from his concern over the precedent which such a trusteeship would establish; a precedent which eventually could be applied to the British colonies. Eden reminded FDR that the President was already on record assuring the French that their colonial territories would be restored after the war. (The Foreign Minister was referring to a memo which had been sent to France with Secretary of State Cordell Hull in January, 1942. The memo stated that, in the mind of the President, "France equals the French Colonial Empire."[3]) FDR replied that Indochina was not included in that

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[1] "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina." Gary Hess, p. 354

[2] Gibbons, p. 9

[3] "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina", p. 355

agreement, thus establishing a "special" designation for Indochina which would be invoked at various times in the colonial debate.

FDR attempted to pacify the situation by claiming that the Atlantic Charter was the document upon which his objections to colonialism were based. Churchill did not accept this rationale, stating that the Atlantic Charter applied only to the territory held by the Germans. Therefore, Allied holdings were not covered by the agreement. In an act independent of the situation in Europe, yet closely related, the Division of Special Research suggested in October of 1942 that the US draft a "Pacific Charter" to establish the universality of its Atlantic predecessor. This proposal, however, never received prolonged serious consideration.[4]

While the Allies argued over what was to be done with Vietnam, the Vietnamese were actively working toward the independence which had been denied to them by the French. The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) had, for quite some time, been active in their resistance of the French colonials. The Vietminh, choosing Communism as their form of government because of its practical nature and proven success in Russia, frequently and efficiently employed the organizational skills learned from the ICP. The Vietminh were active in mobilizing the peasantry and provided an opportunity to contribute politically to the country's future for the first time in quite a while.

In an attempt to prevent the formation of groups similar to the Vietminh, a Vietnamese nationalist movement with a Communist

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[4] Ibid, p. 355

bent, the French disbanded all electoral bodies, except the municipal councils, in 1940. Though the French allowed some Vietnamese to participate in the colonial government, they were not assigned to prominent posts and were rarely members of bodies which had any real power. For example, the Franco-Vietnamese Grand Federal Council was composed of thirty Vietnamese and twenty-three Frenchmen, but the body had a limited budget and only an advisory role in the colonial government.[5] Those Vietnamese selected to serve in the colonial government were sure to be more concerned with personal survival than nationalist objectives. An example of this was the 25-member Federal Council of Indochina created by Vichy appointee Admiral Decoux. By his own admission, the primary criterion for members was their loyalty to France.

Contrary to the popular belief of the French contemporaries of the Viet Minh, the Viet Minh were not anti-French, previously having asked to work with the French against the Japanese. The Viet Minh were, however, anti-imperialist, resisting the Japanese for the same ideological reasons that they resisted the French: both sought to impose colonial governments on the Vietnamese people. Because the US worked with the Vietnamese against the Japanese in return for recovering downed Allied pilots, the Viet Minh were more favorably disposed toward Americans.

The arrival of Japanese troops in August, 1940 was not a great concern to the Vietnamese people. It was widely thought that the Japanese, as Asians, would be more sympathetic to the plight of the

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[5] Hammer, p. 33

Vietnamese. As events would show, however, the Japanese wanted roughly the same things from Indochina that the French wanted. Where France held Indochina for its international prestige and exports, Japan occupied Indochina for the rice grown there and its strategic location. This soon became evident and the Viet Minh sought assistance from the French in fighting the Japanese. Admiral Decoux denied the requests for assistance from the Communist/nationalist Viet Minh, stating that he "formally condemned 'nationalism' of all kinds because it had a xenophobic and anti-French tendency and received its instructions from abroad,"[6] and called the Viet Minh bandits. Despite this denunciation, the Viet Minh continued to fight the Japanese, winning more support daily from the peasantry.

A memo from US diplomats in Vietnam dated February 4, 1942 reflected the degree to which the Vietminh represented the political views of the Vietnamese people. The memo declared that the Vietnamese hated the Japanese and wanted freedom from French rule, as well. It also stated that the Vietnamese exhibited "indifference as to political aspects of the war," preferring to concentrate on the more readily apparent local situation. The diplomats reported a positive attitude among the people toward the US government.[7]

The US government was caught between this endorsement from the Vietnamese and requests for military aid from the French. As early as October, 1943, the French asked the US for troops to

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6 Hammer, p. 33

7 "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina", p.354

assist in the restoration of the colonial regime.[8] US policymakers were reluctant to involve American troops in Vietnam as it would lead to thin distribution of troops in many areas, a condition dangerous to all involved. Beyond the military aspect of this issue, bureaucrats such as John Carter Vincent, a China specialist at the State Department, were leery of being placed in a position which would require US troops to "police" both Japanese and Chinese troops. His concern lay in the possibility of US soldiers having to accept the surrender of both CCP and Japanese troops at war's end. As a compromise, Vincent suggested that KMT troops be responsible for policing Vietnam north of the sixteenth parallel. It was not decided which nation should police the southern half of the country, but an organization of British origin was working to ensure that it would be a colonial power.

At the Tehran Conference, the US, USSR and KMT agreed that Indochina should be governed by a trusteeship after the war. The British, however, disagreed, suggesting a regional military command in its stead. They proceeded with the establishment of the South East Asia Command (SEAC) and offered the US a place in its ranks. General Louis Mountbatten was to command the forces in theater and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff were to assist in the coordination of the group. State Department official John Patton Davies advised against US presence in this group, stating that it would detrimentally link the American government with colonial powers. Policymakers agreed with Davies and the US declined to enter the group.[9] Britain

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[8] Hammer, p. 358

[9] "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina", p. 360

instead invited France to join the SEAC, and France did not decline, giving them the opportunity to re-enter Indochina; an opportunity made real at the Potsdam conference.

The situation in Indochina took a turn for the worse on March 9,1945 when the Japanese attacked French police and military installations. The Japanese arrested government leader Admiral Decoux for inhibiting "the joint defense of the country."[10] In his place, the Japanese placed the playboy emperor Bao Dai. The newly reinstated emperor of Vietnam announced on March 10 the independence of the kingdom of Annam, which included the two *ky*[11] Annam and Tonkin.

Bao Dai's reign as emperor was not extremely notable, save that it established in the minds of the Vietnamese people the demise of the French. The Japanese continued to run the country, only now they were more brazen in their approach. As the Japanese arrested French nationals and as French workers lost their jobs, the Vietnamese began to live free of French rule.

The Vietminh looked no differently upon the Japanese regime than they had upon the French; both stood as obstacles to the Viet Minh objective of Vietnamese self-determination. As such, the Vietminh used the same tactics on a different enemy. They continued to mobilize the peasantry and tribesmen of the mountainous central highlands while simultaneously working to win over the city dwellers of the Mekong Delta region in the south.

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[10] Hammer, p. 38

[11] "Ky is the Vietnamese equivalent of "state." From north to south, the three ky were Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina.

The sudden capitulation of the Japanese in August, 1945 saw the Vietminh invested with power in Indochina by the Japanese, who felt it was better to surrender control to Asians than Europeans. The Viet Minh realized that recognition by the US was essential to their success. Sensing the imminent return of Western colonial powers, the ICP held an emergency meeting in Hanoi where Ho Chi Minh was unanimously elected to head the revolution. Ho correctly assessed that a united Vietnam would be much more successful, and much more appealing to the Americans, than the factional Vietnam which existed at the time. Realizing that Vietminh influence did not extend beyond the borders of Tonkin and Annam, Ho urged the various political and religious sects of the south to unite. He attempted to downplay the role of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD), or Vietnamese Nationalist Party, and unite the various factions in the south. In this fragmented region, the VNQDD had been discredited among the people because the Japanese had not recognized them or thought them a serious threat. The VNQDD was merely one of the larger factions, one whose objectives were detrimental to the cause of Vietnamese unification and self-determination.

Ho realized that the revolution would need assistance from a source higher than the well-organized but poorly equipped Vietminh. Therefor, in hopes of consolidating power, Ho urged Bao Dai to abdicate. The Vietminh sympathizers around Bao Dai urged him to do abdicate his position, as well, in the interests of Vietnamese self-determination and the puppet emperor bowed to the wishes of the Vietminh. In his abdication speech, Bao Dai stated his concerns regarding a split Vietnam and called for national support of the

Vietminh and the burgeoning Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN).[12]

Ho's efforts were successful for a short time and on August 21, 1945, members of such diverse factions as the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Trotskyites and VNQDD marched together under the auspices of the newly-formed United National Front. It was called a march of independence, but independence day was not to come until September 2 when Ho read the declaration of Vietnamese independence to a crowd in Hanoi. Ho claimed that freedom was won from the Japanese, not the French, since the Europeans had possessed only nominal control of the government after 1940. Regardless of whose hold over Vietnam was lost in late 1945, the Viet Minh began to develop and consolidate their power throughout Vietnam in the years to follow.

In keeping with the Potsdam plan, the Nationalist Chinese forces of General Lu Han moved into northern Vietnam in September, 1945. The ragtag KMT soldiers began to eat everything edible and loot everything inedible, stealing from private citizens, as well public buildings. The Chinese also legalized their own currency which was worthless.

While the soldiers were looting, the Chinese commander was busy maneuvering to see that the VNQDD, his favorite of the Vietnamese political parties, gained power in the region. In November, 1945, Lu Han and Ho made a deal, in which Ho disbanded the Communist party in return for Lu Han's promise of elections

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[12] Hammer, p. 97

which would bring about a coalition government composed of elements from both the VNQDD and Vietminh.[13] Members of the VNQDD saw this as an unacceptable compromise and reacted violently. Ho feared the potential for long-term unrest which would provide ample justification, in the eyes of the United Nations, for prolonged occupation by the Chinese forces. His only apparent option which was likely to restore order was to ask for the French to return under the provision that they recognize Vietnamese sovereignty. This idea caused a terrible uproar among the Vietminh hierarchy. Ho railed at them, saying quite poetically, "I prefer to sniff French shit for five years than eat Chinese shit for the rest of my life."[14] He asserted that the French were a weakened colonial power and that the white man was finished in Asia. The Chinese, however, had an established historical precedent of long, painful occupations of Vietnam.

Certain US policymakers were concerned about a Chinese presence in Vietnam and requested information from US contacts in the region. In response to this request, Brigadier General Philip E. Gallagher asked General Lu Han when the Chinese troops would leave Vietnam. The Chinese general's answer, contained in a cable from Gallagher to the Secretary of State dated January 30, 1946 stated that the Chinese forces would leave when the task assigned by the allies had been completed.[15] The task to which Lu Han referred was the disarming of all Japanese troops in northern Vietnam.

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[13] Karnow, p151-152
[14] Ibid, p. 153
[15] FRUS, 1946, p. 16

Aware of the hostile relationship between the French and the Chinese, US government officials were also concerned about the possibility of clashes between soldiers of the two countries involved in the disarming of the Japanese in Vietnam. When asked about this possibility in December 1945, French Commisionser of Tonkin and Northern Annam Jean Sainteny said that no French troops would enter the region until all Chinese troops had left.[16]

Talks between Ho and General Leclerc dragged from March 6, 1946 until late May. Ho initiated the talks, angered by the exclusion of Cochinchina, the southernmost of the three "ky," from the French definition of Vietnam in the March 6 Agreement. The Vietnamese felt that any independence without Cochinchina was merely "theoretical."[17] Cochinchina was held in such high regard because it not only held the major metropolitan areas of Saigon and Cholon, but also the verdant Mekong River Delta, making it the wealthiest of Vietnam's three regions. Ho called for economic independence, a currency and banking system and the release of political prisoners, as well as French departure from Cochinchina.

In the midst of these debates, the French called for a series of talks concerning the situation in the region. Entitled the Dalat Conferences after the resort town in which they were held, the talks included delegates from the following countries or peoples: Cambodia, Laos, the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Cochinchina, native peoples of Southern Annam and the high plateau of Indochina. Conspicuous in their absence were delegates of the

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[16]FRUS, 1946, p. 16
[17]FRUS, 1946, p. 46

Vietnam government, who had not been invited. The French had intentionally neglected the Viet Minh on the grounds of their anti-French policy and actions.[18] The assembly made motions which were vehemently anti-Viet Minh and which reflected the skill with which the French had chosen the countries to be represented. The five motions were as follows:

1) a protest of Vietnamese attempts to equate Vietnam with French Indochina at the Fontainbleau talks
2) Vietnamese claims at Fontainbleau do not represent Indochina as a whole
3) French Indochina depends on the French to check the Vietnamese aggression in the region
4) any solution to French Indochina's problems must be achieved by a concensus of all Indochinese people represented by delegates at Dalat
5) a condemnation of terrorism by Vietnam in all Indochina[19]

In an effort to achieve some kind of settlement, Leclerc's superior, Admiral Thierry D'Argenlieu, High Commisioner of French Indochina, suggested that Ho go to Paris to continue talks with other government members. Ho left Vietnam on May 31 and the French moved in on his heels to establish the Republic of Cochinchina in the name of France.

Ho was willing to work with the French to resolve the difficulties in Indochina, and, therefore, represented the moderate

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[18]FRUS, 1946, p. 37
[19]FRUS, 1946, p. 55

faction of the Viet Minh. Brigadier General Gallagher reported on January 30, 1946 that Ho was willing to cooperate with the US, the Soviets, England or even France, as long as the French alone did not have power in Indochina.[20] Vo Nguyen Giap, however, was not nearly as tolerant of the prospect of prolonged French presence in Vietnam. He felt that it was acceptable to take aid from the French, but to live under French rule was unconscionable.

FDR's death on April 12, 1945, made it possible for the French to re-enter Indochina. He had staunchly resisted French presence in the region throughout the last days in office. Despite the fact that the President had approved the use of US air forces in support of the French resistance in Indochina, it should not be read as a ringing endorsement of French colonial objectives. The order to dispatch planes to the aid of the French soldiers fighting the Vietminh had been given reluctantly and only after nine days had passed.

The ascendancy of a new President heralded the advent of a new international policy. FDR's idealistic international vision did not survive him, giving way to Truman's concern over containment of Soviet-inspired Communism. Fearing that the vacuum left by the absence of a colonial government would allow Soviet-inspired Communists to seize power, Truman was not inclined to impede the French in their return to Vietnam. In a somewhat different form, this had already happened. In the void left by Japan's sudden defeat, the Vietminh had moved successfully into the role of dominant indigenous party. The Vietminh, however, were not

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[20]FRUS, 1946, p. 18

directly influenced by the Soviets. This sentiment found expression, among other places, in a January 30 communique from Brigadier General Gallagher. Gallagher said that despite the fact that the Vietminh are inspired by the Soviet model, they are savvy enough that they do not make Communist noises, emphasizing instead their "Annamese patriotism". "The Viet Minh should not be labeled full-fledged doctrinaire communist."[21] Their party was patterned after the Soviets, but they received no orders from Moscow, as corroborated by Mr. Tswen-ling Tsui, First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Washington during a conversation with State Department officials in December of 1946.[22] The existence of a native Communist party, though more nationalist than Communist, and recommendations from various policymakers that the US should strengthen European allies as a bulwark against Soviet aggression in Europe worked to create a golden opportunity for the French to reclaim Indochina. Secretary of State Byrnes said in a dispatch that the presence of the French in Indochina prevents Soviet influence and deters Chinese imperialism.[23]

This belief that strong European allies were essential found articulation in an April 1945 OSS policy paper which provided a detailed review of post-war US policy. It advocated the abandonment of FDR's trusteeship as too threatening to our potential allies. The US, it advised, should work toward this objective of appeasing European allies, while simultaneously using them to fill

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[21]FRUS, 1946, p. 19
[22]FRUS, 1946, p. 84
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the power vacuums in Asia. The policy statement had the following to say regarding the posture which the US should adopt with respect to its European allies with colonial holdings:

> We have at present no interest in weakening or liquidating these empires or in championing schemes of international trusteeship which may provoke unrest and result in colonial disintegration, and may at the same time alienate us from the European states. [24]

The sentiment expressed in this excerpt reflects an interesting change in US policy, sacrificing Asian self-determination for the sake of European powers. A similar position of the State Department was summed up in a June 22, 1945 policy paper:

> The United States recognizes French sovereignty over Indochina. It is, however, the general policy of the United States to favor a policy which would allow colonial peoples an opportunity to prepare themselves for increased participation in their own government with eventual self-government as the goal. [25]

The consideration of the needs of indigenous peoples for a self-determining government finds articulation in this document, a component which had been conspicuous in its absence from earlier policy papers. Whether or not the government would later give these issues serious consideration will be discussed later. That they were included at all shows that some vestige of FDR's international vision lingered.

Despite these nominal inclusions of concerns about the situation of the people of Vietnam, the only assistance that the US could offer

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[24] Gary Hess, The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950, p. 125

[25] Ibid, p. 21

from November of 1946 until December of 1949 would be in the form of military aid. In November 1946, the US watched as the First Indochina War raged. In January of 1946, Brigadier General Gallagher had stated his opinion that "one or two modern French divisions could defeat the Annamese".[26] It appeared to the US as a military reconquest of Vietnam, though it was actually a war to re-establish French colonial rule, the distinction between which is subtle, but important to understand. The US felt that the war was being fought to restore order to a country in turmoil, while the Vietnamese viewed the fighting as the return of the French to power in Vietnam. The fighting began as the result of disagreements over the collection of tariffs in the port of Haiphong. Vietnamese and French units skirmished there in mid-November and the conflict soon spread throughout the country. There was no formal, diplomatic resolution to the fighting; its intensity merely waned and evolved into a prolonged guerilla campaign, spilling over into the next year. The war was the precursor to US involvement in the politics of the country.

Abbott Low Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs wrote the following in January of 1947,

> Hands-off policy seems here based European considerations and temporary French political situation and appears as US approval French military reconquest Vietnam although in fact Vietnam record no worse than French.[27]

He went on to say that the Soviets were not active in the region and they need not be. In his opinion, the actions of democratic

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[26]FRUS, 1946, p. 17

[27] Gibbons, p. 26

governments proved more effective for the Soviet cause than good propaganda because these actions were alienating the Vietnamese, driving them away from Democracy and into Communism.

US actions in the Greek-Turkish crisis established two patterns which would be repeated in Vietnam. The British announced that they were pulling out of both Greece and Turkey, threatening to leave a power vacuum which it was feared the Soviets would attempt to fill. In February 1947, the US Congress approved the Greek-Turkish Aid Bill which provided for military advisors to be sent to instruct those elements of the indigenous governments resisting Communist insurgence in the region. In so doing, the US government assumed Britain's former role. Later, in Vietnam, the US would also use military advisors to replace the departed French colonial government, an action which the French had expected as early as January, 1946.[28] Many scholars argue that the policy of containment has its origins in the adoption of the Greek-Turkish Aid Bill.

The historian John Lewis Gaddis claims that containment was not part of government policy until it was exercised in Korea. Gaddis states that the US has, since World War I, been concerned about any one country gaining preeminence in Europe. In conjunction with this, the Truman Doctrine did not establish the US as a world policeman, but rather created a doctrinal precedent for US aid to countries resisting the influences of hostile forces from within or without. Gaddis holds that the Truman Doctrine of March 12, 1947 was not a

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[28]FRUS, 1946, p. 19

turning point in US foreign policy.[29] Post-war Soviet actions threatened the spheres of influence to which even FDR had no objections. It was, therefore, imperative, Gaddis says, that the US seek to establish non-Communist governments along the borders of the USSR, an approach designed to show the Soviets that peaceful negotiations were the means by which harmony was to be maintained in the post-war world.

The US would not become the world policeman solely within the terms of the Truman Doctrine because, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson posited, the Truman Doctrine does not establish a blanket proviso of military support to any country seeking aid. Acheson said that each case would be assessed individually.[30] George Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen, as critics of the Truman doctrine and formers of the containment principle, spoke to this aspect of the Truman Doctrine. Both agreed that not all Communist expansion was worth "rolling back." Only those movements which were Soviet-inspired, they said, were worth containing. Both were joined by others in their further criticism of the Doctrine as being too universalistic, too blind to details.

While the Americans debated the theoretical nature of containment, the French executed a practical plan aimed at eliminating the Vietminh and re-establishing their own power in the region. A speech by French Premier Paul Remadier on January 21, 1947, listed the objectives and positions of France in Indochina as follows:

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[29] Gaddis, "Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?", p. 386
[30] Ibid, p. 390

1) restore order and security
2) France will not negotiate with the present Vietnam government, choosing to wait until a more moderate faction to rise to power
3) only at such time as a more moderate government is predominant in Vietnam will France include Cochinchina in its definition of Vietnam and recognize Vietnam outside the French Union[31]

The French Chargé in Siam, Jean Dardian was reported to have said to US officials that the French demands on Ho Chi Minh were made deliberately strict that Ho might find them unacceptable. He cited as the basis behind his reasoning the French desire to deal with a government other than the one run by Ho.[32] The US Consul at Saigon Charles Reed concurred with this opinion, saying in July that if the French were forced to deal with "present Viet Nam government", the French position in Indochina "will be greatly weakened".[33] He went on to say that not only would this damage the French, but that Vietnamese self-determination in all three *ky* would eventually lead to a deterioration of relations with the West. He also wondered whether the "native" government "will not develop a definitely oriental orientation and will not become a prey for non-democratic influences."[34]

In an effort to establish a popular government, the French, in 1947, selected Bao Dai to head the puppet government in Vietnam. The installation of Bao Dai was thought by the French to be the "solution" to their problems in the country. It was hoped that his

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[31]FRUS, 1947, p. 66
[32]FRUS, 1947, p. 102
[33]FRUS, 1947, p. 123
[34]FRUS, 1947, p. 123

figurehead status would satisfy the people of Vietnam sufficiently, quieting the Vietminh and their calls for self-determination. But as it turned out, he was not as malleable a puppet as the French had planned. Though Bao Dai placed his signatures on treaties and agreements which were detrimental to the cause of Vietnamese independence, his ulterior motives in dealing with the French were strictly nationalistic. He attempted to work within the parameters of his role, understood by everyone to be that of a figurehead, in order to bring about Vietnamese self-determination.

On December 7, 1947, the French and Bao Dai signed the first Ha Long Bay Agreement. This document gave the French control over Vietnamese foreign policy, providing for a token number of Vietnamese to work in the policymaking French Foreign Office, and it also created an independent Vietnamese military which was placed at the disposal of the French. In delineating the boundaries of Vietnam to be affected by this agreement, it was decided that only the states of Annam and Tonkin would compromise Vietnam. Cochinchina was left out of this demarcation of Vietnam for reasons similar to those which had fueled the debate over the past two years: the French wanted to maintain control of this wealthiest and most populous of the *ky* while keeping the Viet Minh from doing the same. A fervent nationalist, Bao Dai demanded from the French that they make a formal statement denouncing Ho Chi Minh before the former emperor would return to Vietnam.

The National Union party was formed to provide a basis of support for Bao Dai. Its members were anti-Communists of many types: Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sectarians, members of two pro-

Chinese parties, followers of Bao Dai from his home province Annam, those called by US diplomats on the scene "intellectuals," nationalists and radicals. (Among them, interestingly enough was Ngo Dinh Diem who was to be chosen as the head of a US puppet regime in Vietnam during the 1960's.) The party, like the man it supported, was weak and ineffectual.

To his credit, Bao Dai was upset that the French had continued to treat his country as a colony. Not only were the French treating Vietnam as a colony, they were doing so deliberately. A September 15, 1947, dispatch from Charles Reed, Consul at Saigon, cites both French and Vietnamese sources who said that the French were deliberately offering less to the Vietnamese than stipulated in the March 6 agreements in order to draw out Ho Chi Minh and continue the military campaign against him.[35] Bao Dai was not particularly upset with the way in which the French were treating Ho, but the policies implemented on Ho's people affected all Vietnamese. We can speculate that Bao Dai was incensed that Ho claimed to be the true representative of the Vietnamese people, a claim which the above telegram from Reed also attested. As a man whose nationalist sentiment ran deep, this claim must have fueled the fire of hatred he felt for the communists.

His resulting complaints to the colonial government regarding Vietnam's colonial status led to the adoption of a second Ha Long Bay Agreement, in which the French recognized the government of Vietnam, yet still retained the same controls as before. Like a

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[35]FRUS, 1947, p. 137

pouting child, Bao Dai accepted the agreement because he had no real choice and left soon after for Europe. For five months, the French pursued the recalcitrant chief of state about the resorts of Europe, attempting to persuade him to return to Vietnam.[36]

While Bao Dai was off sulking in Europe, the Vietminh continued their well-organized struggle against the French. Though not receiving direction from the Soviets, the Vietminh were nonetheless highly motivated and dedicated. Brigadier General Gallagher said the Viet Minh were "able...enthusiastic and young", but few in numbers. He felt that they possessed the appropriate "technical skill" but lacked the necessary "executive ability and experience".[37] Despite such lackluster appraisals by French and US diplomats, the Vietminh continued to wage a successful war against their French opposition.

By February 21, 1948, the French had conceded that the war in Indochina was growing beyond their capability. In a dispatch from Washington, US officials reported the content of a conversation with Jean Claude Winckler, the First Secretary of the French Embassy. Winckler expressed his belief that the French could no longer prosecute military operations in French Indochina. The efforts to date, he said were, for the most part, a failure which proved to be a substantial drain on the French national coffers. He went on to say that it might be advisable for the French to accept the "good offices" of a Security Council committee, similar to those implemented in Indonesia from 1946-1949. Winckler was also worried that the Good

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[36] Spector, p. 92
[37] FRUS, 1946, p. 18

Offices Committee in Indochina would "not be made up of powers 'of the same disposition'" as in Indonesia.[38] He was articulating the concern that any attempt by the US to ameliorate the situation in Indochina would ultimately be aimed at eliminating the influence of colonial power.

Secretary of State Marshall echoed Winckler's opinion regarding the failure of the French war against the Vietminh, saying in a July 3 telegram that the French had no chance of reaching a military solution to the problems in Indochina. Marshall also predicted that Indochina would not be a source of strength, but a "grievously costly enterprise" for the French which would ultimately damage the image of the West with "Oriental peoples." Marshall continued his condemnation of French actions by saying that a continuation of the "parade puppets" as government heads in Vietnam would strengthen Ho Chi Minh and quicken the rise of a state "almost certainly oriented toward Moscow." He called for the French to make concessions to assure the rise of a non-Communist government.[39] By late September of 1948, the US Department of State had drafted a policy statement on Indochina which had as one of its components the desire of the US to see the French grant certain concessions to the Vietnamese.

The short-term objective of the US, this paper stated, was to help resolve the impasse currently existing between the French and Vietnamese in a manner which would be agreeable to both parties

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[38]FRUS, 1948, p. 20
[39] FRUS, 1948, p. 30

involved so that there might be an end to the hostilities in the region. The long-term objectives were as follows:

> 1) eliminate Communist influence in Indochina and see installed a pro-US nationalist state closely approximating a Democracy
> 2) establish a degree of pro-West sentiment among the people of the region
> 3) raise the standard of living as a means of securing against "totalitarian influences"
> 4) "prevent" Chinese influence on Indochinese peoples[40]

In terms of policy issues, the State Department paper stated that the US should urge the French to grant to the Vietnamese a union of the three *ky* , "complete internal autonomy" and the right to choose whether or not to participate in the French Union. The actions of the French were counter to US wishes that "dependent peoples...attain their legitimate political aspirations." This belief that the French were implementing a policy which was distasteful to the US was the basis upon which requests for arms shipments from the US to Indochina were denied by policymakers. The US government did, however, send arms to France, allowing them either to be redirected to Indochina or used to replace weapons sent to Southeast Asia.

The evaluation of French and US policy in the region made very clear that the failure of the war against the Vietminh had drained the French treasury and made the Viet Minh the controlling power of the nationalist movement. Ho Chi Minh, the paper said, had been able to capitalize on the French weakness, which had also damaged the reputation of the US in the region. As such, US policy objectives

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[40] FRUS, 1948, p. 43-49

could only be achieved if France were to achieve a settlement which was agreeable to the Vietnamese.

Bao Dai's primary reason for returning to Vietnam after his extended holiday was to expel the French from his homeland. This nationalistic bent also prompted him to sign the Elysee Agreement on March 8, 1949. Archimedes Patti claims that Bao Dai signed this document unifying all three states of Vietnam for three reasons: to keep himself in Vietnam as a non-Communist leader; to keep the French from taking control; and to place himself in a position from which he could effectively seek American aid for fighting the Viet Minh.[41]

Upon Bao Dai's return home, the US was debating whether it should formally announce support for his government. In a dispatch dated May 2, 1949, Secretary of State Acheson urged the consulate in Saigon to avoid committing US support to Bao Dai. He stated that because the French were hesitant about the viability of their chosen ruler, the US should be cautious, as well.[42] The Vietnamese themselves were becoming curious as to the American position on the issue. General Nguyen Van Xuan, former President of Cochinchina, asked the American Consul at Hanoi what American policy would be regarding "supporting or even nominating Vietnam for membership (in) UN" if France were to balk at the prospect.[43] According to a memo of a conversation among members of the Division of Southeastern Affairs dated May 17, "the US should not

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[41] Patti, p. 397
[42] FRUS, 1949, p. 21
[43] Ibid, p. 25

put itself in a forward position in the Indochina problem."[44] Regarding the Elysee Agreements, the consensus of the group was that Vietnam had been left in the hands of the French and this would not be acceptable to the VNQDD. The group also felt that Bao Dai was destined for failure because of this agreement.

For the next five months, the US vacillated as to whether or not Bao Dai was a sound investment, until late September when the victory of the CCP seemed imminent. In a communique dated September 28, 1949, W. Walton Butterworth, Assistant Secretary of State, Far Eastern Affairs, stated the US position. He wrote that in promoting nationalism in Vietnam, the US hoped that other Asian nations would recognize Bao Dai before the US were to do the same. If the US or Britain were first to recognize the government in Vietnam, it would be the "kiss of death," since it would carry with it the taint of imperialism.[45] He went on to write that he wished that France "had gone further in Vietnam." He advised that the US should not recognize the government in Vietnam until France switched the office in which affairs concerning Vietnam were handled from that office dealing with foreign policy to the office dealing with states in the French Union. He, like many others, expressed his lack of confidence in Bao Dai as a solution in Vietnam. The debate would not continue much longer.

To many policymakers, the success of the CCP made clear the decision of whether or not to support Bao Dai. The "fall" of China on October 1, 1949, only shortly preceded the reallocation of funds from

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[44] Ibid, p. 27
[45] Ibid, p. 85

China to Vietnam. On October 6, the US Congress altered the wording of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, Section 303, to devote $75 million to the "general area of China," as opposed to China specifically. In the opinion of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the funds were to go to the French who were well-organized and had effectively pacified the Mekong Delta.[46] Acheson was concerned about the French being able to aid NATO and the war in Indochina was serious drain on their national treasury. Interestingly, some people argued that military aid alone would not provide the necessary "missing component."[47] These people felt that political, economic and agricultural aid would be necessary to assist Vietnam. While the US did not officially recognize the Republic of Vietnam until February 4, 1950, the granting of aid to the French was a *de facto* admission of support for Bao Dai.

The publication of NSC 48/2 did much to strengthen US support of Bao Dai. Entitled "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," NSC 48/2 called for the US to pursue a course in Asia which would both strengthen US security in the region and appeal to the indigenous peoples of the region, as well. The following were considered "basic security objectives:"

1) Development of nations and peoples of Asia on a stable and self-sustaining basis in conformity with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter

2) development of the militaries of non-Communist countries in order to impede the advance of Communism

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[46] Spector, p. 96
[47] Ibid, p. 101

3) reduction of Soviet influence in the region to eliminate Soviet threat to US sucurity and security of allies; impede Soviet attempts to undermine Asian nations and governments

4) prevent an imbalance of power among Asian nations in region which might affect US security

When push came to shove, however, the prosperity of the Vietnamese was more expendable than US security. The document was decidedly anti-Communist in its approach, bolstering the rationale for supporting Bao Dai as a bastion of democracy.

It can be seen that many complex issues faced policymakers when dealing with the Indochina question after World War II. The US government was concerned with US security in the region, which they saw the spread of Communism threatening; the appeasement of European allies in hopes of improving the situation in Europe by creating a bulwark against advancing communism; finally, the concerns which Vietnamese expressed with regards to Vietnamese independence. All three issues were closely related and all greatly influenced the policy of the US government in post-war Vietnam.

KOREA, 1945-1949

US policymakers during the final years of World War II were faced with a much different situation in Korea than that which existed in Indochina. At the Cairo conference in 1943, the US and the British had decided that the Koreans were not quite ready for independence. To answer the questions which Koreans were asking regarding the independence of their country, the British delegate Sir Anthony Eden contrived the phrase "in due course" to define when the Koreans could expect independence. Having no equivalent in their own language for "in due course," the Korean provisional government in Chungking, China,[1] translated the phrase as "within a few days" and "immediately,"[2] giving the Koreans a false sense of hope.

The Soviets had made it clear that they were interested in gaining a foothold on the Korean peninsula in order to secure for themselves a warm-water port and a place in the prosperous northeast Asian economic market. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin began to push for Soviet participation in the impending occupation of Japan and a Soviet presence on the northern-most of the Japanese islands, Hokkaido. The Soviets had serious concerns about a strong Japan, feelings which had their origin in the Japanese defeat of the Russian navy in 1905. As one means of controlling Japan, the Soviets wanted to have some say in the rebuilding of the country. FDR felt secure in denying the Soviets their requests with respect to Japan

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[1] Chungking had been the capital of the Chinese nationalist party, the Kuomintang (KMT). The US had exercised considerable influence in placing the KMT in power in Chungking during World War II.

[2] Dobbs, p. 14

based on the fact that the Soviets had played a miniscule role in defeating the Japanese.

In an attempt to bring about his vision of harmonious relations between the two superpowers in the post-war era, FDR mentioned Korea as a possible country which the Soviets could occupy. Korea would meet the two most important criteria which the Soviets had established: it would provide them with a warm-water port and it would place the Soviets in a region which had long been a "natural market" for goods from Japan. By the Potsdam Conference of 1945, FDR's internationalist vision held cooperation between the US and the Soviets as the hallmark of the post-war world.[3] FDR was willing to use Korea as an arena in which to experiment with trusteeship as a viable political solution.

At the Yalta conference in February, 1945, FDR attempted to cement this relationship with Stalin, working to establish at least an understanding between the US and the USSR, if not an alliance. As a gesture of FDR's sincerity, the US planned to establish a four-power trusteeship over Korea, involving China, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, which the US planned to dominate. Granting the Soviets at least partial control of Korea would appease them by adding to the list of countries in the buffer zone which Soviet government officials were attempting to build around their periphery. FDR favored a trusteeship in Korea because he believed that the Koreans were not ready for self-governance. He was not in favor of continued colonial status for Korea, as we have seen, because of the poor record of

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[3] Hastings, p. 38

European colonial powers in India, Indochina and Indonesia. The Japanese, too, by virtue of their authoritarian rule in Korea, had proven to FDR the evils of colonialism. Despite all of this, the policies which the US employed over the following five years closely approximated those of the Japanese during their reign over Korea, as we will see.

At the Potsdam conference in July and August of 1945, there was no debate over the Korean problem, creating the impression that the US was conceding control of Korea to the Soviets. In fact, the US and USSR had decided to jointly occupy the peninsula with the expressed purposes of disarming the Japanese military, repatriating the colonial government and establishing some semblance of order in the country. It was at Potsdam that the 38th parallel was chosen as the boundary of the joint occupation of Korea. This border was arbitrarily chosen by two US military men, one of whom was future Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who used an old map of Korea and a set of State Department criteria in making their decision. If the US were to share the occupation of Korea with the Soviets, which seemed likely, the State Department wanted the US to have Seoul, the capital, and large population centers in the zone it would occupy. Choosing the 38th parallel as the border left the US zone with Seoul and the large port cities of Pusan and Inchon. In the minds of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this border was thought to create a territory too large for the US military forces in the region to patrol. Any troops sent to Korea as part of the occupation government would be veterans of hard-fought campaigns against the Japanese in the south Pacific. Though the American soldiers would most certainly be experienced,

they would also be in dire need of rest and, therefore, would be unable to police effectively such a large area as southern Korea.

When this proposed border between the two regions was submitted to Stalin, US policymakers were shocked that the Soviet Premier accepted the proposal which so obviously favored the US. Stalin accepted the unfavorable border in hopes of receiving some part of the Japanese islands. The US, however, had quite different ideas with respect to Japan, ideas which did not include the Soviets. Nonetheless, both parties agreed upon the border, and the Soviets moved into northern Korea in August of 1945 to begin the disarming of the Japanese. The US forces moved into southern Korea in September of 1945. The two Koreas would never again be a united political entity.

The US Army XXIV Corps was selected by the Supreme Commander, Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, to occupy the Korean peninsula. The XXIV Corps and their commander, Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, however, were not SCAP's first choice. MacArthur first chose General Joseph W. Stilwell to command the Korean occupation forces. When KMT head Chiang Kai-shek learned of this plan, he complained bitterly. Chiang and Stilwell had developed an adversarial relationship while Stilwell was assigned to Chiang's forces as an advisor during World War II and the Chinese commander did not want his old enemy on his eastern flank. MacArthur's second choice was Lieutenant Albert C. Wedemeyer who was stationed in northern China at the time. He, too, was bypassed as leader of the occupation forces because he was thought to be too experienced in north China to move elsewhere. Thus, MacArthur was

forced by circumstances to choose Hodge, who was unfamiliar and inexperienced concerning the Koreans and their political aspirations.[4]

The Basic Initial Directive from the State Department to SCAP[5] (SWNCC 176/8, approved on October 13, 1945) regarding the occupation of Korea reflected an internationalist, Rooseveltian influence. According to this directive, the occupation forces had three explicitly stated objectives:

1) establish a "free and independent nation" in Korea

2) remove "all vestiges of Japanese control over Korean economic and political life"

3) "assure the abrogation of all laws, orders and regulations which established and maintained restrictions on political and civil liberties on the grounds of race, nationality, creed or political opinion."

In order to make itself most appealing to the Koreans, the US forces were to treat Korea as a liberated country, but only so long as such treatment would not jeopardize the lives of Americans in Korea. In forming the interim government, the US was ordered not to utilize Japanese or Koreans who had collaborated with the Japanese, a directive which Hodge neglected to follow until ordered by SCAP. MacArthur was also "to effectuate liaison with the Russians" in preparation for a joint occupation. On many counts, the official policy was clear in its commitment to Korean civil liberties. The actions of those enforcing policy in Korea, however, did not always reflect these concerns. We shall see, on many occasions, discrepancies between

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[4] Dobbs, p. 25

[5] FRUS, 1945, pp. 1073-1091

official government policy and the *de facto* policy practiced by those in country.

On September 9, 1945, the first wave of the US occupation forces landed at Inchon harbor in the midst of a difficult political situation. Though the Japanese had been defeated, the colonial bureaucracy established thirty-five years ago was still firmly entrenched in Korea. The Japanese, with the assistance of certain Koreans who had collaborated with them during World War II, had continued to exercise political and military control, agreeing to surrender only to the Americans. As the US troops arrived in Inchon, they were greeted by crowds of Koreans and the Japanese troops sent to guard them. Hodge's reaction to the ensuing incident was to establish the nature of the relationship among the three nations represented in Korea. To keep the peace among the enthusiastic Koreans who had massed on the docks of the harbor to see their American liberators, Japanese troops fired their rifles into the crowd, nearly inciting a riot. When Hodge learned of these events, he openly praised the Japanese for keeping order in a difficult situation.[6] This infuriated Koreans who had lived under Japanese colonial oppression. Such a response from the US commander suggested to many Koreans that the US might merely be a replacement of the colonial regime.

Hodge and his people did little to dispel this growing fear on the part of the Koreans, because the Americans utilized not only the Japanese bureaucratic structures, but also the Koreans who had

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[6] Dobbs, p. 39

collaborated with the Japanese and the Japanese bureaucrats themselves. There were no doubts as to the efficiency of the extant bureaucracy which had been entrenched during the past thirty-five years of Japanese rule. There was equally little doubt of the Korean dissent and resistance to continuation of the way in which they had been treated as a colony of Japan. The Japanese had operated a government in which paid informants, cruel police, secret files and torture were rampant. The Americans thus fostered continued dissent by retaining the structure of the previous occupation government--the Japanese and their Korean collaborators.[7]

Upon arriving in Korea, the US policymakers on site had the unenviable task of assessing the Korean political situation. Korea was riddled with political factions which covered the spectrum. In August of 1945, the Japanese had created the Committee to Prepare for Korean Independence (CPKI). The CPKI was peopled primarily with leftists in order to appease the Soviets, the country which the Japanese thought would assume control of Korea. The CPKI was largely a figurehead in the major metropolitan areas where the Japanese could easily monitor the workings of the party. The CPKI often passed pro-Japanese legislation in the cities, providing little resistance. In the countryside, however, the CPKI was the sole authority due to the hatred which the Japanese inspired and the tremendous popular support the CPKI enjoyed among peasants and farmers. On September 6, 1945, just days before the arrival of US occupation forces, the CPKI announced that it was changing its

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[7] Cumings, p. 299

political persuasion to Communism and its name to the Korean People's Republic (KPR). Upon his arrival, Benninghoff declared in a report to the State Department that the KPR had lost many of the conservative members of the CPKI in the shift to the left and to Communism. He stated his opinion that the KPR had no power base among the people, an assessment which was dangerously incorrect given the rapid spread of People's Committees after the commencement of the US occupation.[8] Despite this lack of influence, Benninghoff nonetheless felt that the KPR was dangerous to the US occupation because of the primary objective of the party.

The KPR advocated in their speeches and literature the immediate expulsion of the Japanese from the Korean peninsula. The expulsion of the Japanese was viewed by Hodge and Benninghoff as a dangerous course of action. If the Japanese were repatriated, the US would be forced to find Koreans to replace them in the bureaucracy, judiciary and police forces. This was unacceptable to Hodge who was faced with many difficult tasks, given the situation as it existed at the time. For the sake of expediting his job and the jobs of those in the occupation forces, Hodge chose to utilize those Koreans who had experience in the Japanese system and, at the same time, were friendly toward the US. Those people tended to be members of the Korean Democratic Party (KDP).[9]

The small group of Koreans whom the US felt they could trust in the military government were by no means representative of Koreans as a whole. The members of the KDP were primarily

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[8] Cumings, p. 271-275
[9] Cumings, p. 126

wealthy Koreans who had, by virtue of their wealth, learned English. In the minds of the Americans, this knowledge of English was more valuable than their collaboration with the Japanese was detrimental. The KDP was based in Seoul, giving it not only a limited geographical focus, but also a decidedly metropolitan viewpoint, as well.[10] As early as September, 26, 1945, the US occupation forces realized that the KDP were not an accurate representation of the Korean population. In a telegram to the Secretary of State, a State Department official in Korea William Langdon wrote that the "Military Government long ago realized the unrepresentative character of its Korean structure."[11] The Chief of the State Department Office of Far Eastern Affairs, John Carter Vincent, was opposed to the US using hand-picked Koreans in the military government because he feared that the Soviets would do the same in the north and impede the progress of the trusteeship arrangement which many felt was coming.[12] He saw the US trapped by its own policy; he felt that there should be some group of Koreans in Korea to oppose Communism, but it would violate policy for the US to support any group in particular.

In their search for allies among the Koreans, the US had another choice: the Korean Provisional Government (KPG). The KPG had been in exile in Chungking during the war and, from there, had contacted the US repeatedly in an attempt to return to Korea. The leader of the KPG, Syngman Rhee, had urged the State Department

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[10] Cumings, p. 141
[11] FRUS, 1945, p. 1,135
[12] Cumings, p. 182

throughout the 1940's to allow the return of his party to its homeland. The State Department was reluctant, however, to allow them to return, not only because they chose to leave during the war instead of resisting the Japanese, but also because they built no power while they were in exile. The Kwangbok Army which was attached to the KPG was reported by the KPG to have fought against the CCP in China. There are no records to substantiate this and it is unlikely that the army did fight because, at its peak, membership totalled only 600 men.[13] The men had no weapons, either. They were an army primarily in name alone. Thus, the KPG was bypassed as a viable alternative for governing Korea despite its anti-Communist nature. Its downfall was the failure to demonstrate the ability to lead effectively.

In an attempt to convince the Korean people that Americans were not the sole authority in the military government, Major General Arnold, the Military Governor, established the Advisory Council on October 5, 1945. The council was to provide assistance to the Military Government with the intention of improving the condition of all Korea. At this time, the State Department still entertained the notion that the US and Soviets would jointly occupy Korea. The Advisory Council was to be one of a host of bureaucratic bodies which would allow Koreans involvement in their own government and, at the same time, make conditions in Korea acceptable to Koreans, Soviets and Americans. Eleven prominent Koreans were selected to sit on the council but only nine ever served.

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[13] Cumings, p. 173

One of the eleven was not even in southern Korea. Another representative, one of two token leftists in the group, initially refused on the grounds that his acceptance would confuse who exactly was the host and who was the guest.[14] He was persuaded to reconsider, but upon seeing the predominance of conservatives among the rest of the membership, he promptly walked out of the first meeting. With the conservatives outnumbering the radicals 9 to 1, the ratio on Advisory Council was exactly the opposite of the ratio in the countryside. Most Koreans voiced their displeasure with the US attempt to create a puppet body and Arnold had no choice but to disband the council. Perhaps it was his anger over the failure of this body which prompted Arnold to make the following comment on October 9, 1945: "[the Koreans are] so foolish as to think they can take to themselves and exercise any of the legitimate functions of the Government of Korea."[15]

In response to the formation of the Advisory Council, the KPR began printing pamphlets which condemned the US and their collaborators. As a result, the occupation ordered the cessation of all handbills under the guise of a need to halt the spread of Communism into the south from the northern Soviet-controlled sector. The order was ineffective and only served to demonstrate further the restrictive nature of the occupation government.

When General Hodge officially accepted the Japanese surrender on September 9, 1945, the occupation government had two options: revamp the Japanese colonial system or utilize the established

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[14] Dobbs, p. 44
[15] Cumings, p. 148

bureaucracy, judicial system and police structure. As we have already seen, the US chose to retain this pre-surrender state. The colonial government had proven effective and had been improved upon during thirty-five years of practical application. For some reason, the occupation command felt that Koreans would be more accepting of the Japanese system under American management. We will now examine the alterations made by the occupation to various departments of the Japanese colonial government.

The US inherited from the Japanese the same state tradition which the Japanese inherited from centuries of Korean civilization. Internal developments during the preceding century had given rise to a system in Korea of a weak central bureaucracy which existed to benefit a wealthy elite of landholders and which rarely meddled in the affairs of the peasantry. The Japanese colonials had significantly bolstered this weakened bureaucracy, creating a strong central government which often intervened in the lives of those peasants in the provinces for the sole purpose of achieving the objectives of the colonial overlords. The US occupation perpetuated the structure of the strong central government.

As discussed above, the US had the option of dismantling this colonial state, as the Soviets had done in the north, a course which they chose not to pursue. Instead, the US used the Japanese and their Korean collaborators to strengthen the government which was the legacy of colonialism. The US, concerned about the spread of Communism, opted to err on the side of stringent controls rather than risk "losing" another country to Moscow-inspired Communism. In an effort to legitimize the occupation government, the Americans

capitalized upon the anti-Communist bent of the KDP and their desire for independence by choosing many KDP members to occupy many of the essential positions in the government. The KDP was given control of the police and certain government offices as the result of these US appointments.

Within three months after the US forces arrived in Korea, the national police, court system and the Department of Justice had all been "Koreanized."[16] US officials made sure that KDP members occupied the major positions in these bureaus, hoping to give the occupation a sense of decency which the Japanese had neglected to instill. The national police were the first to be "Koreanized." The Korean National Police, with their virulent anti-Communist persuasion and their self-sufficient nature attributable to the superior equipment received from the US and Japan, were an effective tool for suppression of Communism.[17]

Police were able to issue permits for demonstration and assembly, so they had a great deal of power in determining which groups could publicly express their opinions. They all but became a law unto themselves in the provinces because they did not report to the provincial government, but to the military government in Seoul. The provinces, before the US arrival, had effectively policed their own districts. The military government shifted control to the center, causing conflicts between the national police and the provincial governments, which, almost without exception, leaned toward the left on the political spectrum. That the police were not popular was

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[16] Cumings, p. 158
[17] Cumings, p. 161

clear to those policemen honest enough to admit it. In September of 1945, the Chief of the KNP Detective Bureau Ch'oe Nung-Jin expressed his opinion that if the KNP did not change, 80% of the population would turn to the Communists. He also said that the KNP was the "enemy of the people."[18]

Despite, or perhaps because of, their harsh methods the KNP was not an effective means of keeping order in the provinces. In an effort to make the KNP more effective, Hodge used US troops in conjunction with the KNP during clashes with the National Preparatory Army (NPA) of the KPR. Hodge's concern over the existence of the NPA and other private armies prompted him to begin formation of a national army, despite the fact that he had no authorization to do so from his superiors on the State, War, Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC). The occupational government established the Office of the Director of National Defense, which had jurisdiction over the Army and Navy Departments.

Hodge disguised the true nature of the new Army by calling it a "constabulary," thus making it more readily available for use against the Communists in the south.[19] In training the constabulary, the US emphasized riot control instead of border defense, highlighting the counterinsurgency purpose of the force. Where the US punished the military in Japan after World War II, the Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese were rewarded with positions in the officer corps of the constabulary. The effectiveness of the constabulary lasted less than one year as it became the victim of

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[18] Cumings, p. 167

[19] Cumings, pp. 170-172

leftist infiltration. The leftists were successful in placing their members in the ranks of the constabulary as either officers or enlisted men. Whenever the infiltrated unit of the constabulary were called upon to suppress a Communist uprising or demonstration, the leftist members of the unit would refuse to act, thus disabling the group. By the autumn of 1946, the constabulary was so riddled with leftists that the occupation government could no longer rely on its forces.

Occupation officials saw Communists behind many disturbances in southern Korea. And they were not always forthcoming in their explanations of the suppression of suspected organizations. In late 1945, the occupation government shut down several newspapers suspected of printing leftist literature. The official reason given for the closures, however, was the need to pay defaulted loans or, in some cases, the failure to pay debts by the companies which owned the papers.[20] But most Koreans often were able to see through the deception and thus became even more resentful of the occupation.

Unfortunately, Hodge was caught in a horrible dilemma. He was under orders from the State Department "to break down this Communist government [the KPR] outside of any directives and without benefit of backing from the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the State Department."[21] If he were to obey this directive, Hodge was supposed to eliminate the most popular party in the country while simultaneously appearing to follow the State Department policy of not favoring any one party.

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[20] Dobbs, p. 54
[21] Cumings, p. 194

Hodge realized the damage which the occupation was doing, not only to US policy objectives, but also to the Korean political climate. A December 16, 1945, cable to SCAP advised that the Soviet presence on the peninsula made it more difficult to accomplish the US mission of preparing Korea for independence. He went on to say that the US was commonly blamed for the division of Korea. In his defense, Hodge stated that the Soviets were pursuing a similar policy with regards to controlling the flow of refugees, but they were not receiving as much of the blame. Hodge went on to say that southern Korea was ripe for Communism. Though in his estimation, the Koreans did not want Communism, he thought they might feel driven to it by a lack of confidence in the likelihood of attaining independence any time in the near future. He also cited Cho Man-sik, a democratic leader in the north who believed that Soviet policies were so distasteful to the Koreans that they had ruined any chance of Communism flourishing in the north. Koreans, in the north and south, hated the idea of trusteeship since the idea was first proposed, according to Hodge; it reminded them too much of their colonial past. Hodge closed with five recommendations for US policy. They were

1) removal of the 38th parallel border in order to unify Korea
2) abandonment of the trusteeship idea
3) a positive statement regarding former Japanese property in Korea
4) a reiteration of the promise of Korean independence

5) complete separation of Korea and Japan in the minds of the international press, public and government.[22]

Washington saw any major alterations in policy as detrimental to US prestige, thus it did not waver on Korea. In keeping with previous policies, the US continued to work with the Soviets to form a trusteeship of some sort for Korea.

At the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference in December of 1945, Averell Harriman began trusteeship negotiations for the US. Hodge's political advisor William Langdon seconded his superior's opinion that a trusteeship would not be acceptable to most Koreans; in Langdon's opinion, it could only be initiated and maintained by outside force. The Koreans, Langdon said, are "conscious of independence and eager to exercise it."[23] He believed that cooperation with the Soviets was in the best interests of the US but also felt that it should not be the extent of American policy in Korea.

Despite the informed advice of Langdon, the US and the Soviets agreed to a five-year trusteeship to be governed by China, Great Britain, the Soviets and the US. Washington neglected to inform General Hodge of the impending arrangements until a day after the civilian wire services were notified. When the Koreans learned of this plan for their country's future, they organized a huge protest demonstration. Even Korean members of the occupation boycotted work to join in the demonstration, crippling the bureaucracy for a period of time. Hodge asked the Koreans to be patient and confessed his own dislike of the trusteeship plan. He then advised Washington

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22 FRUS, 1945, pp. 1,144-1,148

23 Dobbs, p. 60

to find a word to replace "trusteeship," saying that the Korean translation reminded people of the Japanese occupation.[24] Syngman Rhee, who returned in the fall of 1945 to ally himself with the KDP, and another, more conservative rightist, Kim Ku, consolidated their respective parties under the dual-planked platform of condemnation of trusteeship, but support for the occupation government.

Arrayed against the occupation government were the Communists and various other leftist parties. The Communists, too, condemned the trusteeship agreement, but they also had other grievances against the occupation. Among other things, they condemned the US for its policy of minimal redistribution of land seized by the Japanese and no punishment for collaborators. The Communists called for execution of "land to the tiller" policies which placed peasants in ownership of the land they worked. The Communists also accused the US of withholding agricultural profits in order to finance the occupation. Confronting such opposition in the south, the US began negotiations with the Soviets in an attempt to establish a favorable relationship between the US and the Soviets, preparing for the day when the four powers would administer a trusteeship over Korea.

In January and February of 1946, the occupational government and the Soviets met at the Joint Conference to discuss differences relating to utilities, communication and rice. The US wanted the Soviets to supply electrical power and coal. The US also requested a resumption of communications and transportation services to the

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[24] Dobbs, p. 65

south, some of which had been cut off in the past months. The Soviets, in turn, made demands for large quantities of rice which they believed the US was hoarding in the south. Such caches did not exist, but the occupation government could not make the Soviets understand this. Neither side would relent and the negotiations broke down after only 20 days. During the abortive talks, the State Department sent a wire to SCAP advising that the occupation should move away from Kim Ku and his ultra-conseravative politics which were felt to be too resistant to change for the good of the occupation. It was also suggested that the US move away from supporting Rhee in keeping with the policy of non-recognition.[25]

On March 20, 1946 the Joint Commission, composed of American and Soviet delegates, convened to choose groups of Koreans who would eventually make up an advisory committee to assist in the creation of a provisional government. Langdon reported in a March 19 cable that many of the political parties were preparing for the upcoming meetings. He wrote that the leftists were moving closer to the Central People's Government, a Communist organization, in order to make themselves more appealing to the Soviets.[26] At the other end of the spectrum, the Korean Representative Democratic Council continued to advise the USAFIK as it had since February 14, 1946, with conservative Rhee as Chair and the more moderate Kim Ku as Secretary General. The membership of the Council was dominated by the conservatives, who held 24 of the 28 seats. The gap between these two groups in particular and among the various

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[25] FRUS, 1946, pp. 645-646
[26] FRUS, 1946, pp. 648-652

other factions in Korea proved too great to overcome and the Joint Commission convened on May 8 without any resolution of the situation in Korea.

While the US was closing down yet another leftist paper, this time for "implication in [a] counterfeiting ring,"[27] members of the far left and right were working to accomplish that which the US and the Soviets could not: plans for a provisional government as per the Moscow Agreement of December 1945. Koreans were greatly disappointed that the superpowers could not could not come to any kind of agreement, so the indigenous political leaders made an attempt to succeed where outsiders had failed. In early July of 1946, the right and left exchanged proposals for a provisional government. The left submitted the following planks to the right:

1) acceptance of the Moscow Agreements
2) land reform, nationalization of important industries, democratic labor laws and political freedom for opposition parties
3) elimination of pro-Japanese government members; release of political prisoners
4) administration of Korea by the People's Committees
5) opposition to the legislative body in the military government.[28]

The unity talks were not successful, however, due in part to the return of Pak Heun Yong from the northern capital Pyongyang. Pak warned delegates not to "play the American game," addressing those

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[27] FRUS, 1946, p. 705
[28] FRUS, 1946, p. 723

who worked with the US occupation forces.[29] To the Americans, it appeared that Pak had become more belligerent after his trip to the north. Whatever Pak's motivation, his words served to highlight the differences among the various factions, and the Korean attempt at cooperative government failed.

North of the 38th parallel, the Korean Communists, under the direction of Kim Il-sung, were taking an active part in the regulation of their own affairs. The Communist party was able unite mine workers and mill workers who were glad to finally have the opportunity to have some degree of control over their respective workplaces. Farmers benefitted from the Communist rule due to the Soviet return of land to the peasants. Under Japanese colonial rule, the laborers and farmers had not been allowed to contribute to any of the daily administrative details. The Communist system encouraged participation in decision-making, task assignation and other governmental necessities.

William Langdon reported on August 23 that such progressive policies were known to the Koreans below the 38th parallel and it caused them to resent the Americans. Langdon also said that control of the factories and land was difficult on the "unfortunate conservative and propertied classes" in the north.[30] He wrote that this perceived difference in the treatment of workers in the north and south was one of the primary reasons for the division of the country which was evident in all aspects of life. The unpopular US

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[29] FRUS, 1946, p. 722
[30] FRUS, 1946, p. 728

bureaucracy stripped Koreans of real power and continued the tradition of colonialism begun by the Japanese.

Korean frustrations reached their peak in the fall of 1946 as riots erupted throughout the south. The violence had its origins in a rail workers' strike over wages. Most of the south shut down from September 22 until roughly October 15, by which time most people had returned to work. The occupation armed forces could not stop the rioting completely, however, as attacks on the police and the Constabulary continued into November. Leftists did not halt sabotage on communication and transportation facilities, either. November 4 saw the first organized attack by leftists against US troops, as opposition members moved in force against the Seoul police headquarters and US forces there in an attempt to kill the police chief, who had proven very brutal in his dealings with leftists.[31] In October, a joint Korean/American conference met to determine the cause of the riots. The results were not surprising: hatred of the police and pro-Japanese collaborators was seen as the root of the disturbances.[32]

The reasons for Washington being able to say nothing in the way of advising the US occupation administration are twofold. First, after a year of occupation, the only people with practical knowledge of Korea were in Korea. Also, Washington had accepted the *status quo* in Korea since March of 1946. A directive from the State Department dated March 20, 1946, describes the "primary" US

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[31] FRUS, 1946, p. 770-771
[32] FRUS, 1946, p. 773-775

objective in Korea as the creation of a stable, independent, democratic government capable of resisting Soviet influence.

> In the American view, freedom from Russian domination is more important than complete independence...Unless coerced by force, it is believed that Korea will, left to itself, orient itself toward the United States. [33]

The "secondary" objective for the US occupation was Korean independence. It was thought that it would not be in the best interests of the US for Korea to become independent within a few years unless the United Nations were to demonstrate the ability to prevent aggression.

This policy lay behind US actions throughout the final months of 1946. In February of 1947, the Special Inter-Departmental Committee on Korea sent its recommendations for US policy to the Secretaries of State and War. The committee's architects were J. Weldon Jones, Assistant Director in charge of the Fiscal Division, J.K. Penfield, Deputy Director, Office of Far Eastern Affairs and Major General Arnold. Their views differed from those of the previous policy. They advocated

1) a self-governing Korea "as soon as possible"

2) a national government, representative of the wishes of the people

3) a sound Korean economy[34]

The US would continue to state these objectives in all of its policy statements during the period of this study. The committee

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[33] Cumings, pp. 238-239

[34] FRUS, 1947, pp. 610-618

acknowledged that present programs were "ineffective" and would only lead to future involvement of US tactical forces in suppression of dissent.

The road out of the impending quagmire was not clear, either. In the collective opinion of the committee, immediate independence for Korea "would create new difficulties". Independence would appear as a failure of US foreign policy and a defeat in a head-to-head confrontation with the Soviets, who would then be able to sponsor the Korean Communists after the US left the peninsula. General Dwight Eisenhower, in January of 1947, had echoed this opinion saying that "in the long run the costs of our retreat from Korea would be far, far greater than any present or contemplated appropriations to maintain ourselves there."[35] The committee toyed with the idea of making the recognition of Korean independence conditional, contingent upon the continued presence of US troops on the peninsula. They realized, however, that the Koreans would not take kindly to US military forces remaining in their country. The committee advised that the US "initiate an aggressive, positive long-term program" with a pricetag of $250 million to be paid by the US government. They also suggested continued talks with the Soviets and a possible agreement in principle with the Soviet proposal for multilateral troop withdrawal from the peninsula.

While diplomats were recommending huge budgets for Korea, the Koreans were taking actions which caused Congress to doubt whether any further money should be sent. On January 20, 1947,

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35 Stueck, p. 75

the interim legislature passed a resolution condemning General Hodge for his policies in Korea. This was the crowning blow of a series of anti-American demonstrations, literature campaigns and speeches which had been prominent in Korean society during the preceding months.[36] These events all were aimed at expressing discontent with US policies and at calling for Korean independence. Even the man whom the occupation was sponsoring was not above working for Korean independence. In October, Rhee began a press campaign addressing the issue of Korean self-determination. Since January, Rhee had been attempting to convince Congress of the ineffectiveness of the occupation.[37]

Though Rhee was critical of US policy in Korea, he did not want the US to leave. Rhee recognized the great advantage which the north had over the south in terms of military might. As such, he was not so foolish or nationalistic as to call for the ouster of those who had provided his protection from invasion: the occupation forces. The political advisor assigned to Hodge, Joseph Jacobs, wrote in a February 10, 1948, cable that Rhee sought continued US aid in bolstering his armed forces. In addition, Rhee felt that the US had a "moral obligation" to leave troops in southern Korea after the establishment of a permanent government. A continued US troop presence would act as a deterrent to further Soviet expansion. He stated his opinion that he held Hodge personally responsible for the

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[36] Stueck, p. 76
[37] Stueck, p. 80

US policy in Korea and all of the problems which were the result of US occupation of the country.[38]

Though the USAFIK had previously acknowledged the failure of various policies, the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not ready to terminate the occupation because of the concern over Soviet expansion down the entire Korean peninsula. The Army felt that Korea was "of considerable strategic importance to the Soviet Union"[39] because of its geographic location. If the Soviets were to gain control of Korea, they would form an arc of Communism about the perimeter of Japan, the core of post-war US concerns in Asia. The US was investing a great deal of time, money and human resources in order to stabilize the Japanese archipelago as a bastion of democracy in northeast Asia. There was already a dispute between the Soviets and the Japanese over the Kurile Islands north of Hokkaido. Army planners felt that to allow the Soviets to encroach further on the latest US project would be detrimental to US security.

General Hodge had pushed during the preceding twelve months to have the State Department take responsibility for the occupation of Korea out of the hands of the Department of War. Hodge had echoed the opinion of US policymakers who suggested that the US continue to seek a settlement with the Soviets with respect to Korea. To resolve the Korean problem at the governmental level, rather than the grassroots level, had been the objective of the Moscow Foreign Ministers Conference of December, 1945. This conference

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[38] FRUS, 1948, pp. 1099-1103

[39] Stueck, p. 78

had provided for a multi-power trusteeship over Korea. US policymakers were happy with this agreement, seeing it as a means of resolution of the Korean problem above the level of indigenous Korean politics. This had been the course of action advised by many policymakers in the months since Moscow. The State Department was working on the Korean problem, of course, but they did not have ultimate authority with respects to policy on site.

Frustrated at all other turns to come up with a solution, the US finally referred the issue to the United Nations in September, 1947. The Soviets had proposed a withdrawal of all foreign troops on the peninsula. Occupation officials were aware that if this were to come to pass, the leftists would have a strong advantage in the ensuing power struggle due to the greater degree of popular support which they enjoyed. The US government felt that this would allow the Soviets to influence events on the Korean peninsula--a state of affairs which, as we have already seen, was unacceptable to US policymakers. On November 14, 1947, the UN accepted the US proposal and established the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK).

When UNTCOK first met on January 12, 1948, in Seoul, it was confronted with political conditions to which the occupation government had become accustomed. Rhee was making statements favoring zonal elections as soon as possible, a proviso in the 1945 Moscow agreement. Rhee began pushing for elections especially hard after UNTCOK was formed because his major opposition, the Communists in the south, had withdrawn themselves from consideration in any elections in protest to the formation of UNTCOK.

The Communists saw the UN commission as a desperate attempt by the US to maintain control over Korea. With the Communists out of the running, the other parties opposed to Rhee and the occupation spoke against elections, saying that they could not represent accurately the will of the Korean people. Kimm Kiu-sic, a moderate, proposed a joint meeting of Korean leaders from above and below the 38th parallel in an effort to create a government which would have the endorsement of the Korean people. This proposal was supported by UNTCOK, but was opposed by Rhee who wanted to limit the elections to the south, the area in which he had the most support. Hodge, however, expressed his opinion that this conference could not replace the elections which would determine the leaders of Korea.[40]

The elections were held on May 10, 1948, and only in the south, much to the liking of Rhee, who saw his conservatives win many of the 198 seats in the National Assembly. Though Rhee's supporters were successful, 85 of those people elected were elected as independents in an election in which 95% of the south voted. At the end of the month, Rhee was selected the chair of the body. Not until August 15 did Rhee officially assume power from the military government and it was then that the Republic of Korea was founded.

The US had allowed this election to take place as part of the policy articulated in NSC 8. Dated April 2, 1948, NSC 8 advised a course of action which would bring about the US withdrawal from Korea "as soon as possible with the minimum of bad effects." The objectives in Korea were to remain the same as they had been since

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[40] FRUS, 1948, pp. 1172-1174

the Special Inter-Departmental Committee on Korea made its recommendations in February, 1947. NSC 8 attributed the failure of US policy in Korea to the problem of occupation members being "handicapped by the political immaturity of the Korean people." In advocating a speedy withdrawal from the peninsula, NSC 8 also warned of a Soviet-dominated Korea which, as mentioned before, would pose a threat to US development of a friendly Japan. The US, the paper advised, should supply the Koreans with increased military and economic assistance to replace departing US soldiers. NSC 8 is a landmark document; it is an acknowledgement of failure by the US government to achieve its policy objectives in Korea.[41]

The situation in South Korea did not improve after the US occupation surrendered power to Rhee and the conservatives. On October 19, 1948, a South Korean army unit was sent to the city of Yosu in order to quell a leftist disturbance in southern Korea. The troops and their officers revolted, refusing to carry out any military action against the leftists. Their actions won them support from the people in the area, who saw the soldiers as resistance fighters working to overthrow the occupation from within. The movement began to spread until it was checked at the end of the month near the town of Sunchon.[42] Because of the violence, Rhee declared martial law in mid-November as a means of controlling the unruly populace.[43]

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41 FRUS, 1948, pp. 1163-1169
42 Hastings, pp. 38-40
43 Stueck, p. 103

In northern Korea, the political situation was not what the US had wished for, either. On September 9, 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established with Kim Il-sung as its leader. Kim was in the process of adopting the totalitarian methods and attitudes of his Soviet sponsors. Like most Koreans, Kim was very critical of occupation policies and actions. In a speech made at the 25th Meeting of the Central Committee of the Democratic National United Front of North Korea, Kim condemned the US for referring the Korean issue to the United Nations in place of letting Koreans work out a government for themselves. Kim said that the

> United States was afraid of exposure to the world of the actual conditions in South Korea, a lawless land where the police and terrorist groups run rampant under the rule of the US military government. [44]

Rhee also condemned UNTCOK for its part in the oppression of the Korean people, saying that the mission of the commission was "to cover up the colonial enslavement policies of the US imperialists in Korea."[45]

On December 12, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly ordered "that the occupying powers withdraw their armed forces from Korea as early as practicable."[46] Initially, the US continued to resist the directive for fear of further Soviet expansion into Korea. However, the government eventually was forced to acquiesce and plan for the withdrawal of troops. Secretary of State Dean Acheson

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[44] Kim, p. 5
[45] Kim, p. 7
[46] Stueck, p. 105

said in a March 18 communique that to leave US troops "on Korean soil for any longer than is necessary" would jeopardize the United Nations objectives.[47]

NSC 8/2, issued on March 22, 1949, called for the withdrawal of all US troops by June 30, except for those 500 members of the Korean Military Assistance Group. Because official US objectives in Korea had not changed, NSC 8/2 advocated the continued support of the Republic of Korea government as a bulwark against Communism in Asia. It was suggested that this support come in the form of economic, technical and military aid. This aid would continue as part of US policy until July, 1950, characteristic of a "hands-off" approach used in Asia. By November of 1949, failure of US policy in Korea and the "loss" of China to the CCP forced the State Department to accept the inability of the US to "influence events on the Asian mainland."[48]

Though the US was still concerned about the spread of Communism throughout East Asia, policymakers realized that it was beyond the scope of American power to enforce US ideas of government on Asians. As such, the US adopted an approach which sought to contain Communism using pro-US Asian governments funded with American dollars while simultaneously establishing a series of military bases along a perimeter about the mainland. From these bases, it was thought that US forces could rapidly deploy themselves to halt a Soviet-inspired Communist advance. In keeping with this principle, Japan was seen to be an excellent opportunity to actually build a government friendly to the wishes of the US. The

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[47] FRUS, 1949, p. 968

[48] Gaddis, "The Defensive Perimeter Concept, 1947-1951," in Borg, p. 66

defeat of Japan was so complete that the US had *carte blanche* in its reconstruction, giving them the ability to forbid other powers from establishing a foothold on the Japanese archipelago.

CONCLUSION

There are many parallels to be drawn between US policy in Korea and its policy in Vietnam after 1945. In both countries, the rationale for initial involvement centered around establishing a bulwark against the spread of what was perceived to be Soviet-inspired Communism. The US supported the French in their bid to maintain their colonial regime in Vietnam so as not to alienate an important ally whose assistance would be needed to contain Communism in Europe. In Korea, the US became interested in the country only after the Soviets had moved into the northern half of the peninsula in August, 1945. In both Korea and Vietnam, the US intervened ostensibly to improve the lot of Asian peoples and secure prosperity for them by allowing Asians to select their own governments. The reality of the situation, however, was such that Koreans and Vietnamese did not select their own governments, nor did their economic conditions improve.

Policies implemented by the US to achieve these ends served only to suppress the self-determination of East Asians by forcing puppet democracies upon the Koreans and Vietnamese. US aid to the French helped to prop up Vietnamese politicians with little or no popular support. In Korea, the US government itself was responsible for seeing that the minority conservative party achieve and maintain control over at least half of the country. In both Korea and Vietnam, the parties opposed to the puppet governments were eventually identified by the US as Communist, though both the leftists in Korea and the Vietminh in Vietnam after 1945 were moved to the far left

in the minds of US policymakers because of their anti-colonial, anti-imperialist nationalism.

In both Korea and Vietnam, the US was insensitive to the political realities of the time, ignoring the loud and constant cries for independence and, choosing, instead, to sponsor previous colonial governments which were widely known to have been despised by the indigenous peoples. The Korean occupation administration used not only the hated system of the Japanese, but also the actual Koreans who had collaborated with the Japanese colonial government. This proved to alienate the Korean people, who had worked to throw out Japanese colonialism for some fifty years. The US sponsored the French, who sought to reinstate their colonial government of nearly one-hundred years, a regime which, even in the eyes of many US policymakers, had been horribly oppressive.

The primary difference between US involvement in Korea and in Vietnam during the years 1945 to1949 was the extent of US presence in both countries. The US occupation forces were in Korea for the four years 1945 to1949, influencing the political, social and economic climates. With respect to Vietnam, only the professional bureaucrats of the US embassy and certain military officials attached to the embassy were actually in the country from 1945 to 1949.

Despite government claims to the contrary, official US policy in Korea and Vietnam from 1945-1949 was more concerned with the attainment of its own security objectives and the containment of what was seen by US policymakers as Soviet expansion than with allowing these East Asian peoples to choose their own forms of government. In carrying out actions designed to achieve the

establishment of democratic governments in Korea and Vietnam, the US government backed the French in their bid to reinstate their colonial government in Vietnam and left intact the oppressive colonial government of the Japanese. Therefore, the US propogated authoritarian systems of government akin to those which the Allies had fought during World War II.

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