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Emergence of Leviathan: Monopolization of Violence in a Post-Colonial State

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Abstract

This article investigates the post-war state building experience of South Korea, with a focus on state-non-state cooperation as a process of the consolidation of power under a single coercive entity. While often presented as an outlier case in terms of state emergence, the evidence suggests that the case of South Korea fits within the broader empirical patterns and experiences of Western polities, which in turn adds robustness to existing theory. Namely, state seekers collaborated with non-state sources of violence in order to obtain and then maintain, internal supremacy. Once coercive supremacy, and thus, legitimacy, was obtained, reliance on such risky outsourcing ceased to occur under any systematic level.

Keywords: Coercion, Contentious Politics, State Development, Korea

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present a critical history of South Korea's early development phase in the post-WWII era, in which a new leviathan emerged to replace the once near omnipresent Japanese colonial rule. Rather than being an outlier, the evidence points to this period in Korea's state development history, as fitting well within the lines of conventional theoretical wisdom and greater empirical patterns. Namely, state seekers and state actors alike utilized non-state specialists in violence in order to expand their forces and/or to extend their reach in order to gain internal supremacy. Once state capacity was greatly enhanced and comparative advantages in coercion obtained, state actors in turn attempted to either fully disband or enlist their non-state forces under their formal state sanctioned umbrella. The first part of this article centers on the immediate post-war period (1945-1960) where state-seekers battled for monopolization over the means and use of violence, and external recognition. Subsequently, the focus will shift to Rhee Syngman's consolidation of power, through the end of his tenure. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main argument and narrative.

Section I: Early Korean State Development

State development, especially in its nascent phases, is disturbingly violent and precarious. The history of state development within the Korean Peninsula was no different. With the abrupt end of Japanese colonialism following the conclusion of WWII, the peninsula was thrown into a stateless period—increasingly chaotic and unpredictable, rife with crime, unemployment, inflation, and corruption. With surrender came an end to both Korea's main export market, Japan, and the industries which had supported the economy, as well as the exodus of Korea's administrative and technical know-how in the form of Japanese officials who had dominated decision making throughout the colonial period. In addition to the collapse of the economy and administrative systems, the volatile situation was exacerbated by the influxes of refugees—either those returning from abroad or streaming down from the North with which the existing institutions hardly had the capacity to absorb (Kim B.J. 2003, 293). Henderson (1968) writes “Refugees and repatriates without jobs and without the social constraints of their home communities joined gangs that stole, black-marketed, or pimped in Seoul and Pusan's alleys and marketplaces” (139). In addition, gangs which had origins in organized crime and violence during the colonial period were harnessed by competing political powers. Most famous were the political thugs led by Kim Du-hwan and Chung Chin-yung—both of whom had been made famous for their anti-colonial activities but were then hired by the Japanese to organize and run the Police Assistance Association—effectively legitimizing their illegal activities. With the end of the colonial period in 1945, both Kim and Chung hired out their services to political parties and power brokers—Kim taking his group to the Rightists and Chung working for the Leftists. As will be explained in the following section, the two would eventually clash (US Army Intelligence Center, 93). In a similar fashion, politically oriented youth and student groups, not immune to the revolutionary atmosphere, quickly formed and became pervasive—tying themselves to power brokers and political factions which afforded them the opportunity to not only earn rents but do so while taking an active role in shaping the direction of the peninsula. Indeed, these groups played a critical role in political socialization and the recruitment of political and military leadership—with many future leaders rising from their ranks. Such groups would then eventually form the basis of power for each political boss and factionalist grouping—to the point where the US Counter-Intelligence Corps noted that “Violence and terrorism on the part of political groups was an accepted technique for getting things done. Any political party which lacked

a strong-arm youth group, fiercely loyal to the cause, to do its dirty work really could not be expected to worry any other political organization (ibid, 76). In addition to ‘grass-works’ work in the form of violent political activities, such groups, largely dependent upon illegal funds, relied upon forced or ‘voluntary contributions’ —contributions which surprisingly amounted to roughly half of national revenues in 1949. Leftists initially dominated the scene which in turn led to the formation of Rightists groups with their own state seeking ambitions (ibid, 76).

The left-right political divide in the peninsula was primarily the outcome of the colonial period in which the Rightists (made up of elitists with land, other forms of capital, and education) were the clear minority, having at least partially collaborated with the colonial power in order to enjoy their elevated status (ibid, 202). That the elites, the basis for the Rightists were the minority and suffered from legitimacy concerns—both in terms of public support and initially, coercive capability—is arguably an understatement. The overwhelming majority of Koreans were naturally left- leaning, being poor, rural, and typically uneducated—having 95% of employed men and 99% of employed women working as laborers as late as 1944 and as little as 11.5% living in urban settings (Henderson 1968, 75). Similar to the privileged class, the police force (staffed by and managed largely by those who had been trained by, served under, prospered and otherwise cooperated with the Japanese) was overwhelmingly viewed as illegitimate (ibid, 143). Indeed, police power had infiltrated and permeated throughout the lives of everyday Koreans during the colonial period and the utilization of brutal tactics, torture, and summary punishments, on the spot executions included, proved immeasurable to Japan’s successful rule of more than 30 years (ibid, 143). General distrust and animosity of homegrown Rightists was so much that in order to obtain at least some semblance of legitimacy they had to look outside of Korea—choosing exiled nationalists and staunch anti-communists such as Rhee Syngman and Kim Ku to lead their cause.

In the wake of such turmoil, a number of both formal and informal protective institutions emerged—many of which were organized prior to and in preparation for the arrival of the Americans in the South. The most conspicuous was established by the politically inclusive Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI)—headed by moderate Yo Un Hyung and anchored by left leaning People’s Committees. The CPKI (later changing its name to the Korean People’s Republic)—formed the first de-facto government in the post-colonial era and had done so with surprising success. Paramount on the to-do list was restoring

order. Untrusting of the then existing police the Committee harnessed existing youth groups (and recruited more from the vast supply of the unemployed) for security purposes, with the intended policy of utilizing the Corps as the main enforcement agency and the police as adjuncts (Meade 1951, 55). By August 25th, 1945, some 2,000 youths had been organized in Seoul, with over 140 branches in areas outside the capital—exercising de-facto sovereignty over the peninsula (Kim, B.J. 2003, 291-292). Despite the organization's effort to obtain official recognition, US officials openly opposed the Korean People's Republic and opted instead to cooperate with the conservative and unpopular Korean Democratic Party (KDP)—a group which was led by exiled nationalists and conservatives and one which was aligned with the tainted Korean National Police (KNP). Whatever order had been obtained by the CPKI was lost with the US Military's refusal of recognition—a move which in no small part exacerbated the already tense relations across the political divide (Cumings 1997, 190-192).

Ostensibly bolstered by the conspicuous presence and support of U.S. forces, the Rightists began to mobilize and consolidate their own paramilitary youth wings in order to compete with the more numerous and better organized Leftist groups. *Compete* is the key word there. Up to that point there were no real state *actors*, rather, a plethora of state seekers all vying for supremacy. Although the Rightists had the police at their disposal, they were significantly outnumbered. The Leftists in turn, without a ready-made police force at hand, had to recruit anyone ready and willing to join. By December of 1945, the umbrella organization referred to as the General Alliance of Young Men for Korean Association of Independence (GAYMKAI), comprised of 43 linked factions was formed. This was a group which posed a direct challenge to the Leftist's own consolidated General Alliance of Joeson Youth (GAJY)—with staunch anti-communist, Rhee Syngman, and nationalist Kim Ku (leader of the Korean Provisional Government), as the president and vice president respectively (Kim, B.J. 2003, 292-294). By 1947, 34 young men's associations—of Leftist and Rightist political orientations—had officially registered before the Joint Commission (Henderson 1968, 141). While officially registered, the violent activities these groups engaged in—both protective and offensive—remained unofficially sanctioned by their respective political leaders.

Under the US military occupation of the South, the buildup of Rightist paramilitary forces went hand in hand with the buildup of the Korean National Police and other forces tasked with the responsibility of bolstering the anti-Communist agenda. While the exact numbers are unclear, accounts have the police force prior to the Japanese surrender at 23,000—with 40% having been staffed by predominately low-ranking Koreans. Japanese

personnel were eventually replaced by Koreans and by mid 1946 the overall numbers had increased to 25,000. By the change of guard to Korean control in 1948, the KNP numbered an estimated 34,000 (ibid 142-143). While the KNP were the main official elements of coercion the violent youth groups, supported and recruited by various Rightist factions (and at times directly by the USAMGIK), were far from insignificant. To suggest that the recruitment of militant youth groups was merely a function of a weak (but politically partisan police force) would however be incorrect. Based on his research on the American occupation in Cholla Nam Do (South Cholla Province), an area known for having especially strong Leftist support, Meade (1951) notes that the two Rightist political parties—the Democrats and the Unification Party—pooled their efforts with the paramilitary youths adopting the Unification label, so as to be able to continue their terrorist activities with the “odium falling upon only one of the rightist groups” (163). Such strategic games were employed throughout the peninsula. Although there were numerous youth organizations of varying sizes and political orientations arguably the most notorious factions were the Korea Democratic Young Men’s Association (KDYA)—led by future assemblyman and well known and aforementioned political gangster Kim Du-hwan, the Northwest Youth Corps (NWYC) and the USAMGIK funded Korean National/Racial Youth Corps (Henderson 1968, 140-141).

Rightist youth bands were largely free to utilize brutal tactics against the leftists and suspected communists. For example, the gangster turned nationalist, Kim Du-Han, unleashed his youth faction on April of 1947 and captured, beat and tortured 13 leftists who had been distributing anti-Rhee Syngman literature (working on behalf of the South Korean Labor Party (SKLP) and under the direction of Chung Chin Yung). With one member eventually escaping and notifying the Seoul District Offices, officials soon arrived in order to investigate—finding two leftists dead—with Kim Du-Hwan and his followers readily admitting the murder. So great was the public outcry that the police were forced to act and arrest those deemed responsible. However, despite Kim Du-Hwan’s own confession as well as the accounts of the surviving victims, the Seoul District Court found insufficient evidence for a murder conviction, and instead fined Kim Du-Hwan 200,000 yen—the equivalent of two cartons of cigarettes on the black market. Although Kim was eventually re-tried by the US Military Government and handed out a death sentence in March of 1948 (commuted to life in prison), by August of 1948, after the end of the US occupation, Kim was given amnesty by the newly elected President Rhee. Following the Korean War, Kim would eventually go on to serve as the Chief of the Investigation Section of the Korean Youth Corps, Rhee’s personal

bodyguard and as a member of the National Assembly in the 1960s (ibid, 92-96).

To be sure, the same lenient treatment did not extend to the leftists who were handed out hard sentences for crimes much less brutal than Kim Du-Han's. Leftists for example were often handed out multiple year sentences, some accompanied with hard labor for attending rallies, giving unauthorized speeches, or in other instances, being suspected of going against the provisional government (ibid, 157). Furthermore, Meade (1951) reiterates that "Leftist terrorism was punished by fines and imprisonment, while rightist goon squads were gently chided and warned not to repeat their offenses" (165).

To suggest that the USAGMIK and other state actors (the KNP included) merely afforded Rightist youth bands preferential treatment, or otherwise couldn't control them because of they lacked capacity, would be incorrect. Rather, such 'paramilitary' youth groups acted largely as auxiliary forces to state forces—with many of the groups having their headquarters either adjacent to, or directly inside police stations (Kuzmarov 2012). For instance, according to Henderson (1968), "gang and boss were less dominators compared to their role as the instruments of domination in government's confrontation with the masses" (234). In a similar fashion, CIA reports stated that: "The enforced alliance of the police with the Right has been reflected in the cooperation of the police with Rightist youth groups for the purpose of completely suppressing the Leftist activity" (Cumings 1997, 202).

Cases that illustrate the collaborative relationships between the Rightists paramilitary youth squads, the KNP, and the USAMGIK are numerous. This was especially so following the 1946 Fall Riots in which, initially, railway laborers (voicing opposition to the daily wage system), followed by electric, printing, postal, and those working in other industries, went on strike. Students as well as a number of government workers soon joined the protests that occurred throughout the South. In response, the Military Government (initially believing the riots to have been agitated by Leftists and Communists groups) ordered the suppression of the strike by force—in which members of the KNP and Rightist paramilitary squads worked side by side. For instance, in Yongsan Railway Station in Seoul, 3,000 armed policemen and 1,000 members of youth squads were deployed to suppress the activities of the strikers and protect right-wing union members returning to work—ultimately arresting 2,000 strikers while injuring 60 through the use of gunfire, clubs, and rocks. For example, Robinson (1960) noted that *Yongsan* and the surrounding areas had the appearance of a battlefield—with armed gangs of hired thugs (operating with the complicity of the KNP) roaming the streets and industrial areas with the "announced purpose of breaking up any Leftist agitation" (162).

Among the hired thugs was Kim Du-hwan's KDYA group, with rifles and hand grenades supplied by the KNP. Besides suppressing strikers, they led attacks against various Leftist organizations—such as ransacking the headquarters of the Joseon Communist Party, the executive offices of the Central People's Committee, and the Jayu Shinmun (Free News) building, while beating the staff and destroying (as well as confiscating) property and documents along the way. Moreover, 3,000 KDYA members, again supplied with weapons and other materials by the KNP and the US Army, were dispatched to locations outside of Seoul—helping to recapture and suppress further riots in areas such as Goryeong, Seognju, Waegon, Yecheon and Yeongcheon (Kim, B.J. 2003, 302-303).

Arguably the most violent, or at least most notorious of paramilitary youth groups was the anticommunist Northwest Young Men's Association (NWYMA)—a group established officially (though with earlier roots) in November of 1946 and one which the CIC established liaison with (among other established rightist organizations) in order to capitalize on their unique comparative advantages. Indeed, the links between the US Military and the NWYMA are quite clear, with the CIC going so far as stating:

“The CIC could not perform its counterespionage mission alone, for reasons attributed in part to language hurdles and absence of professional agents. Of particular value to CIC were members of the North West Young Men's Association, NWYMA, a youth organization composed of men who had fled from North Korea. All members had had to have suffered personally at the hands of the Communists. Unfortunately, this organization was heavily inclined towards brutality in its attempts to even the score with its enemies; but the members knew enough about the top North Korean Reds to make it imperative that they be utilized in counterespionage operations under strict CIC supervision” (US Army Intelligence Center, 25).

Both independently and under the auspices of the CIC, the NWYMA—an organization which the CIC themselves labeled as a top terrorist organization—conducted a range of anticommunist activities including counterespionage missions throughout the peninsula, censoring refugees from North Korea, arranging for jobs for refugees, broadcasting anticommunist messages to the North, and jointly policing areas with the KNP (Kim, B.J. 2003, 309-314).

Perhaps the most egregious pre-war actions taken by the NWYA occurred both prior and during the Cheju Insurgency. Cheju-do, an island roughly 60 miles (100 km) southwest

of South Cholla province, of which it was once administratively part of until 1947—was controlled from 1945 until early 1948 by the left leaning People’s Committees—having consolidated power on the island through armed clashes with Rightists groups in the aftermath of liberation. If the Rightists had legitimacy concerns on the mainland, with roughly 80% of the island population supporting or at least sympathizing with the Leftists and Communists—they had a full-blown legitimacy crisis on their hands-on Cheju-do. Furthermore, the island had a long history of insurrection and rebellions against mainland rule.

Initially peaceful between 1945 and 1947, sporadic violence soon ensued, precipitated by a number of factors including: a poor economy with increased tax burdens, a once cooperative US occupation forces whose attitude towards the leftists hardened in the wake of insurgencies throughout the peninsula, and quite significantly the arrival of a newly appointed ultra-rightist military governor, Yu Hae-jin, who was un-sympathetic to the committee, dictatorial, and ruthless (Cumings 2010, 121-122). Indeed, Governor Yu—a staunch supporter of Rhee Syngman, staffed the already unpopular KNP with mainlanders and unleashed the NWYA, a group which operated according to Merrill (1980) “without even the minimal constraints that, in theory, limited the police” (Merrill 1980, 154). Further exacerbating the tense situation were low police salaries and a “volunteer” rightist terrorist group whose livelihood was dependent upon shakedowns, blackmail, protection rackets, and other “gangster-like” activities which put the KNP, the NWYA, the locally-recruited constabulary, and the islanders in an on-going cycle of terror and counter-terror (ibid, 154).

With conditions apt for rebellion, full-scale insurgency was ignited shortly following the March 1st, 1948 announcement of unpopular separate elections in the South and subsequent rightist crackdowns on demonstrations. Violence on the part of both the Rightists and Leftists was extreme. For instance, Cumings (2010) for notes that “In Hagui village, for example, right-wing youths captured Mun, a pregnant woman aged twenty-one and who faced allegations of being married to an insurgent, took her away from her house where they stabbed her severally, an act that made her lose her pregnancy in the end. She was left to die with her baby half-delivered. Other women were serially raped, often in front of villagers, and then blown up with a grenade in the vagina” (124). In one instance, four American advisers witnessed the execution of seventy-six villagers—among them five women and numerous children—by the NWYA and supervised by the police. The guerrillas perpetrated their own anomic retribution through the raiding of villages and the capturing and killing (at times by hanging or beheading) of Rightist youth members, police and suspected

collaborators (Merrill 1980, 186).

Insurgent forces alone were estimated to be anywhere between 3,000 to 4,000 members in strength, and were more so bolstered by popular support. Government forces, at the outset ineffective, consisting of roughly 450 KNP, hundreds of Rightist youth members, and an ‘understrength’ of sporadically unreliable constabulary. Reinforcements from all southern provinces were quickly mobilized and sent to bolster the weak government forces—with as many as 1,700 police and 800 constabulary troops being sent (Cumings 1997, 229). As the insurrection ensued, the recruitment of mainland forces for the counterinsurgency proved in part disastrous—with the well-documented Yosu Rebellion being sparked by the violent refusal of the elements of the 6th and 14th Regiments to participate in the suppression campaign—a rebellion which quickly spread throughout the South (ibid, 132). By April 1949, resistance forces were curtailed and order essentially restored—with estimated casualties across the island being anywhere between 30,000 to 80,000 people—substantial by any measure but especially so when you consider the total population to have been as low as 300,000 in the late 1940s (ibid, 121; Deane 1999, 37).

Where the US Military capitalized on the pre-existence of the NWYA and other Rightist paramilitary groups, the Korean National Youth Corps (later the Racial Youth Corps) presents a case in which the USAMGIK specifically sponsored, financed and supplied a non-state paramilitary youth group—modeled after Chiang Kai-shek’s “Blue Shirts” and one which was loyal and directly accountable to the Military Government (ibid, 124). The Military Government in 1946 selected Yi Pöm-sök as the head of the organization—a former commander within the Korean Restoration Army in China and one who had worked closely with American Intelligence and the Kuomintang forces. As head of the training facilities Dr. An Ho-sang, a German educated admirer of Hitler’s paramilitary Youth (*Jugend*) was chosen. Based on the fact that it was ostensibly created in order to have an anti-Communist force in place in the event the negotiations with the Russians failed, Henderson (1968) notes that secrecy and the youth association title were employed to avoid protests (Henderson 1968, 141). Along with other Rightists youth associations (and the KNP) they were active in terrorism, strike breaking, suppression of uprisings and other anti-Communist activities throughout the southern peninsula (Dean 1999, 38; Cumings 2010, 124).

Having established himself as the uncontested leader of the Rightists, Rhee Syngman assumed the pinnacle of formal power after the May 10th separate elections—elections that took place under significant security measures. One measure was the creation of Community

Protection Associations—police auxiliary forces composed of Rightist youth members tasked with maintaining order:

Armed with clubs and axes, they patrolled the villages, proud of the government's "favor" to them and anxious to display their new status by interfering in the lives of ordinary citizens. Cases of police or youth groups beating, threatening, robbing, blackmailing, and removing the ration cards of those who would not register were reported to UNTOK (Henderson 1968, 156).

In addition to bringing about a transfer of power from the USAMGIK to Rhee Syngman (through a nearly unanimous National Assembly vote), Communism was officially outlawed under the National Security Law, which provided the KNP and their auxiliary forces virtually unlimited power to root out opposition (Kim C.N. 2008, 52). According to Henderson (1968), the bill was "…so vague as to encourage utilization of the judiciary by the executive to eliminate political enemies. The judiciary as an instrument of executive predominance, not defender of rights or instrument of balance of powers forthwith became even more active than under colonial rule" (162-163). The arbitrarily employed Security Law and domination of the Judiciary by the executive (through intimidation) proved especially valuable to Rhee given that factionalism and competing loyalties was and continues to be resilient characteristic of Korean politics. Through it, Rhee was able to effectively purge or otherwise threaten into compliance a number of National Assembly members with divided loyalties and thus dominate the legislature. Furthermore, Rhee attempted to consolidate his power by absorbing all Rightist youth associations into a single national group termed the Korean Youth Association (KYA)—a group which was accorded official government status and public funds (Kim B.J. 2003, 319). When the National Youth Corps, a group characterized as 'clearly loyal' to and under then Prime Minister Yi Pöm-sök (who was simultaneously made the minister of defense), delayed in joining the KYA, Rhee asked Yi to either dissolve the organization or resign from power. Yi chose the former option, with the KNYA formally disbanding in 1949 (Han 1974, 21). In the same year, the recalcitrant Kim Ku, (then in opposition to Rhee) was assassinated by an army lieutenant who was initially convicted of the murder but was shortly thereafter pardoned and promoted to lieutenant colonel by Rhee Syngman (Henderson 1986, 166, 257). Despite Rhee's moves, in addition to the expansion of forces, control was tentative at best; with on-going guerrilla actions, eventual fraternal war erupted in June of 1950.

Section II: Consolidation of Power and Rise of a Contentious Society: 1952-1960

Having been re-elected in 1952 Rhee Syngman survived the war politically intact as the republic's first president and continued to rule in an increasingly difficult and competitive environment. In 1951, Rhee called upon Yi Pöm-sök to set up the Liberal Party (Chayudang)—a party which penetrated deeply into Korean society through its various core social organizations, one of which was the KNP which remained key to Rhee's machine. Their loyalty being ensured through the Liberal Party's having control over police personnel's origin and survival. In order to further consolidate Rhee's power, he 'rewarded' Yi and his followers by purging them through various methods between 1952 and 1953. Furthermore, he formally dissolved all officially sanctioned youth groups on September 10th, 1953—effectively ending them as significant independent political players. Rhee additionally instructed the Liberal Party to ensure that no former member of the National Youth Corps, a group still loyal to Yi Pöm-sök, would ever gain office in the assembly (Kongboch'o, 130; Henderson 1968, 452). Through such measures and the façade of democratic rule, Rhee was able to dominate the political scene from his initial election triumph in 1948 through 1955—with virtually no social institution effectively being able to operate without providing him and his Liberal Party unconditional support (Han 1974, 21).

With little room for doubt however, Rhee continued to utilize his autocratic and at times, brutal style of governance, and increasingly so, given a number of factors which ratcheted up the competitiveness of South Korean politics following the war. To begin with there was a gradual process of urbanization coupled with increases in mass education. In 1952 roughly 17.2% of the population lived in cities of 50,000 or more. In 1955 this increased to 24.5 % and by 1960, the year in which Rhee and the Liberal Party collapsed, urban residents accounted for a significant 28% (7 million) of the population (ibid, 27). With respect to education, from 1948 to 1960 Korea's university level institutions rose from 31 to 62 with enrollment increasing from 24,000 to 97,819. Secondary schools expanded as well, with 97 institutions in 1945 soaring to 357 in 1960. Furthermore, feeding the increasingly anti-government populace was a massive expansion in communications and mass media, with 600 newspapers and periodicals being registered by 1960, and up to 1,444 by 1961—staffed by roughly 100,000 reporters (Henderson 1968, 170-172).

As if growth in urbanization, education and expansions in communications were not enough, further pressure was put on Rhee's political machine through the development of

a stronger, more united and coherent ‘grand coalition’ of opposition under the Democratic Party (*Minju-dang*) banner in 1955 which offered the population a clear choice of who or who not to vote for and thus exacerbating the polarization of Korean politics. That the urban populace favored the opposition was clear given both Rhee’s and the Liberal Party’s poor electoral results—despite widespread intimidation and electoral manipulation. In the executive election of 1956 for example, Rhee Syngman received only 33.8% of the Seoul vote compared to 56% in the nation. In the 1958 National Assembly elections, only 13 out of 126 seats gained by the Liberal Party came from cities of 50,000 or more, while the Democrats received 43 out of 79 seats from the same cities (Han 1974, 27).

On the heels of political gains over the course of a number of elections, Assembly opposition members and budget conscious economic-aid authorities were able to reduce the inflated police force—having reached a peak of 75,000 during the war—down to 40,000 in July of 1955, and despite continued Liberal Party objections, down to 39,000 in 1958. While the KNP was reduced, the state’s war-expanded military became the preeminent public source of force. This was a key development given that the military was able to maintain semi-independence from the central government (Henderson 1968, 169).

As in the pre-war election, the KNP and now unofficial (though Rhee sanctioned) Rightist youth groups were mobilized and present in voting booths during the 1960 Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections (with two separate voting tickets) ensuring that voters cast their ballots for Rhee and members of his Liberal Party. In addition to outright intimidation and coercion, ballot counts were manipulated or openly fabricated, which was made easier due to the election centers being located within provincial headquarters (Han 1974, 28). Of the election, the Korea Report noted:

Democratic rallies were prohibited throughout the nation. Specific instructions were sent by the Home Ministry to police chiefs throughout the nation specifying the exact plurality by which Dr. Rhee and Mr. Lee were to be elected. Hundreds of thousands of pre-marked ballots accompanied these instructions, and these were dutifully stuffed into the ballot boxes on election day. Hoodlums smashed up Democratic Party offices and beat up Democratic election workers and sympathizers. In the country areas, voters were compelled by the police to go to the ballots in groups of three, one of whom was an arm-banded “Supervisor” whose duty was to check supposedly secret ballots before they were cast (Kim EC and KS Kim 1964).

The results of the election were unsurprising with Rhee receiving 88.7% of the votes while Yi Ki-bung—the Liberal Party’s Vice-Presidential candidate received 8,225,000 votes compared to the Democratic Party’s Chang Myōn receiving 1,850,000 (Henderson 1968, 174). That the election was manipulated was not lost on the vast majority of Koreans. Viewing the results as illegitimate, citizens began demonstrating against the illegal elections in mass, especially so following the killing of eight protesters by the KNP in Masan on election day and the subsequent discovery of a 16 year old victim with a police tear-gas shell lodged in his skull floating in Masan Harbor the following day. Both acts sparked three days of virtually uncontrollable rioting and, yet again, leading to more casualties in the same city (Kim QY 1983, 5). Newspapers—the vast majority of which condemned the killing of students and other protesters—quickly spread information on numerous cases of electoral violations. Other demonstrations occurred, many of which targeted police officers and their stations, as well as the burning of the offices of government propaganda agencies, Rightist youth organizations and other government-aligned organizations such as the Seoul *Sinmun* (Seoul Newspaper) (Kim 1983, 5-6).

In one significant instance (among many similar type actions) the *Ich'on Pa*—a police-protected organized crime group which operated the lucrative Dongdaemun (East Gate) market in Seoul was mobilized to attack protesting Korea University students on April 18th. The following day, the date from which the uprising derives its name, “*Sa-Il Gu*” (April, 19), some 200 demonstrators were killed by government aligned forces thus precipitating further demonstrations with which the Rhee and the Liberal Party, having exhausted their coercive forces, were unable to contain. Despite having called for martial law the military (under United Nations Command) stood by, merely protecting against destruction of property and further bloodshed. On April 21st, in response to the continued chaos, Rhee’s Cabinet resigned. It only took five days from that point for Rhee to capitulate—handing over power to an interim government under Hō Chōng, followed by a short but tumultuous flirtation with democracy under Prime Minister Chang Myōn’s parliamentary government, who was in turn overthrown in the 1961 coup d’état led by Park Chong-hee (Han 1974, 29-30).

Section III: Conclusion

In August of 1945 Japan’s 35-year colonial rule of the peninsula abruptly ended, sending Korea into what can be largely described as a stateless period. State seekers, including the

USAMGIK, supplemented their weak forces through the recruitment and training of private citizens able and willing to utilize violence means. Although Rhee Syngman had attempted to consolidate all groups into one large institution loyal and subservient to his cause, state capacity at that time, coupled with an increasingly powerful society in favor of change, limited his ability to do so. The era of collaboration between political gangsters, nationalists, paramilitaries and state actors to varying extents would thus continue through the post-Rhee period, though to a much less degree, as would be predicted through the lens of state development theory.

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