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Syngman Rhee and the Vietnam War: South Korea's Attempt to Enter the First Indochina Conflict, 1954

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We must act now. Where can we act? We can act in the Far East. Ladies and gentlemen, the Korean front comprises only one small portion of the war we want to win – the war for Asia, the war for the world, the war for freedom on earth. Yet the Republic of Korea has offered you its twenty equipped divisions and the men to compose twenty more. A million and a half young Koreans ask for nothing better than to fight for the cause of human freedom, their honor and their nation.

Syngman Rhee, 1954¹

Although the Republic of Korea (ROK) would not become a major U.S. ally in the Vietnam War until 1965, the history of South Korea's interest in Indochina dates back to the mid 1950s. In 1954, less than a year after the signing of the Korean Armistice, South Korean President Syngman Rhee proposed sending ROK troops to aid the French in their fight against the Communist Vietminh. Although the United States eventually rejected Rhee's offer, top officials in Washington seriously considered the proposal on several occasions in 1954. This initial offer of assistance and subsequent U.S. refusal deserve closer scrutiny in light of President Lyndon Johnson's decision a decade later to reverse this policy and instead actively encourage and support the deployment of ROK forces to Vietnam. In addition, South Korean motives during this early period must be analyzed in order to better understand why Seoul was still eager and willing to dispatch its troops to Vietnam ten years later.

In November 1953 the French began construction of a military base at Dienbienphu, in the northwest corner of Vietnam. From this location they planned to launch a major offensive and force a showdown against the Communists in northern Indochina. The Vietminh responded in December by attacking French Union forces in Laos thereby cutting off and isolating the French garrison at Dienbienphu. Within a matter of months the Vietminh had amassed a sizable force, which surrounded the base and gradually began to tighten its grip. It was under these circumstances in early 1954 that President Syngman Rhee of South Korea, responding to a call for help issued by the Laotian Government, contacted U.S. officials and offered to dispatch at least one ROK division to northern Laos.²

On February 2, 1954 President Rhee contacted General John E. Hull, Commander in Chief, Far East Command, and United Nations Commander in Korea, and personally presented him with South Korea's troop proposal. Later that day General Hull sent a telegram to the

Department of the Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, which contained letters from Syngman Rhee and South Korean Prime Minister Paik Too Chin, formally offering one ROK division for Laos.³ According to Rhee, the situation in Indochina appeared critical and unless reinforcements arrived quickly the French position may become untenable. He also felt that this act would encourage other nations in Southeast Asia to stand up against Communist aggression and also demonstrate his country's sincere appreciation for all the aid provided by the United Nations since 1950.⁴ Although General Hull advised Rhee that his government should keep the proposal secret until the U.S. had a chance to study the issue, Seoul made the offer public before the Eisenhower administration had a chance to respond.⁵

Before American policy makers could debate the merits of Rhee's proposal the French Ambassador to the U.S., Henri Bonnet, contacted the State Department in Washington to express his government's concern. He made it clear to U.S. officials that neither the French nor the Vietnamese or Laotian governments had requested troops from President Rhee. Bonnet went on to assert that Rhee was simply offering them for his own political ends, and that France would probably never agree to the idea, since it might provoke large-scale Chinese intervention and turn Southeast Asia into another Korea.⁶ French officials in Saigon issued a similar statement the following day, and added that South Korea had never officially contacted them about the proposal either.⁷ Likewise, the Vietnamese press also expressed displeasure at the thought of intervention by outside powers, which they feared would enlarge rather than end the conflict. Citing articles in several local newspapers, American diplomats in Saigon informed the State Department that just the mere "suggestion of Korean troops for Indochina evoked a strong adverse reaction" among the local population.⁸

However the Eisenhower administration was not so quick to dismiss Rhee's suggestion. The idea of deploying ROK troops to Laos was a key topic of discussion at a February 17 meeting of the National Security Council (NSC). Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, began by presenting the views expressed by the various chiefs. First he stated that both General Hull and General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, believed that Rhee's proposal had merit.⁹ General Ridgway had initially suggested that the U.S. should inform President Rhee that it did not object to sending an ROK division to Laos as long as the French approved.¹⁰ Radford also noted that the U.S. would be obliged to transport the ROK division and provide logistic support for it, and that the material needed for the task was currently available in both Korea and Indochina. According to Radford, Admiral Robert B. Carney, Chief of Naval Operations, felt that if Rhee was serious, he should present his offer to the French, and not to the Government of Laos, which had originally appealed for assistance.¹¹

President Eisenhower took a more cautious approach. He indicated that because the deployment of ROK forces to Southeast Asia might provoke Communist China, the issue needed to be carefully studied before any decision was made. In addition, the President expressed his concern that the American public may not approve of an entire ROK division going "adventuring" outside of Korea, while the United States continued to maintain its forces on the peninsula. Finally, Eisenhower raised the possibility that if the U.S. transported and supplied a Korean division to Indochina, this may put the world on notice that America was now actively involved in the war.¹² Under Secretary of State, Walter Bedell Smith concluded the discussion by noting that President Rhee had also proposed increasing the number of ROK divisions from twenty to thirty-five. To many administration officials, the timing of Rhee's two proposals gave the appearance of a blatant *quid pro quo*.¹³ Although the President doubted that South Korea

could effectively support an army of 35 divisions, he instructed the Department of Defense to examine the issue. Eisenhower also ordered the NSC Planning Board to prepare a full report debating the merits of deploying ROK forces to Indochina, and he authorized General Hull to advise President Rhee that his offer was being considered at the highest levels in the United States Government.¹⁴

In accordance with the decision of the National Security Council, the Department of State, Department of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) each submitted a study to the NSC Planning Board examining South Korea's troop offer. The Department of State and the Department of Defense respectively analyzed the political and military aspects, while the DCI assessed the probable international reactions to ROK participation in the Indochina war.¹⁵ According to the report issued by the State Department, there were some political advantages to deploying ROK troops to Indochina. They felt that ROK participation in the Indochina conflict could serve as a concrete step toward advancing collective security measures among the free nations of Asia and might accelerate the formation of a regional security pact against Communist aggression in the region. On the other side of the coin, they also noted that the introduction of ROK forces might serve as a signal to the fifteen foreign UN nations with troops still in Korea to conclude that their contingents were not longer needed on the peninsula. The premature demobilization and redeployment of these units could seriously jeopardize South Korean Security. The State Department also pointed out that since the ROK military was largely trained, equipped, and supplied by the U.S., many nations would regard Seoul's presence in Indochina as indirect American participation in the conflict, and may possibly lead to a response from Communist China. The report concluded that on balance, the U.S. should reject the Republic of

Korea's offer because of the risk of expanded hostilities in the Far East, which may lead to possible American involvement.¹⁶

The studies submitted by the DCI and the Department of Defense also recommended the rejection of South Korea's troop proposal. The CIA's report, presented by the agency's director Allen Dulles, assessed both Communist and non-Communist reactions to the deployment of ROK forces against the Vietminh. U.S. intelligence sources estimated that France would almost certainly decline the South Korean initiative since they had consistently opposed the introduction of forces from outside the French Union, and to reverse this policy now would be regarded as a major blow to French prestige. Paris also feared that interjecting a foreign army into the fray might lead to a military response from Communist China. In analyzing the probable views of non-Communist countries in Asia, the CIA believed that most of them would be strongly opposed to the deployment of South Korean forces to Indochina. In addition to their distrust of President Rhee, many Asian nationalists and neutralists "would consider the ROK troops as U.S. mercenaries." Finally, U.S. intelligence asserted that the Communist nations would regard the commitment of ROK forces as essentially a U.S. rather than a South Korean undertaking and would exploit the unpopularity of this action by attacking Washington for trying to undermine the success of the forthcoming Geneva Conference.¹⁷

Based on the views of the Joint Chiefs, the Department of Defense concurred with the CIA and State Department that the military and political disadvantages of accepting the ROK's offer far outweighed the advantages.¹⁸ From a purely military perspective, the introduction of an ROK division would augment the French Union forces, and increase their capability to launch offensive operations against the Vietminh. If the South Korean forces performed well, it might even inspire the Vietnamese troops and demonstrate the effectiveness of U.S. training methods

and lead to their implementation by Vietnamese forces. Nevertheless the Chiefs ultimately decided against the proposal led by General Ridgway, who had initially supported Rhee's suggestion. Ridgway now feared that the presence of ROK troops in Laos would provide the Chinese Communists with an excuse to actively intervene in the conflict. American military leaders also recognized that the U.S. would have to shoulder the burden of transporting and providing logistical support to the South Koreans. Such being the case, they expressed concern that this may be viewed in some quarters of the globe as nothing more than the United States employing "hapless oriental puppets for the benefit of white imperialists." More importantly, the Chiefs argued that it would be difficult for the administration to explain and justify to the American public the transfer of an ROK division to Indochina while maintaining the position that U.S. ground forces were still required in Korea.¹⁹

On March 2, 1954 the NSC Planning Board submitted its recommendations to the National Security Council. Based on the following studies, the Planning Board concluded that most of the Free World would react adversely to ROK participation in the Indochina war, and that the geopolitical and military costs of such a decision were far too great. Therefore the Planning Board advised the NSC to reject Seoul's offer.²⁰ Two days later at the March 4th meeting of the National Security Council, President Eisenhower and his advisors accepted the board's recommendation. In addition, the President argued that public opinion in the United States would never support the removal of a South Korean division for action in other parts of the world while the U.S. still maintained its forces on the peninsula. The President added that he would hate to "have to explain such a situation to the mothers of American soldiers."²¹

On March 13 the Vietminh forces surrounding Dienbienphu launched a full assault against the French garrison. As the French strategic position rapidly deteriorated South Korean

Ambassador You Chan Yang met again with State Department officials in early April and reiterated South Korea's offer to supply one or two volunteer divisions to fight in Southeast Asia.²² The desperate military situation led some American and French officials to reexamine many of their strategic assumptions. The French Commissioner General in Indochina, Maurice Dejean, met with U.S. representatives at the Embassy in Saigon in April and acknowledged that Dienbienphu could only be saved through outside intervention. He also privately indicated that he personally did not exclude the possible use of South Korean divisions "in this theatre," although his government was firmly opposed to the use of either Nationalist Chinese or Japanese troops.²³ On April 12 1954, the Planning Board reevaluated the military situation in Southeast Asia and reversed its previous position. The Board now suggested that further consideration should be given to the possibility of employing one or two ROK divisions to Indochina at an appropriate time.²⁴ The following day at a meeting of the National Security Council, the question of deploying ROK forces to Indochina was once again brought up for discussion. However when President Eisenhower indicated his disapproval, the suggestion was once again dropped.²⁵

On May 7 Dienbienphu finally surrendered. With the Vietminh now controlling approximately ninety percent of North Vietnam, the French hoped to at least salvage their position in the South through negotiations at the forthcoming Geneva Conference. Hoping to secure greater gains at Geneva through continued success on the battlefield, the Vietminh stepped up their offensive against French forces in the weeks that followed.²⁶ Alarmed at the recent turn of events, President Rhee once again urged officials in Washington to support the deployment of ROK troops to Indochina.²⁷

At this point, the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs once again gave serious consideration to the merits of deploying two or three ROK divisions to Vietnam. Concerned that France's recent military setbacks might lead them to capitulate to Vietminh demands at Geneva, many U.S. policy makers were now more inclined to favor the South Korean proposal. They cited the fact that American equipment, organization and training had greatly enhanced the fighting capabilities of the ROK military. In addition, they also believed that there were significant psychological advantages involved in employing "Asiatic troops in an Asian war."²⁸ At the June 3 meeting of the National Security Council, Admiral Radford noted that French forces were tired and suffering from poor morale. He argued that under the present circumstances the use of South Korean troops might prove useful. Radford explained that ROK forces could be flown in with U.S. planes, and if nothing else, their mere presence might "add a spark of enthusiasm and spirit which was so desperately needed at the present time in Indochina."²⁹

Nevertheless some military leaders continued to express concern. In a report to Washington officials dated June 9, Lieutenant General Maxwell D. Taylor, the Commander of the United States Eighth Army in Korea provided his analysis on the ROK troop proposal. General Taylor objected to the plan because he felt that President Rhee would use the deployment of South Korean forces to Indochina as a pretext for demanding an increase in the size of the ROK military, something Rhee had been advocating for quite some time. The American commander also opined that ROK forces would probably not put up an adequate fight without U.S. advisers as far down as the regimental level.³⁰ Taylor's superior, General Hull, also made a similar point. He noted that American personnel would end up becoming involved in any South Korean operation because the United States would need to maintain some sort of

control over ROK forces and would probably have to provide essential combat and logistical support for them as well.³¹ For these reasons, the Department of Defense rejected the idea for a second time. They recognized that American advisers would have to accompany Korean troops, and the international community would construe the presence of even a few U.S. troops in Indochina as an act of overt intervention.³² However, the Eisenhower administration decided to keep its options open with regard to the future use of ROK troops in Indochina. On July 22 the National Security Council recommended that the proposal should “be kept under review in light of future developments.”³³

Although disappointed by America’s decision President Rhee hoped to convince U.S. policy makers of the need to maintain a strong and united front against Communism in Asia during his scheduled trip Washington in late July, 1954.³⁴ On July 28 he addressed a joint session of Congress and urged the American people to remain vigilant in their fight against international Communist aggression. To this end, Rhee advocated expanding the ROK military and creating an anti-Communist alliance in Northern Asia, which would include the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China. Because both nations had been excluded from preliminary talks on the future creation of a Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), Rhee felt that they, along with the United States, should form their own mutual defense organization the so-called NEATO (Northeast Asian Treaty Organization).³⁵ In addition, Rhee also asserted that Korea and Indochina would never have peace until the Chinese Communists were destroyed and Chang Kai-Shek’s government once again reinstated on the mainland.³⁶ To that end he advocated the invasion of North Korea and Red China by an army of two million South Korean and Nationalist Chinese troops supported by American air and naval forces.³⁷

It was precisely this attitude that concerned many U.S. policy makers and convinced some that Rhee probably had ulterior motives when he originally submitted his troop proposal. In fact several American officials who opposed deploying ROK forces to Indochina based their opinion on the belief that Rhee was secretly hoping to draw the United States and Communist China into the conflict in an attempt to renew the Korean War. For example the Joint Chiefs of Staff voted to reject the offer in part, because they feared it would provide President Rhee with an opportunity to exploit the situation to his own advantage. They concluded, “. . . it might be his hope that the transfer of a ROKA division to Indochina would lead to a renewal of hostilities in Korea.”³⁸ Some State Department officials echoed these remarks. Charles C. Stelle, a member of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, argued that Rhee favored internationalizing the war in Indochina “in the hope that such action would lead to the reopening of hostilities in Korea.”³⁹ A separate State Department report also noted that Rhee’s desire to liberate North Korea from Communist rule probably motivated him to propose sending ROK forces to Indochina. They theorized that the South Korean president actually wanted to widen the conflict to include the United States and Communist China in the hope of provoking the Communists on the Korean peninsula. In addition, the study also suggested that Rhee hoped to use the deployment of South Korean forces abroad in order to develop a stronger case for increasing the size of the ROK military.⁴⁰ Likewise, the CIA concluded that most Asian governments would oppose South Korean participation in Vietnam since “non-Communist Asia has a great distrust of Rhee and fears that he desires to provoke World War III in order to obtain his objectives in Korea.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, Rhee was able to exploit the international tension created by the First Indochinese War to extract some military concessions from the United States. One of Rhee’s

primary objectives during this period was to gain U.S. approval and financial support for the expansion of the ROK military. This became especially important to him once it became clear that the United States planned to scale back its military presence in South Korea.⁴² When viewed in this context, Rhee's troop proposal appears to have been motivated in part by a desire to use it as a pretext for demanding an increase in his armed forces. It's probably not a coincidence that his offer was made in connection with a Korean proposal to increase the number of ROK divisions from twenty to thirty-five.⁴³ During his trip to Washington, the South Korean President lobbied hard for a significant increase in the size of his military forces.⁴⁴ In the end, the United States agreed to a moderate increase in the overall size of the ROK armed forces for fiscal year 1955, by raising the total manpower ceiling from 697,500 men to 720,000. The U.S. also pledged \$700 million in economic and military assistance to the Republic of Korea for FY 1955, \$100 million more than had previously been planned, and agreed to develop an adequate South Korean reserve system, and expand ROK air, naval and marine forces.⁴⁵

After serious consideration and prolonged discussion, the Eisenhower administration ultimately rejected the deployment of ROK forces to Indochina in 1954. In addition to the obvious international and political risks involved in such a decision, the United States wisely remained suspicious of Rhee's motives. The South Korean president clearly hoped to use the war in Vietnam as a pretext to furthering his own domestic and foreign policy agenda. By entering the conflict Rhee hoped to secure additional American financial and military aid for the expansion of the ROK armed forces. The deployment of South Korean combat troops overseas would necessitate the strengthening of ROK forces on the peninsula to safeguard the country from a North Korean attack. Military involvement in Vietnam might also bring South Korea into a direct confrontation with Red China, thus providing the impetus for renewing the Korean War

and fulfilling Rhee's longtime dream of governing a united Korea. Interestingly enough, ten years later when the U.S. negotiated with South Korea to deploy military forces to South Vietnam, Seoul successfully extracted a huge package of military and economic concessions from Washington, which included the strengthening and modernization of the ROK armed forces.⁴⁶

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¹ President Syngman Rhee of the Republic of Korea in a speech before the U.S. Congress, July 1954. "Text of Rhee's Address to Congress," *New York Times*, 29 July 1954, sec. 1, p. 2.

² George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, second edition (New York, 1986), 28; The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Volume I, introduction by Terrence J. Gough, (Wilmington, Delaware, 1982), 358. This study was originally prepared as a top-secret document by the Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C. in 1955. It was declassified in April 1981 and subsequently published the following year.

³ Memorandum of Conversation, by Noel Hemmendinger of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, February 2, 1954, U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954* (Washington, D.C., 1982), 13, *Indochina*, p. 1013 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*, with appropriate year, volume and page number).

⁴ That same day, the South Korean Ambassador to the U.S., You Chan Yang, met with Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson and several other State Department officials in Washington and personally presented the ROK's position. Yang explained that although the ROK government understood that it had to be prepared to defend its own soil, it also believed that the fight against Communism in Indochina was the fight of all anti-Communist countries. Memorandum of Conversation, by Noel Hemmendinger of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, February 2, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1012-1013. Furthermore, Yang emphasized that his government firmly believed that the "advancing Communist tide" was "menacing all Asia," and that only united and concerted action could roll it back. Lindsey Parrott, "Rhee Tries New Tack To Challenge The U.N.: Offer of Troops to Indo-China Has as Aim to Expand War on Communists," *New York Times*, 14 February 1954, p. E7.

⁵ The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 358; U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*: Vol. 9, (Washington, D.C., 1971), 259.

⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Officer in Charge of French-Iberian Affairs (McBride), February 12, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1040-1041; Leviero, "Use of Rhee Troops to Fight In Indo-China Is Discussed," *New York Times*, 12 February 1954, sec. 1, p. 1. Tillman Durdin, "French in Indo-China Seek No Korean or U.S. Troops," *New York Times*, 14, February 1954, sec. 1, p. 1; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Officer in Charge of French-Iberian Affairs (McBride), February 12, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1040-1041; The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 369-370. Rene Pleven, the French Minister of National Defense, expressed a similar view when he met with U.S. Senators Styles Bridges (R -New Hampshire) and Stuart Symington (D - Missouri) on March 4, 1954. When questioned by Bridges and Symington about his views on the Korean offer Pleven remarked

that “they would undoubtedly be at least matched by Chinese forces.” See, The Charge in France (Achilles) to the Department of State, March 5, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1096.

⁷ Tillman Durdin, “French in Indo-China Seek No Korean or U.S. Troops,” *New York Times*, 14, February 1954, sec. 1, p. 1. In an official release dated February 12, the Republic of Korea explained that the offer was made in response to two urgent appeals signed by cabinet ministers of the Laotian Government. However according to the American Legation in Vientiane, the only appeals were that made were two general ones issued in May and December of 1953, in which the government of Laos had simply asked for the sympathy and help of the Free World. Attachment A: Political Aspects of Proposed ROK Offer of Troops to Laos (Prepared by the Department of State), undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: “NSC 5416,” Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library [hereafter cited as Eisenhower Library], 1.

⁸ The Charge at Saigon (McClintock) to the Department of State, March 10, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1101-1102. An analysis conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency assessing probable international reaction to ROK participation in the Indochina war reached a similar conclusion. The CIA concluded that although the introduction of South Korean forces into the conflict “would be regarded with mixed feelings in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia . . . we believe that official and unofficial sentiment would be preponderantly against the ROK commitment.” See, Attachment C: Central Intelligence Agency: Memorandum for Executive Secretary National Security Council; Subject: CIA Assessment of Reactions to ROK Participation in the Indochina War, undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: “NSC 5416,” Eisenhower Library, 12.

⁹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1054-1055.

¹⁰ The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. 1, 358-359.

¹¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1055.

¹² Planning Board Note, February 17, 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library Reference Collection of Miscellaneous Document Copies From Unprocessed Collections or Obtained From Other Institutions, box 1, folder: “Planning Board Notes,” Eisenhower Library; Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1055. Also see, George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 42.

¹³ McT. Kahin, *Intervention*, 42; Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1055. On January 22, 1954 South Korean Prime Minister Paik Too Chin sent a letter to Robert T. Stevens, U.S. Secretary of the Army, and requested American assistance for organizing an additional fifteen to twenty ROK divisions, as well as an increasing in the size of the South Korean air force and navy. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1953-1954*, Volume V, preface by Robert J. Watson, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1986), 235. This volume was originally completed and issued in classified version by the Historical Division of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1970.

¹⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1055-1056.

¹⁵ Memorandum by the Executive Secretary (Lay) to the National Security Council, March 2, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15, p. 1754-1755.

¹⁶ Attachment A: Political Aspects of Proposed ROK Offer of Troops to Laos (Prepared by the Department of State), undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: "NSC 5416," Eisenhower Library.

¹⁷ Attachment C: Central Intelligence Agency: Memorandum for Executive Secretary National Security Council; Subject: CIA Assessment of Reactions to ROK Participation in the Indochina War, undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: "NSC 5416," Eisenhower Library.

¹⁸ Memorandum by the Executive Secretary (Lay) to the National Security Council, March 2, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15, p. 1755.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*: Vol. 9, (Washington, D.C., 1971), 259-263. Reprinted here is a full copy of the memo prepared by the Joint Chiefs for the Secretary of Defense on the consideration of the ROK's offer to send a division to Indochina, dated March 1, 1954. General Ridgway's sudden reversal is explained in The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 359.

²⁰ Memorandum by the Executive Secretary (Lay) to the National Security Council, March 2, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 15, p. 1755.

²¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 187th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, March 4, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1756-1757; The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 359-360.

²² "Rhee Urges Unity On Asian Defense: South Korean President Asks Eisenhower to Establish New Military Group," *New York Times*, 11 April 1954, sec. 1, p. 13.

²³ The Charge at Saigon (McClintock) to the Department of State, April 24, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 13, p. 1399-1400.

²⁴ Memorandum for the Vice President; Subject: Expansion of Republic of Korea Forces, April 12, 1954, White House Office, National Security Council Staff Papers, Special Staff File Series, box 9, folder: "Memos for the Vice President," Eisenhower Library.

²⁵ Memorandum of Discussion at the 193^d Meeting of the National Security Council, Tuesday, April 13, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1785-1787.

²⁶ James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945 to 1990* (New York, 1991), 44-47; William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part I: 1945-1960* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986) 214-215, Herring, *America's Longest War*, 34-37.

²⁷ The Ambassador in Korea (Briggs) to the Department of State, July 10, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1832. In addition to his official correspondence to Washington urging them to sign off on his troop proposal, Rhee also issued public statements to Western reporters in South Korea indicating that his government was prepared to send ROK forces to Indochina "at a moment's notice" to aid in the fight against Communist aggression. See for example, *New York Times*, 16 June 1954, sec. 1, p. 4.

²⁸ McT. Kahin, *Intervention*, 42; The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 421. Earlier General Hull had publicly expressed a similar sentiment. After meeting with President Eisenhower on February 11, Hull remarked to reporters that he believed there might be some advantages to South Korean participation in the Indochinese conflict, citing the fact that "one Asiatic country would be going to the assistance of another." Anthony

Leviero, "Use of Rhee Troops to Fight In Indo-China Is Discussed: Gen. Hull Sees Advantage in Asians' Aid to Asians – Permission Unlikely," *New York Times*, 12 February 1954, sec. 1, p. 1.

²⁹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 200th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, June 3, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 13, p. 1660-1661.

³⁰ Memorandum for the Record, by Walter Treumann of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, June 9, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1804-1805.

³¹ Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense: Subject: Consultations with Rhee, July 20, 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President (Ann Whitman File), Administration Series, box 40, folder: "Wilson, Charles E. Secretary of Defense 1954 (3)," Eisenhower Library, Appendix, 4.

³² The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 421.

³³ Memorandum of Discussion at the 207th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, July 22, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 13, p.1867.

³⁴ Rhee's interest in preventing the spread of Communism in East Asia and his desire for South Korea to play a more active role in Asian regional affairs led him to sponsor and host the first Asian People's Anti-Communist League in 1954. The conference met in South Korea from June 5 through the 18, and included representatives from nine Asian nations, including Vietnam. Rhee hoped to establish an Asian treaty organization that would create what he termed "anti-communist crusaders," to combat Communist aggression throughout Asia. Although the conference failed to construct an Asian mutual security system, Rhee continued to actively promote the idea to U.S. and Asian leaders for the remainder of the decade. James L. Morrison, and Chin-Ha Suk, "South Korea's Participation in the Vietnam War: A Historiographical Essay," *Korea Observer*, 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1987), 276; "Anti-Reds Of Asia Convening In Seoul," *New York Times*, 2 June 1959, sec. 1, p. 17.

³⁵ The United States opposed including South Korea and Nationalist China in SEATO for a number of reasons. First the United States argued that South Korea was not geographically located in Southeast Asia, and secondly, the United States already had a mutual defense treaty with South Korea. Finally, the U.S. also feared that including these two nations in the defense pact might provoke Communist China. For Eisenhower's response to the question of including South Korea in SEATO, see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954*, Item # 168, The President's News Conference of July 21, 1954, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 645.

³⁶ "Text of Rhee's Address to Congress," *New York Times*, 29 July 1954, sec. 1, p. 2. For a summary of Rhee's meeting with President Eisenhower see, Hagerty Diary, July 27, 1954, *FRUS*, 15, p. 1839-1847. For a discussion of Rhee's ideas for a mutual defense organization centering on Northeast Asia, see Kyudok Hong, "Unequal Partners: ROK-US Relations During the Vietnam War," (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1991), 93-95.

³⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1953-1954*, Vol. V, 239.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*: Vol. 9, 261; The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954*, Vol. I, 359.

³⁹ Memorandum by Charles C. Stelle to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Bowie), March 31, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 13, p. 1197. A report issued by the National Security Council in April 1954 also made a similar argument. It noted that the ROK would welcome U.S. intervention in Indochina, in the "hope that this would lead to general war between the United States and Communist China. President Rhee, in particular, might be tempted to believe that his chances of involving the United States in a renewal of Korean hostilities were greatly enhanced." U.S. Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States*

Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Volume I, Senator Gravel edition (Boston, 1971), 469 (hereafter cited as *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel edition, with appropriate volume and page number).

⁴⁰ Attachment A: Political Aspects of Proposed ROK Offer of Troops to Laos (Prepared by the Department of State), undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: "NSC 5416," Eisenhower Library, 1.

⁴¹ Attachment C: Central Intelligence Agency: Memorandum for Executive Secretary National Security Council; Subject: CIA Assessment of Reactions to ROK Participation in the Indochina War, undated, Records of White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (OSANSA), NSC Series, Policy Papers, Subseries, box 10, folder: "NSC 5416," Eisenhower Library, 13.

⁴² The 208th meeting of the NSC discussed American plans to redeploy some of its forces from South Korea, see, Memorandum of Discussion at the 208th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, July 29, 1954, *FRUS*, 15, p. 1851-1853; Talk of reducing U.S. troop levels in South Korea worried Rhee and other ROK civil and military leaders who feared being abandoned by the United States and hence, more vulnerable to a Communist attack. However, Rhee did make it clear to American military commanders in Korea that he would not object to the withdrawal of some UN Forces as long as additional ROK units were created. For a discussion of U.S. redeployment plans and Rhee's reaction, see, The Chief of the Mission to the Far East (Van Fleet) to the Secretary of Defense (Wilson), July 3, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1819-1821; The Commander in Chief, Far East (Hull) to the Chief of Staff, United States Army (Ridgway), July 5, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1822-1825.

⁴³ McT. Kahin, *Intervention*, 42; Memorandum of Discussion at the 185th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-1954, 13, p. 1055.

⁴⁴ Unfortunately for Rhee, U.S. policymakers found his suggestion of 35 ROK divisions as "preposterous." Memorandum for the Record, by Walter Treumann of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, June 9, 1954, *FRUS*, 15, p. 1805. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred, noting that South Korea lacked the manpower and economic resources needed to sustain such a huge force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1953-1954*, Vol. V, 235.

⁴⁵ The size of the ROK Army had grown steadily throughout the Korean War from ten divisions in 1950 to twenty by the end of the conflict. Eisenhower finally capped the ROK Army at twenty divisions and set a total personnel ceiling for all ROK forces at 697,500 in 1953: Army=655,000; Navy=10,000; Marine Corps=23,500; Air Force=9,000. These figures can be found in The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1953-1954*, Vol. V, 233. As a result of the Eisenhower – Rhee meeting, the new figures for the ROK military were increased as follows: Army=661,000; Navy=15,000; Marine Corps=27,500; Air Force=16,500; this represented a total overall increase of 22,500 men. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: 1953-1954*, Vol. V, 242-243; The Department of the Army to the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (Hull), September 15, 1954, Appendix B: Republic of Korea Force Levels for Fiscal year 1955 and United States Support Thereof, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 15, p. 1878.

⁴⁶ For more on the financial and military benefits South Korea received in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of dispatching its forces to Vietnam, see Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 1994); Kil J. Yi, "The U.S. – Korean Alliance in the Vietnam War: The Years of Escalation, 1964-1968," in *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, edited by Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, 2000), 154-175; Morrison and Suk, "South Korea's Participation in the Vietnam War,"; Frank Baldwin, "America's Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7, no. 4 (October – December 1975), 33-40; Joon-Young Park, "The Political and Economic Implications of South Korea's Vietnam Involvement, 1964-1973," *Korea and World Affairs* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1981), 471-489; Princeton N. Lyman, "Korea's Involvement in Vietnam," *Orbis* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1968), 563-581; Se Jin Kim, "South Korea's Involvement in Vietnam and Its Economic and Political Impact," *Asian Survey* 10, no. 6 (June 1970), 519-532; Sungjoo Han, "South Korea's Participation in the Vietnam Conflict: An Analysis of the U.S.-Korean Alliance," *Orbis* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1978), 893-912.