

Paramilitary Politics under the USAMGIK and the Establishment of the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

With Liberation, the Korean peninsula was full of revolutionary waves. Against the will of Korean people, however, the USA that occupied South Korea and created the USAMGIK tried to maintain the status quo and build a bulwark against the communist USSR in South Korea. To accomplish its policy, the USAMGIK found the rightist paramilitary youth organizations necessary for illegal missions to smash their rivals by violence that it could not perform by legal method. The USAMGIK and the Rhee-KDP group supported and encouraged the rightist paramilitary youth corps to exercise their violence without any restrictions. By this method, the United States and the Rhee-KDP group finally succeeded in establishing a divided government, the ROK, in South Korea. There remained two features in South Korea. One was the division and the other was a reactionary and anticommunistic Cold War country waiting for the Korean War.

Keywords: paramilitary politics, USAMGIK, rightist paramilitary youth organizations, Cold War, Korean War

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Introduction

When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the USSR occupied the part of the Korean peninsula north of the 38th parallel while the USA occupied the southern part. In the U.S. occupation zone, the United Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK) established the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), which ruled southern Korea from its landing on September 1945 to its transfer of control to the ROK in August 1948. During this important era, Korean political groups contested each other sharply to take leading roles in establishing their new country.

A significant phenomenon arose in this vital process that pushed the political situation to the brink of ruin: the “illegal” paramilitary politics led by both rightist and leftist youth organizations closely related to political forces. Party politics became paralyzed and paramilitary politics took their place. Syngman Rhee and the Korean Democratic Party (KDP) made the most effective use of this ruinous situation. They encouraged and utilized rightist paramilitary youth organizations as their vanguard to win the political struggle against their rivals.

The intent of this study is to analyze the interrelationship between paramilitary politics under the USAMGIK and the establishment of the ROK. Three questions can be raised and answered herein. First, by whom and for what reasons was the normal party political system replaced by the abnormal paramilitary political system under the USAMGIK? Second, how did paramilitary politics come to function; namely, which political groups benefited by the situation, and what did they do to promote this situation? Third, how can the nature of the ROK be defined? These questions can be addressed by examining at each stage the origins and growth of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations and their detailed activities.

The Incipient Stage (August 1945–December 1945)

With liberation, the Korean peninsula was a tumult of revolutionary waves. Koreans wanted socioeconomic changes by liquidating Japanese colonial legacies. This revolutionary fervor was faithfully reflected in politics. At first, the revolutionaries dominated the political scene by winning the Korean people's favor. The Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI), led by Yeo Un-hyeong, came to prominence. People in the whole country spontaneously organized people's committees and these became CPKI branches within ten days of liberation. The CPKI was not a communist organization, but rather a kind of national coalition that included all political forces except the pro-Japanese Koreans.¹ It soon evolved into the Korean People's Republic (KPR). From 15 August, when Korea was liberated, until 8 September, when the U.S. Army first landed in southern Korea, the CPKI ruled the extent of the country. It virtually exercised its sovereignty in the region.

In this revolutionary atmosphere, the United States occupied South Korea and created a military government. The United States, however, had no proper information on or long-term plan for the occupation of Korea.² Given the turbulent climate, it was hardly surprising that John R. Hodge, the Commanding General of the USAFIK, from the outset placed a premium on the maintenance of law and order in South Korea.³

The USAMGIK only acted according to the Cold War logic. It tried to foster its partners, Syngman Rhee as well as the pro-Japanese

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1. Hong In-suk, "Geonjun-ui jojik-gwa hwaldong" (The Structure and Activity of the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence), *Haebang jeonhusa-ui insik* (Recognitions of History before and after Liberation), vol. 2 (Seoul: Hangilsa Publishing Co., 1985), p. 105.
 2. James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941–1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. 50; Grant E. Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, Columbia University, 1951), p. 225. Meade analyzed that the United States occupation of South Korea proved to be a fatal "operation trial and error."
 3. Matray, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

KDP group, whom most Koreans wanted to eliminate, to maintain the status quo and build a bulwark in South Korea against the USSR. Naturally, members of the KDP held the highest bureaucratic positions in the USAMGIK, including the Korean National Police (KNP). In its incipient stage, however, it was very difficult for the USAMGIK and its partners to overcome the overwhelming revolutionary fever of the Korean people.

Backgrounds

The first youth organization appeared in South Korea on 16 August, the day after Liberation. Yeo Un-hyeong instructed Jang Gwon to organize the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence Youth Security Group (CPKIYSC) in order to overcome the chaos that came as a result of liberation's abruptness. Jang mobilized about 2,000 youths and students to maintain public security in Seoul and sent over 200 to the countryside to organize local branches.⁴ The organization created over 140 local branches by 25 August.⁵ Regardless of their political inclinations, all youth groups worked together under the name of the CPKIYSC.

After the USAFIK landed in South Korea and the KDP began to muster rightist political forces, however, the youth movement began to split into right and left wings. Rightists began to encourage and use the rightist paramilitary youth organizations to compete against the powerful leftists. The rightist factions used the paramilitary both passively to protect themselves from leftist attacks and actively as a means of political propaganda and violence against leftists.

Most leaders of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations had fervent political ambitions. Though they were too young to have had any certain political experience to bolster their authority, they sought an active role in establishing a new nation. They wanted to translate

4. Song Nam-heon, *Haebang samnyeonsa* (Three Years' History after Liberation), vol. 1 (Seoul: Kachi Publishing Co., 1985), p. 391.

5. "Gunjeong gyeongchal 28" (National Police Division of the USAMGIK 28), *Kyunghyang Daily News*, 15 February 1977.

their leadership of paramilitary youth into rightist political authority. Eventually, after the Rhee regime was established, many of these youth organization leaders became political leaders in the ROK.

On the other hand, the rank and file of the youth organizations were recruited from the unemployed. At the time of Liberation, Japanese war industries ended abruptly and the unemployment swept through the country. Numerous returnees from abroad made the situation more difficult. They had no prospects for the future. Thus joining the rightist paramilitary youth organizations presented them with answers to their problems, for it provided them with means for making a living as well as a cause for participating in nation building.

Youths from North Korea were another important factor. According to the ROK Ministry of National Defense, from September 1945 to January 1948, about 803,000 refugees came from North Korea.⁶ These may be divided into “negative refugees” and “positive refugees.”⁷ The former came to South Korea to study or to find work while the latter fled North Korea for their anticommunistic inclinations. Many of the positive refugees became members of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. Most of them were middle-class youths who escaped North Korea as the communists took power in the region. They called themselves “experimental anticommunists” and formed the most aggressive anticommunist rightist paramilitary youth organizations, ultimately organizing a strong corps, the Northwest Youth Association (NWYA), on 30 November 1946.

Initial Activities

On 29 September 1945, the first rightist paramilitary youth organiza-

6. Daehan Minguk Gukbangbu Jeonsa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe (Republic of Korea, War History Publishing Committee of the Ministry of National Defense), *Haebang-gwa geon-gun* (Liberation and the Establishment of the Army), vol. 1 of *Hanguk jeonjaengsa* (History of the Korean War) (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea, 1967), p. 81.

7. Yi Gyeong-nam, *Bundan sidae-ui cheongnyeong undong* (Youth Movements in the Age of Division), vol. 1 (Seoul: Samseong Idea Gongmo-guk, 1989), p. 145.

tion, the Korean Young Men's Association for National Construction (KYMANC), was formed. Numerous other rightist paramilitary youth organizations were created subsequently but it proved difficult for any of them to challenge the leftists who had their own strong youth corps, the General Alliance of Joseon Youth (GAJY).

To compete with the GAJY, some KDP leaders like Yun Bo-seon⁸ and Yu Jin-san⁹ tried to form a large coalition of rightist paramilitary youth organizations.¹⁰ On 21 December, their efforts found fruit and the General Alliance of Young Men for Korean Association of Independence (GAYMKAI), composed of 43 organizations, was established. Jeon Jin-han¹¹ was the leader and Syngman Rhee and Kim Gu were made president and vice-president.

Most rightist paramilitary youth organizations that were formed thereafter had Rhee and Kim as their political leaders. As a matter of fact, all the rightists enthusiastically welcomed the return of rightist nationalist Kim Gu and the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) group. Even the Rhee-KDP group wanted to approach Kim. For only by cooperating with the Kim-KPG group could the Rhee-KDP group conceal its reactionary character and certify its rightist nationalist guise.

Growth Stage

Anti-trusteeship Stage (December 1945–May 1946)

The year 1946 began with an earthshaking event in South Korea. Soon after the Moscow Conference in December 1945, Koreans came to know of the trusteehip plan for their country. Koreans unanimously opposed it seeking as they did a unified and independent

8. He later succeeded Rhee as president of the ROK.

9. He later became the president of the largest opposition party in Park Chung-hee period.

10. Seonu Gi-song, *Hanguk cheongnyeon undongsa* (History of Youth Movements in Korea), 2d ed. (Seoul: Geummunsa, 1976), pp. 652-657.

11. He later became the first Minister of Social Affairs in the Rhee regime.

country. The main force that led the anti-trusteeship movement was the Kim-KPG group. On 31 December 1945, it tried to usurp the power of the USAMGIK but after Kim Gu met Hodge on 1 January 1946, he gave up the nationalistic coup bid. Kim suffered “a serious loss of face” from which he and the KPG never really recovered.¹² Naturally, the Rhee-KDP group took over the initiative in the anti-trusteeship movement, shifting the nature of movement from Kim-KPG group’s rightist nationalism to Rhee-KDP group’s anticommunism.

This change in leadership of the anti-trusteeship movement gave the Rhee-KDP group an enormous boost. Leftists and moderates that supported the trusteehip plan could not overcome anti-trusteeship fever of the Korean people; subsequently, they began to lose support of those who had not yet aligned themselves with any of the organizations. On the contrary, the Rhee-KDP group began to take advantage of the situation to the utmost and began to attack leftists and middle-of-the-roaders as “antinationalists” who wanted to sell their country to the USSR.

To overcome the crisis, on 15 February the leftists and moderates formed a coalition named the Democratic National Front (DNF) and a related new youth corps, the Joseon Democratic Youth Alliance (JDYA). At the same time, the rightist paramilitary youth organizations, to continue to make the most of this situation, began to challenge leftists and established such large organizations as the Korean Young Men’s Association (KYMA), the Korean Rehabilitation Young Men’s Association (KRYMA), the Korean Democratic Youth Alliance (KDYA), and the Youth League for National Society for Acceleration of Korean Independence (YLNSAKI). Among these, two major organizations were closely related to the Rhee-KDP group. The first was the YLNSAKI. As the name implies, it was the only rightist paramilitary youth organization officially subordinated to Rhee’s political party, the National Society for Acceleration of Korean Independence

12. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945–1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 220–221.

(NSAKI). As the NSAKI extended its power to local areas, it also enlarged its power in direct proportion. For this reason, it had most local branches nationwide among the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. As it was a subsidiary organization of the NSAKI, its most important missions were mobilizing and guiding audiences and guarding meetings of the NSAKI.¹³ Therefore, its members were called Rhee's "royal guards."¹⁴

The other was the KDYA, led by Yu Jin-san and Kim Du-han. Kim had been the notorious leader of an organized crime syndicate during the Japanese colonial period. After he became the KDYA's Inspection Committee Chief, he mobilized his 600 subordinates to form a "Special Squad" of the KDYA. In line with its criminal roots, the squad stood at the forefront by crushing leftist movements by force.

The Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) produced a long report on a murder case involving Kim Du-han:

. . . In this instance, CIC took pains to secure the punishment of the men who had committed a crime while fighting an enemy that also was the America's rival, communism. . . . Kim's best friend was another young thug named Chung Chin Yong [*sic*] Kim and Chung were legal terrorists and informants for the Japanese. When they saw their position dissolved with the end of the war, they became unemployed thugs, and consequently gathered up their youth group and hired out as strong arms in short notice for political parties. The only trouble was that Chung took his Chosun Chun Wi Dai [*sic*] (Korean Advance Guard) to work for the South Korea Labor Party and Kim hired out to the party of the rightist, Chang Duk Soo [*sic*]. . . . In April 1947, . . . Chung Chin Yong and his thugs had been called upon to distribute pamphlets denouncing Rhee as a gangster and self-interested politician. On 20 April, Kim sent out some of his men to pick up the men distributing the anti-Rhee literature. . . . They had rounded up thirteen leftists, including

13. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Chung, . . . He asked his old friend to recant, but Chung refused. Kim administered another blow which apparently started an internal hemorrhage, and soon Chung was dead. . . . On 26 June 1947, the members of the KDYA were brought to trial in the Seoul District Court. . . . Completely ignoring the statements of the victims and the judge and jury maintained that there was insufficient evidence of the murder. Kim Doo Whan [*sic*] was fined the equivalent of the two cartons of cigarettes on the black market. . . . The incident pointed up the fact that with the right political backing, in Korea one could get away with almost anything. . . . During the interrogation. . . . CIC had quite a problem with their interpreters, who were all of rightist sympathies. . . . The feeling seemed to be that as long as Kim was a rightist, CIC should let him go without investigation. . . . General Hodge then ordered retrial before a Military Commission, . . . Kim was given a death sentence which was commuted to life imprisonment by General MacArthur . . . by 15 August 1948, Korea was a sovereign nation under the Rhee government. Early in April 1948, shortly afterward, Kim was freed. . . . After the Korean War, Kim Doo Whan [*sic*] became the Chief of the Investigation Section of the Korean Youth Corps and the personal bodyguard of Syngman Rhee.¹⁵

It is clear from this report that the Korean National Police (KNP) and the USAMGIK had close relations with the KDYA. First, the CIC expressed its “pains” to punish Kim Du-han who was fighting for “America’s rival.” Second, the case involved two “old friends” who belonged to different ideological youth corps. The only reason for Kim to kill Jeong was to protect Rhee from the latter’s criticisms. Third, the Korean judicial system and Korean interpreters within the Rhee-KDP membership unilaterally sided with Kim to issue an irrational judgment. Fourth, the USAMGIK conducted a retrial and gave Kim a death sentence. According to the CIC, this was a case in which the USAMGIK sought justice even for its political opponents.¹⁶ How-

15. US Army Intelligence Center, *History of the Counter Intelligence Corps, Vol. XXX: CIC During the Occupation in Korea* (March 1959), pp. 92-96.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

ever, if we trace Kim's political career thereafter, it is evident that the case only helped him to further his career as a rightist politician and eventual member of the National Assembly in the 1960s.¹⁷

Another CIC report on this case further illustrates the relationship between the Rhee-KDP group, the USAMGIK, and the KDYA. Here is a CIC translation of a handbill distributed by the KDYA:

So until now . . . has acted with the assistance and cooperation of A.M.G. and National Police (especially with the CIC), . . . The inauspicious event . . . is not one which the KDYA did individually, but . . . with the consent of national police. . . . Kim Doo Whan [*sic*] said, "Tonight we should sweep away some young men with assistance and instructions of Mr. Chang Taik Sang [*sic*], Chief of Police Headquarters. . . . We cannot understand the deeds of CIC either. . . . And we hope for the removal of Chang Taik Sang, who made the KDYA terrorize and betrayed us."¹⁸

Subsequently, the Civil Administration, in Executive Order No. 1, ordered the KDYA to dissolve itself on 22 April 1947.¹⁹ While this seemed to be a fair decision it was in actual fact a pretext to disband the only remaining leftist youth corps, the JDYA, on 16 May 1947 with Executive Order No. 2.²⁰ Yu Jin-san later reorganized the KDYA by simply changing its name to the Alliance of Youth Joseon (AYJ).

Coalition Stage (May 1946–August 1947)

Trusteeship brought everything to a deadlock. In order to break it, Washington decided to support moderates Kim Gyu-sik and Yeo Un-

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17. Kim Du-han was a notorious boss of political hoodlums. He was chosen to be a member of National Assembly twice. He was one of the symbolic persons to show the political disorder in the incipient ROK.
 18. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report 9* (30 April 1947): pp. 2-3.
 19. George M. McCune, "Post-War Government and Politics of Korea," *The Journal of Politics* 9.4 (November 1947): p. 616.
 20. *Seoul Shinmun Daily*, 18 May 1947. The USAMGIK explained the reasons of dispersing the KDYA for its anti-USAMGIK and antinational characters.

hyeong, instead of the Rhee-KDP group, to form the Coalition Committee (CC). Most Koreans heartily welcomed this new policy. As a study pointed out it, “this new policy, if implemented in September 1945, might have contributed to the emergence of a united, democratic, and independent Korea.”²¹

Rhee, however, began to harass the CC. On 3 June, in the so-called “Jeongeup Speech,” he made a bombshell declaration:

Even South Korea alone has to establish somewhat like Provisional Government or Committee to get rid of the USSR from the 38th parallel. So you (the people in South Korea) have to decide. . . .²²

This was the first time that he announced his plan to establish a separate government in South Korea. He also visited the United States from 7 December 1946 to 21 April 1947, where he proposed that South Korea be given an independent government status and be admitted into the UN.²³ At this time, the USAMGIK and Washington had already declared that a unified Korea was a cardinal principle. It was therefore obvious that Rhee’s mission was contrary to the aims and purposes expressed by America and further surprising to find that he was given air priority for his trip, granted a long conference with General MacArthur and in other ways favorably treated.²⁴

The Rhee-KDP group mobilized rightist paramilitary youth organizations to propagate the separate government plan to the Korean people. But the Koreans did not support the Rhee-KDP group; most Koreans still wanted a unified country. This was revealed by an opinion poll compiled by the USAMGIK. In August 1946, 70% of South Koreans preferred socialism, while 14% supported capitalism and 7% communism. Also, 85% of them favored a parliamentary govern-

21. Matray, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

22. *Seoul Shinmun Daily*, 4 June 1946.

23. George M. McCune, “Korea: The First Year of Liberation,” *Pacific Affairs* 20.1 (March 1947): p. 15.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

ment. As for the proper time to establish the constitution, only 27% answered "immediately," while 71% favored "after unification."²⁵

1) Split into Factions

At that time, the split among rightists grew worse. While the Rhee-KDP group urged the establishment of a separate government, other rightists including the Kim-KPG group and moderate Kim Gyu-sik bluntly opposed it and wanted unification. The rightist paramilitary youth organizations were also divided according to their leaders' political line.

The first case was that of the KYMANC. On 12 September 1946, those members who wanted shared the Rhee-KDP group's views seceded from the organization to form the KIYMP. While a large-scale, nationwide organization that followed the Rhee-KDP group already existed in the GAYMAKI, it was not an independent organization but a coalition of over 300 independent organizations based in local areas. Now Rhee wanted a strong independent organization based in Seoul and the KIYMPI was the fruit. Those who seceded from the KYMANC and other 15 rightist youth organizations joined it.²⁶ Its leader, Seo Sang-cheon, was a member of the KDP.²⁷ While the new group did not unify all the rightist paramilitary youth organizations as Rhee had hoped, it did nevertheless follow the Rhee-KDP group's separate government line and was based in Seoul.

As antipathy among rightist politicians deepened, the KIYMP, the YLNSAKI, and the GAYMKAI made it clear that they would follow the Rhee-KDP group. But six other rightist paramilitary youth organizations that decided to follow Kim Gu and Kim Gyu-sik's unification line announced their support for the seven points made public by the

25. *Dong-a Ilbo*, 13 August 1946.

26. O Yu-seok, "Migunjeongha-ui u-ik cheongnyeon danche-e gwanhan yeongu: 1945-1948" (A Study on the Right Wing Youth Corps under the American Military Government: 1945-1948) (master's thesis, Ewha Womans University, 1988), p. 44.

27. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 75.

CC on 12 December.²⁸ They established a loose coalition named the Young Koreans' Party (YKP),²⁹ however, it barely remained in existence after the failure of the coalition movement.

Next was the split in the GAYMKAI. Between 19 and 21 December 1946, the GAYMKAI held the second national delegates' conference to change the style of the organization from a coalition of independent rightist paramilitary youth organizations to a single organization that fell in line with the Rhee-KDP group. Some rank and file, who were also members of the YKP, disagreed and attempted to voice their opposition but were denied the opportunity and left the hall to establish a preparatory committee to form the Young Koreans' Alliance (YKA).³⁰ The two conflicts between the rightist paramilitary youth organizations showed that the supporters for a separate government no longer needed to cooperate with supporters for unification.

2) Auxiliary KNP Functions

The USAMGIK's full-scale oppression of leftists began in May 1946, soon after the US-Soviet Joint Commission (JC) adjourned. In so-called "Jeongpansa Incident,"³¹ the USAMGIK arrested executive members of the Joseon Communist Party (JCP), suspended its bulletin, *Haebang ilbo* (Liberation Daily), and arrested many leftists. After 15 August, it put on the wanted list of executive members of the JCP, including Bak Heon-yeong, and prohibited publication of leftist newspapers like *Joseon inminbo* (Joseon People's News),

28. *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 November 1946.

29. *Chosun Ilbo*, 19 December 1946.

30. O Yu-seok, op. cit., pp. 47-49.

31. Song Nam-heon, *Haebang samnyeonsa* (Three Years' History after Liberation), vol. 2 (Seoul: Kachi Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 412-421: On 5 May 1946, the USAMGIK published that the KNP had been investing a counterfeit-bill case. It pointed that the Joseon Communist Party (JCP) picked up a printing house, the Jeongpansa, where the Japanese issued Korean money. At the printing house, the JCP issued counterfeit notes and used them as its secret fund. Though the JCP bluntly denied all the indicted facts, the accused persons were sentenced guilty. After this, the JCP stopped its legal activities and went underground.

Hyeondae ilbo (Modern Daily), and *Jungang ilbo* (Central Daily).³²

In July 1946, protesting this ever increasing oppression, the JCP proclaimed a “New-Policy” and announced a change in its strategy:

Until now we have cooperated with the USAMGIK. When we criticized it, we used only indirect methods. But from now on, we should use counterblows for self-defense against terrorism of the USAMGIK and its subordinated bodies. Repay terror by terror, blood by blood.³³

Against this background, the KNP also announced a change in its own line. On 3 September, the Metropolitan KNP Chief, Jang Taek-sang, proclaimed:

Now we have to oppress individuals and organizations that alienate people from the authorities. We will use all the organizations that can be our ears and eyes. The KNP alone cannot do this. Supports of the judicial authorities are the first prerequisite. We already obtained them. Now we will use a new policy.³⁴

Extreme antagonism between leftists and the KNP led to the “September General Strike” and “October Uprisings.” On 23 September 1946, in Busan about 8,000 railroad laborers began to strike. Word soon spread through the entire country and 40,000 railroad laborers participated in the general strike, paralyzing railroads throughout the country. The strike expanded to printing, electric, postal and other industries. Students also participated in the movement. Hodge declared that the strike was led by a small number of agitators³⁵ and on 26 September ordered its suppression by force. The USAMGIK and the KNP did not hesitate to use the rightist paramilitary youth organiza-

32. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

33. Kim Nam-sik, *Namnodang yeongu* (A Study on the South Korea Labor Party) (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1984), pp. 235-236.

34. *Chosun Ilbo*, 4 September 1946.

35. *Chosun Ilbo*, 27 November 1946.

tions to smash the strikes. They were mobilized to conduct single-handed or joint operations as auxiliary KNP units.

On 30 September, Jang Taek-sang led 3,000 heavily armed policemen and 1,000 members of rightist paramilitary youth organizations to oppress strikers in Yongsan, Seoul. Kim Du-han recalled that Jang gave the KDYA 300 stands of training rifles and 3 boxes of KNP Academy hand grenades. During the operation, he personally killed a demonstrator with a bamboo spear and buried him.³⁶

On the same day, rightist paramilitary youth organizations jointly assaulted a leftist newspaper building, *Jayu sinmun* (Free News), beat the staff and destroyed property. They also attacked the headquarters of the JCP. The next morning, they gathered again and terrorized most important leftist organizations such as the executive office of the DPF, Central People's Committee, and the JDYA. That afternoon, 200 members of the KDYA independently assaulted the largest leftist labor organization, the National Council of Korean Labor Union (NCKLU), seizing important documents and destroying property.³⁷

Next were the oppressions of the October Uprisings, starting initially in Daegu, Gyeongsangbuk-do province, but soon spreading throughout the country. Here again, the USAMGIK and the KNP openly exploited the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. Kim Du-han recalled that he was dispatched to Daegu with 60 special squads consisting of 3,000 members of the KDYA armed with guns that the KNP provided. With the KNP, they recaptured Yecheon, Yeongcheon, Waegwan, Goryeong, and Seongju. On the day of their departure to Daegu, his 3,000 members held a ceremony at Yongsan railroad station and received 4,000 U.S. Army work clothes and shoes and 3,000 weapons and armbands. He also received a subsidy from "some organization."³⁸ Kim concluded: "As a matter of fact, I was a white terror-

36. Kim Du-han, *Piro muldeurin geon-guk jeonya: Kim Du-han hoegogi* (Bloody Eve of the National Foundation Day: Kim Du-han's Memoirs) (Seoul: Korean Information Service, 1963), p. 152.

37. *Seoul Shinmun Daily*, 5 October 1946.

38. Kim Du-han, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-178.

ist. . . . At that time, I thought that only by smashing the communists by terror, could I rescue my fatherland from serious crisis.”³⁹

By suppressing the two uprisings, direct and official linkages were strengthened between the USAMGIK, the KNP and the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. Now the rightist paramilitary youth organizations became the vanguard of the Rhee-KDP group to oppress all its rivals by violence with the direct help of the USAMGIK and the KNP. They acted as the auxiliary KNP units.

3) The USMGIK's Control

A. Korean National Youth Corps

Amidst this chaos, Yi Beom-seok, the former Commanding General of the Restoration Army in China, asked the USAMGIK for aid to establish an anticommunistic youth corps in preparation for an anticommunist army. General Hodge, who wanted to cope with anti-Americanism and disturbances among the Korean people by mobilizing paramilitary forces, agreed and began to establish the Korean National Youth Corps (KNYC). On 6 October 1946, the KNYC was established with the help of the USAMGIK.

Hodge was trying to secure consent from General MacArthur and the Department of State to establish the KNYC. But this was only ex post facto approval: the KNYC had already been established on 6 October while his requests began on 28 October. That day, he cabled General MacArthur for permission to “Build up a Rightist Youth Army to augment and assist occupation forces and the KNP and constabulary.”⁴⁰ But John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, clearly opposed his plan.⁴¹ General MacArthur was

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

40. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to the Chief of Staff (Eisenhower), 28 October 1946, vol. VIII of *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers* (hereafter, FRUS), ed. U.S. Department of State (1946), p. 751.

41. Director of the Office of the Far Eastern Affairs (Vincent) to the Secretary of State, memorandum, 29 October 1946, *FRUS* (1946), Vol. VII, p. 752.

also doubtful: “This suggestion is believed to be unfeasible.”⁴²

But Hodge had already established the KNYC and supported it without instructions from Washington. The direct sponsorship, counseling, financing and supply of the KNYC was a notable exception to USAMGIK’s policy against sponsoring Korean organizations.⁴³ Besides cash, the USAMGIK supplied the KNYC with equipment and facilities for its training program, offered it buildings and land (such as the National Training School at Suwon) and many forms of support.⁴⁴ Taken together, USAMGIK support for and investment in the KNYC was overwhelming and unprecedented.

At that time, two major Korean organizations received financial support from the USAMGIK. They were the CC and the KNYC. In 1946, the former received 3 million won and the latter 5 million; in 1947, the former received 3 million won and the latter 19 million.⁴⁵ The USAMGIK supported the KNYC secretly through a false-name account, Ha Chung-sik.⁴⁶ “Ha” came from the name of General Hodge, “Chun” from Chungok, pseudonym of Won Se-hun, a member of the CC, and “sik” from the name of Dr. Kim Gyu-sik.⁴⁷ It is suggestive that the USAMGIK invested much more money to the KNYC than the CC, which clearly reveals where its real interest lied.

42. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to the War Department, memorandum, 1 November 1946, *FRUS* (1946), Vol. VIII, p. 753.

43. Hugh Deane, *The Korean War: 1945–1953* (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1999), p. 37.

44. Im Jong-myeong, “Joseon minjok cheongnyeondan yeongu” (A Study on the Korean National Youth Corps) (master’s thesis, Korea University, 1994), p. 8.

45. Kim Cheol-su, “Minjok cheongnyeondan” (The Korean National Youth Corps), in *Cheolgi Yi Beom-seok pyeongjeon*, ed. Memorial Project Meeting for General Cheolgi Yi Beom-seok (Critical Biography of Cheolgi Yi Beom-seok) (Seoul: Hangru, 1992), p. 49; Cf. *XXIV Corps G-2 Weekly Summary* (hereafter, *G-2 Weekly Summary*) 105 (18 September 1947): p. 18. G-2 reported that the KNYC in the current fiscal year received budget grant of 20 million yen as compared with 5 million last year.

46. To perform this secret mission, the USAMGIK used two employees of the Joseon Bank. One was Baek Du-jin, the 4th Premier and the other was Yu Chang-sun, the 15th Premier of the ROK.

47. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 192.

It demonstrates that the USAMGIK preferred illegal paramilitary politics to legal party politics.

General Hodge exercised tight control over the KNYC by dispatching an officer in active service, Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Voss, as the advisor of General Yi. Voss submitted a "Weekly Activity Report" to CIC every week.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that Voss tried to guarantee "the Budget for the Fiscal Year of 1948-1949" for the KNYC,⁴⁹ revealing as it does that the USAMGIK already had blueprints for the KNYC. These reports clearly distinguish the KNYC as an auxiliary organization of the USAMGIK.⁵⁰

General Yi had an interesting military career. He served in the military, both the Chinese and exiled Korean, and concurrently in Tai Li's vast, reactionary intelligence network. After Tai and the OSS reached an accord, he began to work for the Americans. He was involved for a time in Jiang Jieshi's Samminzhuyi Youth Corps and was also linked to the Blue Shirts, a group that was close to fascism. His experience with them had a lasting influence, apparently dictating the blue color of the KNYC uniform and his jeep.⁵¹

He learned his youth corps concept from Hitler Jugend or Hitler Youths. He said in an interview, "We base our instruction on the German youth movement because the Germans are the only people who really know how to organize young men."⁵² In another interview, he also told of the proposed curriculum:

"Also" he said "the method of combating strikes. And history of Hitler Youths." One of Lee's right-hand men, it appeared, had been an enthusiastic member of Hitler Jugend in Germany for three years.⁵³

48. I can find at least twice the "Weekly Activity Report" submitted by Voss in *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 35 (22 December 1947): pp. 3-6; *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 40 (20 January 1948): pp. 7-9.

49. *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 35 (22 December 1947): p. 5.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Mark Gayn, *Japan Diary* (New York: William Sloane Association, 1948), p. 437.

Mark Gayn has remarked:

This topped it all—a Korean “School for Leaders,” teaching the history of Hitler Youths, operating on a subsidy from the American Military Government, and assisted by a colonel [*sic*]⁵⁴ of the U.S. Army.⁵⁵

As a man of fascist ideology, in the early days, General Yi tried to make link the KNYC with other rightist political groups. He also actively participated in the Aid Association for the Korean National Representatives (AAKNR) that supported Rhee’s proposal in Washington for a separate South Korean government.⁵⁶

As the USAMGIK completely controlled the KNYC, General Yi had to act with Hodge’s permission. Ironically Hodge did not set him loose until November 1947, when the U.S. openly took steps towards establishing a separate government in South Korea. Until then, the USAMGIK had officially supported the CC. In order not to agitate the leftists, the USAMGIK refused to allow General Yi to pursue the Rhee-KDP-oriented policy, persuading him instead to follow its “neutral” policy. It made the KNYC display a “nonpartisan” policy.⁵⁷

This led General Yi to refuse Rhee’s request to support his anti-trusteeship movement.⁵⁸ He sent letters to branch offices to make them keep silent about the JC and prepare them to support the provisional government when it was formed.⁵⁹ He even changed his plans to include the history of Hitler Youths in the curriculum of his training school.

In its supposed nonpartisan policy, the KNYC had a unique character. Unlike other rightist youth organizations, the KNYC did not

54. Ernst Voss, at that time, was a lieutenant colonel.

55. Mark Gayn, *op. cit.*

56. Im Jong-myeong, *op. cit.*

57. *XXIV Corps G-2 Periodic Report* (hereafter G-2 Periodic Report) 473 (7 March 1947): p. 2.

58. *G-2 Periodic Report* 550 (7 June 1947): p. 2.

59. *Ibid.*

advocate direct violence against the leftists. This difference naturally alienated the KNYC from other rightist paramilitary youth organizations, leading to clashes⁶⁰ which culminated in September 1947, when General Yi refused to participate in the United Young Men's Corps (UYMC).⁶¹ G-2 even reported that the UYMC held a secret meeting to assassinate General Yi.⁶²

There were other reasons for their conflicts. Besides jealousy over the official support of the USAMGIK,⁶³ its rapid growth through overactive recruiting methods was a major point of contention.⁶⁴ Sometimes it absorbed local branches of other rightist paramilitary youth organizations.⁶⁵ The KNYC tried to expand its power across the nation and in the process membership of the KNYC grew rapidly. In June 1948, membership numbered 873,310 and in late fall of that year it totaled 1.3 million.

After the United States decision to support the Rhee-KDP group's separate government policy, however, the KNYC changed its position completely. Contrary to its previous neutral policy, it declared in February 1948 its support for Rhee Syngman's bid for political control of South Korea.⁶⁶ On 1 March, General Yi was elected vice-chairman of Rhee's political party, the NSAKI.⁶⁷

60. In *G-2 Periodic Reports* we can easily find them. About frictions with the NWYA, see *G-2 Periodic Report* 617 (26 August, 1947): p. 2 and *G-2 Periodic Report* 884 (14 July 1948): p. 2; frictions with the KIYMP, see *G-2 Periodic Report* 824 (3 May 1948): p. 1 and *G-2 Periodic Report* 862 (17 June 1948): p. 1; frictions with the UYMC, see *G-2 Periodic Report* 804 (9 April 1948): p. 3 and *G-2 Periodic Report* 809 (15 April 1948): p. 3, etc.

61. *G-2 Weekly Summary* 105 (18 September 1947): p. 19: Besides rank and file, even General Yi Cheung-cheon, leader of the UYMC, made no effort to conceal his dislike of General Yi.

62. *G-2 Periodic Report* 635 (17 September 1947): pp. 2-3. G-2 commented that assassination, and for as little reason as appeared here, was an ever present possibility in Korea, either with or without political aspirations (both these groups deny them), ruined high.

63. *G-2 Weekly Summary* 105 (18 September 1947): p. 19.

64. *G-2 Periodic Report* 884 (14 July 1948): p. 2.

65. *G-2 Periodic Report* 571 (2 July 1947): p. 2.

66. *G-2 Periodic Report* 762 (1 February 1948): p. 1.

67. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 5 (15 March 1948): p. 9.

Following this reversal, the KNYC actively participated in the separate government policy that the USA and the Rhee-KDP group pushed ahead. It played an active role in the 10 May general elections, mobilizing its members to promote movement with other rightist paramilitary youth organizations. Its leaders ran for the Assembly: among 20 candidates nominated by the KNYC, six won seats. Eight other members also won the election in the name of independents or Rhee's NSAKI. A total of 14 KNYC members were elected to the National Assembly.⁶⁸

This made Yi Beom-seok the first Premier and Minister of National Defense in the Rhee regime. His "Hitler Youths Dream" was finally realized when his "right-hand man," An Ho-sang⁶⁹ established the Student Defense Corps (SDC) in all high schools and universities. The SDC system reorganized students into military-style units and mandated anticommunist practices and curricula. Greeting seniors or teachers took the form of military salutes with slogans such as "Smash Communism" or "Anticommunism." Students were to learn *gyoryeon* or Military and Spiritual Training as a compulsory subject in regular school curriculum. The system that strove to make all Korean students a vanguard against communism lasted all the way to the 1980s.

B. Northwest Youth Association

The NWYA was established on 30 November 1946. Refugees from North Korea had formed several independent youth organizations immediately after Liberation but over the course of their struggles with the leftists, they realized the need to establish a unified anticommunist organization. The name "Northwest Youth" was meant to encompass young refugees from all over North Korea: as "north" means Hamgyeong-do province and "west" means Pyeongan-do province and Hwanghae-do province, the word "northwest" means

68. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 196-97.

69. He later became the first Minister of Education in the Rhee government.

all the North Korean areas. Its membership totaled about 300,000.⁷⁰

In addition to general anticommunist activities that it undertook with other rightist paramilitary youth organizations, it engaged in specialized missions. First was anti-North Korean activity. On every Sunday, Seonu Gi-seong, head of the NWYA, aired anticommunist messages to the people of North Korea at Seoul Central Broadcasting Station.⁷¹ It also infiltrated its members into North Korea to perform special espionage missions.⁷² CIC admitted it in a report titled "CIC Sends Korean Agents North Korea."⁷³ The USAMGIK also gave it counterespionage missions.⁷⁴ The USAMGIK tacitly used the NWYA as its auxiliary organization.

Second, it helped the USAMGIK and the KNP in controlling civilian lives, principally by censoring refugees from North Korea. Its goal was to ferret out the communists among them. While its tactics were illegal, the USAMGIK and the KNP approved and even encouraged them.⁷⁵ It also engaged in "enlightening" people on the conditions of North Korea. When it sought to crush suspected leftists in a village, it called together (usually in a coercive manner) meetings for "enlightenment" in which it would identify leftists and eliminate them with deadly force.⁷⁶

Third, it enlarged its realm to schools and factories. The NWYA acquired the right to publish school certificates for youths from North Korea to enter or transfer to schools and universities without examination.⁷⁷ In spring 1947, it published 3,600 certificates and 6,000 by

70. US Army Intelligence Center, *History of the Counter Intelligence Corps, Vol. XXX: CIC During the Occupation in Korea* (March 1959), p. 123.

71. Seonu Gi-song, *op. cit.*, p. 724.

72. *Ibid.*

73. US Army Intelligence Center, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

75. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 86-88.

76. HQ, USAFIK, *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 9 (19 June 1947): p. 10; *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 13 (30 June 1947): pp. 4-5.

77. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-83.

September.⁷⁸ In this process, not a few intentionally misrepresented their school careers to enter more prestigious schools and universities. Naturally, many of them became repeaters or dropouts.⁷⁹ This was trivial to the NWYA, however, as long as they engaged in undermining leftist student power. The organization also arranged jobs for refugees from North Korea and used them as the main force to attack leftist trade unions. They actively struggled to destroy the September Strike in the Seoul-Incheon area.⁸⁰

Fourth, it expanded its power to the Korean Constabulary. On 23 October 1947, NWYA members comprised two thirds of the cadets in the fifth term of Military Academy. On 6 April 1948, after six months of training, they were commissioned as second lieutenants. They later made up the core of anticommunist military officials sent to suppress the Jeju Insurgency of April 3, the Yeosu Revolt of 1948–1949, and to fight in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. On 16 May 1961, some of them participated in the military coup led by Park Chung-hee.⁸¹

As the USAMGIK and the KNP supported the NWYA and used it as their auxiliary organization, the NWYA could exercise its violent practices without any restriction. Besides its independent activities,⁸² the NWYA performed joint terrorist activities with other rightist paramilitary youth organizations.⁸³ The CIC portrayed it as “the vanguard of rightist terrorism,”⁸⁴ and specifically identified 26 activities from 1 September 1946 to 18 April 1947.⁸⁵ As late as 31 July 1947, the CIC reported that the NWYA was still at the top of the list for terrorist activities.⁸⁶

78. Mun Bong-je, “Seobuk cheongnyeonghoe” (Northwest Youth Association), *JoongAng Ilbo*, 21 January 1973.

79. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

80. Mun Bong-je, “Northwest Youth Association,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, 4 January 1973.

81. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126.

82. *G-2 Periodic Report* 635: p. 2.

83. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 23 (30 November 1947): p. 8.

84. *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 2 (1 May 1947): p. 5.

85. *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 6 (29 May 1947): pp. 3-5.

86. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 15 (31 July 1947): p. 4.

By 1947, it had enlarged its power to local areas. It established a local base in Daejeon under the name of the South Korean Detachment (SKD), and amassing 50,000 members. It then extended its range to cover Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Gyeongsang provinces, establishing 57 branches in these areas alone.⁸⁷ Its repressive hand gripped virtually all around the territory south of the 38th parallel.

The NWYA suffered division when General Yi Cheong-cheon tried to organize a unified rightist youth organization, the UYMC. In September 1947, the NWYA divided into separate factions over the problem of joining the UYMC. Seonu Gi-song, head of the NWYA, and other members agreed with the UYMC's cause of uniting the right into a single organization and joined it. But Mun Bong-je, head of the Rebuilt NWYA (RNWYA), and others followed the Rhee-KDP group's separate government line and stood against joining it.⁸⁸

The RNWYA⁸⁹ enlarged its power to the remotest island, Jeju, where it provided the major spark for the local uprising. As a study presented it, "Nowhere else did such a violent outpouring of a popular opposition to a postwar occupation occur."⁹⁰ It proved to be the most tragic incident that the USAMGIK experienced in South Korea. It lasted for six years and six months from 3 April 1948 to 21 September 1954. During this period, the uprising claimed at least 30,000 dead, about 10 percent of the island's population.⁹¹

The late General, Kim Ik-ryeol, commander of the ninth Regiment that commanded the ground troops in Jeju island during the incipient phase of the uprising, left a posthumous manuscript on the uprising.⁹² In this manuscript, he wrote about the main cause of the

87. Mun Bong-je, "Northwest Youth Association," *JoongAng Ilbo*, 18 January 1973.

88. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 220-227.

89. As the RNWYA still used the name NWYA after division, we can distinguish them only by date.

90. John Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," *Journal of Korean Studies* 2 (1980): p. 196.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

92. Kim Ik-ryeol, "Kim Ik-ryeol janggun sillok yugo: 4-3-ui jinsil" (Posthumous Manuscripts of General Kim Ik-ryeol: Truth about Jeju Insurgency of April 3), in vol. 2 of *4-3-eun mal-handa: Daeha sillok jeju minjung undongsa* (April 3 Says: Records of the History of People's Movement in Jeju Island), ed. Report Team of Jeju

uprising:

At the beginning, the USAMGIK and I agreed that the main cause of the uprising was illegal violence of the NWYA. Its violence against innocent islanders enraged them. And the KNP that only sided with the NWYA aggravated the situation to explosion. . . .⁹³ The main cause of the uprising was innocent islanders' revenge for the KNP and the NWYA that did nothing but illegal arrests, tortures, murders, rapes and property confiscation. . . .⁹⁴

Hugh Deane, an American reporter, also mentioned that “the KNP and their allies in the NWYA savaged the village and the hatred thus engendered led to riotous demonstrations that climaxed in an island-wide rebellion.”⁹⁵

During the uprising, the NWYA members participated in the massacre partly as members of the NWYA and partly as hurriedly organized members of the KNP and constabulary.⁹⁶ This was done at the request of both Syngman Rhee and the USAMGIK. Rhee personally attended a general meeting of the NWYA to encourage its members to participate in the massacre.⁹⁷ G-2 also indicated that “the assistance furnished the police and constabulary by the NWYA on Cheju-do [*sic*] has been commended by several American officers.”⁹⁸

Final Stage (September 1947–December 1948)

The JC met again in the summer of 1947, but it soon reached another

Peoples' News (Seoul: Jeonyewon, 1994), pp. 271-357. General Kim died in 1988, but the manuscript was not published until 1994, according to his dying wish to publish it without any retouching by governmental authority.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

95. Hugh Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

96. Report Team of Jejudo People's News, *op. cit.*, vol. 4 (1997), pp. 144-175; Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 122.

97. Report Team of Jemin ilbo, *op. cit.*, vol. 4 (1997), p. 151.

98. *G-2 Periodic Report* 951 (1 October 1948): p. 2.

deadlock. Finally, in September the United States referred the Korean issue to the UN. On 14 November, the UN resolved to establish the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). When communists prevented the UNTCOK member from operating in the north in early 1948, the UN changed the Commission's mandate to only oversee elections south of the 38th parallel.⁹⁹

After the United States decided to establish a separate government in South Korea, white terror by the rightist paramilitary youth organizations became a part of daily life. Violence was not concentrated on leftists alone but covered all of Korean society. But while most of the victims were innocent civilians,¹⁰⁰ and while G-2 and CIC reports recorded countless acts of violence, no appropriate actions were taken by the USAMGIK.

Banding Together

In April 1947, Yi Cheong-cheon,¹⁰¹ who was the former General Commander of the Restoration Army, returned to South Korea. He wanted to unite all the rightist paramilitary youth organizations under his command. His military career gave him enormous clout with almost all the members of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. In September 1947, he unified 26 organizations to establish the UYMC.¹⁰²

There appeared a great stir in rightist paramilitary youth organizations about whether to join the new group. The KNYC, under the USAMGIK's control, and the Korea Independence Young Men's Party (KIYMP), under the KDP's control, refused to participate in it from the beginning. Further, the AYJ, the RNWYA, and the YLNSAKI did not join the UYMC, principally because Rhee opposed it.¹⁰³

99. Steven Hugh Lee, *The Korean War* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), p. 29.

100. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 23 (30 November 1947): p. 8. Among many such cases, violence in Hoengseong was the most typical one.

101. He later became the first Minister without Portfolio in the Rhee regime.

102. *CIC Weekly Information Bulletin* 23 (25 September 1947): p. 7.

103. Yi Gyeong-nam, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 226.

When Yi first wanted to unify all the rightist paramilitary youth organizations, Rhee publicly supported his action. But in September, Rhee changed his mind and attempted to put all of them under his own control. That month, the United States finally changed its policy and agreed to support the Rhee-KDP group's separate government line. The path to becoming the first president of the separate government was now open and it was incumbent on Rhee to undermine any competitors. As he already suspected that General Yi was a Kim Gu partisan, Rhee did not want him to assume power over the largest and most powerful youth organization.

In actual fact, Rhee wanted to make that powerful coalition of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations blindly obedient to his leadership. At his request, the AYJ, the RNWYA, the KIYMP, the YLNSAKI unified to make a new organization, the Salvation Young Men's Alliance (SYMA).¹⁰⁴ It began to practice the Rhee-KDP group's policy with the open aid of the KNP.

Though there were some members who wanted to follow the unification line to establish the YMAFU,¹⁰⁵ leaders of the UYMC finally decided to follow Rhee-KDP group's line and betrayed Kim Gu on 31 July 1948. "Until now we have followed Kim Gu's political line," it announced, "But now unification has become impossible. So we have to participate in the elections."¹⁰⁶ On 1 March 1948, Yi Cheongcheon personally participated in the NSAKI as one of the five vice-chairmen with Yi Beom-seok of the KNYC, Mun Bong-je of the RNWYA, Yu Jin-san of the AYJ and Sin Ik-hui,¹⁰⁷ who also was a cabinet member of the KPG under Kim Gu.¹⁰⁸

Establishing a Divided Country

At the beginning of 1948, all the large rightist paramilitary youth

104. *Chosun Ilbo*, 15 February 1948.

105. *Chosun Ilbo*, 3 August 1948.

106. *Dong-a Ilbo*, 29 February 1948.

107. He later became the Chairman of the National Assembly in the Rhee regime.

108. *CIC Semi-Monthly Report* 5 (15 March 1948): p. 9.

organizations pushed ahead with the 10 May general elections. In addition to the SYMA, the UYMC and even the KNYC worked together without friction under the Rhee-KDP group's leadership.

To say nothing of the communists, almost all the political groups opposed the elections to establish a separate government, with the exception of the Rhee-KDP associated group. On 7 February 1948, the DPF and the South Korean Labor Party (SKLP) agitated for a general strike. In April, the Kim Gu/Kim Gyu-sik group and many other parties and social organizations that opposed the separate government went to North Korea to participate in a meeting called the "North-South Conference." On 7 May, the SKLP pushed once again for another general strike.

In this final stage, the rightist paramilitary youth organizations that followed the Rhee-KDP group's line employed violent means to oppress its opponents. They arrested, beat, and even killed whomever they thought were their rivals. The KNP directly supported them without hesitation. In April, one month before the elections, the USAMGIK ordered the establishment of the Neighborhood Defense Corps (NDC) as an auxiliary KNP unit.¹⁰⁹ Members of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations joined it voluntarily to help the KNP.

As a result, on 10 May, some 7,036,750 of the 7,837,504 (90 percent) registered voters cast their ballots. This seemed to be an indication of real enthusiasm on the part of the people. It would be blindness, however, to overlook considerable counts of violence and threats of violence in connection with the elections. Besides Jeju island, where two of the three electoral districts were invalidated by the uprising, 323 persons including 32 policemen were killed in various riots and raids in the ten days leading up to the elections.¹¹⁰

Following an observation tour for the elections, UNTCOK delegates noted that one reason for the very high registration was a threat

109. Jo Byeong-ok, *Na-ui hoegorok (My Retrospections)* (Seoul: Mingyosa, 1959), pp. 202-203.

110. Leon Gordenker, "The United Nations, the United States Occupation and the 1948 Election in Korea," *Political Science Quarterly* 73.3 (September 1958): p. 447.

by the KNP to withdraw individual ration cards from Koreans who did not register. Some delegates also feared that “youth organization” and block leaders or “gun chiefs” were playing a large part in the election.¹¹¹ Their protests elicited from General William F. Dean, the Military Governor, an affirmation that orders had been given to prevent any pressure involving ration cards, that rightist paramilitary youth organizations were not to participate in election arrangements and that any misuse of authority by the KNP would bring immediate investigation.¹¹²

The rightist paramilitary youth organizations intervened in the elections in two ways. First, they helped candidates of their own organizations.¹¹³ If they had no candidate of their own, they helped the Rhee-KDP candidates. Second, they participated in “enlightenment” programs such as election promotion movements. As most prominent political parties boycotted the election, their most significant intervention was the attempt to prevent abstentions by compelling people to register.

The RNWYA tried to have Rhee elected without a vote. Rhee’s counterpart was Choe Neung-jin or Daniel Choe.¹¹⁴ The RNWYA and the KNP systematically opposed Choe’s registration as a candidate

111. *Ibid.*, p. 442.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Seoul Shinmun Daily*, 10 May 1948. Actually, the KIYMP and the AYC tried to support their leaders, Seo Sang-cheon and Yu Jin-san. The KNYC and the UYMC nominated many candidates to win seats in the National Assembly. The KNYC and the UYMC nominated 20 and 87 candidates and won 6 and 12 seats, respectively. But the KNYC had 8 more members who ran the election by name of other political parties. So the KNYC won total 14 seats in the election.

114. Song Nam-heon, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 384-387. After the September Strike and October Uprisings, the “Joint American-Korean Conference” was held to investigate the reasons and solve the pending questions of the two riots. At this conference, Jo Byeong-ok, head of the KNP, praised the “patriotic policemen’s noble sacrifices,” however, Choe Neung-jin, Chief of Detective Bureau of the KNP, who was sent to the spot to investigate the reasons for the riots by the USAMGIK, analyzed differently. He found reasons in the KNP system. He vainly suggested to get rid of the pro-Japanese policemen to prevent another spontaneous uprising. As the result, the USAMGIK ironically purged him instead of adopting his solution.

from the beginning and intimidated his supporters into giving up their recommendations. Just two days before the closing date for candidate registration, Choe received from the National Election Committee (NEC) a report stating the nullification of his candidacy on the grounds that 57 of his 217 signatures (200 required) were forgeries or were obtained by misrepresentation.¹¹⁵ Mun Bong-je visited him to convince him to drop his opposition to Rhee.¹¹⁶

But Choe, despite violent measures by the RNWYA and the KDP (beating campaign workers, stealing bags of signatures),¹¹⁷ managed to secure the necessary replacement signatures and tried to register again. The NEC, however, refused to receive the documents on the pretext of the chairman's absence. Choe was unable to register and raised a protest to General Dean, who extended the closing date. But once again the RNWYA and the KNP intimidated his supporters into saying that they had not recommended him voluntarily. Finally, Choe failed to register and Rhee won the seat without opposition.¹¹⁸ Choe now took the case to the UNTCOK and the USAMGIK. General Dean appointed a committee of three to investigate and by late May it reported that 18 of Choe's recommendations were spurious, reducing the number to 199, one less than the minimum required.¹¹⁹

Clearly, Rhee would not have been able to be elected a member of National Assembly without violence of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations and the KNP. Many candidates of the KDP also registered as independents, because an absolute majority of Koreans disliked the political line and terrorist methods associated with the group.

It was by this course that Rhee became the first president of the ROK. No one supported him except the Rhee-KDP group, the KNP and rightist paramilitary youth organizations. Soon after, even the

115. Hugh Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

118. An Jin, *Migunjeonggi eogap gigu yeongu* (A Study on Oppression System during the USAMGIK) (Seoul: Saegil, 1996), pp. 245-269.

119. Hugh Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

KDP began to break away from him as an outcome of their displeasure over the appointment of cabinet members. Then communists rebelled in Yeosu in October 1948 and guerilla activities followed. From the beginning, due to the opposition of the vast majority of South Koreans, Rhee could not govern the ROK by normal methods. On 19 December 1948, Rhee moved to unite all the rightist paramilitary youth organizations into one creating the Korea Youth Association (KYA).¹²⁰

Rhee made the KYA an official government organization and paid its expenses from the government budget.¹²¹ Its leaders began to participate in politics as high-ranking bureaucrats or members of the National Assembly. Rank and file regarded themselves as cornerstones of the ROK and tried to control all the activities of the Korean people.

Conclusion

With Liberation, the Korean peninsula was a tumult of revolutionary waves. Koreans wanted socioeconomic changes by settling Japanese colonial legacies. This revolutionary fervor was reflected faithfully in a political field. The revolutionaries acted in South Korea with the support and acquiescence of the Korean people.

The United States occupied South Korea and imposed a military government onto its fragile situation. Against the revolutionary will of Korean people, the USAMGIK tried to foster its partners, Syngman Rhee and the pro-Japanese KDP group, to maintain the status quo and to build a bulwark against the communist USSR in South Korea. The USAMGIK and its partners, however, could not overcome the overwhelming revolutionary fever of Korean people through the legal

120. Ha Yu-sik, "Yi Seung-man jeonggwon chogi daehan cheongnyeondan jojik-gwa hwaldong" (Organization and Activities of the Korea Youth Corps in the Incipient Period of the Syngman Rhee Regime) (master's thesis, Busan National University, 1996).

121. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.

party political system alone. They found the rightist paramilitary youth organizations necessary to eliminate, usually by force, problems and rivals that could not be addressed through conventional politics. This was the sine qua non that a paramilitary politics could appear in South Korea.

The USAMGIK and its partners pulled the wires of the rightist paramilitary youth organizations. The support and encouragement was tacit until the USAMGIK officially used them as auxiliary KNP units in suppressing the September Strike and the October Uprisings in 1946. This was the point that the normal party political system flipped over to an abnormal paramilitary political system. Following this, even the USAMGIK established its own auxiliary youth organization.

After the United States decided to support the Rhee-KDP group's policy to establish a separate government in South Korea, the rightist paramilitary youth organizations were able to exercise their violence without any restrictions. Violence was not directed towards the leftists alone but extended to all of Korean society. Innocent civilians were objects of their violence. The repression was so extreme that it can be seen as constituting a civil war. The elections to establish the ROK were held in this atmosphere of white terrorism.

Through these means, the United States and the Rhee-KDP group managed to establish a divided government, the ROK, in South Korea against the will of the Korean people. This left two marks on the South Korean political landscape: peninsular division and a reactionary, anticommunist government poised for war.

Table 1. List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	English	Korean
AAKNR	Aid Association for the Korean National Representative	Hanguk Minjok Daepyo Huwonhoe
AYJ	Alliance of Youth Joseon	Cheongnyeon Joseon Dongmaeng
CC	Coalition Committee	Jwau Hapjak Wiwonhoe
CIC	Counter-Intelligence Corps	Bangcheopdae
CPKI	Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence	Joseon Geon-guk Junbi Wiwonhoe
CPKIYSC	Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence Youth Security Corps	Joseon Geon-guk Junbi Wiwonhoe Cheongnyeon Chiandae
DNF	Democratic National Front	Minjujuui Minjok Jeonseon
GAJY	General Alliance of Joseon Youths	Joseon Cheongnyeon Chong Yeonmaeng
GAYMKAI	General Alliance of Young Men for Korean Acceleration of Independence	Daehan Dongnip Chokseong Jeon-guk Cheongnyeon Chong Yeonmaeng
JC	US-Soviet Joint Commission	Miso Gongdong Wiwonhoe
JCP	Joseon Communist Party	Joseon Gongsandang
JDYA	Joseon Democratic Youth Alliance	Joseon Minju Cheongnyeon Dongmaeng
KDP	Korean Democratic Party	Hanguk Minjudang
KDYA	Korean Democratic Youth Alliance	Daehan Minju Cheongnyeon Dongmaeng
KIYMP	Korea Independence Young Men's Party	Daehan Dongnip Cheongnyeondang
KNP	Korean National Police	Gungnip Gyeongchal
KNYC	Korean National Youth Corps	Joseon Minjok Cheongnyeondan
KPG	Korean Provisional Government	Daehan Minguk Imsi Jeongbu
KRP	Korean People's Republic	Joseon Inmin Gonghwaguk
KRYMA	Korean Rehabilitation Young Men's Association	Hanguk Gwangbok Cheongnyeonhoe

Table.1 (Continued)

Abbreviation	English	Korean
KYA	Korea Youth Association	Daehan Cheongnyeondan
KYMA	Korea and Young Men's Association	Hanguk Cheongnyeonghoe
KYMANC	Korean Young Men's Association for National Construction	Joseon Geon-guk Cheongnyeonghoe
NCKLU	National Council of Korean Labor Union	Jeonpyeong
NDC	Neighborhood Defense Corps	Hyangbodan
NEC	National Election Committee	Gungnip Seon-geo Wiwonhoe
NSAKI	National Society for Acceleration of Korean Independence	Daehan Dongnip Chokseong Gungminhoe
NWYA	Northwest Youth Association	Seobuk Cheongnyeonghoe
RNWYA	Rebuilt NWYA	Jaegeon Seocheong
ROK	Republic of Korea	Daehan Minguk
SDC	Student Defense Corps	Hakdo Hogukdan
SKD	South Korean Detachment	Namseon Pagyaeondae
SKLP	South Korea Labor Party	Namnodang
SYMA	Salvation Young Men's Alliance	Geon-guk Cheongnyeong Yeonmaeng
UN	United Nations	Gukje Yeonhap
UNTCOK	United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea	UN Hanguk Imsi Wiwondan
USAFIK	United States Army Forces in Korea	Juhan Migun
USAMGIK	United States Army Military Government in Korea	Juhan Migunjeong
UYMC	United Young Men's Corps	Daedong Cheongnyeondan
YKA	Young Koreans' Alliance	Joseon Cheongnyeong Dongmaeng
YKP	Young Koreans' Party	Joseon Cheongnyeondang
YLNSAKI	Youth League for National Society for Acceleration of Korean Independence	Daehan Dongnip Chokseong Gungminhoe Cheongnyeondan