

AMBASSADOR AT WAR: JOHN J. MUCCIO AND THE
KOREAN WAR (1948-1952)

A Master's Thesis

by
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August 2019

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1952)

Bilkent University 2019

To my parents Mehmet and Züleyha

AMBASSADOR AT WAR: JOHN J. MUCCIO AND THE KOREAN WAR (1948-
1952)

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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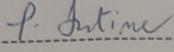
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

AUGUST 2019

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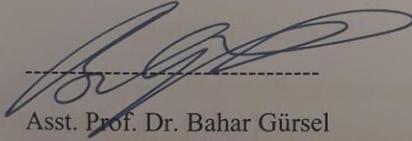
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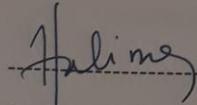
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ABSTRACT

AMBASSADOR AT WAR: JOHN J. MUCCIO AND THE KOREAN WAR (1948-1952)

Kubat, Muhammed Cihad

M.A, Department of History

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Paul Latimer

August 2019

The United States of America sent eight ministers to Korea's Chosŏn Dynasty and Korean Empire from 1883 until 1905. John J. Muccio was the first Ambassador that the U.S. dispatched to the Republic of Korea. What made Muccio different from the other eight representatives was his country's changing place in world politics after World War I and World War II. After World War II, the U.S. became a key player in the decision making process with regard to the Korean Peninsula's fate along with the Soviet Union. The dissertation explores the salient aspirations, dilemmas and experiences of the "dean of diplomatic corps" in the Republic of Korea. Relying extensively on the American and Korean declassified archival materials, this dissertation reconstructs the Korean War from the point of view of John J. Muccio. Muccio was one of the primary proponents of the idea of delaying the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from the Republic of Korea. Immediately after the outbreak of the Korean War, Muccio had to overstep his bounds as an envoy of a foreign nation mainly because of the lack of leadership shown by Syngman Rhee. Muccio became the *de facto* leader of the civilian opposition against the North Korean onslaught, a position he kept until the relocation of the Republic of Korea to Seoul

on September 29, 1950. The political crisis of 1952 was when Muccio yielded to Rhee's manipulation tactics and it set a precedent for the U.S. to align itself with authoritative figures in Korea instead of supporting democratic processes.

Key words: John J. Muccio, Korean War, Republic of Korea. Syngman Rhee, The United States of America.

ÖZET

SAVAŞTAKİ BÜYÜKELÇİ: JOHN J. MUCCIO VE KORE SAVAŞI (1948-1952)

Kubat, Muhammed Cihad

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Paul Latimer

Ağustos 2019

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Kore'nin Chosön Krallığı'na ve Kore İmparatorluğu'na 1883'ten 1905'e kadar sekiz elçi gönderdi. John J. Muccio, A.B.D.'nin Kore Cumhuriyeti'ne gönderdiği ilk büyükelçiydi. Muccio'yu sekiz selefine kıyasla farklı kılan nokta ise ülkesinin I. Dünya Savaşı ve II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası dünya politikasındaki değişen yeriydi. II. Dünya Savaşı sonrasında A.B.D. Sovyetler Birliği ile birlikte Kore Yarımadasının kaderini belirleme sürecinde en etkin rol oynayan ülke konumundaydı. Bu tez, Kore Cumhuriyetindeki “en kıdemli diplomatın” dikkat çeken amaçlarını, ikilemelerini ve deneyimlerini tetkik etmektedir. Bu tez, gizliliği kaldırılmış Amerikan ve Kore arşiv belgelerine geniş ölçüde başvurarak Kore Savaşını John J. Muccio'nun gözünden tekrar inşa etmektedir. Muccio, Amerikan askeri birliklerinin Kore'den çekilmesinin ertelenmesi fikrinin başta gelen savunucularından birisidir. Kore Savaşı'nın patlak vermesinin hemen ardından Muccio yabancı bir ülkenin temsilcisi olmakla beraber gelen sınırlamaları Syngman Rhee'nin yeterli liderlik gösterememesi nedeniyle çiğnemek zorunda kalmıştır. Muccio, Kuzey Kore'nin şiddetli saldırısının karşısında olan sivillerin fiili lideri olmuştur ve bu pozisyonunu Kore Cumhuriyeti'nin 29 Eylül 1950'de Seul'e tekrar dönmesine kadar korumuştur. 1952'deki siyasi kriz sırasında Muccio, Rhee'nin manipülasyon

taktiklerine boyun eęmek zorunda kalmıř ve bu olay A.B.D.'nin Kore'de demokratik sreęleri desteklemek yerine otoriter liderlerle aynı eksene girmesi konusunda emsal teřkil etmiřtir.

Anahtar Szckler: Amerika Birleřik Devletleri, John J. Muccio, Kore Savařı, Kore Cumhuriyeti, Syngman Rhee.

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Archives and libraries are indispensable aspects for doing historical research. I have benefited from several archives and libraries which I would like to write one by one here. The National Archives of the Republic of Korea, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Syngman Rhee Presidential Archives located in the Yonsei University Library, National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea, National Library of the Republic of Korea. I would especially like to thank the National Institute of Korean History for providing me with the American archival materials. Bilkent University library was my mecca as a history graduate student. I would like to thank them for acquiring more than 300 books of my choice, which enabled me to write my thesis in the best way. I would like to thank the librarians and archivists of the abovementioned institutions for guiding me during my research.

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Finally, although I share the strengths of this study with many scholars who wrote about the Korean War before me, I alone bear the responsibility for its errors and shortcomings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Objectives

In the days before Emperor Hirohito's announcement of Japan's surrender in World War II, John J. McCloy of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) gave the task of dividing Korea to two young colonels, Dean Rusk who would later become Secretary of State and Charles H. Bonesteel who would later become Commander of the U.S. Forces in Korea. It was around midnight on August 10, 1945, and American planners were in a hurry to plan the aftermath of Japan's retreat from the Korean Peninsula. Given 30 minutes to decide, Rusk and Bonesteel chose the 38th parallel since it would place the capital Seoul in the American zone but they were also concerned about the possibility that the Soviets might not have agreed with their proposition because American troops were far away from the Korean Peninsula while the Soviets had already

started to liberate Korea from Japan.¹ Surprisingly, the Soviets accepted the proposal when they were in an advantageous position militarily to take over the whole peninsula. With the Soviets already in Korea, American command tried to find a unit that could reach the Korean Peninsula in a short notice. They decided to send the Tenth Army's 24th Corps which was based in Okinawa. Led by General John Hodge, a hero of the Okinawa campaign, 24th Corps left Okinawa on September 5, and arrived in Inch'ŏn on September 8. Afterwards, General Hodge set up the United States Army Military Government (USAMGIK) which was going to be the official ruling body of the southern half of the Korean Peninsula from September 8, 1945 to August 15, 1948.

USAMGIK transferred all of its powers to the Republic of Korea (ROK) after the latter's inauguration on August 15, 1948; and the State Department started to look around for a competent candidate to become the U.S. representative in the ROK. On April 27, 1948, Secretary of State G.C. Marshall sent a memorandum to President Harry S. Truman. He suggested John J. Muccio, a Foreign Service Officer, could become the first Ambassador to the Republic of Korea on the grounds that he "ha[d] demonstrated unusual ability" and had experiences in the Far East, South America and Germany.² Eventually, John J. Muccio was appointed as the Special Representative of the President to Korea in August 1948.

John Joseph Muccio was born in Italy. His parents came to the U.S. when he was an infant and they settled in Providence, Rhode Island. During World War I, Muccio

¹ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in The Sun A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 187. *Hereafter *Korea's Place*.

² Foreign Relations of United States (FRUS), *The Far East and Australasia (1948)*, Volume VI, 1183. *Hereafter FRUS.

served in the U.S. Army briefly and then, in 1921 he graduated from Brown University. In the same year he became a naturalized U.S. citizen, and started working in the consular service. He also received an M.A. degree from George Washington University's Department of International Relations where he wrote a dissertation on the Hawaiian Annexation.³ On August 24, 1948, Muccio arrived in Korea as the Special Representative of the President of the U.S. Four months later he would be officially entitled as the first Ambassador of the U.S. The U.S. sent its ministers to Korea's Chōson Dynasty after signing the United States-Korea Treaty of 1882 (the Shufeldt Treaty). Starting from 1883, the U.S. sent in total eight ministers to Korea's Chōson Dynasty (1392-1897) and the Korean Empire (1897-1910) until Japanese annexation in 1910. What made Muccio different from the other eight representatives was his country's changing place in world politics after World War I and World War II. After World War II, the U.S. became a key player in Korea's future along with the Soviet Union. Muccio was not just a diplomat but someone to be consulted before making a decision internally or externally because of the ROK's immense dependence upon the economic aid coming from the U.S.

This thesis is primarily concerned with John J. Muccio and his tenure in the ROK from 1948 to 1952. Muccio's mission was a challenging one from the start. Between 1948 and 1950, he had to deal with the complicated nature of the ROK's politics and make sure that the authoritarian Syngman Rhee did not establish himself as a dictator just as Kim Il Sung did on the northern side. Abiding by the orders given to him, Muccio had to force Rhee to take bolder steps in economic reformation as well as the process regarding the

³Stanley Sandler, *Korean War: An Encyclopedia* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 225.

formation of the military forces of the ROK. However, Muccio did not agree with all of the instructions handed over to him. The most important of which was the retreat order of the U.S. military forces stationed in the southern part of Korea after the end of WWII. Muccio almost begged Washington in order to prevent a premature retreat of American troops from the start of his tenure until the adoption of the National Security Council (NSC) 8/2.⁴ The Truman administration failed to take into account his suggestions with regards to military aid to the ROK after the adoption of NSC 8/2 and paved the way for the Soviets and North Korea to perceive that Korea was a dispensable aspect of American foreign policy.⁵ After the initiation of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, Muccio's position changed due to the lack of leadership coming from Rhee. Muccio became the civilian *de facto* leader of the resistance against the North Korean aggression and he made sure that the ROK government did not crumble from the shock of the situation. While he infused positivity to the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy, he appealed to the Truman Administration to support the ROK against the North Korean aggression. As the Ambassador to Korea, his suggestions became very important for Truman specifically after June 25, 1950. Muccio's role was overshadowed in the historiography of the Korean War due to the abundance of important characters involved in the crisis. This thesis will cover John J. Muccio's tenure in Korea (1948-1952) and reconstruct the history of the Korean War from the standpoint of a top diplomat working in the field. It will demonstrate that Muccio strongly opposed the suggestions of a premature all out withdrawal of the

⁴ NSC 8/2 is a foreign policy document of the U.S. that finalized the date of the U.S. troop withdrawal from the ROK.

⁵ Kathryn Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung, and the Prelude to War," Cold War International History Project, Bulletin, no. 5, Woodrow Wilson Center, (Spring 1995): 1-8. *Hereafter CWIHP.

U.S. troops from late August 1948 till the adoption of NSC 8/2 in which he was a primary member in the decision making process at Washington. After the adoption of NSC 8/2, Muccio's suggestions to the Department of State with regard to the supplies of the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) were overruled by the State Department which eventually caused the Republic of Korea's Army to be inadequately supplied. This thesis argues that after the outbreak of hostilities on June 25, 1950, Muccio had to overstep his position as an Ambassador to a foreign nation and act as the *de facto* leader of the South Korean resistance until the ROK's relocation to Seoul in September 29, 1950. The thesis will demonstrate that Muccio's suggestions regarding the structure of the U.S. Army in Korea were crucial in holding the defense perimeter until MacArthur's amphibious landing in Inch'ŏn. Finally, this thesis will suggest that during the Armistice Talks, Muccio tried to contain the furious Rhee from exploding the negotiations and voiced his disfavor against a *coup d'état* plan to topple Rhee.

1.2. Historiography

Up until recently, there was no single academic work that dealt primarily with Muccio and his tenure in Korea. This is perhaps because his personal papers were not open for research in comparison to the papers of other well known diplomats. Another reason is the involvement of several leaders which eventually overshadowed most of the role of Muccio played before and during the Korean War. This is also evident in the current literature of the Korean War in which we come across very limited information about Muccio.

The most comprehensive work that deals with Muccio is Kim Do Min's M.A. thesis titled "1948~50 nyŏn Chuhanmidaesagwanŭi Sŏlch'iwa Chŏngmuhwaldong" [The United States Embassy in Korea and its political activities from 1948 to 1950] which was submitted to Seoul National University in 2012. Even though it is primarily concerned with the Embassy's activities from 1948 to 1950, it provides us with some insight about Muccio's position regarding the developments in the Korean Peninsula. Kim argues that Muccio's previous relation with the military was a decisive factor in his appointment as the Special Representative of the President to Korea because at the time of Muccio's appointment South Korea was ruled by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK).⁶ Kim suggests that for some time there was confusion in the administrative structure of the U.S. in Korea, but after the arrival of Muccio, all of the U.S.' administrative bodies command was given to him including the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) which had been the ruling body since 1948.⁷ According to Kim, the U.S. Embassy had an absolute role in the survival of the Republic of Korea.⁸ In addition, after the Yŏsu-Sunch'ŏn Rebellion, the lower staff of the Embassy observed a change in the Korean perceptions of the U.S. Previously, the Koreans would call Americans *Migungnom* [American Bastard], but after the rebellion they started to call them *Yangban* [Nobleman]. Kim suggests that Muccio and the higher staff of the Korean Embassy did not add this kind of information to their reports because their main aim was maintaining the stability of the Rhee regime.⁹ According to Kim, the U.S. Embassy

⁶ Kim Do Min, *1948~50 nyŏn Chuhanmidaesagwanŭi Sŏlch'iwa Chŏngmuhwaldong* [The United States Embassy in Korea and its political activities from 1948 to 1950] Seoul National University, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, 2012, 19-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

actively refuted domestic and international criticisms against the Rhee government and defended Rhee by emphasizing the inevitability of the ROK's non-democratic measures.¹⁰ Kim argues that before the May 1949 elections, Muccio changed his mind about Rhee's autocratic administration and started criticizing some of Rhee's policies.¹¹ Finally, Kim argues that between 1948 and 1950, the views of the U.S. Ambassador were the main criteria for the State Department's decisions regarding Korea.¹² Kim Do Min provides us a concise story of the U.S. Embassy in Korea from 1948 to 1950 but he skips some of the main issues, and makes a number of generalizations. For example, he does not focus on the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Korea in which Muccio was at odds with the Department of Defense. This thesis will focus on this issue and argue that Muccio's views were not always the main criterion for the State Department's decisions regarding Korea, especially after the adaptation of NSC 8/2 when the State Department continuously overruled Muccio's suggestions to supply the Republic of Korea's Army with adequate weaponry.

The other scholarly work that deals with Muccio is Lee Sang-ho's recent article titled "Ch'odae Chuhanmiguktaesa Much'owa Chuhanmigun Ch'ölssue Taehan Taeüŋ" [US Ambassador John J. Muccio and His Response to the Withdrawal of the United States Armed Forces in Korea]. Lee's article is primarily concerned with the U.S. troops' withdrawal which this thesis also puts special emphasis on as well. Lee argues that there was a rift between the State Department and the military.¹³ Furthermore, Lee suggests that

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹² Ibid., 64.

¹³ Lee Sang-ho, "Ch'odae Chuhanmiguktaesa Much'owa Chuhanmigun Ch'ölssue Taehan Taeüŋ," [US Ambassador John J. Muccio and His Response to the Withdrawal of the United States Armed Forces in Korea] *Aseayön'gu* 61(1): 61.

Muccio did not strongly oppose Washington's decision regarding the retreat of most of its troops from the Korean Peninsula since he had to follow Truman Administration's decision.¹⁴ In addition, he argues that Muccio was in a dilemma because on the one hand, he wanted to strengthen the Korean military but on the other hand, he did not want to provide more than what was necessary because he was afraid of a possible South Korean attack against the North.¹⁵ According to Lee, Muccio's point of view regarding the troops' withdrawal had to change because he had no other choice apart from following the State Department's policies.¹⁶

Even though this thesis is in line with most of the suggestions put forward by Lee, there are some details that are seen from a different angle. First and foremost, this thesis interprets the U.S. troops' withdrawal in the context of East Asian history. Thus, the U.S.' decision to withdraw its troops from the Korean Peninsula had a wide array of effects not only regarding the U.S., but it also made North Korea, Russia and China to interpret the situation as the U.S.' lack of interest in the Korean Peninsula. In addition, this thesis argues that Muccio did whatever he could in order to delay and stop U.S. troops withdrawal from Korea until the adoption of NSC 8/2. This thesis also argues that Muccio was not a bystander in the decision process and he was the one who suggested June 30, 1949, as the date of withdrawal which was adopted in NSC 8/2.

Since this thesis is also concerned with the Korean War, it is deemed necessary to provide the reader with a historiography of Korean War studies and indicate this thesis' position. Many academic books have been written on the Korean War. The main

¹⁴Ibid., 64.

¹⁵ Ibid.,72.

¹⁶ Ibid., 74.

distinction between them is their viewpoint of the war. There is an orthodox/ traditional view, a revisionist view and finally a post-revisionist view. The historians who fall in the category of orthodox/ traditional contend that the United States was resisting the spread of communism during the period of the American Military Government (USAMGIK) just as it did in the course of the Korean War. Accordingly, it was Stalin who ordered Kim Il Sung to attack the ROK. The first major scholarly synthesis of the subject, from this point of view, was David Rees' *Korea: The Limited War* which was published in 1964. "The Korean War" states Rees, "was the first important war in American history that was not a crusade."¹⁷ Rees perceives the Korean War primarily as a manifestation of a limited war. He admires the intelligent Truman who "represented a vital part of the American consciousness almost outside the General's [MacArthur's] comprehension."¹⁸ According to Rees, the American way of war has always been an all-out crusade for total victory. Thus, there was a struggle between the American "liberal" view of warfare in which the enemy was totally destroyed and the realist Clausewitzian doctrine that created concepts such as containment and limited war. According to Rees, during the Korean War, MacArthur and the Republicans were "liberals" and Truman, Acheson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were realists. After General MacArthur's Inch'ŏn landing strategy, the south of the 38th parallel was secured but since MacArthur settled on a rollback against North Korea, he proceeded to the Yalu River and China eventually intervened in the Korean War. Despite MacArthur's desire to wage an all-out war on China, the Joint Chiefs

¹⁷ David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), xi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

of Staff suggested that this would be “the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Therefore, MacArthur was recalled and the war remained as a limited one.¹⁹

James Irving Matray is another scholar who perceives the Korean War as an international struggle in his book *Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950*. Matray surveys the U.S.’ Korean policy from 1941 to 1950 by placing an emphasis on Washington officials. He analyzes the Korean War as a “test case” of the U.S. containment strategy against the Soviet expansion in Asia. According to him, the outbreak of the War forced the U.S. to change its policy, which was based on indifference towards Korea, and to support Korean independence. He argues that “Truman’s commitment to South Korea was much greater than most scholars acknowledge” and “the administration consistently provided it with economic assistance, technical advice, and military aid during the period before June 25, 1950.”²⁰

William Stueck also supports the traditionalist view in his book *The Korean War: An International History*. Even though he acknowledges the civil dimension of the origins of the Korean War, he suggests that without the support of Mao and Stalin there would not have been a war in the Korean Peninsula in the first place. Thus, he states that the Korean War was primarily an international war. He argues that “in its timing, its course and its outcome, the Korean War served as a substitute for World War III.”²¹ Stueck was

¹⁹ Ibid., 272-4.

²⁰ James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 254.

²¹ William W. Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

one of the leading scholars who used U.S. declassified diplomatic archival resources (Foreign Relations of the United States) regarding the Korean War in his work.

The revisionist scholars mainly disagree with the traditional view in relation to the origins of the Korean War. The revisionists put forward the thesis that the Korean War did not start due to international factors; rather it was a local war which had its origins from Japanese colonization. One of the foremost representatives of the revisionist approach is Bruce Cumings with his two volume work on the origins of the Korean War. Unlike Rees, Matray and Stueck, Cumings utilizes Korean primary sources, and makes use of the captured North Korean documents during the Korean War. In the first volume of his *Origins of the Korean War Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947*, Cumings puts forward two theses. First, he asserts that Korean society was on the verge of a social revolution following the end of Japan's thirty-five year colonial rule. Even without Soviet and American occupation, there would have been political upheavals. According to him "land conditions and relationships, especially in the south, augured revolution."²² The second thesis of Cumings is that the Soviets supported the ongoing revolution, but the Americans under the leadership of General Hodge tried to suppress it. Korea was one of the test zones of the U.S. nation building policy, but it failed not because the American leaders were "ill-intended" but because "they were [...] historically shaped by the experience of their own country and therefore had little to offer a very different country."²³

²² Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), xxvii. *Hereafter *Origins Vol I*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 443.

In the second volume of his book titled *The Origins of the Korean War The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950*, Cumings focuses primarily on the American involvement in the years before the Korean War. He suggests that there was a “conflict of threes” in American foreign policy at the time, namely: 1) internationalism/imperialism, 2) containment, 3) rollback. Among these three, the first and the third are extreme choices but the second is a compromise that, while pleasing “no one in entirety, it gave almost every interest something of what it wanted and therefore persisted longer than internationalism or rollback.”²⁴ Cumings places a special emphasis on Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s speech of January 12, 1950 in which he did not add Korea to the U.S. defense perimeter. He argues “Stalin, of all people, or for that matter Kim Il Sung, would be misled by a public speech into thinking that the United States would not defend South Korea.”²⁵ For the question “who started the Korean War?” Cumings answers with three scenarios that he calls “mosaics.” The first is the “established American-South Korean position: that the Soviets and North Koreans stealthily prepared a heinous, unprovoked invasion.” The second mosaic concerns the idea that “the South provoked the war” and finally the third one posits “the South launched a surprise, unprovoked invasion all along the parallel.”²⁶ He comes to the conclusion that the third mosaic is the least plausible, for the first, we do not have any evidence, and the second “cannot be dismissed by honest historians.”²⁷ Therefore, Cumings does not clearly answer the question of who started the Korean War.

²⁴ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 29. *Hereafter *Origins Vol II*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 410.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 568.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 618.

Due to the censorship of successive authoritarian regimes, South Korean scholars were unable to do research freely on the Korean War until the late 1980s. Kim Hakjoon is the first Korean scholar to use Korean military archival materials in his work titled *Han'gungmunjewa Kukchejǒngch'i* [Korean Affairs and International Politics]. Even though he covered a variety of issues regarding the Korean War, he chose not to argue something controversial.²⁸ Pang Sunjoo, a Korean scholar living in the U.S., examined the captured North Korean documents and contended that North Korean forces were the ones who started the Korean War with their first shots. He also argued that the U.S. had full knowledge of North Korean preparations to attack but it did nothing significant to deter North Korea.²⁹ Following the example of Bruce Cumings, Pak Myǒng-nim published his version of the history of the Korean War titled *Han'guk Chǒnjaengŭi Palbalgwa Kiwǒn* [The Outbreak and the Origins of the Korean War]. Pak also examined the captured documents of North Korea along with South Korean documents, and illustrated the complex nature of the internal conditions that eventually led to the Korean War. He considered the KPA “6th Division’s operational plan to move south” which is one of the North Korean captured documents, as “the core proof that the North attacked first.” Pak also argued that the North Korean Defense Minister Ch'oe Yonggǒn was against the plan to attack the South.³⁰

In the recent years, there is a trend of incorporating declassified archival materials from around the world in the historiography of the Korean War which we may call “post-

²⁸ Kim Hakjoon, *Han'gungmunjewa Kukchejǒngch'i* [Korean Affairs and International Politics] (Seoul: Park Young Sa Publishing, 1975).

²⁹ Pang Sunjoo, “Nohoaek Pukhan Pipchwamunso Haejae,” [Captured North Korean Materials with Commentary] (1), *Asea Munhwa*. First issue, Institute of Asian Culture, Hallym University, 1986.

³⁰ Pak Myǒng-nim, *Hanguk Chǒnjaengŭi Palbal kwa Kiwǒn* [The Outbreak and Origins of the Korean War] (Seoul: Nanamu Ch'ǒlp'an, 1996), Vol I, 409-415.

revisionist” or simply an “internationalist” approach. One of the foremost representatives of this approach is Kathryn Weathersby who made good use of the declassified Soviet documents in her article entitled “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives.” In this article, Weathersby suggests that the invasion of the South was propagated by Kim Il Sung to Stalin from the start but Stalin did not give Kim the green light till the spring of 1950. According to her “Stalin’s policy toward Korea took an abrupt turn” and “during the meetings with Kim Il Sung in Moscow in April, Stalin approved Kim’s plan.”³¹ With this and several other articles based on Soviet archival sources, Weathersby proved Stalin’s role in the emergence of the Korean War.

Shen Zhihua’s work *Mao, Stalin and the Korean War: Trilateral Communist Relations in the 1950s* draws in the accessible Soviet and Chinese sources into the overall picture. Zhihua suggests that “Moscow later judged that the U.S. would not intervene and agreed to Kim’s military action.”³² His real contribution however is to the Chinese side of the story. Shen agrees with the earlier findings of the scholars that China’s involvement in the origins of the Korean War was limited. However, he also blames Mao of being an “idealist” on the issue of sending troops in support for North Korea and compares Mao with Zhou Enlai who comes out as a “pragmatist” from the Chinese sources according to Shen.³³

³¹ Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives,” CWIHP, Woodrow Wilson International Center, Working Paper No.8, (November 1993): 28.

³² Shen Zhihua, *Mao, Stalin, and the Korean War: Trilateral Communist Relations in the 1950s* (London: Routledge, 2012), 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, 164.

Wada Haruki published one of the latest scholarly works on the Korean War titled *The Korean War: An International History*. He draws on archival resources from the U.S., Soviets, China, Korea and Japan. His classification of the Korean War is a bit different from the above-mentioned scholars. He characterizes the Korean War as a Northeast Asian War because “Northeast Asia, with the United States’ participation, was the region in which the most fundamental changes occurred as the legacies of that war.”³⁴ Wada argues that Stalin interpreted Dean Acheson’s perimeter speech as “an indication that the Truman administration was washing his hands of South Korea.”³⁵ According to him, the United States knew of the buildup of forces in North Korea but did not take it seriously.³⁶ Wada concludes by challenging the civil war point of view and argues that North Korean leaders saw the war as both a civil war in Korea and an extension of the Chinese Revolution.³⁷

In this thesis, it is my aim to incorporate the three aforementioned approaches and make a case for myself. It should be noted that the work that fits mostly with my research is Wada Haruki’s *The Korean War: An International History*. However, this does not exclude me from incorporating the works of other scholars into the thesis. The orthodox/traditional approach overlooks the internal factors that led to the Korean War, but gets it right in its argument that Stalin had a certain role in the origins of the conflict. The revisionist account draws our attention to the internal factors which Muccio had to deal with in his early days like the Yösu-Sunch’ön Rebellion of 1948. Thus, it is highly relevant

³⁴ Wada Haruki, *Korean War An International History* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), xxvii.

*Hereafter *Korean War*.

³⁵ Ibid., 51.

³⁶ Ibid., 67-8.

³⁷ Ibid., 84.

for the purposes of this research as well. The post-revisionist accounts answer the questions that orthodox/traditional and revisionist accounts cannot find a suitable answer for via incorporating the foreign archives relevant to the Korean War. One of the most important answers they found is the change of Stalin's stance towards Korea after Dean Acheson's perimeter speech which is totally in line with the findings of this research.

1.3. Resources and Methodology

The main thrust of the thesis will be dependent on the archival documents of the State Department of the United States. The volumes that this thesis is primarily concerned with are as follows: *The Far East and Australasia, Volume VI (1948)*, *The Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 1 and Part 2 (1949)*, *Korea, Volume VII (1950)*, *Korea and China, Volume VII, Part 1 and Part 2 (1951)* and finally *Korea, Volume XV, Part 1 and Part 2 (1952)*. In these volumes we can find most of the correspondence between John J. Muccio and Washington. Muccio turned to the drafting skills of Everett F. Drumright, counselor of the Embassy, for his correspondence with Washington, which he checked and approved every morning. In these correspondences, we are able to see what was in his mind during the tumultuous periods before and during the Korean War. The abovementioned volumes have been declassified by the State Department, and are accessible online through the Department's official website. Since all of the correspondence of Muccio is not included in FRUS, relevant declassified archival materials regarding Korea in the National Archives of the U.S. are employed. In addition, some of the special collections such as "Murphy Collection on International Communism" from the National Archives are also utilized as well.

The second most important primary source for this thesis is a collection of oral history accounts. Three oral history interviews were conducted with John J. Muccio on behalf of the Truman Library. The first two were done by Jerry N. Hess in Washington D.C. on February 10, 1971 and February 18, 1971. The last one was done by Richard D. Mckinzie in Washington D.C. on December 27, 1973. By benefiting from these three interviews, we can understand the feelings of Muccio during his tenure in Korea. Through these interviews, we can find some background information that is not reachable in the State Department's archival records. In these interviews, Muccio yields his personal opinions about the people he interacted with during his tenure in Korea. Therefore, these three oral history interviews are indispensable primary sources for this thesis. The three oral history accounts are accessible through the Truman Library's official website in the format of interview transcripts which are approximately 150 pages. Apart from the oral history interviews, the files from the Harry Truman Library regarding Muccio, such as the Office of Strategic Service's assessment, are also utilized.

The third major primary source of the thesis is Muccio's statements made in public. The first one is his Congressional Committee Hearing in 1950 titled "Military Aid to Korean Security Forces." In this speech he urged Congress to vote in favor of increasing the military/financial aid towards the ROK just before the Korean War, and unfortunately Congress did the opposite. The second statement is the Commencement Speech he delivered in his alma mater Brown University in 1952. In this speech entitled "Korea and the Explosion of Communist Illusion", Muccio defended the Truman Administration's policies towards Korea. These two speeches were published by the *Department of State Bulletin* in the years 1950 and 1952.

The final English language primary source is Harold Joyce Noble's *The Embassy at War* book. Noble was the counselor of the United States Embassy in the ROK from August 1949 to January 1951. This particular book is a memoir that deals with the Korean War from its outbreak until the ROK's relocation to Seoul and how the American Embassy reacted to the Korean War. Noble has several interesting comments about Muccio and his character. Therefore, it is an important book to consult to realize how Muccio was perceived by his staff members. Noble's account is very significant since it provides a day-by-day account of what he was doing during the tumultuous period, and he mentions Muccio frequently.

The Korean archival sources relevant to this thesis are as follows: ROK Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs files regarding John J. Muccio and Korean-American relations. It should be noted that due to the North Korean invasion of Seoul in the early stages of the Korean War, the archival resources from 1948 to 1950, including most of the files regarding Muccio, remain elusive and are assumed to be lost. In addition to the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Syngman Rhee Presidential Archives located in the Yonsei University Library are utilized. This collection has a variety of documents written to Muccio from various individuals of the ROK's hierarchy, including President Rhee.

Additionally, First Lady Francesca Donner Rhee's diary regarding the Korean War entitled *Isŭngman'gwa 6.25 Chŏnjaeng* [Korean War and Syngman Rhee], which is generally overlooked by Korean War historians, is also used as a primary source since it provides very crucial information not only regarding Muccio, but also regarding the

overall Korean War. Apart from Francesca Rhee's diary, U.S. and Korean newspapers are also employed to pinpoint Muccio's public statements.

The second chapter will focus on the years between 1948 and 1949 in which there were numerous political upheavals. The thesis will incorporate Bruce Cumings' argument that the Korean War had its roots in the Japanese colonial rule that lasted for thirty-five years, and these political upheavals should be regarded as an extension of it. Then, it will elaborate on Muccio's perception of events. As an American, he most probably was not aware of the long history of political upheavals in Korea, hence, he supported the oppression of the rebels by force.

The third chapter will mainly focus on the years between 1949 and June 25, 1950, and the origins of the Korean War. It will argue that the State Department and Truman Administration did not show a lot of interest in the ROK. It will demonstrate Muccio's attempts to prevent a premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from the ROK. It will argue that Muccio strongly opposed the suggestions of a premature withdrawal from late August 1948 till the adoption of NSC 8/2. Muccio suggested June 20, 1949, as the appropriate date for the withdrawal, which was accepted by the Department of State and adopted in NSC 8/2. However, after the adoption of NSC 8/2, the Department of State started to overrule Muccio's suggestions of providing military aid to the ROK. This part will argue that the Truman Administration made the ROK look like a dispensable aspect of American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union and its allies.

The fourth chapter will deal with the first two months after the outbreak of hostilities on June 25, 1950. It will specifically try to track down Muccio's role in these

tumultuous days, and focus on his decision-making process. Muccio's communication with Rhee and other agents of the Republic of Korea's hierarchy will be specifically illustrated. This chapter will put forward the argument that Muccio became the *de facto* leader of the South Korean resistance immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, largely due to the lack of leadership President Syngman Rhee showed during the early days of the war.

The last chapter will focus on the situation after the ROK's relocation to Seoul until September 8, 1952, which was Muccio's last day in Korea. It will specifically try to track down his role during this period. The chapter will detail Muccio's role in the planning of the UN control over North Korea. In addition, the chapter will elaborate on how Muccio implemented the State Department's instruction to contain Rhee. This chapter will argue that Muccio was not in favor of a *coup d'état* attempt against Rhee because of the lack of leaders in the ROK's hierarchy at the time.

I have transliterated all Korean words according to the McCune-Reischauer system of romanization, except for the words with commonly accepted spellings, such as Syngman Rhee, Kim Il Sung etc. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Korean and Classical Chinese are my own.

CHAPTER II

NEW AMBASSADOR, NEW WAYS

2.1. American Foreign Policy towards Korea by 1945

Formal diplomatic relations between Korea and the U.S. started after the signing of the Shufeldt Treaty (1882) also known as the “Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States of America and Corea.” It was negotiated between the representatives of Korea’s Chosŏn Dynasty and the U.S. in 1882. The final draft of the treaty was accepted at Ch'emulp'o (today’s Inch'ŏn) in April and May 1884. The treaty opened Korea to the outside world and significantly changed Korea’s legal dependency status with China. The benefits gained by the U.S. from this treaty were not significant however; it was one of the most important events in the nineteenth century for the Koreans since the treaty became a model for all the other treaties Korea concluded with other Western powers.³⁸

³⁸ Jongsuk Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry Korean-American Relations to 1910* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 58.

It was reported that the Korean King “danced for joy” after the arrival of the first minister of the U.S. to Korea, Lucius H. Foote.³⁹ The Koreans initially thought that the Shufeldt Treaty would induce the United States to supply Korea with the requisite manpower, capital and technology.⁴⁰ However, the U.S. influence turned out to be much more limited than the Koreans had expected.

The first major test of U.S.-Korean relations was the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). President Theodore Roosevelt took on the role of mediator for peace between Russia and Japan. At the start of the war, he positioned himself as pro-Japanese. However, after Japan’s consecutive victories against Russia, he became concerned with the idea that Japan could drive the Russians totally out of East Asia, and eventually become a threat to American interests in Asia.⁴¹ The Kingdom of Korea in Theodore Roosevelt’s mind had shown an inability to remain independent, which was why he “should like to see Japan have Korea.”⁴² The second article of the Portsmouth Treaty reflected Theodore Roosevelt’s vision. According to the Treaty, Russia recognized Japan’s “predominant political, military and economic interests in Korea” and Russia also agreed not to interfere in “any measure of direction, protection and supervision” which Japan may deem necessary.⁴³

³⁹ George M. McCune and John A. Harrison eds, *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Vol. I: Initial Period, 1883-1886* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 105.

⁴⁰ Young Ick Lew, *Early Korean Encounters with the United States and Japan* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 2008), 9.

⁴¹ Elting E. Morison (ed.), *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt: Volume II The Years of Preparation 1898-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 1394.

⁴² Eugene P. Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth: An Adventure in American Diplomacy* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 90.

⁴³ Iutaro Komura, K. Takahira and Sergius Witte, “The Peace of Portsmouth, September 5, 1905,” *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 1, No. 1, Supplement: Official Documents (Jan., 1907): 18.

In November 1905, the former Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi arrived at Seoul, and forced the Korean government to accept a new protectorate treaty by which Japan would control all of the foreign relations of Korea. On November 20, Chang Chiyŏn (1864-1921), the publisher of the *Hwangsong Sinmun* [the Imperial Capital Newspaper], wrote an editorial regarding the Protectorate Treaty entitled "We Wail Today" in which one may grasp how the Koreans reacted to the developments around them. In his editorial, he compared the ministers with Chosŏn Ministers during the Manchu invasion of 1636. He accused the Ministers of "reducing twenty million souls to being the slaves of foreigners" and argued that they were beneath the level of dogs and pigs. He continued: "Alas! How bitter it is! My 20 million fellow compatriots who became slaves!"⁴⁴ The Portsmouth Treaty was indeed crucial for the future of Korea, and the U.S. positioned itself in a way that would not support an independent Korea.

The second test regarding the U.S.' stance towards Korea came about 38 years after the Portsmouth Treaty, and before the end of World War II. This time, Korea's fate was decided by Theodore Roosevelt's fifth cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt. President Roosevelt firstly discussed the future of Korea with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and as part of his grand design for a new world order, he proposed to place the Korean peninsula under the trusteeship of the U.S., China and two other states since the Koreans were not yet prepared for self-government.⁴⁵ Then the most specific mention of Korea came in the Cairo Conference, which was convened on November 22-26, 1943. In the conference, the United States, Great Britain and China agreed that Korea should

⁴⁴ Chang Chiyŏn, I Nare Mongnoha T'onggokhanora [We Wail Today], *Hwangsong Sinmun*, 20 November 1905.

⁴⁵ Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965), 378.

become an independent nation “in due course” but the specifics of the date were not clear.⁴⁶ Roosevelt shared his idea of trusteeship with Joseph Stalin at the Tehran Conference between November 28 and December 1, 1943. Stalin agreed with the idea, but thought that the period of the trusteeship should be as short as possible.⁴⁷ Roosevelt and Stalin again discussed Korea at the Yalta Conference between February 4 and February 11, 1945, and Stalin agreed that the Soviet forces would liberate Korea while Americans would invade Japan in the course of the war.⁴⁸

Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. His successor was Vice President Harry S. Truman, who was an “exaggerated everyman from Missouri” and not well known to most Americans at the time, and he set to work in order to conclude World War II.⁴⁹ At the Potsdam Conference, which was convened between July 17 and August 2, 1945, the Secretary of War Henry Stimson told Harry Truman that the atomic bomb, which had been secretly developed, would be ready in a matter of days to use against Japan. Truman and Winston Churchill weighed the notion that, if they released the details of the bomb, Stalin would try to enter the war against Japan earlier than expected in order to gain more concessions at the end of the war. Hence, Truman told Stalin that “an entirely novel form of bomb” was developed by specifically using vague terms and not mentioning

⁴⁶ “Cairo Conference 1943”, Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/cairo.asp> Accessed on 25.04.2019.

⁴⁷ Report by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Subcommittee for the Far East, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers, 1945, vol. 6: The British Commonwealth, The Far East, 1098.

⁴⁸ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 17. *Hereafter *Brothers*.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Weisbrode, *The Year of Indecision, 1946 A Tour Through the Crucible of Harry Truman's America* (New York: Viking, 2016), 23.

the specifics of the atomic bomb.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Stalin was already aware of the details of the bomb through Soviet intelligence and his main course of action was to outmaneuver Churchill and Truman. Therefore, he decided to advance the agreed date of his attack against Japan by ten days. On August 8, 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and Soviet troops started to cross into Manchuria. Within one week, they reclaimed the whole territory that the Soviet Union had lost in the Russo-Japanese War. With the Soviet Union reclaiming its lost territories, Truman had lost the race to bring about Japan's surrender before the Soviet Union's entry into the war with Japan.⁵¹

2.2. Korea after Japan's Defeat in World War II

The Shōwa Emperor delivered *Gyokuon-hōsō*, the Jewel Voice Broadcast on August 15, 1945. In his speech, the Shōwa Emperor specifically cited “the most cruel bomb” as one of the reasons why Japan had to accept the Potsdam Declaration, because the continuation of the war may have resulted in the “obliteration of the Japanese nation.”⁵² This speech meant liberation for the native population in the Japanese occupied areas including Korea. August 15, 1945, was a day of jubilation throughout the Korean peninsula. Korea had been a colony of Japan for 35 years by then. After listening to the Emperor from the radio, the Koreans flooded the streets burning Japanese flags and chanting *Manse!* [hurrah!]. Anti-Japanese activities started immediately after the end of the war, and its organizers targeted symbols of Japanese authorities such as Shinto shrines. The organizers posted handbills encouraging citizens to “Burn Korea Shrine and Seoul

⁵⁰ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 141.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 189-191.

⁵² *The New York Times*, 15 August 1945, 3.

Shrine.”⁵³ On the other hand, the Koreans did not achieve liberation by their own efforts; it was handed over to them. Therefore, they had to obey the conditions that came with liberation.

The Americans began working on the aftermath of Japan’s defeat even before the Emperor’s speech. At the Potsdam Conference, it seemed like the Americans handed over all of the responsibility regarding Korea to the Soviets: “with reference to clean-up of the Asiatic mainland, our objective should be to get the Russians to deal with Japs [sic] in Manchuria (and Korea if necessary)” argued General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.⁵⁴ However, it is obvious that American planners changed their minds regarding the fate of the Korean peninsula. John J. McCloy from State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) gave the task of dividing Korea to two young colonels, Dean Rusk who would later become Secretary of State and Charles H. Bonesteel who would later become the Commander of the U.S. Forces in Korea. It was around midnight on August 10-11, 1945, and they were given thirty minutes to decide. Rusk and Bonesteel chose the 38th parallel on the *National Geographic* map that was provided. In his memoirs, Rusk argues that “the army did not want to go onto the mainland at all.” Then he explains their rationale for selecting the 38th parallel:

We finally reached a compromise that would keep at least some US forces on the mainland, a sort of toehold on the Korean peninsula for symbolic purposes. During a SWINK [State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee] meeting on August 14, 1945, the same day of the Japanese surrender, Colonel Charles Bonesteel and I retired to an adjacent room late at night and studied intently a map of the Korean peninsula. Working in haste and under great pressure, we had a formidable task: to pick a zone for the American occupation. Neither Tic nor I was a Korea expert, but it seemed to us that Seoul, the

⁵³ Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (California: University of California Press, 2014), 206.

⁵⁴ Memorandum by the Secretary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (McFarland), Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945, Volume I, 929-30.

capital, should be in the American sector. We also knew that the US Army opposed an extensive area of occupation. Using a *National Geographic* map, we looked just north of Seoul for a convenient dividing line but could not find a natural geographical line. We saw instead the thirty-eighth parallel and decided to recommend that.

SWINK accepted it without too much haggling, and surprisingly, so did the Soviets. I had thought they might insist on a line farther south in view of our respective military positions. No one present at our meeting, including, two young American colonels, was aware that at the turn of the century the Russians and Japanese had discussed spheres of influence in Korea, divided along the thirty-eighth parallel. Had we known that, we almost surely would have chosen another line of demarcation. Remembering those earlier discussions, the Russians might have interpreted our action as acknowledgment of their sphere of influence in Korea north of the thirty-eighth parallel. Any future talk about the agreed-upon reunification of Korea would be seen as mere show. But we were ignorant of all this, and SWINK's choice of the thirty-eighth parallel, recommended by two tired colonels working late at night, proved fateful.⁵⁵

The last time Korea was partitioned was before the foundation of Koryŏ Dynasty in 918, thus the comprehension and acceptance of the division by the 38th parallel proved to be immensely hard for the Koreans. Some of the popular songs in the late 1940s such as *P'anmunjŏmüi Talbam* [A Moonlit Night at P'anmunjŏm] (1946), *Kagŏra Samp'alsŏn* [The 38th Parallel Should Be Removed] (1947), and "*Hae do Hana, Tal Do Hana* [The Sun Is the Same, The Moon is the Same for Koreans] (1949), reflected the Koreans' persistent disregard of the man-made border.

Even though the Koreans did not particularly like the idea of partition, the troops of the 25th Army of the Soviet Union crossed the Chinese-Korean border on August 13, 1945.⁵⁶ Stalin accepted the 38th parallel as a demarcation line almost immediately after the American proposal to do so. A recent research suggests that Stalin was "almost obsessed with avoiding an armed conflict" with the U.S. just after the end of World War

⁵⁵ Dean Rusk, *As I saw it* Daniel S. Papp (ed.) (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 123-124.

⁵⁶ Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung The Formation of North Korea 1945-1960* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.

II.⁵⁷ Wada Haruki argues that Stalin's cautious attitude towards the proposal of the 38th parallel had two main reasons: The first one was the strained Soviet finances due to the expansion of the Soviet camp after World War II. The next was Stalin's fear of the American atomic bomb.⁵⁸

With the Soviets already in Korea, the American command tried to find a unit that could reach the Korean peninsula at short notice. They decided to send the Tenth Army's 24th Corps which was based in Okinawa. Led by General John Hodge, a hero of the Okinawa campaign, the 24th Corps left Okinawa on September 5 and arrived in Inch'ŏn on September 8. Hodge arrived in Korea "with no translators, no area specialists, no background studies and fundamentally no plan whatsoever."⁵⁹ H. Merrell Benninghoff, the State Department's political adviser to General Hodge, sent a report to Washington describing the atmosphere in Korea as "a powder keg ready to explode at the application of a spark."⁶⁰ In the meantime, General Hodge set up the United States Army Military Government (USAMGIK) and took total control of the southern part of the peninsula. Hodge refused to acknowledge and work with the Korean People's Republic (KPR) which was led by Yŏ Un-Hyŏng, who was one of the leaders of the leftist movement, partly because of the orders coming from Washington about not to recognize any indigenous government, and also due to his suspicion that the KPR was dominated by the

⁵⁷ Jongsoo Lee, *The Partition of Korea after World War II: A Global History* (New York: Macmillan, 2006), 41.

⁵⁸ Haruki, *Korean War*, 4. Also see: Wada Haruki, "The Korean War, Stalin's Policy, and Japan," *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Apr., 1998): 5-29.

⁵⁹ Michael E Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey A Short History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 105.

⁶⁰ Benninghoff to State Department, FRUS (1945), vol.6, 1049.

Communists.⁶¹ Since they had no area specialists with them, the Americans looked for the best-educated and wealthiest non-communist Koreans in order to be able to govern Korea, which led to the close relationship between the USAMGIK and the Korea Democratic Party (KDP). The KDP was a right-wing party established on the grounds that the KPR was not legitimate because of the fact that it was founded on the directions given by the Japanese Governor Abe, the last Governor General of colonial Korea. On the other hand, the KDP lacked popular support due to most of its members known backgrounds as collaborators of the Japanese Empire, and their landlordship status throughout the southern part of the peninsula. While the KDP was not popular, left-wing parties, namely the Korean Communist Party led by Pak Hōnyōng, who was one of the main leaders of the Korean Communist Movement during the colonial period, and Yō Un-Hyōng's the Korean People's Party, were popular among the common people.⁶²

The U.S. military government sought to change the above-mentioned political topography in Korea. To do that, the Americans wanted to strengthen rightist groups like the KDP and weaken the left's popularity. The main problem encountered by the right wing nationalists was "their lack of nationalist credentials."⁶³ Therefore, they wanted to bring back some of the exiled nationalists like Kim Ku, who was a leading figure in the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai and another leading figure backed by the

⁶¹ Hong Yong Pyo, *State Security and Regime Security President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea 1953-60* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 17.

⁶² Cumings, *Origins Vol I*, 193.

⁶³ Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 194.

Office of Strategic Services (OSS); Syngman Rhee, who was on political exile living in the United States.⁶⁴

Syngman Rhee was the first president of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea which was based in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation period. He was educated in the U.S., and received his PhD from Princeton University, which made him the first Korean to earn a doctoral degree in the U.S. He had befriended wartime intelligence people, one of the most important of which was M. Preston Goodfellow, then serving in the Secret Intelligence Branch of the OSS. He thought that “Rhee had more of an American point of view.”⁶⁵ Goodfellow assisted and raised money for Rhee to help him to go back to Korea, with a promise of commercial concessions in Korea to be given when Rhee gained power.⁶⁶ The State Department objected Syngman Rhee’s return to Korea suggesting that his nationalistic credentials might cause problems in the future. Therefore, it refused to issue a visa for him to return to Korea.⁶⁷ Despite the State Department’s objection, General Douglas MacArthur supported Rhee, and after meeting him in Japan, Rhee was transferred to Seoul in mid-October 1945 on MacArthur’s personal plane, *Bataan*.⁶⁸

Within years, Rhee consolidated his political power and, with the assassination of Yō Unyōng, there were no rivals that could compete with him. By the spring of 1947, Rhee became the head of the Representative Democratic Council, and the Americans

⁶⁴ Tae Gyun Park, *An Ally and Empire Two Myths of South Korea- United States Relations, 1945-1980* (Seoul: Academy of Korean Studies Press, 2012), 45. *Hereafter *Ally*.

⁶⁵ Cumings, *Korea’s Place*, 195.

⁶⁶ Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon& Schuster Paperbacks, 1987), 34.

⁶⁷ Park, *Ally*, 46.

⁶⁸ Cleaver Thomas McKelvey, *The Frozen Chosen The First Marine Division At the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2016), 36.

asked the United Nations to form a commission to supervise elections across the peninsula. The Soviets did not allow the entry of the commission in the North, and organized their own elections. Meanwhile in May 1948, the elections proceeded in the South. The results were not unexpected. Rhee's National Society for Rapid Realization of Independence led with 55 seats, Kim Söngsu's conservative Korean Democratic Party was next with 28 seats and other minor parties and independents composed the other part of the 198 man Assembly.⁶⁹ The newly elected National Assembly passed a constitution which stated that the president had to be elected by the National Assembly. On July 20, 1948, Rhee was elected by the National Assembly as the first president of the Republic of Korea. Rhee faced a number of problems immediately after becoming the president. The most important of them were rebellions against the newly formed government namely: the Cheju-do, Yösu and Sunchön Rebellions. Helping to suppress these rebellions and consolidating the power of the Republic of Korea would become the main task of John J. Muccio once he arrived in Korea.

2.3. New Ambassador, New Ways

The U.S., on the other hand, was preparing to hand over all authority in the Korean peninsula to the new government. On April 27, 1948, Secretary of State George C. Marshall sent a memorandum to President Truman regarding diplomatic relations with the new government. He suggested John J. Muccio, a Foreign Service officer, to be the first Ambassador to the Republic of Korea on the grounds that he "ha[d] demonstrated unusual ability" and he had an outstanding experience in the Far East, South America and

⁶⁹ Allen Richard C, *Korea's Syngman Rhee An Unauthorized Portrait* (Tokyo: Charles E.Tuttle Company, 1960), 94.

Germany.⁷⁰ However, the officials of the State Department decided not to appoint Muccio as an Ambassador since the U.S.' policy towards Korea was not fully developed, and the future of the Korean peninsula was uncertain. Thus, Under Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett suggested to Truman that he appoint Muccio as a Special Representative of the President to Korea with the personal rank of Ambassador. Lovett argued that the "circumstances require[d] that Mr. Muccio proceed[ed] to Korea with full authority to represent the interests of the United States, and, in particular, to negotiate a series of agreements with the new Korean Government."⁷¹

John Joseph Muccio was born in Valle Agricola, Italy on March 19, 1900. His parents immigrated to the U.S. when he was an infant and they settled in Providence, Rhode Island. During WW1, he served in the U.S. Army briefly and then in 1921 he graduated from Brown University. The same year he became a naturalized U.S. citizen and started working in the Foreign Service. While working in the Foreign Service, he also received a Master of Arts degree from the International Relations Department of the George Washington University with a dissertation on the Hawaiian Annexation.⁷² Harold Joyce Noble, the first secretary of the Korean Embassy, describes Muccio as follows:

Although he was very conscious of his position as ambassador, he was relaxed and outwardly easygoing. He always dressed well and neatly whatever the occasion, even during the most difficult days of the retreat. He usually wore a gay, factory tied bow tie and was rarely to be found with a four-in-hand.

⁷⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, FRUS, 1948, Volume VI: The Far East and Australasia, 1183.

⁷¹ Robert A. Lovett, "Memorandum for the President: Proposed Appointment of John J. Muccio as Special Representative of the President of the United States, with the personal rank of Ambassador," White House Central Files. Box No. 40. State Department Correspondence, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷² "Biography of the Honorable John J. Muccio, Ambassador to Korea," Ibid.

Either by temperament or from his more than twenty years in the diplomatic service, Muccio had learned the wisdom of the indirect approach, the wisdom of avoiding clashes between friendly governments...

While I would not call Muccio a great man, I doubt that any other American was quite so suited to represent United States government... Muccio's relaxed calmness and sympathy were ideal. He genuinely liked Koreans and most Koreans genuinely admired, liked, and respected him. He could go to a very official, very stuffy party where everyone sat on the floor to eat ... by some magic of his personality, (he) makes everyone down the line to the lowest ranking man present feel at ease and comfortable. There was nothing stuffy about him.⁷³

Muccio was appointed as the Special Representative of the President to Korea with the personal rank of Ambassador on July 28, 1948. He met with Truman in the White House before his departure to Korea on August 4 at 11:30 a.m. for half an hour.⁷⁴ The first time Muccio saw Truman face to face was at Potsdam. When he met with him again in the White House, he recalled that Truman "had a wonderful tan, was very exuberant, brightly dressed" and looked like a completely different person from the one in Potsdam.⁷⁵ Muccio left Washington on August 9, and arrived in Tokyo five days later. In Tokyo, he gave a statement to the press regarding his new posting. Muccio stressed that his main duty was to prepare for the future relations between the Republic of Korea and the United States. He said that his country was waiting for the UN's decision in order to recognize the Republic of Korea. At the same time, he would oversee the gradual power transition

⁷³ Harold Joyce Noble, *Embassy at War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 3-6.

*Hereafter *Embassy*.

⁷⁴Memorandum for Mr. Connelly, Office File, Box 30, Office of Strategic Service, Korea, 1945; Office File 1392, John J. Muccio, Harry S. Truman Library. Also see: Daily Appointment Sheet for President Harry S. Truman, August 4, 1948. Connelly Files - Daily Presidential Appointments, 1945-1952, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁵ Jerry N. Hess, "Oral History Interview with John J. Muccio," Washington, D. C. February 10, 1971, Harry S. Truman Library, 3. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/muccio1> Accessed on 13. 08. 2019. *Hereafter *Muccio* Interview.

Unfortunately, we have no record regarding the content of this meeting. The interviewer cuts Muccio and jumps to another question just as Muccio was explaining his meeting with Truman.

from the USAMGIK to the Republic of Korea.⁷⁶ He stayed in Tokyo for nine days and had consultations in MacArthur's command headquarters.

On August 23, 1948, Muccio took MacArthur's personal plane *Bataan* from Tokyo Airport at 10:10 a.m., and arrived at the Kimpo Airport at 2:25 p.m. Muccio was 48 years old when he first arrived in Korea. He served for four months as the Special Representative of the President with a personal rank of Ambassador because of the delay of the U.S.' full recognition of the Republic of Korea. The news of him coming to Korea meant a lot to the Koreans therefore; they did whatever they could in order to welcome him in the best manner. When he arrived at the Kimpo Airport, which is around half an hour drive from the city center of Seoul, he was welcomed by Prime Minister Yi Pömsök, Foreign Minister Chang T'aeksang and Interior Minister Yun Chi'-yöng.⁷⁷ In his speech at Kimpo Airport, Muccio stated that the Korean Republic would be freed from "all the foreign controls" and qualify for the membership of the UN "without further delay."⁷⁸ Since Muccio was not assigned as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, he did not carry the regular Ambassadorial credentials. However, he stated that he was carrying a "commission" addressed "to whom it may concern" signed by Truman.⁷⁹ Muccio presented his credentials to President Rhee at 10 p.m. and had a meeting with him for about an hour in the Presidential Office.⁸⁰ After he presented his credentials to President

⁷⁶ Much'yodaesa, Ch'ulbaljön Puimsogam P'iryök [Ambassador Mucho expresses his impressions regarding his new post before departure], *Chosön Ilbo*, 14 August 1948.

⁷⁷ Much'yo Miguk Taet'ongnyöngt'üksa Han'guge Toch'ak [Special Representative of the U.S. President Muccio Arrives in Korea], *Chayu Sinmun*, 24 August 1948.

⁷⁸ Muccio Arrives in Korea, States Trust in Gov't, *Stars and Stripes*, 24 August 1948, RG 332, USAFIK, XXIV Corps, G-2, Historical Section, Box No. 25.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Isüngman Taet'ongnyöng Much'yo T'üksawa Hoedam [President Rhee had a meeting with Special Representative Muccio], *Söul Sinmun*, 26 August 1948.

Rhee, the Korean police and troops lined up between the Bando Hotel where his office was located, and near the Presidential office building. Thousands of Korean citizens followed Muccio's car until he reached his office that was located downtown.⁸¹ Muccio was a 48 years old bachelor when he first set his foot in the Korean peninsula.

2.4. 1948: The Foundations of the New Republic

Muccio had two right-hand men in the U.S. Embassy. Everett Francis Drumright was the counselor of the Embassy which meant that he was the second most important official after Muccio. Just like Muccio, Drumright did not know the Korean language at that time. On the other hand, he knew Chinese, which enabled him to communicate with most of his counterparts since most of the ROK's government officials spoke Chinese at the time. Muccio handpicked Harold Joyce Noble as the First Secretary of the Embassy mainly because of his Korean skills. Noble came from an old missionary family and his father taught Rhee at Paejae School in the 1890s.⁸²

The first task on the desk of Muccio was about the transition of power from USAMGIK, the sole governing body of the Southern part of Korea from the end of World War II until the inauguration of the new Republic on August 15, 1948, to the Republic of Korea. The struggle between the Koreans who were assigned to governmental positions by the USAMGIK and the Koreans who were newly assigned to governmental positions by the ROK was what Muccio pointed to as an interesting problem that plagued him during

⁸¹ Chay Jongsuk, *Unequal Partners in Peace and War Republic of Korea and the United States 1948-1953* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 83.

⁸² Cumings, *Origins Vol II*, 230.

this transition process.⁸³ Muccio sent his first telegram to Secretary of State George C. Marshall on September 3, 1948. The transition from military government to the ROK was ongoing and since Rhee did not have many experts at hand, he asked the U.S.' support on the issue. Rhee accepted the proposition that spending of the aid funds had to be approved by the U.S. but he did not want to give the appearance of a "rubber stamp."⁸⁴ In a private letter, Rhee also asked Muccio to "publish each month regularly the amount and nature of the aid Korea receive[d]" in order to prevent attempts of "an element in Korea" which was trying to create misunderstandings between the U.S. and Korea. Muccio also reported that Rhee stressed the fact that he did not want to be seen as solely dependent on the U.S. otherwise communists and "middle of road" groups would "wage an effective propaganda campaign charging his government with being dominated by U.S. advisers."⁸⁵ To prevent that, Rhee formed a personal cabinet within his own cabinet which was often called the "kitchen cabinet," which consisted primarily of a number of Americans or Koreans who had spent a long time in the United States. This cabinet was eventually going to pose a threat to Muccio's authority in Korea due to some of its members' attempts to bypass Muccio in reaching the Truman Administration's officials. Taken their closeness due to the nature of their job into account, Muccio must have known Rhee well. Therefore, his observations on the first President of the ROK was crucial. He described Rhee as a "very intelligent person":

When he was in his logical frame of mind, he had an excellent historical prospective [perspective?]. He understood the very complex world setup to a very high degree. But when he got emotional, then he reverted to his longstanding instincts of self survival of

⁸³ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 6-7.

⁸⁴ Muccio to the Secretary of State (Marshall), FRUS (1948), Far East and Australasia, Volume VI: 1289.

⁸⁵ Rhee to Muccio, RG 338 Records of United States Army Force in Korea, Lt. Gen. John R. Hodge Official File, 1944-48, Entry 11070, Box 71.

himself as an individual, as a leader of this independence move, and the survival of his people. But self-survival came first always. And with the experience he had had he was very distrustful, inordinately so. He didn't trust anyone. I doubt whether he trusted himself. He was a very complex personality, but a man who thought well and worked well under stress and he expressed himself in English, orally and in writing, beautifully. He prided himself in being a Jeffersonian Democrat. His rhetoric in this respect spellbound most American visitors. I think he should have changed that over to a Rhee Autocrat.⁸⁶

Just after Rhee assumed power, the CIA circulated an estimate which was in line with Muccio's comments. The CIA's prophetic personality study concluded, "the danger exists however that Rhee's inflated ego may lead him into action disastrous or at least highly embarrassing to the new Korean Government and to the interests of the U.S."⁸⁷ "Princetonian" was the moniker Muccio used to refer Rhee when the latter was not in sight.⁸⁸ "Muccio fellow" was the nickname Rhee chose to use in order to refer to Muccio during his private conversations with his entourage.⁸⁹ Muccio and Rhee's relationship was based primarily on necessity. Rhee knew that without the support of the U.S., his government would not last very long. Therefore, he tried to use Muccio as a messenger between him and Truman. On the other hand, Muccio was well aware of his position. One may argue that at times, he was much more powerful than Rhee because of the ROK's dependence on the U.S. in almost every aspect of governance, and he wisely used this power in order to shape the ROK based upon his instructions arriving from Washington. Muccio also had a special relationship with the First Lady Francesca Donner Rhee, an Austrian who met Rhee at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, and married him in New York. After the establishment of the ROK in 1948, she became the inaugural First Lady

⁸⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Prospects for Survival of the Republic of Korea," Appendix A: "Personality of Rhee Syngman," 11.

⁸⁸ Cumings, *Origins Vol II*, 229.

⁸⁹ Francesca Donner Rhee, *Yugiowa Isŭngman: P'ŭranch'esŭk'aŭi Nanjungilgi* [The Korean War and Syngman Rhee: Francesca's war diary] (Seoul: Giparang, 2010), 29.

of the ROK. Even though most people thought that the First Lady had a huge influence on Rhee, Muccio did not share this view.⁹⁰ In his oral history interview, Muccio explained “a little procedural understanding” that they developed:

She would get on the phone and call (and she didn't have to say anything on the phone), the call itself was just a tip-off to me that he [Rhee] was about to do something that she thought was not advisable. I would then find some excuse for dropping in on the old man. And if I sat there long enough he'd come out with what he had in mind. She did this repeatedly during those very crucial days.”⁹¹

Francesca Donner Rhee’s diary of the Korean War also provides exceptional glimpses regarding Muccio which will be referred to in detail in the subsequent chapters.

On September 18, 1948, Muccio sent another telegram to the Secretary of State related to the newly formed “Supreme People’s Council” in Pyongyang. In 1948, the U.S. had a military liaison group in Pyongyang, and the Soviet Union had a liaison group in Seoul. Therefore, the relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were more interconnected.⁹² In the telegram, Muccio informed Washington about a rejected letter from the North Korean regime regarding their demand for Soviet-U.S. military retreat from the peninsula.⁹³ This made an impact on the State Department. If the Soviets were going to retreat from the peninsula, would the U.S. retreat as well? The Department of State issued a press release which was sent to Muccio. The press release referred to the UNGA Resolution of November 14, 1947, and stated clearly that the U.S. had no intention to stay in the peninsula.⁹⁴ The news of the U.S.’ decision to retreat was not welcomed in

⁹⁰ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹³ Muccio to Marshall, FRUS (1948), 1305.

⁹⁴ Muccio to Marshall, *Ibid.*, 1307.

Seoul specifically by Rhee. Rhee had certain reservations in his mind about the stability of the newly founded Republic, and he did not want his “big brother” to leave him with all the problems he had. Muccio recalled the time he suggested Rhee to take back the U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula in his oral history interview. He mentioned that Rhee “did not like [it] a damn bit” and he was “more interested in keeping the U.S. tied up there.”⁹⁵ At this point, we must remember the fact that Rhee had always been a fighter for an independent and unified Korea throughout his life. He must have known the simple fact that with his military power which was rather small at the time, he could not reach this goal.

One of the main reasons why Rhee was so concerned about the stability and the future of his government was the rebellions that started even before the inauguration of the ROK. A revolt of 350 communist and left wing armed rebels began on April 3, 1948, in the South Korean province of Cheju Island. In the later stages “sixty to seventy thousand islanders joined the party” in addition to six to seven thousand “agitators and organizers” according to Colonel Rothwell Brown, an American advisor.⁹⁶ One of the main causes of the Cheju-do Uprising was “the islanders’ long-held grievances against outside interventions and police harassment of the local population.”⁹⁷ It was one of the most violent events in modern Korean history. Between October 1948 and March 1949, the ROK Army (ROKA) waged an extensive “program of mass slaughter” against the rebels which resulted in the death of thirty to eighty thousand.⁹⁸ The USAMGIK was also deeply

⁹⁵ Jerry N Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 11-12.

⁹⁶ John Merrill, *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War* (University of Delaware Press, 1989), 67.

⁹⁷ Su-Kyoung Hwang, *Korea’s Grievous War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 28.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-29.

involved in the suppression campaign by laying out strategies, supplying ROKA with necessary equipment, allocating relevant personnel and overseeing the whole suppression operation.⁹⁹

While the Cheju Uprising was in full swing, the soldiers of the 14th Regiment of the ROKA tasked with suppressing the Cheju Uprising also rebelled against Rhee regime in Yösu, a port city of South Chölla, on October 19. The soldiers were joined by civilian sympathizers and the insurgency spread to the nearby city Sunch'ön. While the ROK government was struggling with suppressing the rebellions in multiple parts of the country, there were also some clashes between the ROKA's forces and North Korean forces along the 38th parallel. In light of these issues, Rhee decided to ask the U.S. to form a military and naval mission instead of taking its troops back from the peninsula. He wanted the U.S. Army to train 50,000 more men because of the possibility of more insurgencies in the near future and that it would create a "moral effect" on the ROKA's forces.¹⁰⁰ Rhee even sent a word to Chang Myön of the Korean delegation in Paris to make a formal appeal to the UN General Assembly in order for the U.S. forces to be supplied because of the possibility of a communist attack coming from the North.¹⁰¹ Despite all the efforts of the Korean side, the U.S. government was determined to withdraw all of its forces from Korea. Secretary Royall was very sure of himself when he argued "no invasion of North Korea could in any event take place" as long as U.S. combat troops were in South

⁹⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁰ Muccio to Marshall, FRUS (1948), 1320.

¹⁰¹ Muccio to Marshall, Ibid., 1323.

Korea.¹⁰² The U.S. government was clearly taking this issue lightly and they did not calculate the possible outcomes of their move carefully.

On November 12, 1948, Muccio sent a secret telegram to the Secretary of State which was titled “Estimate Future Prospects of Korean Government.” He defined Rhee’s government as “incompetent without strong public support and security forces” while on the other hand stressed the preparedness of internal and external communists with adequate weapons. In the 5th article he presented the military intelligence reports starting with the possibility of a civil war. Muccio pointed out that if the North attacked the South, it would most probably win the war, and it would be even more plausible in the event of the Korean troops in Manchuria reinforcing them.¹⁰³ Muccio also mentioned the rumors that the attack would start after the U.S. troops left Korea. Muccio added that the invasion might have waited till spring, and may have taken the form of rescuing “democratic elements” that were revolting against the Rhee regime. Therefore, in the 7th article Muccio proposed a delay of the U.S. military withdrawal from Korea because “the situation [was] still very much in state flux.”¹⁰⁴ This report is crucial because it shows us that the environment in Korea was not ready for such a change. Hence, we can easily deduce the fact that Muccio had a good grasp of the situation and he offered an accurate solution to the problem. At this point one may wonder about the Rhee government’s intelligence capabilities and its limits. At one instance Muccio stated that “we had better intelligence than the old man had.”¹⁰⁵ Rhee, on the other hand was not naive. He sent an additional

¹⁰² Haruki, *Korean War*, 10.

¹⁰³ North Korea provided military units to Chinese Communists Party after the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1946. See: Kim Sang Won, “The Chinese Civil War and Sino-North Korea Relations, 1945–50,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 27, no. 1 (June 2014): 91–113.

¹⁰⁴ Muccio to Marshall, FRUS (1948), 1326–27.

¹⁰⁵ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 20.

message to Truman via Muccio almost begging for the U.S.' military help again. He mentioned the communist success in China and stressed that the Korean troops in China may have reinforced the North's army. He also highlighted the inadequacy of the ROKA's troops and asked for U.S. military assistance to help train and equip ROK troops as soon as possible.¹⁰⁶ Muccio commented on Rhee's message by mentioning Rhee's almost daily expectation from him to declare to the public that the U.S. Army would not withdraw from Korea. Muccio stressed that the government's stance was solid and there was no change with regards to the State Department's statement on September 20.¹⁰⁷

To conclude, the U.S. did not have a fully-fledged foreign policy with regard to Korea when it decided to take control of the Southern part of the Korean peninsula in 1945. The State Department had an internal discussion on whether to appoint Muccio as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, but in the end, they decided to appoint him as Special Representative of the President to Korea with the personal rank of Ambassador. This status of Muccio did not have a negative effect on the Koreans. On the contrary, they were happy to welcome a civilian representative after nearly three years of U.S. military rule. The main aim of Muccio in 1948 was to oversee and ensure a smooth administrative transfer of power process from the USAMGIK to the ROK. The second task of Muccio was to report on a suitable time for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Korea. The Department of Defense preferred a swift retreat immediately after the inauguration of the ROK. However, with the State Department's cooperation, Muccio managed to postpone the planned withdrawal. In addition, as the highest ranking U.S.

¹⁰⁶ Muccio to Marshall, FRUS (1948), 1331-32.

¹⁰⁷ Muccio to Marshall, *Ibid.*, 1333.

official in Korea, Muccio had to oversee the brutal suppression of open rebellions. Finally, Muccio urged the Department of State to provide funds in order to assist and train the inadequate ROKA forces.

CHAPTER III

MUCCIO AGAINST THE BIG GUNS: DIPLOMATIC ORIGINS OF THE KOREAN WAR (1949-1950)

“Twice in 40 years Unites States had abandoned Korea. Theodore Roosevelt had done so in the first time and Franklin D. Roosevelt had done so the second time in Yalta...if the United States has to be involved in a war to save Korea, how much can Korea count on the United States?”

Rhee¹⁰⁸

“The president [Rhee] then asserted that it had been suggested the U.S. had decided it is not worthwhile to try to defend Korea... The story of the contraction of the U.S. defense line had been spread all over Korea...He would be grateful if President Truman and the State Department could help him clarify this situation”

Muccio¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949) Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2: 1004.

¹⁰⁹ Muccio to Acheson, RG 84, Korea, Seoul Mission and Embassy, Box 1, May 2, 1949.

3.1. ROK's First Steps

1948 was an eventful year not only for the newly founded Republic of Korea, but also for the Embassy of the United States in Korea. ROK had to go through a series of open rebellions, namely Cheju-do, Yösu and Sunch'ön. As Bruce Cumings argues, the Korean society was ripe for a social revolution after the end of World War II, and these rebellions were thus a part of a longer trend of revolutionary nationalism which started during the Japanese colonial rule.¹¹⁰ Syngman Rhee tightened his grip on power and asked for more concessions from the Truman administration, the most important of which was his request for delaying the withdrawal of the American troops from Korea. The recognition of the Republic of Korea by the UN General Assembly under Resolution 195 on December 12, 1948, was an undeniable moral boost for the Rhee regime. John J. Muccio, on the other hand, was responsible and mainly concerned with the transfer of power from the USAMGIK to the ROK. At the same time, he was closely following and reporting the developments in the Korean peninsula to Washington. After the outbreak of the rebellions, Muccio suggested a delay to the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops but to no avail. Steven Hugh Lee described the power relationship between the U.S. and the ROK after 1948 as being an “informal empire” since the U.S.’ influence on Korea’s economic, political and military development was excessive.¹¹¹ Thus, as the highest official of this informal empire, Muccio was overseeing all of the U.S. efforts of nation building in Korea. The main task ahead of Muccio in 1949 was to execute the

¹¹⁰ Cumings, *Origins Vol I*, xxvii.

¹¹¹ Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire Korea, Vietnam and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal&Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 4.

planned withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula and persuade Rhee in that regard.

On January 27, 1949, Muccio sent a telegram titled top secret to the newly appointed Secretary of State Dean Acheson regarding the situation in Korea and summarized what was happening by providing both the positive and negative sides of the situation. There were in total nine titles, namely: political, economic, military, psychological, communism in South Korea, North Korea, comment, objectives, and recommendations. Under the title “political”, Muccio reported that after the recognition of the ROK at the United Nations General Assembly on December 12, 1948, the ROK government became more confident than it was before. After the rebellions, particularly the Yösu rebellion, the ROK government became more dependant on the U.S., especially with regards to military support. Muccio suggested that the government was stronger than it had been in 1948, but that did not change the fact that the ROK was poorly managed. In addition, there were rivalries within the cabinet and political parties were trying to support their people in the government positions. Furthermore, the telegram included the National Traitors Act, which was passed by the ROK Assembly in order to purge those who had served the Japanese (*ch'inilp'a*) during the colonial period, as one of the negative aspects of the government because it had a possibility of causing “considerable dissension, bitterness and spitefulness throughout governmental organization.”¹¹² It was no secret that Rhee was also using the National Traitors Act to strengthen his political base and eliminate potential problems to his administration.¹¹³ Under the “economy” section, Muccio

¹¹² Muccio to Secretary of State, FRUS (1949) Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2: 947-8.

¹¹³ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950 A House Burning* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 198. *Hereafter *War for Korea*.

reported that economic collapse was not expected. The farm population, which represented two thirds of the total population, was well off but rice collection as a tax by the government had not been working properly. On the other hand, in later parts Muccio mentioned that the “long term view is as bleak as ever.”¹¹⁴ Under the title “military”, Muccio reported that the ROKA forces were improving in quality and quantity. Suppressing the Yösu Rebellion gave them the morale that they had long needed. Muccio also provided the exact number of the ROKA forces: the army constituting the majority with 65,000, then the police with 45,000 and lastly the navy with 4,000. Muccio stressed his conviction that the U.S. should continue supplying the ROKA’s forces in terms of military equipment. Under the “psychology” section, Muccio informed the Secretary of State that in comparison to the situation when the U.S. first announced the withdrawal of its troops, the Koreans felt more confident, but there was still fear that the communists would proceed to the south once U.S. troops withdrew from the peninsula. In addition, Muccio highlighted communism in the south with reference to the Korean Labor Party and guerilla activities across the nation. He suggested that in spite of the last purges of the KLP, it still held major power due to the fact that most of its major leaders had escaped apprehension. Under the title “North Korea”, Muccio elucidated U.S. intelligence on North Korea. According to the sources, 64,000 troops were deployed near the 38th parallel, plus 9,000 border constabulary. The total number of the People’s Army was estimated at a minimum of 100,000, 25 percent of which was composed of the fighters that had returned from Manchuria. Muccio reported that an immediate invasion was unlikely and that civil affairs in North Korea were believed to be stable. Lastly, under the titles

¹¹⁴ Muccio to Secretary of State, FRUS (1949) Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2: 950.

“objectives” and “recommendations”, Muccio provided his immediate insights to the Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He suggested that the task force of the U.S. Army should not be withdrawn from the peninsula because the ROKA’s forces were still not organized and they needed improved training as well as adequate equipment and supplies. Muccio also added that the presence of the U.S. troops was “mostly important for its psychological and stabilizing value.” Therefore, he suggested the Secretary not to withdraw them until June 1949 because by then, the ROKA’s forces were expected to have the needed qualifications to control the ROK territories alone.¹¹⁵

3.2. Muccio’s Position on U.S. Troop Withdrawal

As is evident in the abovementioned telegram, Muccio was against a premature withdrawal of U.S. troops. According to him, the most important issue pending against the troops’ withdrawal was the imbalance of armed forces between South and North Korea. Especially after the Yōsu Rebellion in which segments of the ROKA’s forces rebelled, the quality of the ROKA forces became much more questionable. Thus, with his recommendations, the State Department was pushing the Department of Army for a postponement of withdrawal.

There was a consensus in the Department of Army with regards to the U.S. troops withdrawal from the Korean peninsula. The main proponents of the withdrawal were “Japan-firsters” such as Robert Patterson, William Draper, and Robert Lovett. According to them, the U.S. was supposed to redirect its limited sources to the revival of Japan, not Korea. Before Muccio’s arrival to Korea in March 1948, Secretary of Army Kenneth

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 950-952.

Royall argued that the Army “insist[ed] with the State Department that our troops be removed from Korea as soon as the election there [was] over.”¹¹⁶ As was mentioned in the previous chapter, after his arrival in Korea, Muccio put more pressure on the State Department to delay U.S. troops withdrawal subsequently from August to December 1948. Thus, Muccio aimed to make the attempts of the Department of Defense in vain.

On February 6, 1949, Secretary of Army Kenneth Royall made an off-the-record press conference at the American Embassy in Tokyo, which eventually proved to the Koreans that the ROK was not in the defense perimeter of the U.S. In this press conference, Royall suggested that, in the event of a war with the Soviet Union, the U.S. had no responsibility to defend Japan. He went further and said that Japan was in fact a liability and “it might be more profitable from the point of view of U.S. policy to pull out all troops in Japan.”¹¹⁷ Royall’s statement reflects the ambivalence of the U.S. policy makers with regard to the fate of Japan. The discussions regarding Japan started immediately after World War II. George F. Kennan’s visit to Japan in March 1948 and his discussions with MacArthur materialized several points. In their meeting, MacArthur described Kennan the defense perimeter of the U.S. in the Pacific as a “U-shaped area embracing the Aleutians, Midway, the former Japanese mandated islands, Clark Field in the Philippines, and above all Okinawa.”¹¹⁸ MacArthur and Kennan agreed that it would not be feasible for the U.S. to retain any bases in the Japanese mainland after the conclusion of a peace treaty. Even though MacArthur and Kennan agreed on several

¹¹⁶ Cumings, *Origins Vol II*, 380.

¹¹⁷ Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Sebald) to the Secretary of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, *The Far East and Australasia*, Volume VII, Part 2: 648.

¹¹⁸ Report by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan), FRUS (1948) *Far East and Australia*, Volume VI, 701; John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan An American Life* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 300-3.

points, discussion on a variety of issues such as the defense of Japan was still ongoing. Thus, Royall's statement was a continuum of the internal discussion process among the U.S. policy makers. Crucially, Rhee perceived Royall's remarks as an outright statement that Korea was outside of the U.S.' defense perimeter, which created a considerable amount of uneasiness on the Korean side and from this moment onwards, Koreans assumed that the ROK was outside of the U.S.' defense perimeter. With this assumption at hand, Koreans pressurized the U.S. to declare that Korea was in the U.S.' defense perimeter.¹¹⁹ Less than a month after Royall's statement, MacArthur confirmed Rhee's perception that Korea was outside of the defense perimeter. On March 1, 1949, in an on-the-record interview, MacArthur defined the U.S.' defense perimeter as: "[it] runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa." MacArthur added "then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska."¹²⁰ With this statement, MacArthur excluded the ROK and Formosa from the U.S.' defense perimeter. Within the span of thirty days, the Koreans had at hand two statements that confirmed the ROK was not in the defense perimeter of the U.S.

After his press conference in Tokyo, Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall visited Korea with an agenda to determine the date for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Along with Muccio, he met with Syngman Rhee. Most probably at the time of their meeting, Rhee was unaware of the details of Royall's press conference at the American Embassy in Tokyo. In their meeting, Rhee disclosed his vision of *Pukchin T'ongil* (March North to

¹¹⁹ The author wishes to thank Jennifer M. Miller and Edward G. Miller for sharing their views on Royall's statement.

¹²⁰ "M'Arthur Pledges Defense of Japan," *New York Times*, 2 March 1949.

Unify Korea) with Royall and Muccio.¹²¹ Rhee argued that he could increase the ROKA's forces by 100,000 within the timespan of six weeks by reassigning the Korean soldiers who had served under Japanese colonial rule or the ones that came back from China. After that, he was planning to "move" to the Northern part of the peninsula. In reply to Rhee's dangerous vision, Muccio suggested that the ROK should follow a peaceful path in order to reunify the peninsula. Royall, in line with Muccio insisted that a preemptive attack on North Korea while U.S. troops were still in the south was out of question. In his memorandum to the Secretary of State, Royall recommended that if the U.S. increased the number of people in its advisory mission and supplied the ROK with arms, Rhee would not oppose U.S. troop withdrawal from the peninsula. In conclusion, Royall argued that the U.S. should capitalize as much as possible with regards to the Russian troops' withdrawal, and U.S. troops should "withdraw promptly." Royall added that he certainly did not feel that the U.S. should wait until May 10, which was the time suggested by the State Department.¹²²

In response to Royall's memorandum, Muccio wrote another memorandum to the Secretary of State in which he disagreed with the argument that Rhee would agree to U.S. troops withdrawal since he "hardly said "yes" and hardly said "no" to the suggestion during their conversation. He also contradicted Royall on the withdrawal of U.S. troops. He argued that the best target date for the withdrawal was June 30, 1949, by which date

¹²¹ Rhee developed this vision which called for an immediate war with North Korea with the help of Robert T. Oliver, his advisor and ghostwriter. It was a reaction against Kim Il Sung's political program announced earlier in the year which called for completion of national territory [*kukdo wanjong*]. See: Hong Yong-pyo. *State Security and Regime Security: President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea, 1953-60* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 155.

¹²² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of the Army (Royall), FRUS (1949) Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2: 956-8.

the basic training of the ROKA forces were scheduled to end. He also informed Dean Acheson that he had got Rhee's word not to attack North Korea unilaterally.¹²³

Shortly after Royall's departure from Korea, Muccio went to Washington for consultations at the State Department. At that time, the State Department was in the final stages of drafting the document, National Security Council 8/2. The National Security Act of July 26, 1947, created the National Security Council (NSC) under the chairmanship of the President, with the Secretaries of State and Defense as its key members, to coordinate foreign policy and defense policy, and to reconcile diplomatic and military commitments. The NSC 8/2 was a revised version of the NSC 8 released on April 2, 1948.¹²⁴ The main aim of the NSC 8/2 was to re-assess the position of the U.S. with respect to Korea. The NSC 8/2 finalized the date of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the ROK.¹²⁵

A recent article on the U.S. troops withdrawal written by Lee Sang-ho argues that "instead of strongly opposing the troop withdrawal, Muccio had to follow Washington's pre-planned schedule."¹²⁶ I do not share the same view with regards to the two above-mentioned arguments. Muccio strongly opposed the suggestions for a premature all out withdrawal from late August 1948 till the adaptation of the NSC 8/2. In addition, Muccio was a party to the decision making process in Washington. He left Seoul for Washington on 9th of February at 11:30 a.m. for consultations in connection with the National Security

¹²³ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Special Representative in Korea (Muccio), *Ibid.*, 959.

¹²⁴ NSC- 8, FRUS (1948), Far East and Australasia, Volume VI, 1164-69.

¹²⁵ NSC 8/2, FRUS (1949), 969-978.

¹²⁶ Lee Sang-ho, "Ch'odae Chuhanmiguktaesa Much'owa Chuhanmigun Ch'ölssue Taehan Taeüŋ," [US Ambassador John J. Muccio and His Response to the Withdrawal of the United States Armed Forces in Korea] *Aseyön'gu*, 61(1), 64.

Council review of U.S. policy toward Korea.¹²⁷ He was appointed as the first Ambassador of the U.S. to the Republic of Korea.¹²⁸ In Washington, he met Truman on the same day the NSC 8/2 was released, and he was at the State Department for consultations from early February 1949 onwards.¹²⁹ Taking the NSC 8/2's adoption of the date of June 30, 1949, for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops which was suggested by Muccio in his telegram dated February 25, it would be an injustice to depict him as a mere bystander in the decision making process. Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that Muccio was one of the key agents in the making of the U.S.' troops withdrawal policy in Korea. He was strongly against a premature withdrawal and he hoped that the ROKA forces would have enough training to counter any problem that might occur in the peninsula by late June. After meeting with Truman at the White House, Muccio made a press conference regarding the meeting:

I informed President Truman about the latest situation in Korea, and the president was particularly satisfied with it. The U.S. military authorities in South Korea began the process of transfer of power to the government of the Republic of Korea from the last autumn and completed the transfer work around December. The South Korean government has achieved more than anyone has ever asked and since then, the Korean people have been living happily. I am going to leave Washington on the 22nd and return to Seoul on the weekend.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Much'yo Chuhanmit'ükpyöldaep'yobu T'üksa, Ömmuhyöbüich'a Kwiguk [Special Representative Muccio Returns Back for Consultations], *Söul Sinmun*, 2 February 1949.

¹²⁸ James E. Webb, "Memorandum for the President Proposed Appointment of John J. Muccio as Ambassador to the Republic of Korea," Office File, Box 30, Office of Strategic Service, Korea, 1945; Office File 1392, John J. Muccio, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹²⁹ Daily Appointments of Harry S. Truman, 22 March 1949, Matthew J. Connelly Files, Box 5, Harry S. Truman Library.

¹³⁰ Much'yo Chuhanmidaesa, T'üruman Taet'ongnyöngege Han'guk Sajöngül Pogo hu Kijahoegyön [After Reporting the Situation in Korea to President Truman Ambassador Muccio Held a Press Conference], *Söul Sinmun*, 24 March 1949.

3.3. The Impossible Task: Muccio at Odds with the State Department

With the release of the NSC 8/2, the United States clarified its policy regarding Korea. Accordingly, the U.S. would withdraw its troops from the Korean peninsula by June 30, 1949.¹³¹ Therefore, Muccio was tasked with creating the best environment to announce U.S. troops withdrawal, and persuade Rhee not to object to this decision. Immediately after his return to Korea, Muccio started working on persuading Rhee. In his meeting with Rhee, Muccio assured him that the U.S. would furnish the ROKA with adequate arms, equipment and munitions. According to Muccio, Rhee calmly accepted the situation but he “merely expressed hope they [U.S. troops] could be maintained until the Republic had an adequate force to protect its interests and sufficient arms and ammunitions to supply its force.”¹³² In his oral history interview, Muccio explained the situation from Rhee’s point of view as “the whole aim ...was to keep us there militarily.”¹³³ In his letter to William Walton Butterworth, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Muccio stated that the Koreans “moved heaven and earth to have withdrawal deferred.”¹³⁴

The same day, Muccio sent another telegram to the Secretary of State regarding the Cheju uprising. The ROKA forces had been trying to suppress the uprising since late 1948. By April 1949, the uprising was almost completely suppressed with over 2,000 guerillas captured and 5,409 surrendered.¹³⁵ Muccio reported that Defense Minister Shin

¹³¹ NSC 8/2 “Report by the National Security Council to the President,” FRUS (1949), 978.

¹³² Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 981-2.

¹³³ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 22.

¹³⁴ Muccio letter to Butterworth, August 27, 1949, RG 59, 895.00 file, box 946.

¹³⁵ Brendan Wright, *Civil War, Politicide, and the Politics of Memory in South Korea, 1948-1961*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2016, 83.

told him that the ROKA forces had surrounded the remnants of the rebels in their mountain strongholds and that the rebels could not hold out much longer.¹³⁶ Historian Namhee Lee compares the tactics used by U.S. military and the ROKA forces in suppressing the Cheju Uprising with the tactics employed by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.¹³⁷ Even though Muccio was convinced that the Cheju Uprising was supported by the Soviets, he could not turn a blind eye on the civilian atrocities. He noted that the photographs taken during the Cheju Uprising indicated “unusual sadistic propensities.” Among those atrocities were mass killings of the village population, and revenge operations against the guerillas “brought down vengeance on unarmed villagers.”¹³⁸ James Hausman, the U.S. Army military advisor to Korea, recalls the time when one of these photographs was shown to Muccio:

Unfortunately, a picture was taken later and was given to Ambassador Muccio. I might add, a Korean Military Advisor Group sergeant had witnessed this act and he was plainly recognizable in that picture. I was ordered to report to the Ambassador. When confronted with the facts in the picture, I told the Ambassador that this was a good sign because in the past, similar groups of two hundred or more had been summarily executed and now the number was down to twenty. This was progress! I won't repeat the Ambassador's reply to me. I wouldn't want to give you the impression that he was short-tempered and uncouth.¹³⁹

On 12 April, Muccio informed the Secretary of State that Rhee had accepted the withdrawal in return for a promise of increased military assistance.¹⁴⁰ However, Rhee was eager to learn about the details of the military assistance. Muccio later informed Rhee

¹³⁶ See: Hun Joon Kim, *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹³⁷ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung Democracy and the Politics of Representation in Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 59.

¹³⁸ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 984.

¹³⁹ Jager, *Brothers*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 986.

about the Department of State's answer to his expectation of military as well as political assistance. In its response, the U.S. was assuring Rhee that it was on his side. On the other hand, the response was stressing the role of the UN Commission in Korea by referring to the 12th December resolution, and the U.S.' commitment to it. On the issue of withdrawal, the U.S. wanted its troops to be withdrawn "as early as practicable."¹⁴¹ The U.S. was not providing any guarantee on its role after the withdrawal and it was basically wishing good luck to Rhee and his government in a respectful manner. Rhee immediately changed his mind after this response from Acheson, and wrote a letter to Muccio, again expecting the U.S. to stay a little longer in the peninsula because the situation was not yet in place that he could guarantee what would happen after the withdrawal. By referring to the withdrawal, Rhee implied that it might "have [had] disastrous consequences." He also suggested to the U.S. to "reaffirm the pledge contained in the amity clause of the Korean-American Treaty of 1882."¹⁴² The amity clause in the treaty suggested that both nations would "exert their good offices" should another power deals with either of them unjustly.¹⁴³ Rhee was desperately trying to find something by which he could tie the U.S. to Korea's security, but he would find all his hopes in vain when Acheson informed him that the Korean-American Treaty of 1882 was not in effect anymore.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, the idea of a mutual security pact between the U.S. and the ROK was floated by Rhee's

¹⁴¹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 989.

¹⁴² Draft Letter From the President of the Republic of Korea (Rhee) to the Special Representative in Korea (Muccio), *Ibid.*, 990-1.

¹⁴³ Treaty between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Chosen," 471, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/b-korea-ust000009-0470.pdf> Accessed on 26.08.2019.

¹⁴⁴ The Secretary of State to the American Mission in Korea, *Ibid.*, 992.

supporters in Seoul. When asked about this issue, Muccio responded that the America that he knew had never signed a mutual security pact since Thomas Jefferson.¹⁴⁵

While the disagreements between Muccio and Rhee were ongoing, the Ambassadorial Credentials Ceremony was held on 20th of April. The ceremony was held solemnly at the Presidential Office of the Central Government Office at 11 a.m. where Muccio presented his credentials to President Syngman Rhee.¹⁴⁶ In his congratulatory remarks, President Rhee again mentioned the Korean-American Treaty of 1882. He said that the treaty “includes a provision that clearly expresses the significance of a particularly close and respectful connection” between Korea and the U.S.¹⁴⁷ Rhee’s emphasis on the Korean-American Treaty of 1882 even after receiving Dean Acheson’s answer reflects the desperate situation he found himself in with regards to the security of the Korean peninsula.

Dealing with Rhee must have been extremely hard for Muccio at the time. On April 26, he asked for some vessels to reinforce the ROK’s navy so that he could attempt to negotiate with Rhee. Otherwise, he found it “exceedingly hard to persuade” Rhee on withdrawal.¹⁴⁸ Two days later, the Secretary of State informed Rhee regarding the Korean Military Advisor Group (KMAG) which would consist of 500 men, and this would be the last American unit in the Korean Peninsula.¹⁴⁹ Looking at the situation from Rhee’s

¹⁴⁵ Young Ick Lew, *Kŏn'guktaet'ongnyŏng Isŭngman Saengae Sasang Ŏpchŏgŭi Saeroun Chomyŏng* [Founding President Syngman Rhee Shedding New Light on his Life, Thought] (Sŏul: iljogak, 2015), 264.

¹⁴⁶ Muccio, John J. Taesa Ch'odaesangju [Ambassador the First to be Stationed] 1949. 4. 20 Sinimjang Chejŏng [Presentation of Credentials], Taesa Puim- Miguk [Ambassador Appointments, the U.S.], B-0002-02/34/711.2 US, Diplomatic Archives of the Republic of Korea, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

¹⁴⁷ Chon j. Much'yo Chuhanmiguk Ch'odaedaesa, Sinimjang Pongjŏng [The First Ambassador of the U.S. to Korea John J. Muccio's Credential Presentation], *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, 21 April 1949.

¹⁴⁸ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 996.

¹⁴⁹ The Secretary of State to the American Mission in Korea, *Ibid.*, 997.

perspective, his plan to form a huge army with the help of the U.S. did not work out. On the contrary, the U.S. did not acknowledge that it supported Rhee and the ROK government militarily. Rhee did not have much of a choice either when the U.S. was trying hard to get out of Korea as soon as possible.

At this point, Muccio decided to postpone the public announcement of the Korean Military Advisory Group. He insisted on settling things with Rhee before the declassification of the KMAG announcement.¹⁵⁰ Muccio wanted Rhee to be informed about events that were bound to happen. Muccio also requested more time for another chance to engage in another conversation with him. On May 2nd, President Rhee, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, John Muccio, General Roberts and Everett Drumright had a meeting in the Presidential Complex. The main subject was the withdrawal of the U.S. troops. General Roberts, who was going to be the head of the KMAG, explained how they intended to support the ROKA. After some chit-chat, Captain Sin, the Minister of Defense, asked what sort of an aid could be expected from the U.S. “when the time comes.”¹⁵¹ Sin was referring to a possible confrontation with North Korea. Muccio, by using his diplomatic skills, redirected the question to Korea’s economy. Rhee then highlighted the problem again by saying that “we need assurance we will be aided.”¹⁵² In addition, he mentioned Kenneth C. Royall’s statement on Japan in which he suggested that the U.S. had no responsibility to defend Japan in the event of a war with Soviet Union.¹⁵³ Rhee misperceived Royall’s remarks as Japan’s exclusion from the U.S.’

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 997.

¹⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), FRUS (1949), 1003.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1004.

¹⁵³ Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Sebald) to the Secretary of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2: 648.

defense perimeter. He curiously asked “if Japan is outside of U.S.’ defense line, then Korea must be well outside that line.”¹⁵⁴ Muccio had no clear answer to the questions directed to him and he must have been in an extremely difficult situation. By the time of this discussion, Rhee must have had at hand MacArthur’s statement in which MacArthur solidly excluded the ROK from the U.S.’ defense perimeter. Hence, Rhee asked Muccio to confirm with the State Department the position of the ROK in the defense perimeter of the U.S.

From the point of view of the ROK officials, it was hard to deduce anything other than the U.S.’ lack of interest in the peninsula. The Truman administration clearly did not deem that war was imminent and it tried not to be deeply involved in the problems the ROK had to deal with. The outlook made Rhee very nervous and he knew that he had to do something rather than sitting idly. He ordered his troops to engage in raids on the 38th parallel. Just two days after his meeting with Muccio, an important border battle emerged in Kaesŏng which led to 400 North Korean and 20 South Korean soldiers’ death according to American and South Korean data.¹⁵⁵ Rhee also released a statement to the press in which he was inquiring whether Korea was in the defense perimeter of the U.S. or not. The Director of the Office of Public Information who released Rhee’s statement added that the U.S. could not withdraw its troops before clearly answering the ROK’s questions regarding the U.S., aid in the event of war.¹⁵⁶

On May 3, Muccio suggested to the Department of State to provide the ROK with various military aircraft. He argued that the ROK “should not be denied an opportunity to

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), FRUS (1949), 1005.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 139.

¹⁵⁶ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 1012.

get some knowledge on aviation.”¹⁵⁷ Answering Muccio’s suggestions, Secretary of State Acheson dismissed all equipment requests for Korea. Acheson also mentioned the executive decision to provide \$11 million in contrast to \$200 million that was requested by the ROK.¹⁵⁸ As military historian Allan R. Millett boldly suggests, “Korea played no role in defense planning, even for Japan.”¹⁵⁹ This development proved Rhee right on his prediction that the Truman administration was simply giving up on Korea. In another telegram, Acheson directly threatened Rhee by suggesting that if his uncooperative attitude continued, the U.S. would cut all of its economic and military aid to Korea.¹⁶⁰ After the receipt of Acheson’s telegrams, it seemed like Muccio’s efforts were wasted and he had a real problem with Rhee that needed to be resolved promptly for the good of both parties.

The Korean public was as anxious as Rhee at the time. This anxiety is explicit in the questions asked to Muccio when he went to Pusan to attend the opening ceremony of the U.S. Public Relations Service on April 12. There, the press asked him whether the U.S. considered an attack against the ROK as an attack against itself. He answered the question diplomatically by saying that the public attention towards the outbreak of a war had to be avoided at all cost. Since he received a lot of questions regarding military issues, he reminded the reporters that he was a diplomat, not a military man. However, he added that he believed in the ROK’s ability to defend itself against any foreign power.¹⁶¹ After

¹⁵⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1006.

¹⁵⁸ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, *Ibid.*, 1015.

¹⁵⁹ Millett, *War for Korea*, 192.

¹⁶⁰ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, FRUS (1949), 1014.

¹⁶¹ Much'yo Chuhanmidaesa, Migunch'ölssu Pandaenün Ihaehal Su Őpsūmyō Chōnjaengsōrūn Sin'gyōnggwaminirago Kijahoegyōn [Ambassador Muccio said “I don’t Understand the Opposition to U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Rumors of War is Hypersensitivity” in his Interview with the Press], *Chosŏn Jungang Ilbo*, 15 May 1949.

Pusan, he went to Kyōngju and there he gave a speech regarding the ROK's situation. He suggested "currently, the Republic of Korea has a well-equipped army, a good navy and a strong police force, and I think Korea can maintain a good order both domestically and abroad if the three sides cooperate."¹⁶² When we look at Muccio's statements in public at the time, it is obvious that he was trying to instill confidence in the Korean public who were anxious due to the U.S. troops withdrawal. On the other hand, in his correspondence with the State Department, he was insisting on more military support for the ROK from the U.S.

Muccio answered Dean Acheson's telegrams on May 11. He mentioned that the Department of State took the recommendations of Cho Pyōng-ok, the ROK's Ambassador to the UN, instead of his own modest recommendations on naval and air demands. He suggested that even Rhee may not know the details of Cho Pyōng-ok's suggestions. The reason why Muccio thought that Rhee may not know the details was because he specifically asked Rhee not to ask for military aid directly since it might have spoiled some confidential arrangements made by Muccio. Rhee disclosed this information in his letter to Cho Pyōng-ok dated April 10, 1949. In this letter, Rhee instructed Cho to "frankly discuss" Korea's situation with high officials and "in a strictly confidential manner" inform them about the ROK's needs for military arms and ammunitions.¹⁶³ It seems like after Rhee's instruction, Cho wrote down a detailed memorandum and submitted it to the Department of State. On April 20, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and

¹⁶² Much'yo Chuhanmidaesa, Kyōngjuesō Han'gugūi Kukpangnūngnyōgi Ch'ungbunhadago Parōn [U.S. Ambassador Muccio said ROK's Defense Capability is Sufficient in Gyeongju], *Yōnhap Sinmun*, 17 May 1949.

¹⁶³ Rhee to Cough, April 10, 1949, "Ambassador Myun Chang File," Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Pacific Affairs Butterworth acknowledged the receipt and promised that the memorandum would receive “careful study and consideration.”¹⁶⁴ Eventually, Muccio was overruled by the Department of State and Rhee, which indicates the shrinking influence of the top U.S. official in Korea. In his telegram, Muccio disagreed with Acheson’s decision about not providing vessels and aircrafts for the ROK. He argued that “it [was] absurd to pour in hundreds of millions of dollars for economic aid and not spend a small amount to prevent critical items being smuggled.”¹⁶⁵ He reiterated his conviction that the ROK needed some vessels and aircrafts in order to have sufficient power to defend itself.

Acheson’s threat had an immediate effect on Rhee. In his meeting with Muccio, Rhee backpedaled and said all he had in mind in issuing his statement was to make the Korean position clear to the American people. Thus, he expected the U.S. to be “liberal” to the ROK and make a public statement of assurance regarding U.S. aid after the withdrawal of troops.¹⁶⁶ In another meeting, Rhee floated the idea of the conclusion of a Pacific Pact similar to the Atlantic Pact, or a conclusive agreement between the U.S. and Korea alone, or with other nations, for mutual defense against any aggressor nations, or the reaffirmation by the U.S. of the amity clause in the U.S.-Korean Treaty of 1882 (Shufeldt Treaty). Muccio did not give any assurances to Rhee on these matters, but suggested that the U.S. would consider a modern treaty of friendship and commerce.¹⁶⁷ The U.S. clearly did not want to tie itself to the ROK’s security. After this meeting, Muccio reported that it seemed like Rhee was reconciled to the U.S. troops withdrawal.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 1018-9.

¹⁶⁶ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1022.

¹⁶⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1030.

On May 31, Muccio informed the Department of State that nearly 2200 military personnel and 60% of the Army equipment had left the Korean peninsula. He reported the eruption of a crisis after the withdrawal by noting that “clamor and fear aroused by [the] troop[s] withdrawal have far exceeded” his expectations.¹⁶⁸ Apart from a small contingent of 500 soldiers, the U.S. was planning to withdraw all of its troops by the end of June, but Muccio suggested to the Department of State not to publicly release the news because of the fear of possible Korean resentment. On June 11, Muccio sent another telegram explaining the risks of total withdrawal as:

...completion of the withdrawal of United States occupation forces by the end of June will leave two native Korean forces facing each other across the long line of the 38th parallel. Assuming withdrawal will be substantially completed, both on the part of the Americans and the Soviets, it will be apparent that the restraining influence hitherto exercised by the occupying powers will have been largely removed. Nevertheless it is the considered view of this Mission that neither South Korea nor North Korea, with what would appear to be fairly evenly balanced military forces, is likely in the foreseeable future to assume the risks associated with a deliberate all-out invasion.¹⁶⁹

He also mentioned the regrouping of the North Korean army, and emphasized the importance of the Manchurian units that had reinforced the North Korean Army. Muccio again and again requested the U.S. to supply the ROK with vessels because they were crucial in stopping smuggling from the North.¹⁷⁰

Kim Ku, one of the foremost leaders of the Korean independence movement and the leader of the Korea Independence Party, was assassinated by a lieutenant named An Tuhŭi on June 26, 1949. This was arguably the most notorious political assassination in 20th-century Korea. In 2001, the declassified United States military documents dating

¹⁶⁸ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1035.

¹⁶⁹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1042.

¹⁷⁰ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1067.

from 1949 revealed that An Tuhŭi was working as an agent for the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps (US CIC) in Korea.¹⁷¹ Muccio wrote a seven-page report on this assassination to Acheson, which details the U.S. Embassy's position. While Muccio's report did not mention anything with regard to An Tuhŭi being an American spy, it accused the Rhee government and the ROKA of protecting him openly. Muccio called attention to Kim's ambitious nature and suggested that he was playing with fire in his last days by surrounding himself with ambiguous men close to the left. By referring to Kim's assassin background, Muccio stated "Kim Koo lived an assassin's life, surround himself with an assassin's tools and friends, and died the death which of all deaths he best understood." He argued that Kim's assassination and its aftermath would "long remain a classic case in Korean history."¹⁷²

After the North's attack on South Korean forces occupying a small mountain north of the 38th parallel on August 20, Rhee wrote a letter to Truman. In the letter, Rhee was demanding military aid because his officers told him that if an all-out attack started, they could only hold the northern army for two days.¹⁷³ Truman on September 26 replied to Rhee's letter. In summary, he expressed that he understood the situation in Korea, but he could not make any promises whatsoever.¹⁷⁴

In the first half of October, Muccio reported that the Cheju Uprising was suppressed by the ROKA but guerillas in the Chiri mountain area were still there and

¹⁷¹ Jager, *Brothers*, 496.

¹⁷² Aftermath of the Assassination of Kim Koo; the trial and Sentence of AN Too Hi, August 9, 1949, RG 263, The Murphy Collection on International Communism, 1917-58, Entry Murphy Papers, Box 69 (1).

¹⁷³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 1076.

¹⁷⁴ Truman to Rhee, *Ibid.*, 1085.

backed by North Korea. He mentioned that there was no considerable gain of land, but psychologically the native population was moved by the communist effect.¹⁷⁵ In addition, Muccio asked the KMAG to investigate the ROKA and its needs and send these to the Department of State so that they could adequately supply it.¹⁷⁶ In November, Muccio reported that the North Korean Air Force was strengthening in every way, and there needed to be a countermeasure. He suggested the General Robert's modest program to support and train the ROKA for an air combat.¹⁷⁷ On December 7, Rhee formally requested an extension of the military aid program including aid to the Korean Air Force.¹⁷⁸ Muccio, based on General Robert's plan, proposed that, given the external threats the ROK faced, allocation of minimum \$20 million was essential.¹⁷⁹ In an oral history interview with historian William Stueck, Muccio disclosed that he "was distrustful enough to ensure that the allocation of U.S. military aid to the ROK was sufficiently piecemeal to discourage adventurism toward the North."¹⁸⁰

On the other hand, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program Appropriations Act on October 6, 1949, and allocated \$10 million to Korea, certainly very bad news for Muccio since the amount was less than what he described as piecemeal aid. Then, the official Mutual Defense Assistance Program survey team, consisting of Niles W. Bond from the State Department, and Colonel Richard H. Lawson from the Defense Department came to Seoul on December 14, 1949. The final capital investment plan based

¹⁷⁵ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid.,1087.

¹⁷⁶ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid., 1089.

¹⁷⁷ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid., 1094.

¹⁷⁸ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid., 1106.

¹⁷⁹ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid., 1112.

¹⁸⁰ William Stueck & Boram Yi (2010) "An Alliance Forged in Blood': The American Occupation of Korea, the Korean War, and the US-South Korean Alliance," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, (33:2): 204.

on their survey allocated \$10.23 million to the ROK without any promise of combat aircraft, naval patrol ships, tanks and heavy artillery since they were too costly.¹⁸¹

In late December, Muccio met with Vyvian Holt, the British Minister to Korea and they discussed a potential attack from North Korea. According to Holt, Muccio's views were as follows:

He [Muccio] said that they [the ROK government] might try but he could not believe that the present regime could survive for more than a few days if the Government abandoned the Capital. I agree with this view. I think that the President and the Cabinet would probably flee the country and try to persuade the American government to support them in Hawaii or elsewhere as a Government in exile.¹⁸²

In the year's last telegram on December 30, the Department of State summarized its views on the ROK. Though it recognized the need for military support, it put forward economic development first. The telegram highlighted the high rates of inflation and asked the ROK government to take immediate measures against it.¹⁸³ This telegram is the basic example of the Department of State's problematic position on Korea. While there was an immediate danger against its existence, there was no way for the ROK to focus primarily on economic development. It is clear that the Department of State's continuous refusal to supply the ROKA with more weaponry resulted in a more vulnerable ROKA against a potential North Korean attack.

¹⁸¹ Millett, *War for Korea*, 217-8.

¹⁸² Letter from Vyvian Holt to Peter Scarlett, December 22, 1949, Foreign Office Files for China 371/84078/1, National Archives of the U.K.

¹⁸³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1949), 1113-4.

3.4. War Drums: Acheson's Last Straw

North Korean leader Kim Il Sung was just as eager as Rhee to reunify the peninsula by force. His plan for the “completion of national territory” (*kukdo wanjong*) was in full swing from the end of 1948. Just like Rhee, he was pushing the Soviet Union to back him for a military operation to unify Korea. Kim went to Moscow in early March 1949 to propagate his plan for the forceful unification of the Korean Peninsula to Stalin. Stalin's response was that Kim could only attack the ROK if the latter attacked North Korea first. Stalin argued “then your move will be understood and supported by everyone.”¹⁸⁴ Disappointed Kim Il Sung however continued to push the Soviets with regards to a forced unification even to the point of gaining Soviet Ambassador Shtykov's support for taking a piece of Kaesŏng and Ongjin, a part of the ROK's soil.¹⁸⁵ Stalin though was unmoved and advised Kim not to attack first throughout 1949. Given his well-established spy network in the U.S., Stalin most probably was aware of the context of Royall's press conference, the Congress' decision to cut financial aid to the ROK and the U.S. troops withdrawal, but the last straw would be Secretary of State Acheson's speech.

The New Year started with proof that Muccio and his suggestions were no longer influential in the chains of the Department of State. On January 12, Secretary of State Dean Acheson placed the Aleutian Islands, Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines within the U.S. defense perimeter and left Taiwan and Korea outside of it in his infamous speech

¹⁸⁴ Bajanov Evgeni, “Assessing the Politics of Korean War, 1949-51,” *CWIHP Bulletin* no.6-7, 54, 87.

¹⁸⁵ Telegram from Shtykov to Stalin, September 15, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119383>. Accessed on 07.08.2019.

at the National Press Club.¹⁸⁶ This speech is generally regarded as a turning point among the historians of the Korean War. In the ROK, this speech was not mentioned directly in any meeting between Rhee and Muccio. Bruce Cumings and Pak Myŏng-nim argued that the reason why the ROK did not protest Acheson's speech was because the ROK considered itself as inside the defense line.¹⁸⁷ However, from Muccio's meeting with Rhee on May 2, 1949, we know that Rhee interpreted Royall's statement as an affirmation that "Korea must be well outside that line."¹⁸⁸ Thus, it is only natural that the ROK did not protest Acheson's speech since the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy already knew that the ROK was outside of the defense line of the U.S. which was reinforced by MacArthur's statement in March 1949. Until the outbreak of the Korean War, the ROK tried every possible way to make the U.S. announce that the ROK was inside of the U.S. defense line.

On the other hand, this speech was a turning point for Stalin's position with regard to Korea. When Stalin looked at the U.S. stance towards Korea, he had at hand MacArthur's statement in which MacArthur confirmed that the ROK was not in the defense perimeter of the U.S., Congress' decision to cut financial aid to the ROK and the U.S. troops withdrawal. Adding Acheson's speech to this equation, Stalin concluded that the ROK was a dispensable aspect of American foreign policy. Thus, on January 30, 1950, Stalin completely changed his stance and informed Soviet Ambassador Shtykov that he was happy to help Kim on the matter of forced reunification.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶Remarks by Dean Acheson Before the National Press Club, ca. 1950. Elsej Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Cumings, *Origins*, 424-5, Pak Myŏng-nim, *Hanguk Chŏnjaengŭi Palbal kwa Kiwŏn* [The Outbreak and Origins of the Korean War] (Seoul: Nanamu Ch'ŏlp'an, 1996), Vol II, 556-569.

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum of Conversation by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), FRUS (1949), 1003-5.

¹⁸⁹ Zhihua Shen & Danhui Li *After Leaning to One Side China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 20.

As the first job of 1950, Muccio met with Rhee regarding the inflation issue and they talked for about an hour. Rhee expressed the problems he faced, especially with the cabinet members, but all in all he agreed to do what he could on the issue.¹⁹⁰ Rhee passed on his desire for the U.S. to help build the ROKA in a better way, therefore he suggested some vessels to be lend to the ROKA's forces.¹⁹¹ Muccio, on the other hand, sent another telegram to the Secretary of State informing him of the urgent need of military aid to Korea. He made the KMAG experts calculate the number and they informed Muccio that the \$10 million allotment was far from adequate to meet the minimum needs of the ROKA. Therefore, he suggested that a minimum \$20 million must be allocated in order to meet the necessary needs of the ROKA.¹⁹² On March 23, 1950, Muccio was recalled by Acheson for a brief consultation about the inflation and democratic atmosphere in Korea.¹⁹³ Muccio responded to Acheson on March 29 by agreeing that it was timely for consultations and that he wanted to get back to Seoul before elections scheduled for May. On April 1, Muccio sent another telegram explaining the political situation in Korea. He highlighted that Rhee was planning to postpone the upcoming elections from May to November.¹⁹⁴ The ROK was already uneasy about Congress' decision to cut its aid. In a private letter to Robert T. Oliver, an advisor of Rhee, First Lady Francesca Rhee complained about Congress' decision by comparing the ROK's aid with that of Japan: "Japan was the aggressor nation and how much money is poured into Japan? Definitely more than \$25.000.000... what has Korea done to deserve that?"¹⁹⁵ Even though people

¹⁹⁰ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950) Korea, Volume VII, 8-11.

¹⁹¹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹² Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹³ Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁹⁴ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Francesca Rhee to Robert Oliver, February 9, 1950, "Robert T. Oliver File," Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

in the higher cadres of the ROK hierarchy did not appreciate Congress' decision, they knew that Korea was in no position to refuse U.S. aid.

On April 3, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson handed over an *aide-mémoire* ultimatum letter to the Korean Ambassador in Washington, Chang Myŏn, to be conveyed to Rhee. In the letter, Acheson asked Chang to inform Rhee about the Truman Administration's "deep concern" over the mounting inflation. Acheson went further and threatened Rhee that unless effective measures were taken to tackle inflation, it would be necessary "to reexamine, and perhaps to make adjustments in, the Economic Cooperation Administration's assistance program in Korea." In addition, Acheson warned Rhee not to postpone the elections scheduled for May and emphasized that the U.S. aid was predicated upon democratic development.¹⁹⁶ In support of Acheson, the head of the Economy Cooperation Administration, Paul G. Hoffman, suggested that unless anti-inflation measures were taken, he could not "justify the scope or nature of the current proposal for aid to Korea" and that he might demand a reduction of aid to Congress.¹⁹⁷ The warnings coming from the U.S. were taken very seriously in Korea. Acheson's letter was read at the Korean National Assembly in Seoul on April 7. Muccio's summoning to Washington was also seen as an expression of dissatisfaction in the ROK.¹⁹⁸

While the ROK was dealing with these economic problems, Kim Il Sung and Pak Hon Yong travelled to Moscow for discussions with Stalin on March 30. At their meeting,

¹⁹⁶ The Secretary of State to the Korean Ambassador (Chang), FRUS (1950), 44.

¹⁹⁷ Miguk Kungmubu, Han'gukchŏngbue Ch'ongsŏn'gŏ-Inp'ülleisyŏn Munjee Taehan Kyŏnggo Sŏhanül Palp'yo [US State Department announces a warning letter to the Korean government on the issue of general election and inflation], *Sŏul Sinmun*, 9 April 1950.

¹⁹⁸ Aech'isŭn mi Kungmubujanggwan, Inp'ülleisyŏn Hyŏbüirül Wihae Much'yo Chuhanmiguktaesarül Sohwan [US Secretary of State Acheson summons US Ambassador to Korea Muccio for inflation talks], *Chayu Sinmun*, 9 April 1950.

Stalin explained his rationalization by arguing that the “international environment has sufficiently changed to permit a more active stance on the unification of Korea.” Stalin also assured Kim that if necessary the Chinese troops “c[ould] be utilized without any harm to the other needs of China.” He also mentioned the Chinese-Soviet treaty of alliance and argued that the “Americans will be even more hesitant to challenge the Communists in Asia” and added “the prevailing mood is not to interfere. Such a mood is reinforced by the fact that USSR now has the atomic bomb.” Stalin then asked Kim to make sure that Mao also endorsed him. Kim guaranteed the endorsement. Stalin asserted that the Soviet Union would not directly participate in the war because it “had serious challenges elsewhere to cope with, especially the West.” He again emphasized the need to consult Mao’s opinion because he “had a good understanding of Oriental matters.”¹⁹⁹ On May 15, Kim met with Mao and got the latter’s assurance that he would dispatch Chinese troops to Korea if the U.S. were to intervene in the war.²⁰⁰ Therefore, from this point onwards Kim Il Sung totally focused on military build-up in order to invade the South.

Muccio returned back to Washington on April 17. In Washington, he stated that the ROK National Assembly passed an election law and it was in consideration of several tax-related laws. In addition, the budget system was approved, and an organization was established for land distribution. Therefore, he believed that “Korea's overall condition [was] much better than a month ago.”²⁰¹ During Muccio’s two week consultation visit to

¹⁹⁹ Kathryn Weathersby, “Should We Fear This? Stalin and Danger of War with America,” CWHIP Working Paper 39 (July 20, 2002): 9-11.

²⁰⁰ Zhihua Shen & Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 34.

²⁰¹ Much'yo Chuhanmiguktaesa, Wösingt'önesö Han'gukkyöngjeüi Paljönsangwange Taehae pogo Yejöng [US Ambassador to Korea Muccio will report on the development of the Korean economy in Washington], *Chayu Sinmun*, 19 April 1950.

Washington, the ROK National Assembly passed the above-mentioned bills and acting Prime Minister Sin Sŏngmo announced that the elections were not going to be postponed. These developments meant that the Department of State had accomplished all of its aims stated in Dean Acheson's ultimatum. Hence, Muccio could return to Korea. Before his return, Muccio met with President Truman on May 4, 1950, at 12 p.m. for fifteen minutes.²⁰² Muccio issued a statement after his meeting in which he suggested that he was "deeply impressed" by the enthusiasm for the elections scheduled for May 30. He added that he was not "doubtful of the American enthusiasm for maintaining Korea's independence."²⁰³ On April 16, Muccio returned to Seoul and made a press conference at his residence and said the following: "President Truman told me that he has a direct interest in the Republic of Korea as an individual. I assure you that I will do whatever I can to aid the Korean government to maintain and develop a solid, safe and unified country."²⁰⁴

On May 19, Acting Secretary of State Webb asked Muccio what good an aircraft supply would bring to Korea.²⁰⁵ Muccio explained his plan in detail to Webb. He suggested 40 F-51, 10 T-6 and 3 C-47 type aircraft for the air security of the ROK.²⁰⁶ In the end, the ROK would only get five light aircrafts. On May 25, Muccio sent a complaint to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Dean Rusk, regarding the

²⁰² Daily Appointments of Harry S. Truman, 4 May 1950, Matthew J. Connelly Files, Box 5.

²⁰³ Much'yo Chuhanmiguktaesa, Han'gugŭn Inp'ulleisyŏn Ŏkchee Sŏnggongal Kŏsirago Kwiim Sŏngmyŏng [U.S. Ambassador to Korea Muccio said South Korea will succeed in curbing inflation], *Chayu Sinmun*, 6 May 1950.

²⁰⁴ Much'yo Chuhanmiguktaesa, Migugŭn Han'guge Taehan Wŏnjojŭl Kanghwahal Kŏsirago Kwiim Kijahoegyŏn [U.S. Ambassador to Korea Muccio said the U.S. will strengthen aid to South Korea at a press conference], *Chayu Sinmun*, 18 May 1950.

²⁰⁵ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, FRUS (1950), 85-6.

²⁰⁶ Muccio to Acheson,, *Ibid.*, 87.

omission of Korea's name from the countries names that were special to the U.S. in media briefings, publications etc.²⁰⁷ It is obvious that weeks before North Korea's attack on the South, the U.S. was not at all interested in Korea. Rhee, on the other hand, discarded the possibility of postponing elections, and Muccio reported that elections would be relatively free.²⁰⁸

On June 9, John Muccio sent a letter to Congress in which he was asking for continued military aid to the ROK. Muccio summarized the situation in Korea as follows:

Although the threat of North Korean aggression seems temporarily at least to have been contained, the undeniable material superiority of the North Korean forces would provide North Korea with a margin of victory in the event of a full-scale invasion of the Republic. Such superiority is particularly evident in the matter of heavy infantry support weapons, tanks, and combat aircraft with which the USSR has supplied and continues to supply its Korean puppet. It has been aggravated also by the recent Communist successes in China, which have increased considerably the military potential of the North, particularly by releasing undetermined numbers of Korean troops from the Chinese Communist armies for service in Korea. The threat to the Republic will continue as long as there exists in the North an aggressive Communist regime desiring the conquest and domination of the south.²⁰⁹

In late June, Ambassador-at-large John Foster Dulles did something unprecedented and decided to visit Korea before visiting Japan. The Korean Ambassador in Washington, Chang Myŏn, met with Dulles before his visit. Myŏn ironically told Dulles that his visit to Korea would be "regarded as the visit of an angel of peace."²¹⁰ In his letter to Rhee, Myŏn argued that Dulles would "place Korea in United States' line of defense in

²⁰⁷ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰⁹ John J. Muccio, "Military Aid to Korean Security Forces," Department of State Bulletin, XXII (June 26, 1950), 1.

²¹⁰ Ambassador Chang to Rhee, June 14, 1950, "Ambassador Myun Chang File," Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

the Pacific.”²¹¹ Chang Myŏn’s letter to Rhee is another proof that the ROK did not consider itself inside the defense line of the U.S. Muccio previously reported that Defense Department officials would never visit Seoul in their official trips to East Asia. That is why Koreans expected a change in U.S. foreign policy with Dulles’ visit. In Korea, the press inquired whether the U.S. Department of State had abandoned Korea since it did not include Korea within its defense line. Dulles replied that “giving up Korea is an assumption.”²¹² Dulles’s statements in Korea were along the lines of “U.S. supports Korea.” Even though it was good moral support, it did not change anything in terms of *realpolitik* since he did not suggest that Korea was within the defense perimeter of the U.S.

On June 19, 1950, the CIA sent a memorandum related to North Korea and its capabilities. The CIA argued that North Korea, without armed support from China or the Soviets would still be able to take over the entire peninsula. In addition, the report also acknowledged that there was an unusual movement along the 38th parallel from the North.²¹³ On June 23, Muccio sent his last telegram regarding the reduction of KMAG personnel by half.²¹⁴ Two days after this telegram, the North would attack the South, and change the whole situation.

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated that there was a rift between the State Department and Department of Defense with regard to the date of the U.S. troops’ withdrawal from Korea. Muccio strongly opposed the suggestions of a premature all-out

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Töllesü Mi Kungmubu Komun Han'gugül Ttŏnam [Dulles, U.S. State Department Advisor, Leaves Korea], *Chayu Sinmun*, 22 June 1950.

²¹³ Memorandum by the Central Intelligence Agency, FRUS (1950), 109-121.

²¹⁴ Muccio to Acheson, Ibid., 122.

withdrawal from late August 1948 until the adaptation of the NSC 8/2. The NSC 8/2 adopted the date proposed by Muccio as the final decision of Truman Administration with regard to the topic of U.S. troops withdrawal. Since Rhee interpreted Royall's speech as an affirmation that the ROK was outside of the defense line of the U.S., it was very hard from Muccio's perspective to persuade him on the issue of withdrawal. Affirming and reinforcing MacArthur's statement in March 1949, Acheson placed the ROK outside of the U.S. defense perimeter, which in the end made the ROK look like a dispensable element of American foreign policy to Stalin. After the adaptation of the NSC 8/2, the State Department started to overrule Muccio's suggestions especially on military aid to the ROKA's forces which made the ROKA more vulnerable to an attack from North Korea.

CHAPTER IV

AMBASSADOR AT WAR

“If you just hold together and not despair, you will win out despite the early defeats. Koreans must not give up hope; the worse the situation, the more you should pull together.”

Muccio²¹⁵

“I should emphasize that history has not been fair to John Muccio in recognizing what he did single-handedly to hold the situation together...Muccio managed somehow or other to instill enough confidence into the Korean government... It was very difficult, but had Muccio not taken that firm positive reassuring stance, based on very little evidence, the situation would have been much worse.”

Donald S. MacDonald (Third Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Korea)²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Noble, *Embassy*, 61.

²¹⁶ Charles Stuart Kennedy, “Interview with Donald S. MacDonald,” The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 12.

<https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/MacDonald,%20Donald%20S%20.toc.pdf> Accessed on 10.08.2019.

4.1. Saving the Republic of Korea

The Korean People's Army (KPA) launched its blitzkrieg attack on June 25, 1950, at 4 a.m. along the 38th parallel simultaneously with its seven divisions. With this unprovoked offensive, North Korea eventually turned the civil war that had its roots in Japanese colonization into an international war. The ROKA was caught off guard, and the manpower advantage of three or two to one was on the KPA's side. The KPA was assisted by nearly 200 aircraft and around 150 T-34 tanks.²¹⁷ With no tanks, no heavy artillery and no fighter aircraft, the ROKA forces were alarmingly underequipped. As was mentioned earlier, Muccio suggested to the Department of State to consider providing the ROKA with fighter aircraft and other military material that would be needed to repel an attack coming from the North, but the Department of State eventually rejected his proposal. Truth be told, even if the Department of State had approved Muccio's modest proposal, it would not have been enough to repel North Korea's assault.

June 25, 1950, was a typical rainy day of *changma*, the Korean summer rainy season, when the military attaché of the American Embassy Lt. Col. Bob Edwards got a call from the KMAG regarding the North Korean offensive around seven o'clock. He promptly called Everett F. Drumright, Counselor of the Embassy, and cautiously informed him about the unusual activity of the KPA without mentioning the all-out offensive since he was not exactly sure about the information he received from the KMAG. At eight o'clock, Edwards called Drumright again, this time informing him of the extensive reports he received which indicated a general invasion but he added that there was some room for

²¹⁷ Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 85-7.

optimism.²¹⁸ Without further ado, Drumright called Muccio and said “John, we’re in trouble. We have an invasion here all along the 38th parallel.”²¹⁹ Drumright informed Muccio about the details of the assault briefly over the phone. Muccio replied “well, I’ll meet you at the office right away.”²²⁰

It took five minutes to reach the chancery from his residence. On his way to the chancery at around 8:30 a.m., Muccio ran into Jack James, Seoul bureau manager of the *UP*, who stopped off at the U.S. Embassy pressroom to retrieve the coat he left earlier.²²¹ Jack James was planning to go on a picnic later that day.²²² At the Embassy, he came across with Commander Jack Seifert, the Naval Attaché, who informed him about the unusual activity along the 38th parallel. After closely watching the reports coming to the Embassy and discussing them with Drumright who thought that it was the long-expected general assault, he decided to head toward his office to write down a story about a general invasion.²²³ On his way back, he ran into Muccio and asked, “What are you doing stirring at this time of the morning?” Muccio observed that James was looking disorganized and he must have had a “restless night.” Indeed, he had a restless night attending a late party with his colleague O.H.P King, the Associated Press’ reporter, who was still sleeping. Jack James did not bother notifying his colleague because he was well aware that it could

²¹⁸ Noble, *Embassy*, 10-13.

²¹⁹ Lee Cotterman, “Interview with Ambassador Everett Drumright,” The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 16.
<https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Drumright,%20Everett.1988.toc.pdf> Accessed on 10.08.2019.

²²⁰ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 30.

²²¹ Muccio wrongly recollects Jack James’ name as Bill in his oral history interview with Jerry N. Hess.

²²² “U.P.’s Jack James was Going to Picnic June 25.” *Editor and Publisher*, 83:30 (1950): 10.

²²³ Noble, *Embassy*, 13.

be the story of his lifetime. In his reply to Jack James, Muccio said: "Oh, we've had some disturbing reports from activities on the 38th parallel, you might want to look into them."²²⁴

After his brief encounter with Jack James, Muccio went into the Embassy to look into the situation. Drumright shared with him the reports that came from the KMAG and other intelligence sources. Then, Muccio drafted a very carefully worded telegraph to alert Washington. However, he wanted to be absolutely sure that the Northern attack was an all-out offense. On the other hand, Jack James completed his story about the invasion and filed it at 9:50 a.m. According to Harold Joyce Noble, the First Secretary of the Embassy, Muccio sent the drafted telegram only after James sent his story since he thought that the story would serve as an initial warning.²²⁵ The invasion telegram marked "Night Action" (NIACT) was sent from Seoul at 10 a.m. NIACT telegrams were designated for emergency use only and the addressee of the NIACT, in this case Acheson, was supposed to take immediate action. In the telegram, Muccio informed Acheson about the targets of the KPA and suggested that "from nature of attack and manner in which it was launched that it constitutes all out offensive against ROK."²²⁶

Just as Muccio expected, Jack James' story alerted the State Department which immediately sent a telegram to him asking for urgent advice.²²⁷ Taking into account the time difference of thirteen hours between Seoul and Washington D.C., the State Department could only receive Muccio's telegram on June 24, at 9:26 p.m. Alarmed by Muccio's telegram, John Hickerson, Assistant Secretary for United Nations Affairs, Dean

²²⁴ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 31.

²²⁵ Noble, *Embassy*, 14.

²²⁶ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS, 1950, 125-6.

²²⁷ Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 126.

Rusk, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, and Philip C. Jessup, Ambassador at large, were called to the State Department. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who was at his country house in Maryland was informed by a telephone call from the White House around 10 p.m. Acheson asked for the State Department's suggestion regarding action, and Hickerson suggested to request an emergency session at the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution calling for immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of the North Korean troops from South Korea.²²⁸ Acheson approved Hickerson's suggestion, and rushed to call Truman who was on a visit to his mother in Independence, Missouri. Acheson said, "Mr. President, I have very serious news. The North Koreans have invaded South Korea." Even though Truman wanted to return to Washington at once, Acheson advised him not to rush and come back the next day.²²⁹

In the first hours of the invasion, the role of the American Embassy previously unanticipated emerged. It became the duty of the Embassy to keep up the morale of the Koreans. Harold Joyce Noble recalls the time when all phones of the Embassy were ringing, and the American officials were trying their best in order to reassure the public as well as the people in the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy.²³⁰ The challenge that Muccio had to shoulder was definitely one of the hardest that any career diplomat could ever imagine. On the one hand, he had to keep all of the American organizations (e.g. ECA, KMAG, etc.) in order and inform Washington in the best way he could about the developments in the field. On the other hand, he had to make sure that the ROK would

²²⁸ Dean Acheson, *The Korean War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 15; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), 404.

²²⁹ Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 339.

²³⁰ Noble, *Embassy*, 15.

be able to resist the North Korean invasion in the best way it could. The latter proved to be the hardest, which eventually forced him to overstep his authority as the Ambassador of a foreign nation.

The following telegram of Muccio remarked that both the Korean officials and security personnel were handling the situation calmly and that there was no need for alarm.²³¹ Acheson responded that all the U.S. agencies were alerted, and they were waiting for his reports.²³² Muccio then went to see Rhee at 11:35 a.m. in Kyōngmudae, the Presidential Palace. Muccio observed that Rhee was under considerable emotional tension; however, he was composed. Muccio started off the conversation by pointing out that the Korean military and American advisors were coping with the situation efficiently. In response, Rhee told Muccio that they were in dire need of “more arms and ammunition.” This was not a newly discovered need of the Republic of Korea. On the contrary, Rhee had been emphasizing this need on almost every occasion he had with a high-ranking American official. In an attempt to lift Rhee’s spirits, Muccio mentioned that the ROKA’s forces were in a much better condition than they were one year ago. In response, Rhee said that he was considering proclaiming martial law in Seoul and gather his cabinet at 2 p.m. Rhee added that he was “trying to avoid making Korea a second Sarajevo” but he added, “the present crisis presented the best opportunity for settling the Korean problem once and for all.”²³³ Rhee’s strategic mention of Sarajevo is crucial.²³⁴ He knew well enough that his mention of Sarajevo would raise red flags in the minds of

²³¹ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 127.

²³² Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 128.

²³³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 130-1.

²³⁴ Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. This event is considered as the immediate catalyst for the World War I.

the State Department officials. This was one of the rhetorical tactics Rhee developed while talking to Americans during his time in the U.S. He would give an example that Americans knew very well and tie it to Korean affairs.²³⁵ At this point, Rhee was in his logical frame of mind therefore: “had an excellent historical perspective.”²³⁶ Unfortunately, as the war deteriorated, Rhee started to lose this decisive perspective.

In the following hours, Muccio transmitted the details of the Pyŏngyang Radio broadcast which claimed that it was the South Korean forces that firstly attacked and the KPA was on a counter operation.²³⁷ Before sunset, North Korea was in control of most of the airspace of the ROK. From Muccio’s point of view, the ROKA forces were able, but the air superiority of North Korea proved to be the game changer. Thus, he commented that the “future course of hostilities may depend largely on whether US will or will not give adequate air assistance.”²³⁸

Even though many of the ROKA forces fought bravely, ineptness of the senior officers of ROKA served as an advantage for the KPA.²³⁹ Before the end of the day, the KPA managed to reach as far as Ŭijŏngbu area, about 17 miles north of Seoul. As bad reports kept coming his way, Rhee decided to telephone Muccio at 10 p.m. and asked him to come to Kyŏngmudae. Earlier that day, some of Rhee’s confidants began propagating

²³⁵ For the discourse Rhee employed talking to Americans see: David P. Fields, *Foreign Friends Syngman Rhee, American Exceptionalism and the Division of Korea* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 136-174.

²³⁶ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 13.

²³⁷ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 132. For the North Korean propaganda on this issue see: *The US Imperialists Started the Korean War* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1993).

²³⁸ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 133.

²³⁹ Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 87.

the idea of leaving Seoul.²⁴⁰ Before Muccio, Rhee met with former Prime Minister and Defense Minister Yi Pömsök and Cho Pyöngok, the former head of the national police and foreign minister. Cho asserted that Rhee should not leave the city because the situation was still unclear, and it would give the people a wrong message. Yi, on the other hand, supported the idea and urged Rhee to evacuate the capital and take the government to the South. Cho was strongly against the idea and he insisted that such an action should not be taken without prior consultation with Muccio.²⁴¹

Muccio was accompanied by Sin Söngmo, the Acting Prime Minister, who came to the Embassy to take him and when they arrived at the Kyöngmudae, Yi Pömsök was still at the President's residence. Muccio observed that Rhee was under great strain: "his face was working and his statements were repetitious, half-formed and disconnected." This emotional face of Rhee was what Muccio called the "old guerilla, old revolutionary" in his oral history interview. Accordingly, when Rhee got emotional, he returned to his old self and put his self-survival before everything else.²⁴² At the meeting, Rhee pointed out the North Korean tanks had started to gather around Üijöngbu. He asserted that it was beyond the ROKA's power to halt those tanks coming towards Seoul which was true. Thus, he suggested to transfer the government to Taejön, a major South Korean city 100 miles south of Seoul. Muccio was "jarred" to hear Rhee's plan.²⁴³ He tried to persuade Rhee by pointing out that they were at the first phases of the war and the ROKA forces

²⁴⁰ Harold Joyce Noble argues that Sin Söngmo, the Acting Prime Minister was most probably one of them.

²⁴¹ Noble, *Embassy*, 20.

²⁴² Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 63. For the best English language work on Rhee's early life see: Young Ick Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

²⁴³ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 34.

could stop the enemy should they give adequate support. In addition, he argued that if the government left Seoul, much of the battle would be lost since the moral superiority would be on the side of the North Koreans. Muccio's words made little, if any impression on Rhee who kept repeating that it was not because his personal safety was on the line but because "the government must not run risk of capture." When it became evident that Rhee would not change his mind, Muccio rose and said that, regardless of Rhee's decision, he would remain in Seoul. He added that American women and children would be evacuated early next morning, and during the implementation of the evacuation, there would be air cover over Seoul. Rhee agreed to the evacuation plan. After the meeting, Yi told Muccio that the progress towards Seoul was an easy one, and that they had to fight against the attacks towards Seoul. Yi returned back to "have some words" with Rhee. Outside the residence, Sin took Muccio aside and told him that moving the government was a unilateral decision of Rhee, and he was not consulted beforehand.²⁴⁴ Sin was lying because he was the one who arranged Rhee's meeting with Yi and Cho. If we take Harold Joyce Noble's suggestion that Sin was one of the propagators of the relocation idea, then, at that instance, he must have been trying to mislead Muccio.

After his meeting with Rhee, the most pressing task for Muccio was to handle the evacuation of 1,200 American and foreign citizens such as military dependents, government employees, missionaries, visitors, businessmen etc. Luckily, the Embassy had a plan that was prepared one year ago. It was called "Operation Cruller" which was designed to evacuate dependents first, and the KMAG personnel next. The plan was to first take them to the military depot Ascom City which was located on the spur of the road

²⁴⁴ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 142-3.

that goes to Inchon and cuts out through Suwon and Taejŏn then Taegu to Pusan. Operation Cruller was activated by the codeword “fireside” that was broadcasted by the American Forces Network Station starting from Sunday afternoon. Muccio authorized the evacuation of the first group composed of American dependents and civilians without official duties at 2 a.m. Operation Cruller successfully managed to mobilize 682 dependents on *Reinholt*, a Norwegian chartered freighter from Inchŏn harbor en route to Fukuoka.²⁴⁵ Muccio later recalled that he “never felt so relieved at any time” as when he learned that all the dependents were on the vessel on the way to Japan.²⁴⁶

Rhee, on the other hand, was trying to find a way out. He could not sleep and called General MacArthur on June 26 at 3 a.m. MacArthur’s aide informed him that the General would not take calls outside of office hours. This made Rhee furious and he started screaming “each and every American in Korea will die so wake the General up!” Rhee’s words made an impact on the aide and he woke MacArthur up. When MacArthur got on the phone Rhee told him “Whose fault is this situation? If your country was a bit more interested in Korea, we wouldn’t be facing this situation. Didn’t we warn you several times? You must save Korea!”²⁴⁷ MacArthur promised to send ten F-51 Mustang fighter bombers, thirty six M2A1 105 mm howitzers, thirty five 155mm howitzers, and more anti-tank rocket launchers. Rhee also called his Ambassador in Washington and instructed him to ask for a \$20 million aid package from the Truman Administration.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 168.

²⁴⁶ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 40.

²⁴⁷ Francesca Donner Rhee, *Yugiowa Isŭngman: P’ŭranch’esŭk’aŭi nanjungilgi* [The Korean War and Syngman Rhee: Francesca’s war diary] (Seoul: Giparang, 2010), 23-4.

²⁴⁸ Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 100.

The first thing Muccio did in the morning of June 26 was to see Rhee and inform him about the developments. He did this throughout the day. According to John J. Hickerson, Assistant Secretary of State, probably later in June 26, Rhee went into hiding in the outskirts of Seoul. After hearing this, Muccio “metaphorically” collared him and asked him to return. According to Hickerson, Muccio talked long and hard in order to convince him but what really changed Rhee’s mind was one particular sentence of Muccio. Muccio said “Mr. President, if you don’t go back, think what history will say of you.” Rhee in return said “that did it” and went back to Kyŏngmudae. Hickerson suggested that this incident was “the thing that President Truman got the biggest laugh out.”²⁴⁹

Later, Muccio sent a telegram to Dean Rusk, thanking him for his encouraging phone message. In his view, the South Korean “GIs ha[d] given extremely good account of themselves” and they would do so in the future. He mentioned the recent departure of General Roberts and temporary absence of Colonel Wright as handicaps.²⁵⁰ However, at 12 p.m. Muccio reported rapid deterioration and disintegration. It was reported that the ROKA forces lost the battle at Ŭijŏngbu. The ROK government did not wish its citizens to break down. Therefore, they kept airing the radio message delivered by Muccio in the morning:

We have been through a stirring twenty-four hours; we have endured a long, bitter night...the armed forces of the Republic of Korea have acquitted themselves well... their position at dawn today is stronger than the tenuous position they held at twilight yesterday...Through the darkness of the night they fought bravely; they counterattacked and threw back opposing forces...with cool courage they withstood some of the most

²⁴⁹ Richard D. McKinzie, “Third Oral History Interview with John D. Hickerson,” Washington, D.C., June 5, 1973, Harry S. Truman Library. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/hickerson> Accessed on 14.08.2019.

²⁵⁰ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 166.

savage blows that a tricky enemy could hurl... I am confident that the righteous cause of the liberty-loving Korean citizens of the independent Republic of Korea will prevail.²⁵¹

Why was Muccio, an emissary of a foreign nation, on the radio encouraging South Korean citizens instead of their president? Here, it is clear that Rhee had lost the upper hand under pressure, and Muccio had to intervene in order to prevent further deterioration. From this moment onwards, Muccio would take the role of the civilian leader of resistance against the North Korean aggression. In the face of the deterioration of the war situation, Muccio decided to start the second phase of Operation Cruller. According to the plan, he was going to move all of the female employees and all of the Embassy staff except for one hundred key male personnel. The Embassy staff had already started burning the classified materials while the Marine guards killed the motor pool with bullets into each Embassy vehicle's motorblock.²⁵² At dawn on June 27, transport planes from the 5th Air Force escorted by F80 jets took out some 850 evacuees at Kimpo, and flew them to Itazuke Air Base in Japan. The F80's downed some of the YAK's when they tried to intervene, and this marked the first time that the U.S. Air Force directly engaged the North Korean Air Force. Colonel Wright also sent all of the KMAG forces apart from fifty officers. Wright decided to stay in Seoul as long as Muccio did because the KMAG possessed an SCR 399, the only mobile radio in Seoul capable of sending secure voice, Morse code, and teletype messages to Tokyo. According to Wright's reports, his officers and the ROK

²⁵¹ Noble, Embassy, 29.

²⁵² Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 102.

generals were in consensus that Seoul's fall was a matter of time. He added that the majority thought that the ROK would collapse just after Seoul's downfall.²⁵³

The night of June 26-27 did not bring any good news with regard to Seoul's position in the general picture of the Korean War. As the reports of defeat kept flowing, panicky rumors also started at the Embassy. Sometime during the night, a rumor started to fly around that North Koreans had captured Yöngdunp'o, an industrial suburb across the Han River, and Kimpo Airport as well. The Embassy had to send a small party to Kimpo in order to test the truthfulness of the rumor which found that the content of the rumor was false.²⁵⁴ Rhee was also receiving rumors like this in another sleepless night. At 2 a.m. he received the Acting Prime Minister Sin, the Seoul mayor Ri Kibung and politician Cho Pyöngok. They urged him to immediately leave Seoul. Even though he disagreed at first, his wife Francesca eventually persuaded him by arguing that it would damage the nation more if he was taken prisoner by the North Koreans.²⁵⁵ Rhee finally decided to leave Seoul at 4 a.m. on a special train.

It is only natural that Rhee decided not to notify Muccio about his decision to flee from the capital city because he knew that Muccio would strongly disagree just as he did in previous instances.²⁵⁶ At 2 a.m. Acting Prime Minister Sin convened an emergency cabinet meeting and invited the ex-Prime Minister Yi Pömsök in order to persuade the cabinet to evacuate Seoul. Even though most of the cabinet agreed, there were some members who had hesitations about this move. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben C. Limb,

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁵⁴ Noble, *Embassy*, 30.

²⁵⁵ Francesca Donner Rhee, *Yugiowa Isüngman: P'ü ranch'esük'aüi nanjungilgi* [The Korean War and Syngman Rhee: Francesca's war diary] (Seoul: Giparang, 2010), 25.

²⁵⁶ In his oral history interview Muccio asked the interviewer Jerry N. Hess to close this information.

Home Minister Paek Söng-uk and Director of Public Information Clarence Ryee went to the American Embassy to see Muccio. They immediately noticed a big fire from the masses of the classified documents which had been going on throughout the night. In their meeting, Muccio again emphasized that he was going nowhere even after learning that the President was fleeing from his capital city.²⁵⁷ As military historian Allan R. Millett rightfully argued “President Rhee became almost a spectator as the crisis of defending Korea grew.”²⁵⁸ The absence of a leader to lead the resistance movement forced Muccio to become the *de facto* leader of the South Korean resistance. What was the reason behind Muccio’s insistence on not leaving Seoul? It was because he knew well that the loss of the capital city would demoralize South Korean soldiers and citizens. Therefore, he did whatever he could in order to infuse positivity to the South Koreans. After Rhee left Seoul, Muccio’s position as the *de facto* leader became crystal-clear. In another oral history account with Richard D. McKinzie, Muccio further deliberated on his position: “if we had moved too early, there would have been no resistance whatsoever on the part of the South Koreans. It was a question of staying there and encouraging the entire Korean military forces to face up to the Communists onslaught without, at the same time, our being caught.”²⁵⁹ Hence, he decided to stay in Seoul until it was clear that the city was doomed.

Muccio’s decision to stay in Seoul caused a disagreement between him and his right hand man, counselor Drumright. Drumright’s reasoning was that the Embassy was accredited to the ROK government and if they decided to relocate, then the Embassy had

²⁵⁷ Noble, *Embassy*, 32.

²⁵⁸ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 102.

²⁵⁹ Richard D. McKinzie, “Oral History Interview with John J. Muccio,” Washington, D. C. December 27, 1973, Harry S. Truman Library, 5. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/muccio3> Accessed on 14. 08. 2019. *Hereafter *Muccio Interview*.

to do so as well.²⁶⁰ Since Muccio did not back away from his decision, they found a compromise. Drumright would take some of the Embassy staff and go south in order to find Rhee and the ROK government. Muccio sent a telegram to Acheson on June 27 at 6 a.m. regarding his decision. He informed Acheson that the Embassy was in danger of being cut off and explained his decision:

President and most Cabinet have departed south from Seoul. Acting PriMin and Defense Minister Sihm and Korean Army Staff still assert will stick it out here. I propose remain Seoul with limited volunteer staff until bitter end, sending Counselor Drumright with few FSO's south by motor vehicle to follow President. It proposed key KMAG personnel move southward via motor vehicle, timing depending upon developments, to preclude potential accusation abandonment; other KMAG personnel to be airlifted.²⁶¹

The words “until bitter end” caused a misunderstanding. Acheson thought that Muccio was suggesting that they could become captives of the North Koreans. In his response to Muccio, he suggested that it was inadvisable for him or any members of the Embassy staff to voluntarily become hostages. Acheson also instructed Muccio to leave Seoul before a safe departure became impossible.²⁶² In his oral history interview with Richard D. McKinzie, Muccio argued that it was never his intention to stay in Seoul after the KPA invasion.²⁶³ In the early morning of June 27, before receiving Acheson’s instructions, Muccio went to see the Chinese, French and British diplomats and the UN Commission in order to inform them about his decision to get out of Seoul before the KPA’s arrival. Harold Joyce Noble contends that Muccio was considered to be the “dean” of the whole diplomatic community in Seoul.²⁶⁴ However, British Minister Vyvian Holt

²⁶⁰ Noble, *Embassy*, 34.

²⁶¹ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 173.

²⁶² Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁶³ Richard D. McKinzie, *Muccio Interview*, 5, 8.

²⁶⁴ Noble, *Embassy*, 33.

and the French Chargé Monsieur Perruche, suggested that since they did not have any instruction on what to do, they would not leave Seoul. In return, Muccio pointed out that he also had no instruction from Washington but he saw nothing to be gained by becoming the guests of the Communists. He added that he was not leaving the country but “just going to move down through the countryside.”²⁶⁵ In the end, these words of Muccio did not change their mind.

On the night of June 27, at 5 a.m. Muccio decided to send the rest of his staff to Japan. Counselor Drumright took Commander Seifert, Naval Attaché, Lt. Colonel Edwards, Military Attaché, J. Stewart, Public Affairs Officer, Prendergast, Third Secretary, Ivo Fatigati, clerk, Branch, JAS motor officer, and left the Embassy at 10 a. m. to follow the Korean Government south. Muccio was left with Berry, the clerk, Morgan, JAS commission officer, Smith, JAS motor officer, MacDonald, Third Secretary, Edwards, security, Holland, KMAG, and Lynch, Military Attaché.²⁶⁶

Muccio went to his residence at around 11 a.m. It was the first time he returned there after Drumright’s call on June 25 at 8 a.m. He describes what he did as follows:

I went by the residence, opened up the food and liquor lockers, and told the servants to help themselves and not to be found there at the residence. And I took my personal car with Sam Berry, Don MacDonald and Major Holland from KMAG, who had handled the evacuation. I told my chauffeur, Chung, to take the official limousine and put his family in it and whatever supplies he needed and drive south. I went into the residence and I picked up my cigars and I told Sergeant Edwards, who was my right-hand man, to get a case of Scotch and I packed a bag with some clean socks, and underwear, a hat and a few shirts, and started down to KMAG headquarters...²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 42.

²⁶⁶ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 185.

²⁶⁷ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 41.

At the time, the KMAG headquarters was in the same complex of buildings as the Korean Army headquarters. There he caught up with the Acting Prime Minister Sin, the ROK Army Chief of Staff Maj. General Cha'ae Pyöng-dök ("Fat Chae") and the whole senior hierarchy that was left as well as the KMAG officers. There, he ate his lunch out of cans with the KMAG officers. By that time, the KPA had reached the outskirts of Seoul and several passes of the YAK jets forced them to take refuge under their desks twice.²⁶⁸ Muccio had to hurry because the ROKA was planning to blow up the bridges across the Han River in order to slow down the movement of the KPA forces into the south. At around 4 p.m. Muccio decided that it was time to move and agreed to meet with Colonel Wright at a certain school compound across the Han River or at Suwön if a problem occurs. McDonald, Edwards and Berry were with him. Later, Lynch also joined them at Suwön.²⁶⁹ When Muccio's party reached the Han River, the bridge was already jammed with refugees. Just after they got across, a YAK pursued by two F-80's emerged out of nowhere. Seconds later, a volley of machinegun fire from an F-80 went right over their heads. Muccio turned to Major Holland and asked:" what do we do now?" Holland responded:"oh, that was friendly fire." In return Muccio said:"well, I'm not going to give a damn whether it is friendly or not, let's get out of here."²⁷⁰ After Muccio's instruction, his party went straight to Suwön.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁶⁹ Noble, *Embassy*, 36.

²⁷⁰ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 44-5.

4.2. Momentous Decisions

While Muccio was on his way to Suwŏn, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 82 on June 25 which called for immediate cessation of hostilities.²⁷¹ Since North Korea did not accede, the Security Council adopted Resolution 83 on June 27 which called on the member states to furnish assistance to the ROK in order to “repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area.”²⁷² President Truman on the other hand, decided to order the United States Air and Sea forces to provide the ROKA troops cover and support.²⁷³ At the same time, General MacArthur sent a survey party to Korea headed by Brig. General John H. Church whose mission was to assist Ambassador Muccio and the KMAG in determining the logistical needs of ROKA.²⁷⁴

Harold Joyce Noble, who came from Japan earlier on June 27, was on his way to Suwŏn Airstrip in order to look for Muccio and his party. He saw a familiar blue Mercury sedan driven by Muccio and waived his hands. The car stopped and Muccio barked: “where the hell do you think you are going? Japan?” Noble answered: “No. I’m reporting for duty.” In a much friendlier tone, Muccio said “Oh! get in.”²⁷⁵ Noble sat beside Muccio and they drove to the railway station in Suwŏn where some of the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy were assembled. When they arrived at the railway station, they saw the Minister

²⁷¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 82, “Complaint of aggression upon the Republic of Korea” <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/82> Accessed: 28.06.2019.

²⁷² United Nations Security Council Resolution 83, “Complaint of aggression upon the Republic of Korea” <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/83> Accessed: 28.06.2019.

²⁷³ Statement by the President on the Situation in Korea, June 27, 1950, Public Papers Harry S. Truman 1945-1953, Number 173, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.

²⁷⁴ Roy E. Appleman, *South to Naktong North to the Yalu* (Washington:United States Army, 1992), 43.

²⁷⁵ Noble, *Embassy*, 60.

of Education George L. Paik talking to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Cho Pong-am. Paik asked Muccio about the war situation. Muccio answered with his “war song” which he kept telling to all Koreans. He said: “If you just hold together and not despair, you will win out despite the early defeats. Koreans must not give up hope; the worse the situation, the more you should pull together.” Paik said that the Acting Prime Minister Sin was inside the station. Sin was eating *kuksu*, the Korean noodle dish served with beef, and since Muccio and MacDonald were hungry, they went for a bowl of *kuksu*. Noble was not hungry, so he went to Muccio’s car and opened the trunk. There he found the Scotch bottles Muccio had brought with him. He took one bottle and everyone drank some to feel a bit better.²⁷⁶

After informing Sin about MacArthur’s survey team, Muccio went to Suwŏn Airfield with his entourage to welcome Brig. General Church. At around 6 p.m. a C-47 touched down and out climbed Church and his thirteen officers. They were supposed to set up General Headquarters, Advance Command and Liaison Group (GHQ, ADCOM) in the local Government Agricultural Center near Suwŏn Airport. After his arrival, Church immediately turned to Muccio and asked the whereabouts of the senior officer of KMAG Colonel Wright. Muccio said he left him at Seoul but “he should be here any minute.”²⁷⁷ Then, they left for the Government Agricultural Center. Noble suggested that from this time onwards, their role changed a bit and they were supposed to perform the fundamental role of a “liaison between the U.S. Army and the ROK Army and government.” At first, Church wanted to go to Seoul but he was discouraged by Muccio.²⁷⁸ While they were

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁷⁷ Jerry N. Hess, *Interview*, 44.

²⁷⁸ Noble, *Embassy*, 63.

discussing the next steps, ROK Foreign Minister Ben Lim's chauffeur came up and said that General MacArthur was on the phone and asking for Muccio. Muccio recalled this moment: "if it had been anyone else I would have considered him a phony of some kind, because I didn't know of any possible telephone connection from Suwon to Tokyo." In the end, he decided to go and check for himself and asked General John H. Church to come with him in case MacArthur wanted the talk with him as well.²⁷⁹

It was pouring rain outside and because of the YAKs, they had to drive without lights on a very dark night. Muccio recalls that it was a very "eerie feeling" when he reached the Post Office of Suwŏn and picked up an old French style telephone. As Muccio picked up the phone, a female voice with an American accent said: "Mr. Ambassador?" Muccio replied: "yes, yes, but who and where are you?" The woman in return said: "Goddamn it, they all left and I'm still here at the switchboard." This was the chief operator of the international switchboard Maria Park Lee, a Korean woman brought up in the Hawaiian Islands. She was chosen for the job because of her command of Korean and English. In the morning of June 27, she called Muccio and asked whether she could be evacuated with the Americans since her daughter was an American citizen. Muccio replied positively, and told her to come down to the Embassy and report to Major Holland, the officer responsible for the evacuation of the U.S. citizens. Obviously, something went wrong and she was stuck in Seoul. Muccio suggested that he was "terribly surprised" when he heard her voice. Afterwards, Lee said "just a minute, the General is on." However, the one on the other line was not MacArthur but General Edward M. Almond, the Chief of Staff. He informed Muccio that the General had already left the headquarters, and wanted

²⁷⁹ Jerry N. Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 44.

to come down to Korea to “get a feel of the situation.” Almond asked Muccio’s advice on where would be advisable for the General to land. Since Suwŏn was the only “plausible airstrip” Muccio advised MacArthur to come down to Suwŏn.²⁸⁰

That night Muccio slept in a room with MacDonald and Noble at the Government Agricultural Center. On the morning of June 28 around 6 a.m., a KMAG sergeant hurried to Muccio’s room and informed him that KPA tanks were now in the center of Seoul and the ROK Army Chief of Staff Maj. General Cha’ae Pyŏng-dŏk (“Fat Chae”) was moving his headquarters to the south of the Han River. Muccio immediately got up and listened to the report while Noble slept a bit more.²⁸¹ At 10 a.m. Muccio sent his first telegram to Acheson outside of Seoul. Muccio informed Acheson that Truman’s combat aid decision and General Church’s presence “had a great morale effect.” He added that the upcoming air strikes would undoubtedly demoralize the enemy. In addition, he suggested that Kimpo was lost and the situation in Seoul was confusing.²⁸²

Muccio’s next step was to go to Taejŏn to bring Rhee with him in order to meet with General MacArthur who was supposed to reach Suwŏn the following day. In the afternoon Muccio went to Suwŏn Airstrip in order to get into his plane *en route* to Taejŏn. Things did not go his way and several of the YAKs began bombing the field. Muccio immediately took cover and when the bombing was over, he found himself covered in mud with one trouser leg torn. However, miraculously, his plane was not damaged at all. Thus, he took the plane and reached Taejŏn at 2:15 p.m. He directly appeared before Rhee along with Drumright and Steward. Later, he told Noble that “he must be the first

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

²⁸¹ Noble, *Embassy*, 65-6.

²⁸² Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 211.

American Ambassador in history to call on the head of state to whom he was accredited with his clothes in tatters and covered with mud.”²⁸³

Muccio had no specific instructions from the State Department, but he was wise enough to realize that it was a crucial time for the ROK. He walked in with his muddy clothes, and spoke informally in a friendly tone with the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy. He argued that even though the ROK had lost Seoul, it was still in control of most of South Korea. He said that even though it was not noticeable from Taejŏn, the American Air Force was hunting down all of the YAKs. He added that the U.S. decided to “go all out help South Korea” and North Korea would not be able to bring more supplies from the 38th parallel. The ROKA on the other hand, would get the professional help of General Church and be supplied by U.S. Far East Command in Japan. Muccio also pointed out the necessity of keeping the government and army apart, letting them do what they know best. In addition, he said that the resistance was a “joint Korean-American effort” and that there were things Koreans did better than Americans but also there were some things Americans could do better. Thus, the Ambassador argued “we must unite and coordinate so that we can get the best total effort from them both.” Muccio continued:

I know you have been forced to leave your dear ones behind in many cases, and you are often confused and deeply worried. Everything is very difficult for you now. I won't try to minimize the difficulties before you. But I and the government I represent are convinced that the Korean people have the determination and the will to see this through. If I didn't have this confidence I wouldn't be here, and United States forces wouldn't be in Korea. This aid reflects the determination of American people through their government to do all they can to support the people of Korea in this crisis to liberty. I am only the symbol of the determination of the American people.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Noble, *Embassy*, 75.

²⁸⁴ Noble, *Embassy*, 76-7.

Harold Joyce Noble argued that what Muccio did in the afternoon was “the most superb job of his career.” According to him, “in those days it was touch and go whether the ROK government would survive,” and Noble added “more than any other man Muccio prevented the government from crumbling.”²⁸⁵ Muccio’s efforts from June 25 onwards definitely leave no doubt that he was a first class diplomat. From his discourse, it can be inferred that even though he did not know what Washington’s decision would eventually be, he was hoping that Washington would help the ROK in the best way that it could.

After trying to persuade the ROK hierarchy that the war was not over, Muccio took Rhee aside and told him that General MacArthur would visit Korea the next day. This information must have given Rhee more optimism than Muccio’s words. In the early morning of June 29, Rhee and Muccio flew to Suwŏn separately in the L-5’s allocated to them. MacArthur’s personal plane *Bataan* protected by fighter jets touched down at Suwŏn Airstrip around 10 a.m.²⁸⁶ General MacArthur, wearing his famous cap and smoking his corn cob pipe, was welcomed by Muccio and Rhee. Then, General MacArthur was taken to the Government Agricultural Center to get the war briefings. Afterwards, he had a meeting with Muccio and Rhee. While staying in Korea, MacArthur wanted to observe the war situation himself. Thus, he went to the Han River whose bridges were blown up by the ROKA’s forces not too long ago. MacArthur recalls that he could see “the towers of smoke rising from the ruins of this fourteenth-century city [Seoul].” In his eyes, he inherited a disaster.²⁸⁷ General MacArthur’s visit had an extensive coverage in the Korean media where they praised the U.S. Air Force for crushing the “North Korean

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 75, 77.

²⁸⁶ Roy E. Appleman, *South to Naktong North to the Yalu* (Washington: United States Army, 1992), 44-5.

²⁸⁷ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (McGraw-Hill: New York, 1964), 332-3.

puppet army.”²⁸⁸ Before he left Korea, MacArthur told Muccio that he had decided to inform Washington that Korea needed some regular U.S. armed units to “firm up the Koreans: Say, some two divisions.”²⁸⁹ MacArthur was convinced that the ROKA was not a real army but rather a constabulary.²⁹⁰ Drumright informed Acheson that MacArthur “arrived at certain momentous decisions” which would be communicated later.²⁹¹ MacArthur also ordered Colonel Anthony Story, his air pilot, to send Muccio and Rhee with Beechcraft Aircraft to Taejŏn. Unfortunately, halfway down the runway Beechcraft jerked into a quick turnaround because a YAK came down. The crew shouted at them “jump for it, take cover.” They took cover out in a rice paddy. Muccio and Rhee got up muddled and decided to drive to Taejŏn with Muccio’s personal car.²⁹²

June 30 was a quiet day at the temporary Embassy building in Taejŏn. On the other hand, the decision makers in Washington were carrying the burden of reaching a decision. Firstly, they received the message that MacArthur had drafted in his flight from Korea to Japan. He reported that the ROKA forces were in confusion, lacked leadership and “have not seriously fought” in the war. ROKA had no preparations for defense, no plans whatsoever and “they have either lost, or abandoned, their supplies and heavier equipment.” MacArthur argued that the ROKA would not be able to defend itself against the KPA. Thus, the only way to hold the present situation and regain the lost soils was “through the introduction of US ground combat forces into the Korean battle area.”

²⁸⁸ Isŭngman Taet'ongnyŏng, Panganhan Maegadŏ Mi Kŭktonggunsaryŏnggwan'gwa Hoedong [President Rhee Syngman met with U.S. Far East Commander MacArthur in Korea], *Kyŏngje Sinmun*, 1 July 1950.

²⁸⁹ Jerry N. Hess, *Interview*, 47.

²⁹⁰ Drumright Interview in “KBS Ttak'yument'ŏri Han'gukchŏnjaeng - Chŏnjaengŭi Sigŭnŏl [KBS Documentary Korean War the Signal of the War]” *Youtube*. Video File. Accessed on 10.08.2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LeDYZ0R8pE&list=LLiSV4Km1tq8joULusXI5xtg&index=4&t=481s>.

²⁹¹ Drumright to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 228.

²⁹² Noble, *Embassy*, 92.

Consequently, MacArthur asked for the introduction of two division regimental combat teams to Korea immediately.²⁹³

In Washington, President Truman met with the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Service Secretaries, and a few other officials on the morning of June 30 and decided to commit United States ground forces to Korea. When we recall the speech of the Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall, Congress' decision to cut financial aid to the ROK, Acheson's speech at the National Press Club and finally, the State Department's "mistake" of not adding the ROK to the list of countries important to the U.S., it had seemed almost certain that the U.S. would not intervene in this war regardless of what had happened in Korea. Why exactly had the decision makers in Washington decide to intervene? The most satisfying answer to this question was given by historian Ernest R. May in his article titled "The Nature of Foreign Policy: The Calculated versus the Axiomatic." According to May, the advisers of Truman foresaw a potential confrontation in East Europe rather than Korea. Thus, their *calculated policy* did not take into account Korea which obviously was a big mistake. When Truman and his advisors heard about the North Korean attack, they were reminded of an axiom "that any armed aggression anywhere constituted a threat to all nations everywhere." This *a posteriori* reasoning is defined as *axiomatic policy* by Ernest R. May.²⁹⁴ However, it should be noted that expecting the Soviet Union and its allies to realize this and act accordingly was at least naivety. Despite Rhee's attempts to warn, high cadres of the State

²⁹³ MacArthur to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 248-250.

²⁹⁴ Ernest R. May, "The Nature of Foreign Policy: The Calculated versus the Axiomatic," *Daedalus*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Fall, 1962): 662.

Department and the Department of Defense made the ROK look like a dispensable aspect of American Foreign Policy and caused an unnecessary war.

4.3. International War

“Would it be correct... to call this a police action under the United Nations?” was the question that was asked to Truman in a press conference on June 29, 1950. “Yes” replied Truman, “that is exactly what it amounts to.”²⁹⁵ By declaring the U.S. intervention as a “police action” Truman bypassed the authority of Congress in declaring war.²⁹⁶ Truman and his advisors initially thought that the Korean People’s Army (KPA) would be an easy adversary for the U.S. Army. Since they thought that it would be a relatively simple and quick affair, Truman defined the war as a “police action.” This definition would eventually haunt him especially after the American public realized that what Truman committed their boys to was not a simple police action. However, for the time being, Truman’s euphemism and positivity served well to downplay the seriousness of the situation.²⁹⁷

General MacArthur decided to send the 24th Infantry Division as the first unit to deploy to Korea. The commanding general of the division was Major General William Dean, the only division commander of the 8th U.S. Army, who had commanded troops in combat. MacArthur instructed Dean to send a battalion task force immediately to be followed by the remaining parts of the division. Dean chose the 1st Battalion of the 21st Infantry Regiment which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Smith, an able

²⁹⁵ Anthony Leverio, “U.S. ‘Not at War,’ President Asserts,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1950.

²⁹⁶ Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea : The Politics of America's First Undeclared War* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 33.

²⁹⁷ Jager, Brothers, 73.

battalion commander with experience in the Pacific in World War II. Dean instructed Smith to “contact Brig. Gen. John Church and if you can’t locate him, go to Taejŏn and beyond if you can... Good luck to you and God bless you and your men.”²⁹⁸

On July 1, 1950, Muccio was drinking his glass of Scotch and looking at a large map at a table surrounded by the Embassy and KMAG officers. They were at a small wooden house which was serving both as chancery and residence in Taejŏn. The previous day he had received information that the ADCOM-KMAG group of General Church and Colonel Wright had abandoned Suwŏn because of a presumed KPA attack, and they were on their way to Taejŏn. Harold Joyce Noble observed that Muccio “seemed weary, depressed and irritable.” Muccio told him that he received orders to go south. They went over the routes and Noble suggested some. Sometime later, the phone rang and it was President Rhee on the other line who wanted to talk to Muccio. Muccio talked with Rhee for a brief period of time, informing him that the news from the north was not good but there was still some hope. He said: “Mr. Noble has just come in from Suwŏn and I’ll send him over. There are some things I want him to tell you. I’d rather not discuss over phone.” Muccio asked Noble to persuade Rhee to leave Taejŏn.²⁹⁹ Muccio was using what Noble called the “indirect approach.” When Muccio thought that Rhee would not agree with his suggestions, he would send Noble to soften Rhee on his position. When Noble met with Rhee, he resisted a bit but Noble gave him assurance that the U.S. Embassy would follow him south immediately after General Church’s arrival in Taejŏn. Rhee eventually agreed but it should be noted that Muccio did not know about Truman’s decision to commit

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁹⁹ Noble, *Embassy*, 102.

American ground forces to Korea at the time. After Church's arrival, they learned that Americans troops would set foot in Korea in a matter of days. Muccio immediately went to see Rhee to stop him but he found out that Rhee had already left. Then, Muccio tasked Noble with following Rhee and delaying his return to Taejŏn until American troops arrival.³⁰⁰

Later that day, Muccio reported to Acheson that the ROKA forces had held their ground well contrary to predictions. Muccio cited the ROK intelligence had suggested that the KPA would most probably try to push its tanks across the Han River. Muccio noted that he pleaded with the National Assemblymen of ROK to go back to their home districts and assure the citizens. He mentioned the problem of refugees who were streaming from Seoul-Suwŏn route. Muccio reported that North Korean communists disguised in ROKA uniforms caused near panic in Suwŏn the previous day when they rushed down the highway and shouted "tanks coming." He assured Acheson that he has been "making supreme effort all week to fortify wavering determination of Koreans to continue resistance."³⁰¹

On the morning of July 2, Colonel Smith was able to catch up with General Church at Taejŏn. In their meeting, Church suggested that all they needed to stop the KPA was "a few Americans who would not run from tanks." Smith was ordered to take position in the north of the village of Osan and stop the enemy. The KPA's main route of attack from Seoul passed through Osan and further south through Taejŏn and Taegu to Pusan. This is the only corridor in South Korea that is free from mountains that otherwise dominate most

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁰¹ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS, 1950, 273-4.

of the peninsula. Even today, this corridor constitutes the key line of communication, and transportation therefore, it serves as the backbone of the ROK's bustling economy. As the north of Osan was defended by Smith, P'yŏngtaek, the south of Osan, was defended by the 24th Infantry Division's 34th Infantry Regiment, led by Colonel Jay Loveless.³⁰²

While American forces were taking up their positions, North Korea was reassessing the situation with its allies. On July 1, Terentii Shytkov, Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, reported to Stalin that American intervention in the war created "individual attitudes of lack of belief in the final victory." He also added that especially the liberation of Seoul boosted the enthusiasm of the North Koreans, and people were welcoming the KPA soldiers.³⁰³ "The soldiers were speaking in their hard *sobuk* accent" wrote Kim Sŏng-ch'il, a history professor at Seoul National University, in his diary and added "they seemed like long-lost brothers who had finally come home from a far-away place."³⁰⁴ A survey conducted after the occupation of Seoul by a group of social scientists concluded that the North Koreans' conduct was "courteous and reasonable."³⁰⁵ In the liberated areas, the North Koreans immediately set up People's Committees, and banned South Korean newspapers and magazines. Instead, they launched *Haebang Ilbo* [Liberation Daily], *Chosŏn Inminpo* [Korean People's News] in addition to Pyongyang's regular *Nodong Sinmun* [Worker's News]. On July 2, the front page of *Haebang Ilbo*

³⁰² Jager, *Brothers*, 74-5.

³⁰³ Shytkov to Stalin, New Russian Documents on the Korean War (NRDKW), Center for Korean Research of Columbia University and the Cold War International History Project, Wilson Center, 30-31. [http://web.sungshin.ac.kr/~youngho/data/security/SovietDocuments-2\(1995-6\).doc](http://web.sungshin.ac.kr/~youngho/data/security/SovietDocuments-2(1995-6).doc) Accessed on 10.07.2019. *Hereafter NRDKW.

³⁰⁴ Kim Sŏng-ch'il, *Yŏksa Ap'esŏ Han Sahakchaŭi 6.25 Ilgi* [Witness to History: A Historian's Diary of the Korean War] (Seoul: Ch'angjakkwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1993), 68-9.

³⁰⁵ Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak North Korea and the World 1950-1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 16.

showcased a photo of Kim Il Sung who urged for the expansion of liberated zones and revival of the People's Committees.³⁰⁶

On July 3, Kim Il Sung met with Shytkov and expressed his dissatisfaction with the KPA's slow advance. Kim blamed Ch'oe Yonggön, the Defense Minister of North Korea, for the disorganization of the operation. He pointed out the danger of landings by American troops in the rear of the KPA units, and asked for a quick delivery of arms to form two divisions, 12 battalions of marines and for the formation of security detachments. Since he was not satisfied with the KPA's pace in the war, Kim asked for Shytkov's advice on reorganization of the KPA troops. Shytkov and the Soviet Chief Military Adviser, N.A. Vasil'ev, suggested Kim to do some reshuffling in the command structure of the KPA. Much to Kim Il Sung's dissatisfaction, they urged him to retain Ch'oe Yonggön as the Defense Minister.³⁰⁷ Despite some of the positive reports from Korea, Stalin did not want to leave anything to chance, and urged Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Foreign Minister, to immediately deploy nine Chinese divisions on the border between China- North Korea "in case the enemy crosses the 38th parallel." He promised that the Soviets would provide air cover for these units.³⁰⁸

After the major changes in its command structure, the KPA was ready for its big push which would eventually become one of its finest battles. On the morning of July 5, Colonel Smith caught sight of the KPA supported with over thirty tanks. Even though Smith destroyed four tanks, the other tanks continued to break the defensive lines and headed towards P'yongtaek. When Smith ordered the withdrawal, he had already lost 150

³⁰⁶ *Haebang Ilbo*, July 2, 1950.

³⁰⁷ Shytkov to Stalin, NRDKW, 32-4.

³⁰⁸ Stalin to Enlai, *Ibid.*, 34.

men, a quarter of the unit. When Colonel Lovless received a report that Smith was defeated, he immediately ordered a fall back to Ch'ŏnan, eight miles farther south. According to military historian Allan R. Millett, the fate of Smith “established a pattern of battlefield defeat that was repeated larger and larger American units for the rest of July.”³⁰⁹ It did not take long for Ch'ŏnan's defenses to fall apart and bewildered American and the ROKA forces continued their retreat.

On July 9, General MacArthur informed the Truman Administration that the situation in Korea was critical. MacArthur defined the state of the KPA as “thoroughly first class quality.”³¹⁰ MacArthur eventually decided to commit the whole U.S. Eighth Army to Korea, and appointed General Walton “Johnnie” Walker, who had extensive experience in WWI and WWII, as its commander. On July 10, Truman announced that the General of the Army, Douglas MacArthur, would become the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command while retaining his post as the U.S. Far East Command and Supreme Commander Allied Powers occupation authority.³¹¹ On July 14, President Rhee conceded “the command authority over all land, sea and air forces of the Republic of Korea” to MacArthur.³¹² Through Muccio, MacArthur sent his response on July 16. In his letter MacArthur said: “tell him [Rhee] also not to lose heart, that the way may be long and hard, but the ultimate result cannot fail to be victory.”³¹³

³⁰⁹ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2010), 137.

³¹⁰ MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, FRUS (1950), 336.

³¹¹ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea 1950-1951 They Came From the North* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2010), 143.

³¹² Rhee to Korean Army Chief of Staff, July 14, 1950. “Official Correspondences 1950-1953,” Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

³¹³ Muccio to Rhee, July 16, 1950. “Official Correspondences 1950-1953,” Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Muccio was with Rhee at Taegu, the fourth largest city of South Korea, where the temporary government was established. Even though Rhee wanted to return to Taejŏn after he heard Truman's commitment of U.S. troops, Muccio ordered his train to stop at Taegu station.³¹⁴ He was basically stopping the head of the state in his own soil without asking anyone's approval. This instance clearly illustrates how much power he possessed during those critical days. Just as Shytkov, Muccio suggested some changes in the ROK hierarchy the most important of which was the dismissal of the Home Minister. He urged the immediate appointment of a strong, vigorous, courageous Home Minister.³¹⁵ Rhee eventually appointed Cho Pyŏngok, the former Ambassador of the ROK to the UN. Muccio also reported Rhee's continuous requests to return back to Taejŏn. Rhee apprehended the importance of the leader leading his soldiers in the frontlines a bit late. According to Muccio, General Ch'ae Pyŏng-dŏk ("Fat Chae") was reluctant to accept the orders of the new commander of the ROKA, Chŏng Il-gwŏn.³¹⁶

Muccio's days in Taegu followed a routine. In the morning, he would first see General Walker to discuss the latest news with regard to the war and then call on Rhee. Crucially, Muccio almost always reported the good news to Rhee. The main reason for this action was obvious: he wanted to keep the morale of the South Koreans high so that they would not lose their spirit of resistance. According to Harold Joyce Noble, if they had to relay gloomy news, Muccio would ask General Walker to see Rhee and communicate the news because Walker would generally succeed in uplifting Rhee's spirits. After meeting with Rhee, Muccio would attend the 5th Air Force briefing in the

³¹⁴ Noble, *Embassy*, 128.

³¹⁵ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 389.

³¹⁶ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 400.

late afternoon. In addition, Muccio would pay a closer attention to the queries and replies before they went out.³¹⁷

On the other hand, by the time Muccio reached Taegu, the war had taken a great deal out of him. He was under immense pressure and as the previous days proved, he had to be decisive and precise. As the *de facto* civilian leader of resistance, he had to encourage the Koreans, the U.S. Army, correspondents etc. As Harold Joyce Noble suggests:” he had literally worn himself out pouring enthusiasm and hope into the listless and fearful.” According to Noble, in Taegu, “Muccio had no strength left to inspire anyone inside the embassy.” He was living with the Embassy staff at a large missionary residence which was effectively serving as the temporary U.S. Embassy. When the Embassy staff had their meals in the sixteen-place table, they could only say a few words on official business out of their fear. Thus, most of them tried to secure a place at the end of the table, rather than at the head where Muccio would be seated. The only person at the table that dared to talk back to Muccio was Drumright. The two would generally argue about the China question while the rest sat silently.³¹⁸

During his time at Taegu, Muccio made three important contributions that made an impact on the overall structure of the U.S. Army and on the ROKA’s involvement in the war. He was inspired by the Seoul police chief Kim Tae-sŏn’s organization of a combat battalion from Seoul metropolitan police in order to lead American divisions and detect enemy agents and infiltrators in the battles north of Taejŏn. He suggested to form and train special combat battalions of the Korean police whose main mission would be spotting

³¹⁷ Noble, *Embassy*, 141-3.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

infiltrators, plugging holes and covering the rear against the enemy. General Walker, who had ordered the Korean police to get out of the war, needed some convincing. After Muccio's continuous suggestions, Walker finally agreed with him and the battalions were formed. The second contribution of Muccio was related to the problem of the undermanning in all American divisions except the marine brigade. Harold Joyce Noble illustrated the problem:" some divisions had only two regiments instead of three, or two battalions in a regiment instead of three. There just were not enough American soldiers." Muccio's solution to the problem was filling the gaps with Korean soldiers so as to bring every division up to strength.³¹⁹ Muccio discussed this problem with MacArthur when he came to Korea on July, 27. However, the main problem was that the newly arrived U.S. Army officers were expressing an astonishing amount of contempt towards the ROKA. This was in part due to racism very common at the time among the American soldiers and their perception of the ROKA as a defeated army.³²⁰ Therefore, Walker and his whole staff were against this idea, but MacArthur instructed Walker to discuss this idea with Muccio and see whether Muccio could get Rhee to agree with the plan. Muccio discussed the whole idea with Rhee and got the latter's approval.³²¹ Thus, the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) as a branch of the ROKA was established. The first 20,000 Korean conscripts were sent to Japan in August, 1950 where they would get their short training and under the "buddy system" every Korean would have an American

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152-4.

³²⁰ For the racial segregation among American soldiers during the Korean war see: Mitchell Lerner, "Is it For This We Fought And Bled?": The Korean War and the Struggle for Civil Rights," *Journal of Military History*, Vol.82, (Issue.2): 515-45.

³²¹ Noble, *Embassy*, 287.

soldier assigned to him who was supposed to help him train.³²² As of today, July, 2019, the KATUSA program is still active. The last major contribution of Muccio with regard to the overall military structure during the war is related to the military buildup of the ROKA. On July 17, MacArthur concluded that the maximum ground forces the ROK was supposed to have should be limited to four infantry divisions, which limited the ROKA to 65,000 men. Muccio, in his correspondence with Acheson argued against MacArthur's decision and urged the U.S. to arm "largest possible number able-bodied Korean soldiers" by adding that General Walter concurred his view.³²³ This eventually resulted in MacArthur's *volte-face* and on August 9, and he authorized Walter to increase the ROKA's strength.³²⁴ Taking the aforementioned three contributions into account, it is safe to argue that Muccio was the primary proponent of the ROKA's inclusion into the U.S. Army during the Korean War which stiffened the defense of the combined U.S.- ROKA forces and earned them the much needed time before MacArthur's Inchön landing. It should be noted that unfortunately the Korean War historians rarely, if ever, mention the abovementioned major contributions of Muccio in their work.

On July 19, Rhee wrote a letter to Truman in which he expressed his gratitude for the sacrifices made by the people of the U.S. to protect the ROK. He assured Truman that the Korean people would never forget the courage and sacrifices of the U.S. troops. He argued that it would be an "utter folly" to just restore the *status quo ante*. He suggested that "the time has come to cut out once and for all the cancer of imperialist aggression."

³²² Roy E. Appleman, *South to Naktong North to the Yalu* (Washington:United States Army, 1992), 387-389.

³²³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 511.

³²⁴ Noble, *Embassy*, 290.

With this letter, Rhee was openly asking Truman not to stop at the 38th parallel. Just as he told Muccio on June 25, Rhee saw the crisis as a chance to unify the Korean peninsula under his leadership. He declared openly that he would not be satisfied with anything less.³²⁵ This was the first time Rhee disclosed his vision of *Pukchin T'ongil* (March North to Unify Korea) with Truman.

The KPA forces reached the city of Taejŏn on July 20, and immediately began their assault. The KPA used a combination of frontal assault and guerilla warfare in their assault. Pretending to be refugees, local peasants including women and children would come running near the battle lines and “at a given signal, the ‘refugees’ snatched rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades from their bundles and brought down withering fire on the troops.” The Americans began to consider anyone with “white pajamas,” which they called the Korean native dress, could be a potential enemy.³²⁶

In 2005, historian Sahr Conway-Lanz unearthed one of the letters of Muccio written to Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, explaining the policy of the U.S. Army towards the refugees during the Korean War.³²⁷ In his letter dated July 26, 1950, Muccio defined the refugee problem as “serious, even critical military nature.” He argued that the infiltration of the North Korean soldiers among the refugees was one of the major causes of defeat in Taejŏn. He then went on to communicate the decision of the U.S. Army in order to end this threat: “Leaflet drops will be made north of US lines warning the people not to proceed south, that they risk being fired upon if they

³²⁵ Rhee to Truman, *Ibid.*, 428-430.

³²⁶ Cumings, *Origins Vol II*, 687.

³²⁷ Sahr Conway-Lanz, “Beyond No Gun Ri: Refugees and the United States Military in the Korean War,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 29, Issue 1, (January 2005): 49–81.

do so. If refugees do appear from north of U.S. lines they will receive warning shots, and if they then persist in advancing they will be shot.”³²⁸

After the adoption of this policy, the 7th Cavalry Division of the 2nd Battalion of the U.S. Army committed one of the worst civilian atrocities during the Korean War. Near the village of Nogŭn-ri, about a hundred miles southeast of Seoul, around 600 refugees were stopped by the American troops and they were ordered onto the parallel railroad tracks where their belongings were searched by the soldiers. While the refugees were resting, an American aircraft strafed and bombed them which resulted in the death of 100 refugees. The survivors took shelter in a small culvert underneath the railroad trucks. Then the soldiers forced the refugees out of the culvert and drove them into double tunnels nearby. Between July 26 and July 29, American soldiers fired into both ends of the tunnel killing around 300 refugees.³²⁹

August brought more despair than hope in the battlefield. General Walker suggested to the ROK Government to relocate to Pusan. Muccio on the other hand, pointed out that August 15 was *Kwangbokchŏl*, the National Liberation Day and retreating before August 15 would be a big morale loss on part of the ROK. Hence, immediately after the Liberation Day celebrations, on August 16, Muccio broached the idea of relocation of the seat of government from Taegu with Rhee and his War Cabinet. Even though all of his ministers agreed with the plan, Rhee was reluctant to accept it.³³⁰ On the morning of

³²⁸ Muccio to Rusk, 26 July 1950, RG 59, Central Decimal Files 1950–54, Box 4266, National Archives, College Park.

³²⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Korea. 2007. December Newsletter. www.jinsil.go.kr/English/Information/general/news_01/sub_6.asp Accessed 22 July 2019.

In addition see: Bruce Cumings, “Occurrence at Nogŭn-ri Bridge: An Inquiry into the History and Memory of a Civil War,” *Critical Asian Studies*, (33:4): 509-526.

³³⁰ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 590.

August 17, Rhee reconciled with the relocation idea and was flown to Chinhae, a small city 20 miles west of Pusan.³³¹

Muccio sent his first telegram from Pusan on September 1 regarding his meeting with Rhee. In Pusan, the opposing groups of the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy were on a mission of “knifing” each other. The National Assembly passed a resolution by overwhelming margin which called upon Rhee to discharge Cho Pyŏngok, the Home Minister and Sin Sŏngmo, the Prime Minister. Muccio expressed his disappointment to Rhee that it was deplorable to see these people going after each other while the very life of the ROK was at stake. Muccio reminded Rhee that in the past he threw his weight on the issue of U.S. aid to Korea, and that these developments jarred him personally and officially. He pointed out that 53 UN member states endorsed the ROK and some among them were sending their loved ones to Korea in order to support the UN’s mission. Thus, the ROK government should be exceedingly careful about its appearance. After Muccio’s warning, Rhee went to the National Assembly and addressed the members of the parliament regarding the issues raised by Muccio. Muccio also intervened himself and expressed to the leaders of the National Assembly that the Prime Minister and Home Minister were doing an exceptional job. After his personal intervention, the leaders of the National Assembly promised him to stop the legislature-executive conflict for the time being.³³²

On September 4, Muccio informed Acheson that dissuading Rhee from making harmful public statements and actions was getting very hard. The first problem was the

³³¹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 595-6.

³³² Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 694-6.

Youth Corps, an auxiliary of the Korean National Police, which was using its “goon” squads to impress other youth but not furnish any of its members to the battlefield. Muccio asked Rhee to make some of its members available for the battle but Rhee refused by arguing that Muccio did not understand the Youth Corps. Rhee strongly rejected Muccio’s suggestion because he was using them to pressurize political factions opposing Rhee. The second problem was related to Rhee’s vision of *Pukchin T’ongil* (March North to Unify Korea). Rhee drafted a letter to the 53 nations that supported the ROK at the UN which stated that he would not accept any negotiation of which he was not a part. Here, Rhee was trying to prevent a result similar to Korea’s partition in 1945. In addition, Rhee wrote down that the Korean forces would not stop at the 38th parallel. Along with Harold Joyce Noble, Muccio cautioned against such an action. Rhee eventually did not publicize that letter.³³³

While General Walker set up the Pusan perimeter, a rectangular area about 100 miles from north to south and about 50 miles from east to west, General MacArthur was finalizing his plans for an amphibious landing behind the rear of the KPA units. There were three possible landing sites namely: In’chŏn, on the west coast of Korea 25 miles away from Seoul, Posŭng-myŏn, around 50 miles southwest of Seoul and finally Kŭnsan, around 100 miles southwest of Seoul. The main aim of MacArthur’s “Operation Chromite” was to capture Seoul as soon as possible. His decision to land at Inch’ŏn was not popular among the cadres of U.S. hierarchy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, suggested that MacArthur’s plan was “very risky and had very little chance of success” mainly because of Inch’ŏn’s tremendous tides of thirty feet or more and the lack of suitable

³³³ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 697.

beaches to land comfortably.³³⁴ MacArthur defended his bold plan by arguing that it was indeed those impracticalities that would ensure the success of the operation “for the enemy commander will reason that no one would be so brash as to make such an attempt.”³³⁵ Truman, as Commander-in-Chief, gave his backing for the Operation Chromite not because MacArthur’s plan was the most convincing one, but because it was General Douglas MacArthur who proposed it. In other words, MacArthur’s reputation saved the day. Eventually, MacArthur’s gamble paid off and by September 25, the marines entered Seoul. On September 27, Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized MacArthur’s advance into North Korea.³³⁶

MacArthur sent his personal plane *Bataan* to pick Rhee and Muccio for the ceremony to restore the capital of the Republic of Korea. On September 29, the ceremony was held at the Capitol Hall in Seoul where MacArthur, Rhee and Muccio gave speeches. Rhee, deeply moved, thanked the allied forces for restoring the capital city of the Republic of Korea. Then, Muccio took the stage and praised the ROK government, soldiers and its people for their courage. Lastly, MacArthur closed the ceremony with the Lord’s Prayer. After the ceremony, Rhee asked MacArthur’s approval for the ROKA to cross the 38th parallel and pursue the KPA forces. MacArthur asked for a few days so that he could issue a surrender ultimatum to Kim Il Sung. However, on September 30, without waiting for MacArthur’s authorization, Rhee ordered the Chief-of-Staff of the ROKA Chŏng Il-gwŏn

³³⁴ Jager, *Brothers*, 81.

³³⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 349.

³³⁶ Jager, *Brothers*, 114.

to immediately advance north.³³⁷ The ROK's relocation to Seoul marks the point when Muccio ceded the civilian leadership of the resistance to Rhee.

In conclusion, the outbreak of hostilities on June 25, 1950, forced Muccio to overstep his bounds as an envoy of a foreign nation due to the lack of leadership shown by Rhee and take the role as the *de facto* leader of resistance against the North Korean aggression. Crucially, Muccio prevented the newly established Republic of Korea from crumbling under the shock of the situation. He adopted a strategy to communicate mostly the positive side of the events to the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy in an attempt to infuse optimism. In Taegu, Muccio contributed to the overall war by suggesting to mix the Korean soldiers with Americans so as to change the disadvantage of American units who knew very little about Korea's topography and to supply the undermanned American units. By doing this, Muccio not only saved quite a lot of American lives, but he also strengthened the defense perimeter of the U.S. which had to hold until MacArthur's amphibious landing at In'chŏn. Taking into consideration all the aforementioned points, I contend that Muccio was the unchallenged civilian leader in the field from the outbreak of the hostilities until the relocation of the ROK to Seoul on September 29, 1950. Consequently, Muccio's tremendous contributions in the initial phases of the war to the overall resistance effort against the North Korean invasion makes him an unsung hero of the Korean War.

³³⁷ Haruki, *Korean War*, 116.

CHAPTER V

THUG OF WAR: RHEE AGAINST MUCCIO

“I hope that Koreans will never give credit to me as an individual for what I have done in this country in the past. I have only done my best to carry out the instructions strictly on behalf of the government of the United States.”

Muccio³³⁸

“Ambassador Mucio had to support it [the coup plan] under the instructions of Washington, but he paid the price with his dismissal. We must exclude him from the list of conspirators. In other words, we will not mention his name in connection with this conspiracy.”

Rhee³³⁹

5.1. An Entirely New War

When Muccio returned to Seoul, one of the first things he did was to check the Embassy building. Unfortunately, the Embassy building was burned down by the retreating KPA forces but the second Embassy Residence area was in a much better shape. Thus, the Embassy staff started working in the second Residence area. Harold Joyce Noble recalls that Muccio was badly hurt due to the loss of all of his possessions at his

³³⁸ Much'yo Chuhanmidaesa, Chŏnbyŏlyŏnesŏ Ihan Sogam Palp'yo [Ambassador Muccio Shares his Feelings about his Departure], *Pusan Ilbo*, 7 September 1952.

³³⁹ Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe [National Institute of Korean History], *Taehanmin'guksa Jaryojip 31 Kwŏn* [The History of the Republic of Korea Volume 31] (Kwach'ŏn: Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1996), 333-6.

residence.³⁴⁰ Since Muccio had ceded the civilian leadership of the resistance against North Korean aggression, what then was his main task after September 1950? It was to lead the UN rehabilitation of North Korea. Since MacArthur promised to conclude the war before Thanksgiving, Muccio started immediately to plan for the post-war setup of the Korean peninsula.³⁴¹

The night of October 14, Muccio received an enigmatic telegram from the State Department which stated: "if invited, take the trip." Two hours later, he received a message from MacArthur explaining that he should be at the Haneda Airport at 11 a.m. Then, General Earle E. Partridge, the commanding general of the Fifth Air Force, informed Muccio that he had received instructions from MacArthur to facilitate his arrival to Haneda. At 11 a.m. Muccio was sitting alongside MacArthur in *Bataan* with no clue as to the destination of the plane. MacArthur was mad and he "very clearly reflected his disgust of being summoned for political reasons when the front and active military operations had so many calls on his time." This was the exact moment Muccio realized that there would be a meeting between Truman and MacArthur. During this trip, Muccio and MacArthur discussed at length the issue of Korea's rehabilitation.³⁴² They arrived at Wake Island at 6 p.m.

The next morning Truman arrived at Wake Island. After a one-on-one breakfast with MacArthur, he took part in the Wake Island Conference. The following were at the table: Truman, MacArthur, Muccio, the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Arthur W. Radford, the Secretary of the Army Frank Pace, Ambassador at Large

³⁴⁰ Noble, *Embassy*, 204.

³⁴¹ Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 406.

³⁴² Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 79-81.

Philip C. Jessup, General of the Army Omar N. Bradley, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Democratic Politician Averell Harriman and Colonel A.L. Hamblen. Truman started the conference by inquiring about MacArthur's plans regarding the rehabilitation of Korea after the war. MacArthur suggested that the formal resistance would end by Thanksgiving. According to him, the North Koreans were "only fighting to save the face" and he added "orientals prefer to die rather than to lose face."³⁴³ MacArthur then recommended 150 million aid for three to five years for Korea to get back on its feet. Muccio agreed and argued that the U.S. should "emphasize the mental and psychological rehabilitation more than the economic." Muccio anticipated that the elimination of the 38th parallel would prove to be a "challenging opportunity" for the U.S. Then, the discussion turned to the UN control of North Korea. Muccio pointed out that the Koreans were very obstinate regarding the UN control. He argued: "they ha[d] been pushed around so long they don't like it" and added "they are convinced that we don't want Korea."³⁴⁴ Here it seems that with "Koreans" Muccio refers to Rhee's opinions. Later, Muccio also suggested the Koreans take over the heavy industries, railroads and utilities instead of the UN authorities.³⁴⁵ It is not clear whether he referred to the native North Korean population or the ROK officers. Then, Harriman inquired about the specifics of Muccio's plans regarding the psychological rehabilitation. Muccio's response was simple: "bring in the Koreans more." According to him, Koreans knew each other best and this job should be handed over to the ROK. Muccio suggested setting up a system of "radio or loud speaker in every school and village center." In response, Truman said "I believe in sound trucks.

³⁴³ Substance of Statements Made At Wake Island Conference on October 15, 1950, Eley Papers, Harry S. Truman Administration File, Harry S. Truman Library, 1-3.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

I won two elections with them (laughter).”³⁴⁶ Afterwards, Truman inquired on how Rhee would react to the idea of an election. MacArthur immediately replied that he would not like it. Muccio, on the other hand disagreed by reminding MacArthur of the last election in 1948 which he argued was “about as honest as any ever held in Far East.” He was of the opinion that local elections and elections for provincial governors could be held soon.³⁴⁷ Finally, Truman asked the most important question: the possibility of the Chinese or Soviet interference. MacArthur, confident of himself, answered that the possibility was “very little.”³⁴⁸ This eventually turned out to be a huge miscalculation. Since MacArthur assured everyone at the conference that China or the Soviet Union would not intervene in the war, Dean Rusk turned to Muccio and asked Muccio to accompany him to Washington. Rusk wanted to discuss the post-war setup of Korea in detail. Muccio in return said:”Dean, I don't think it's that immediate, I have the following matters before me with Rhee, I think it would be better for me to go back to Korea, and then I'll wait for you to signal me and I can be back in 36 hours.”³⁴⁹ Hence, Muccio returned to Japan with MacArthur.

After the ROK's relocation to Seoul, Muccio was instructed by Acheson to make all efforts to stop any suggestion of crossing the 38th parallel by Rhee or any other member of the high cadres of the ROK. Rhee did not like the idea of UN control in the North one little bit. Therefore, during a conversation about this issue, he did not cooperate but at the same time not openly defy the idea.³⁵⁰ The main reason behind Rhee's uncooperative

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁴⁹ Richard D. McKinzie, *Muccio Interview*, 27.

³⁵⁰ Drumright to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 964.

attitude was related to his desire to unify Korea. Rhee knew well that if the UN took control of North Korea, then the issue of unification would be more complicated. Immediately after his arrival at Seoul from Wake Island, Muccio had to deal with Rhee who gave an interview to *UP* and suggested that the ROK would assign civilian governors to the North.³⁵¹ Rhee also added that the Koreans felt like they were being sabotaged by the UN. Muccio met with Rhee on October 20, and got the latter's word that he would avoid making statements like these.³⁵² One day later, Rhee insisted on a statement either from Muccio or MacArthur that the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) would only observe the conduct of the elections to be held in the future.³⁵³ Since Muccio's answer was negative, Rhee continued his negative statements about the UN. He argued that if the people of the South and North Korea agree on elections, "it w[ould] be carried out."³⁵⁴

While Rhee continued his uncooperative attitude, Dean Rusk gave the signal Muccio had been waiting for and Muccio started preparing for his return to the U.S. On October 28, 1950, Muccio started his visit for two weeks to the U.S.³⁵⁵ Muccio spent ten days in the U.S. He first went to the UN headquarters at Lake Success, and informed the officials about the situation in the battlefield. Muccio informed the UN officials that the Allied Command under MacArthur had three aims in his war: 1) maintenance of public order, 2) rapid revival of Korea, 3) preparation for the unification of Korea. He suggested

³⁵¹ Acheson to Embassy in Korea, FRUS (1950), 980.

³⁵² Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 985.

³⁵³ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 990-1.

³⁵⁴ Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 995.

³⁵⁵ Much'yo Chuhan Midaesa, Wösingt'önüro Kwihwanhayö T'üruman Midaet'ongnyönggwa Hoedam Yejöng [U.S. Ambassador Muccio Returns Back to Washington and Set to Meet with Truman], *Pusan Ilbo*, 31 October 1950.

that South Koreans not take over the North's government, and the Allied Command was doing the best it could in order to preserve the Northern ways of government.³⁵⁶ Muccio then went to Washington. After his regular consultations at the State Department, Muccio met with Truman at the White House on November 7.³⁵⁷ After his meeting with Truman, Muccio made a press conference and stated that "the United Nations and its member states will not stop its efforts until the unification is realized."³⁵⁸ Muccio then went back to Japan.

While Muccio was away, the UN forces managed to liberate most of North Korea including P'yŏngyang and according to MacArthur's plans, they were in an offensive to return to their homes by Christmas. Right after Muccio left for Washington, Drumright started reporting the capturing of individual Chinese soldiers by the UN forces.³⁵⁹ On his way back to Seoul, Muccio had a meeting with MacArthur in Japan. In their meeting, MacArthur argued that China had sent 25,000, at most 30,000, troops across the Yalu River. He ruled out the possibility of more Chinese troops since the Air Force did not detect them. All in all, MacArthur was sure about final victory.³⁶⁰ When Muccio returned back to Seoul, he reported that the questioning of the Chinese POWs indicated that the decision to send them to Korea must have been made at a high level.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ Much'yo Chuhan Midaesa, Yuen Kyŏngjesahoeisahoe Pimilhoeüiesö Yuen'gunjŏngch'aek Önmyŏng [Ambassador Muccio Announced the Allied Command's Policy at a Secret Meeting in United Nations Economic and Social Council], *Sŏul Sinmun*, 4 November 1950.

³⁵⁷ Daily Appointments of Harry S. Truman, 7 November 1950, Matthew J. Connelly Files, Box 5.

³⁵⁸ Much'yo Chuhan Midaesa Kwiimsŏngmyŏng Palp'yo [Ambassador Muccio Makes a Statement Before Returning Back to his Post], *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, 22 November 1950.

³⁵⁹ Drumright to Acheson, FRUS (1950), 1014.

³⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), *Ibid.*, 1175.

³⁶¹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1218.

Indeed, the decision was made at a high level. Immediately after the ROKA-UN troops crossed the 38th parallel, Kim Il Sung appealed to Stalin and Mao for military backup.³⁶² In his correspondence, Stalin asked Mao to send five or six divisions to Korea since he promised to do so in the event of a U.S. intervention. However, when Mao brought up this issue in the Chinese Communist Party Politburo Conference on October 2, he faced opposition. In the end, the issue was resolved when the People's Liberation Army Leader Peng Deuhai took Mao's side in the next meeting. Eventually, China decided to dispatch nine divisions to assist North Korea.³⁶³

Chinese troops began crossing the Yalu River on October 19 and in less than two weeks, 200,000 crossed into North Korea undiscovered by the United Nations Command (UNC). Eventually, Chinese troops began their assault and they encircled the UNC troops. At first, the UNC did not put much emphasis on the reports from the battlefield regarding Chinese troops. However, the gravity of the situation was understood after the Chinese troops began defeating and encircling the standing UNC troops. On November 28, MacArthur informed Washington that they "face an entirely new war." MacArthur then ordered an immediate withdrawal.³⁶⁴

On December 5, the combined KPA-Chinese troops recaptured P'yŏngyang. Syngman Rhee reacted immediately, and ordered the execution of suspected enemies among the POWs. According to Chŏng Il-gwŏn's memoirs, Rhee had anticipated the Chinese intervention. He thought it would give Truman some guts in order to make crucial decisions. However, Rhee did not worry a lot because of his faith in MacArthur's ability

³⁶² Haruki, *Korean War*, 118.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 128-132.

³⁶⁴ MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, FRUS (1950), 1238.

to keep things under control.³⁶⁵ Obviously, things did not pan out the way Rhee expected and he had to take precautionary actions. Acting Secretary of State James E. Webb inquired about the mass executions on December 18.³⁶⁶ Muccio reported that 39 prisoners were executed, and 151 were awaiting execution. The main problem was that the British troops confronted the Korean police and threatened to shoot them if they executed any other prisoners.³⁶⁷ These incidents were reported widely by the American and British newspapers which caused an international outrage. Therefore, Rhee ordered the suspension of executions, and started an inquiry into the conduct of executions.³⁶⁸

The New Year brought more despair than hope. Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, Commanding General of the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea, advised Muccio to immediately evacuate Seoul since the combined KPA-Chinese troops were gaining ground very fast. Hence, Muccio had to persuade Rhee to withdraw to Pusan. The internal debate among the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy revolved around the issue of the UN withdrawal. Francesca Donner Rhee, the First Lady, illustrated the debate in her diary: “why didn’t they [ROKA] fight like Marines? Why did not the all UN army fight like the Turks or the Marines?”³⁶⁹ In his quest to persuade Rhee, Muccio used his usual tactic: providing the bright side of the events while ignoring the dark side. Rhee was having none of it though. He told Muccio that all the UN was doing was talking while Rome was burning.³⁷⁰ Francesca Rhee also mentioned Muccio’s attitude in her diary: “He is always very

³⁶⁵ Chŏng Ilgwŏn, *Chŏng Ilgwŏn hoegorok* [Memoir of Chŏng Ilgwŏn] (Seoul: Koryŏ Sŏjŏk, 1996), 304-6.

³⁶⁶ Webb to Muccio, FRUS (1950), 1567.

³⁶⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1579-81.

³⁶⁸ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1587.

³⁶⁹ Francesca Donner Rhee, *Yugiowa isŭngman: P’ŭranch’esŭk’aŭi Nanjungilgi* [The Korean War and Syngman Rhee: Francesca’s war diary] (Seoul: Giparang, 2010), 285.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 286-7.

optimistic, but at the same time tells us to leave the city.”³⁷¹ Muccio also used Harold Joyce Noble to soften Rhee’s attitude and eventually Rhee agreed to the evacuation plan. On January 3, Seoul was abandoned again. Muccio suggested Rhee to recall Chang Myŏn, the Ambassador of ROK to Washington, to boost the morale of the ROK’s leaders and make sure that the ROK had a capable man at hand “should anything happen to Princetonian.”³⁷²

On February 7, 1951, Muccio received an eyes only telegram from Dean Rusk. Rusk started off by stating that “neither US nor UN has ever committed itself to unification of Kor[ea] by unlimited commitment of whatever force required.” He continued by informing Muccio that the State Department officials started to consider a political solution to the Korean crisis instead of a military one. Hence, Rusk suggested a negotiation process to be started with the Chinese. He inquired Muccio’s opinion and potential reaction from the ROK.³⁷³ Muccio responded to Rusk on February 12. He supported Rusk on the idea of negotiations with the Chinese and suggested that the U.S. should avoid spreading the hostilities to other parts of the world. In addition, Muccio argued that the U.S. should wait for the stabilization of the battlefield before starting any negotiation. He also noted that “any attempt to reestablish the 38th parallel would bring a violent explosion from all Koreans.”³⁷⁴

On April 10, Truman ordered MacArthur’s relief of duty mainly due to his insubordination. MacArthur initially wanted to spread the war to China by using atomic

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 314.

³⁷² Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1951), Korea and China, Volume VII, Part 1, 40-1.

³⁷³ Rusk to Muccio, FRUS (1951), 159-160.

³⁷⁴ Muccio to Rusk, *Ibid.*, 168.

weapons. However, the Truman Administration was against spreading the Korean War outside of Korea, and urged MacArthur continuously not to make public statements against their policy. MacArthur, on the other hand, did not seem to care too much about the warnings coming his way from the Truman Administration. On March 24, MacArthur issued a public statement in which he argued that the UN would not continue its tolerant attitude towards China anymore and he basically sabotaged the chances of a peace settlement.³⁷⁵ In his memoirs, Truman pinpointed March 24 as the day he decided to relieve MacArthur of duty.³⁷⁶ In his oral history interview, Muccio backed up Truman for firing MacArthur. He said: "for any officer of the United States doing what he did, complete disregard of directions from the Commander-in-Chief, he should have been removed long--much earlier."³⁷⁷ General Ridgway eventually filled MacArthur's position.

On May 6, Muccio transmitted the letter General James Van Fleet, the Commander of the U.S. Eighth Army wrote to the Chief of Staff of ROKA, Chŏng Il-gwŏn. In his letter, Fleet argued that the major problem the ROKA faced was the lack of military leadership. According to Fleet, it would not be advisable for the U.S. to furnish more weapons to the ROKA until they came to their senses.³⁷⁸ Especially after China's entry into the Korean War, the ROKA showed poor performance in almost every way, which in turn worried Muccio and American Generals in the field. Americans were taking extra precaution on

³⁷⁵ Jager, *Brothers*, 173.

³⁷⁶ Truman, *Memoirs*, vol.2, 441-2.

³⁷⁷ Hess, *Muccio Interview*, 97.

³⁷⁸ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1951), 419-420.

furnishing the ROKA with more advanced weapons due to their fear of Rhee's unpredictability.

Rhee on the other hand, became very furious when he heard the rumors about the possibility of truce talks. To him, anything less than unification meant failure. Therefore, in a press conference, Rhee mentioned the possibility of rearming additional ROKA forces in return for a subsequent withdrawal of American forces from Korea. Acheson requested Muccio to warn Rhee about the negative effects of his statements and urge him to be careful. Muccio once again met with Rhee on the same issue. Rhee defended himself by saying that the newspapers frequently misquoted him and that he would be more careful in the future.³⁷⁹

On the issue of truce talks, Muccio sent a telegram explaining his views on June 1. He pointed out that the U.S.' record was not bright after 1945 in obtaining political objectives with regard to territorial adjustments under the control of North Korea. He warned Acheson not to overlook the Korean reaction in the post-war settlement period. Muccio argued that if Koreans felt that they were sold out by the U.S., "they would make things very difficult and possibly dangerous for the U.S. and UN missions in Korea."³⁸⁰ Then, on June 9, Muccio informed Acheson that the Koreans inquired almost every day about the U.S.' position on the issue of peace talks. Since he could not answer these questions, Muccio asked the Department to clarify its policy on that and suggest ways to

³⁷⁹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 504.

³⁸⁰ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 496-7.

calm the fears of Koreans. Muccio stated that his efforts to reassure Koreans were only partially successful.³⁸¹

On June 29, Acheson responded to Muccio's telegram. First and foremost, Acheson informed Muccio that ceasefire talks might get underway since the Soviet representative to the UN hinted that in a radio address over the UN network. Acheson praised Muccio's efforts in making sure that things did not get out of hand. Acheson communicated the Department's full understanding of the possible friction between the U.S.-UN and the ROK due to the ceasefire talks. Therefore, Acheson suggested the following points to be made during discussions: 1) The ROK did not have international recognition beyond the 38th Parallel, 2) Even though an independent and unified Korea was the aim of the U.S. and UN, they never suggested this aim to be accomplished by military means, 3) June 25 and June 27 Security Council resolutions did not require the UN to liberate North Korea, 4) Koreans had to realize that the advent of WWII would not be in their best interests, 5) The chances of having a unified Korea were only possible if the ROK stood with the free world, 6) The long term rehabilitation of the ROK was only possible with the assistance of the U.S. Therefore, Koreans had to avoid making statements that could jeopardize the mutual relations.³⁸² With this telegram, Acheson gave the main task Muccio had to shoulder until the end of his tenure in Korea. He was supposed to bring the negative reactions of the Koreans under control, and urge them not to openly defy the U.S.' position. However, the State Department was already aware of the problematic nature of this task. The South Koreans were the ones attacked by the North

³⁸¹ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 526-7.

³⁸² Acheson to Muccio, *Ibid.*, 588-90.

and they would not welcome any suggestion of *status quo ante*. Hence, Muccio's task was close to impossible from the start. Nevertheless, the State Department expected him to do his best.

Immediately after Muccio received Acheson's telegram, he phoned Rhee and said that he had important news from Washington that needed Rhee's attention. However, General Ridgway caught Muccio napping when he delivered a communiqué which was an offer to the KPA to discuss armistice. Thus, when Muccio arrived at Kyōngmudae, the Presidential Palace, Rhee had already summoned Prime Minister Chang Myōn, Foreign Minister Pyōn Yōngt'ae and Defense Minister Yi Kibong. The furious Rhee read Ridgway's communiqué aloud to Muccio. For an hour, they discussed various issues mostly irrelevant to armistice negotiations. Rhee told Muccio that he would call an emergency meeting with his cabinet in order to decide on the ROK's terms for negotiations. Muccio urged Rhee to avoid making hasty decisions and particularly discuss pending issues with the UNCURK. Pyōn Yōngt'ae said that he called for a press conference regarding this issue, but Rhee asked him to call it off. Chang Myōn put forward the idea that until communists were out of the Korean peninsula, there had to be no communication with them, which was in essence Rhee's idea. Muccio urged them to explore the possibility of negotiations and once again asked them to avoid statements against negotiations.³⁸³

To lower the chances of the ROK's negative reaction regarding armistice talks, Muccio suggested Acheson add a ROK military officer in the talks and only mention the

³⁸³ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 604-5.

38th parallel as a front rather than a delineation.³⁸⁴ On July 2, Muccio reported that visits of General Ridgway and General Van Fleet were very helpful in persuading Rhee. In their conversation, Rhee stated that on the issue of armistice talks, the ROK would go along with the decisions of the U.S.³⁸⁵ While Rhee was saying this in front of Muccio, he was also covertly supporting the anti-ceasefire campaign that started after Ridgway's communiqué. On July 7, Muccio informed Acheson that the local campaign reached new heights and a local paper attacked Truman by labeling the ceasefire talks as "cowardly."³⁸⁶

On July 2, Thomas E. Dewey, the Governor of New York, visited Korea and met with Rhee alongside Muccio. In this meeting, Rhee found another chance to express his views regarding the ongoing war and the armistice negotiations. According to Muccio, Rhee stated the importance of prestige in the "orient" and suggested that the U.S.-UN would lose face due to the treatment of communists as equals. In addition, Rhee stated that the Koreans could not live as a divided nation, so if the U.S. did not want to continue fighting, "Korean boys should be allowed [to] carry on alone." Dewey in return claimed that the Russians would not attack a place they attacked twice thus, Korea would be free from their attacks for a long time to come. In his telegram, Muccio stated that Rhee struck him as being in a better mental condition but Dewey did not share his perspective and thought that "the old man appeared to be pretty senile and guided by emotions."³⁸⁷

The delegation of the communist side for the negotiations was led by the KPA chief of staff General Nam Il, and the vice commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers

³⁸⁴ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 607.

³⁸⁵ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 611.

³⁸⁶ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 635.

³⁸⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 640-2.

(CVP) Deng Hua. The UN side was led by Admiral Charles Turner Joy who was aided by three U.S. Generals and the ROKA's General Paek Sönyöp. Five items Joy presented to the communist side for negotiations were as follows:

Item 1. Fixing a demarcation line between both sides so as to establish a demilitarized zone as a basic condition for the cessation of hostilities in Korea.

Item 2. Withdrawal of all armed forces of foreign countries from Korea.

Item 3. Concrete arrangements for the realization of cease fire and armistice

Item 4. Arrangements relating to prisoners of war.

Item 5. Recommendations on the countries concerned.³⁸⁸

In reality, Rhee did not want any type of negotiations with the North Koreans. He was also irked by the prominent role given to the North Koreans while the ROK was only a party of a larger group in the UN. On July 10, General Ridgway met with Rhee to discuss the armistice negotiations. Rhee stated that the Koreans' ultimate desire was unification and that they wanted to obliterate the bad memories of the 38th parallel. He insisted that signing a ceasefire with the communists would not help to avoid WWII, and asked why the U.S. did not use the atomic bomb. Ridgway in return said that if they use the atomic bomb in Korea, the emergence of WWII would be inevitable. In the end, Rhee agreed to send General Paek Sönyöp, Commander of ROK I Corps, as his delegate to the truce talks which opened on the same day at Kaesöng. General Paek received a letter from Rhee in which he said: "I don't want the United Nations side to make any agreement that will leave Korea divided" but added that he had to participate in the negotiations for the time being.³⁸⁹ However, on July 27, he did not attend the truce talks when the issue of the 38th

³⁸⁸ William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 159.

³⁸⁹ Paik Sun Yup, *From Pusan to Panmunjom* (Washington: Potomac Books, 1992), 172.

parallel was raised. In his diary, Paek suggested that he insisted on P'yöngyang-Wönsan line as a possible discussion point and this caused a disagreement between him and Ridgway.³⁹⁰ Paek walked out in another meeting when the demarcation line issue was being discussed. Therefore, Muccio met with Rhee and protested the steps taken by the ROK. Rhee in return, argued that he did not give any orders to Paek but he could not order him to accept the division of his country. This was Rhee's tactic in sabotaging the negotiations and hoping that there would be no substantial result. On August 1, Acheson declared in a press conference that the 38th parallel could not be accepted as a buffer zone. In return, Rhee ordered Paek to return to the negotiation table.³⁹¹ On August 23, the Communist delegation abruptly broke off the negotiations claiming that an American aircraft had bombed a neutral area near Kaesöng.³⁹²

Muccio was not a part of the negotiations, since the negotiations were led by military men rather than diplomats. He was instructed to contain Rhee and the ROK officials, and that, in the words of Dean Rusk was an "explosive issue." It should be noted that this was the period when Muccio had a low profile in terms of his effect on the overall decisions. This was mainly due to the sum of all the characters involved in most of the processes he had been entitled to do in the past. However, he was by no means seen as an outcast by the State Department. On the contrary, Dean Acheson and Dean Rusk constantly sought his advice on more or less all of the issues regarding the Korean War.

On September 20, after the suspension of negotiations, Rhee declared the ROK's conditions for the resumption of talks. He stated that Kaesöng, the old capital of the Koryö

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁹¹ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1951), 784-5.

³⁹² Jager, *Brothers*, 198.

Dynasty, was below the 38th parallel and the North Koreans illegally invaded the city. Rhee argued that the communists humiliated the U.S.-UN in the previous negotiations. Therefore, he insisted on the fulfillment of the ROK's five conditions before the resumption of negotiations: 1) Chinese troops had to withdraw from the Korean peninsula, 2) North Korean troops had to be disarmed, 3) North Koreans would be given seats in the National Assembly-of ROK- after the objective elections throughout the peninsula, 4) There had to be an expiry date around 10 days set by the UNC for North Koreans to accept these proposals otherwise, the negotiations had to be completely terminated. Muccio considered the reaction of Rhee predictable given the circumstances.³⁹³ Rhee was aware of the impossibility of the communist side's acceptance of the clauses that he proposed. On the other hand, it was exactly why he put forward them. Rhee wanted to make sure that there would be not agreement. Muccio reported that Rhee did not wish to give up on the Ongjin Peninsula which was just below the 38th parallel, the northwestern part of the ROK.³⁹⁴

The same day Rhee announced his terms, the Communist delegation asked for the resumption of negotiations at Kaesŏng. Taking into account Rhee's warnings, the UN delegation asked for a transfer of the negotiations venue from Kaesŏng to Panmunjom, a small village north of the 38th parallel. Even though the communist side rejected this proposal at first, Mao softened his approach and ordered them to accept the change of the venue. Mao also personally intervened in the issue of the 38th parallel, and instructed the

³⁹³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1951), 927-8.

³⁹⁴ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1092.

communist delegation to accept the present battle lines as a demarcation line instead of the 38th parallel.³⁹⁵ Hence, on November 27, both sides met at Panmunjom again.

Since the negotiations at Panmunjom would focus on the issue of POWs, Acheson inquired about the potential number of ROK internees on November 30.³⁹⁶ Muccio replied that even though the ROK officials verbally suggested that about 20,000 people were taken to the North, the only list that details these internees in the ROK listed 2,438 people.³⁹⁷ On December 22, Muccio sent another telegram to the State Department detailing the activities of Rhee. Muccio reported that after the communist delegation's acceptance of the current battle lines as the demarcation line, Rhee's camp resumed its campaign against the negotiations in every possible way. Muccio suggested that Rhee had lost the support of the majority of the National Assembly, and since the National Assembly elected the president according to the first constitution of the ROK, Rhee became very worried.³⁹⁸

5.2. 1952 Political Crisis

After the election on May 30, 1950, a significant number of independent candidates who had been critical of Rhee's authoritarianism were elected, and that put Rhee in a hard situation. In January 1952, the National Assembly of the ROK rejected a constitutional amendment for the direct election of the president which was put forward by Rhee's Liberal Party. Rhee immediately realized that he would not get his way in the National Assembly. Therefore, under Rhee's orders, his supporters organized a mass

³⁹⁵ Haruki, *Korean War*, 203.

³⁹⁶ Acheson to Muccio, FRUS (1951), 1206.

³⁹⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1253-4.

³⁹⁸ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 1418.

protest against the decision of the National Assembly. On February 14, Muccio met with Rhee and discussed matters related to his political maneuvers. Muccio informed Acheson that he had adopted a new tactic while talking with Rhee regarding matters of great importance. He would state his stance and never go into arguments until a later date. Muccio decided that it was about time to let Rhee know that the U.S. was following his political maneuvers closely. Muccio told Rhee that he was finding it exceedingly difficult to explain some of Rhee's political maneuvers. Asked to be specific, Muccio gave the example of one of Rhee's speeches in which he used derogatory terms for General Walker. Muccio also stated that for some time it was getting hard to be alongside him in public meetings due to Rhee's constant "march to Yalu" discourse. Muccio then mentioned Rhee's Youth Corps, and suggested that one of the boys affiliated with it ordered his chauffeur to attend "spontaneous" meetings. Muccio also queried Rhee whether he used the Youth Corps to effect National Assembly votes. Rhee in return said that he and Muccio had had an excellent relationship for three years, but, at that time, Muccio was misled. Finally, Muccio stated that he was at the end of his tether regarding the irresponsible activities of some of the ROK officials and Rhee's continued distrust regarding the U.S.-UN on negotiations.³⁹⁹

On February 15, Muccio sent a telegram regarding the upcoming presidential election in the National Assembly to the Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, John Allison. Muccio argued that "fate has not dealt us a good hand of cards in the coming election." According to Muccio, Rhee was becoming increasingly "recalcitrant and senile." He suggested that no one in the ROK had the guts to go against Rhee while he

³⁹⁹ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1952-1954), Korea, Volume XV, Part 1, 47-50. *Hereafter FRUS (1952).

was holding the presidency. Muccio thought that the Prime Minister Chang Myŏn and the Minister of Health Hŏ Chŏng were the best candidates from the point of view of the Embassy, but they lacked popular support. Muccio argued that the U.S. had to take the necessary measures in order to warn the Rhee faction about its undemocratic practices. He also informed Allison that he would do whatever he could to back the leaders of the National Assembly to vote freely.⁴⁰⁰ In another telegram to Ural Alexis Johnson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Muccio argued that the attitude of the ROKA and police would be crucial. He stated that the U.S. could trust the ROKA but not the police.⁴⁰¹

The warning Muccio asked for came in the form of a letter to Rhee from Truman on March 4, 1952. Truman mentioned the differing position of the ROK regarding the negotiations and suggested that it was not constructive. Then, he warned Rhee that the degree of assistance from the U.S. in the future would be bound to the ROK's "devotion to democratic ideals."⁴⁰² In return, Rhee wrote a letter to Truman. He suggested that Truman had been misled generally, and that there was no problem whatsoever. Rhee asked Truman's help in signing a mutual security pact which he argued would eliminate any further aggression against the ROK. In addition, Rhee asked Truman's help for the expansion of the ROKA.⁴⁰³ Rhee was well aware of the major problems he faced. By the time he wrote down this letter to Truman, the ROK National Assembly was working on a bill to abolish the presidential system and adopt a parliamentary system.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Muccio to Allison, *Ibid.*, 50-2.

⁴⁰¹ Muccio to Johnson, *Ibid.*, 64-6.

⁴⁰² Truman to Rhee, *Ibid.*, 74-6.

⁴⁰³ Rhee to Truman, *Ibid.*, 114-6.

⁴⁰⁴ Haruki, *Korean War*, 228.

Even after receiving Truman's letter, Rhee wanted to arrest some of the National Assembly members who were opposed to him with the charges that they were communists. He wanted Muccio to agree with him on that and publicly announce it. In his oral history interview, Muccio recalled the time when Rhee sent him a couple of footlockers full of brand new \$50. Muccio asked him "why do you send this to me? Why don't you present it to your own authorities?"⁴⁰⁵ It must be around this time Rhee decided that Muccio had turned against him, and using his connections with the extreme right wing in the U.S. Congress such as Stiles Bridges, he went after Muccio.⁴⁰⁶ According to Fred Charles Thomas, a lieutenant working at the Embassy, Rhee "was mad at Muccio because he thought Muccio was screwing him back [in the U.S.]"⁴⁰⁷

On May 23, Muccio met with Rhee before he left for Washington for consultations at the State Department. Muccio pointed out the rumors regarding his and the Embassy officials' opposition to Rhee's election as a president. Rhee replied that he had not heard of such rumors and even if he did, he would not believe them. Muccio urged Rhee to protect the law and order while he was away. Rhee promised Muccio on that regard. Finally, Muccio mentioned that the eyes of the whole world were on Korea, and it would be very negative if internal matters suggested that the ROK's leaders were unable to govern.⁴⁰⁸

The day after Muccio left Korea, on May 25, Rhee summoned some ROKA units from the front and declared martial law around Pusan. Eleven of the Assemblymen

⁴⁰⁵ McKinzie, *Muccio Interview*, 32.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Fred Charles Thomas Jr., The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 31. <http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001171> Accessed on 01.08.2019.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁰⁸ Memorandum of Conversation (Muccio), FRUS (1952), 228-231.

Muccio mentioned in his oral history interview were arrested and charged with being members of the International Communist Party. Rhee basically made the ROK legislature stop functioning with this move.⁴⁰⁹ Muccio immediately sent a telegram to Edwin Allan Lightner, the Counselor of the Embassy, and asked him to immediately meet with Rhee to deliver his personal message. In his message, Muccio pointed out that he clearly communicated Truman's concern over the political situation in the ROK. He suggested that it would be very hard for him to explain the situation to Truman, and asked for Rhee's explanation.⁴¹⁰ After meeting with Rhee, Lightner's comments were as follows:

Rhee has thumbed his nose at US Govt today. He is playing for time and doesn't need much. He appears quite willing receive any number official visitors, listen to their protestations, play through his wellknown phonograph record and then go on with his dirty work. My point is situation is crystal clear; US Govt cannot fall back on excuse later that it didn't know what was up; and must decide now (I mean now) whether to let this thing slide or take necessary steps thwart it.⁴¹¹

On May 29, Muccio discussed Rhee's latest move with Truman. At the time, Truman had already appointed Muccio to the UN Trusteeship Council, but Muccio asked the State Department not to publicize his new post out of fear that his influence on Rhee would be diminished. Truman authorized a cable to Rhee which expressed his deep concern about the situation, and urged Rhee to protect democracy in his country.⁴¹² On May 30, Muccio visited his *alma mater*, Brown University to receive an honorary doctorate and make a commencement speech where he defended the Truman Administration's policies towards Korea.⁴¹³ Immediately after his speech, he was taken to

⁴⁰⁹ Park, *Ally*, 113.

⁴¹⁰ Muccio to Lightner, FRUS (1952), 251-2.

⁴¹¹ Lightner to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 268-9.

⁴¹² Truman to Rhee, *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴¹³ John J. Muccio, "Korea and the Explosion of the Communist Delusion," is in U.S. Dept. of State, *Bulletin*, XXVI (1952), 939-942.

Washington by a private plane for a special meeting with Acheson.⁴¹⁴ Eventually, they decided not to interfere militarily in the events, and stick with Rhee. The instruction Muccio received was that he was supposed to use every method short of active military intervention.⁴¹⁵ Later, Muccio told Lightner that the reason why the State Department took this decision was because he, at the meeting with Acheson, could not specify who the National Assembly would elect as the president in the event of a *coup d'état* against Rhee.⁴¹⁶

On June 12, after his return to Korea, Muccio had a meeting with Rhee which he called “the most futile hour” he had ever spent with Rhee. In the meeting, Rhee argued that Truman and the U.S. did not understand his noble purposes. According to Muccio, he was completely irrational and Muccio thought that the U.S. could not expect an effective leadership from Rhee.⁴¹⁷ On June 25, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the opinion of the Commander in Chief, Far East Mark W. Clark with regard to a *coup d'état* against Rhee, and detailed the possibilities.⁴¹⁸ Muccio, on the other hand, urged for restraint and argued that there was no need for a showdown.⁴¹⁹ On June 19, the CIA reported that Rhee was planning to discredit Muccio due to his alleged interference in Korean politics.⁴²⁰ In a letter to Robert Murphy, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Muccio very clearly explained

⁴¹⁴ Edward C. Keefer, “The Truman Administration and the South Korean Political Crisis of 1952: Democracy's Failure?” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (May, 1991): 146.

⁴¹⁵ Acheson to Muccio, FRUS (1952), 302.

⁴¹⁶ Richard D. McKinzie, “Oral History Interview with E. Allan Lightner, Jr.,” Harry S. Truman Library, 119. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/lightner> Accessed on 13.08.2019.

⁴¹⁷ Muccio to Acheson, *Ibid.*, 325-6.

⁴¹⁸ The Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Far East (Clark), *Ibid.*, 358-360.

⁴¹⁹ Muccio to Acheson, 361-2.

⁴²⁰ Central Intelligence Bulletin, June 19, 1952, CIA-RDP79T00975A000700320001-8. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00975a000700320001-8> Accessed on 13.08.2019.

his position regarding the coup plan: “I am the last one to want the Military to get enmeshed in this situation.”⁴²¹

On July 1, the National Assembly convened for a special session to discuss the issue of the direct election of the president. The two-thirds of the assembly voted yes to amend the constitution. On July 5, the amendment approving the direct presidential elections was adopted by a vote of 160 to 0.⁴²² Muccio’s comments on the result were that Rhee still had most of the cards, and could use them in the way he saw fit. He thought that the key to the future of Korea was the selection of an able Prime Minister. Finally, he added that the opposition was far from dead and there was still some hope for Korea.⁴²³ This was the last major challenge Muccio faced. If he took a stronger stance, there could have been a military coup made by the U.S.-UN combined forces alongside the ROKA. Why did he not commit to such a strong position even after observing the problems of the Rhee administration? The lack of leadership in the ROK was the main reason as stated by Muccio in his conversation with Acheson in Washington. Also, he did not want a major problem to occur just before his departure from Korea in September. In any case, he did not support the elimination of Rhee from the ROK’s presidency, which eventually was a great triumph for Rhee. Years later in a family lunch at Washington along with Lightner and Niles W. Bond, the former officer in charge of the Korean Affairs in the Department of State, Muccio expressed his regret over his decision not to intervene. Referring to

⁴²¹ Muccio to Murphy, RG 84, Japan, Tokyo Embassy, Classified General Records, 1952, Box 5.

⁴²² Haruki, *Korean War*, 233-4.

⁴²³ Muccio to Acheson, FRUS (1952), 403-4.

Lightner's telegrams during the crisis, Muccio suggested that they missed an opportunity to get rid of Rhee and that it was their "big mistake."⁴²⁴

Eventually Rhee and Muccio reconciled through private conversations during Muccio's last month in Korea. On August 30, 1952, Rhee released a statement regarding Muccio's new appointment. Rhee declared Muccio as the true friend of the Korean people. He then mentioned Muccio's efforts after June 25, 1950, which seems to be his reason for reconciling with Muccio:

The Ambassador was more interested in our safety than in his own during the most dangerous period after June 25, 1950, when the Communist invaders attacked to the South. I will never forget some of the unusual events that I and the Ambassador have experienced together. I, myself and his friends in Korea, including my wife, all feel sad that he will leave Korea and I believe the Ambassador who have always felt compassionate about the Korean people also regrets that he will be separated from them.⁴²⁵

Before his departure from Korea, Muccio received an honorary doctoral degree from Seoul National University. On September 7, Muccio spoke for the last time in Korea during his farewell party. He said "I hope that Koreans will never give credit to me as an individual for what I have done in this country in the past. I have only done my best to carry out the instructions strictly on behalf of the government of the United States." This appears to be his explanation for the planned *coup d'etat* attempt. He then went on and stated that the future of Korea would be bright: "Anyone who observed Korea over the past four years will have no doubt that Korea's future will be great."⁴²⁶ Rhee explained his decision about Muccio to his entourage two days after Muccio's speech. He referred to

⁴²⁴ Richard D. McKinzie, *Lightner Interview*, 129.

⁴²⁵ Isŭngman Taet'ongnyŏng, Much'yo Taesa Ihane Taehan Tamhwa Palp'yo [President Rhee Releases a Statement Regarding Ambassador Muccio's Departure from Korea], *Pusan Ilbo*, 30 August 1952.

⁴²⁶ Much'yo Chuhanmidaesa, Chŏnbyŏlyŏnesŏ Ihan Sogam Palp'yo [Ambassador Muccio Shares his Feelings about his Departure], *Pusan Ilbo*, 7 September 1952.

Muccio's last speech and said: "Ambassador Mucio had to support it [the coup plan] under the instructions of Washington, but he paid the price with his dismissal." Rhee then added: "we must exclude him from the list of conspirators. In other words, we will not mention his name in connection with this conspiracy."⁴²⁷ On September 7, *Tonga Ilbo* published an editorial titled "[Our] Sorrow over Ambassador Muccio's Departure" and Seoul Metropolitan Government decided to name the road in front of the U.S. Embassy located in Bando Hotel –today's Lotte Hotel- after Muccio as *Much'oro*, the "Muccio Street."⁴²⁸ Ambassador Muccio left Korea on September 8, 1952.

To conclude, Muccio ceded the civilian leadership against the North Korean invasion to Rhee after the ROK's relocation to Seoul on September 29, 1950. Afterwards, he was tasked with planning the rehabilitation of North Korea after the war. Even though he planned the details of the rehabilitation under UN rule, China's intervention in the Korean War ruined the U.S.' plans. After China's intervention, the State Department instructed Muccio to contain Rhee and the high cadres of the ROK's hierarchy from making statements against the U.S.' position which proved to be very hard. The last challenge Muccio faced was the political crisis of 1952. The U.S. seriously considered facilitating a *coup d'état* against Rhee but Muccio did not support the idea most probably due to the lack of leaders in the ROK at the time. Even though Muccio did not support the plot against Rhee, Rhee felt otherwise and went after Muccio. Consequently, Rhee and

⁴²⁷ Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe [National Institute of Korean History], *Taehanmin'guksa Jaryojip 31 Kwŏn* [The History of the Republic of Korea Volume 31], (Kwach'ŏn: Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1996), 333-6.

⁴²⁸ Mu Taesa iimŭr Aesŏkham [Our Sorrow over Ambassador Muccio's Leave], *Tonga Ilbo*, 7 September 1952.

Muccio reconciled after Rhee reminded himself of Muccio's merits, especially in the period after June 25, 1950.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses primarily on John J. Muccio's tenure in Korea as the Ambassador of the U.S. between 1948 until 1952. It asserts that there was a rift between the State Department and the Department of Defense regarding all-out withdrawal of American troops from Korea. Immediately after the start of his tenure in 1948, Muccio evaluated the situation and came to the conclusion that U.S. troops in the ROK did not only constitute a deterrent against a North Korean attack, but also became a stabilizing force in the ROK which was shaken by several rebellions. Therefore, Muccio urged the State Department for a delay of the withdrawal. The State Department supported Muccio in not operating a premature withdrawal from Korea, which was suggested by the Department of Defense. The Truman Administration finalized its decision on the withdrawal with the announcement of the NSC 8/2. Muccio was an important party in the

decision making process, and the NSC 8/2 adopted the date June 30, 1949, as the final date of withdrawal which was suggested by him.

In the meantime, the Secretary of Army Kenneth Royall's statements in the off-the-record press conference was perceived by Rhee as an outright statement that the ROK was outside of the U.S.' defense perimeter. In March 1949, MacArthur proved Rhee right by placing the ROK and Formosa outside of the U.S.' defense perimeter. Therefore, Royall's speech was the origin of the ROK's removal from the U.S. defense perimeter in the eyes of the ROK's high cadres, not Acheson's infamous "perimeter speech." The ROK's leaders tried their best to get a confirmation from a high authority in the Truman Administration that Korea was inside of the U.S. defense line until the very start of the Korean War with no avail.

The role of the Ambassadors in wartime involves in ensuring the safe escape of their citizens from the warzone and reporting to their capitals about the developments on battlefield. There are rare examples that go against this equation. One of them was the U.S.' Ambassador to France, William Christian Bullitt Jr., who went against Roosevelt's instruction to follow the French government to Bordeaux on the eve of the German invasion. Muccio can be considered as an Ambassador who overstepped his bounds as an envoy of a foreign nation. The main reason why Muccio was able to overstep his bounds was related with the ROK's role as part of an "informal empire" of the U.S. Muccio did not wish to see the ROK crumble by the sudden North Korean attack on June 25, 1950. Therefore, he took the *de facto* leadership of the civilian resistance against the North Korean aggression. Muccio kept this position until the relocation of the ROK government in Seoul in September 1950. During the period between the outbreak of hostilities until

the relocation of ROK government to Seoul. He infused positivity to the high cadres of the ROK hierarchy during the most depressing days of the Korean War and lifted their spirits, which in turn made them not lose hope in the ROK. In addition to his role as the *de facto* leader, Muccio also contributed to the overall war by his suggestions for the combined U.S.-ROKA forces. Since there was a lack of manpower in the U.S. divisions, Muccio suggested to fill those places with the Korean soldiers who would provide crucial information to the American units with their knowledge of Korea's topography. Furthermore, Muccio put forward the idea of training the ROKA's soldiers in Japan during the Korean War, which led to the formation of the KATUSA units. Lastly, Muccio prevented MacArthur in limiting the number of ROKA's forces during the Korean War and urged the Truman Administration to give prominence to the ROKA in the battles. It is my conviction that the above-mentioned points prove that Muccio was an unsung hero of the Korean War.

Between September 1950 to September 1952, Muccio had to maintain a low profile due to the sum of the leaders involved in the crisis. Because of the interference and deep involvement of various figures in the Korean War, Muccio's role became limited to the exchanges with the ROK hierarchy. Especially after the start of Armistice Negotiations, Rhee became very impatient and the State Department instructed Muccio to control Rhee, which became his last duty. In the second half of 1952, the Joint Chiefs of Staff planned a *coup d'état* against Rhee, but Muccio in the end supported Rhee most probably because of the lack of leadership material in the ROK hierarchy at the time.

Muccio's story shows us that the relations between the U.S. and the ROK were more complicated than that of a client-state relationship. Muccio and Rhee played the

game of manipulation against each other. In some instances such as the political crisis of 1952, when Muccio had to give in, and in other cases such as the U.S. troops withdrawal from Korea, Rhee had to give in. However, the political crisis of 1952 set a precedent for the U.S. to align itself with authoritative figures in Korea instead of supporting democratic processes. Since the U.S. did not plainly support a democratic change of power and opted for stable authoritative figures, the democratization process of the ROK took a much longer time span.

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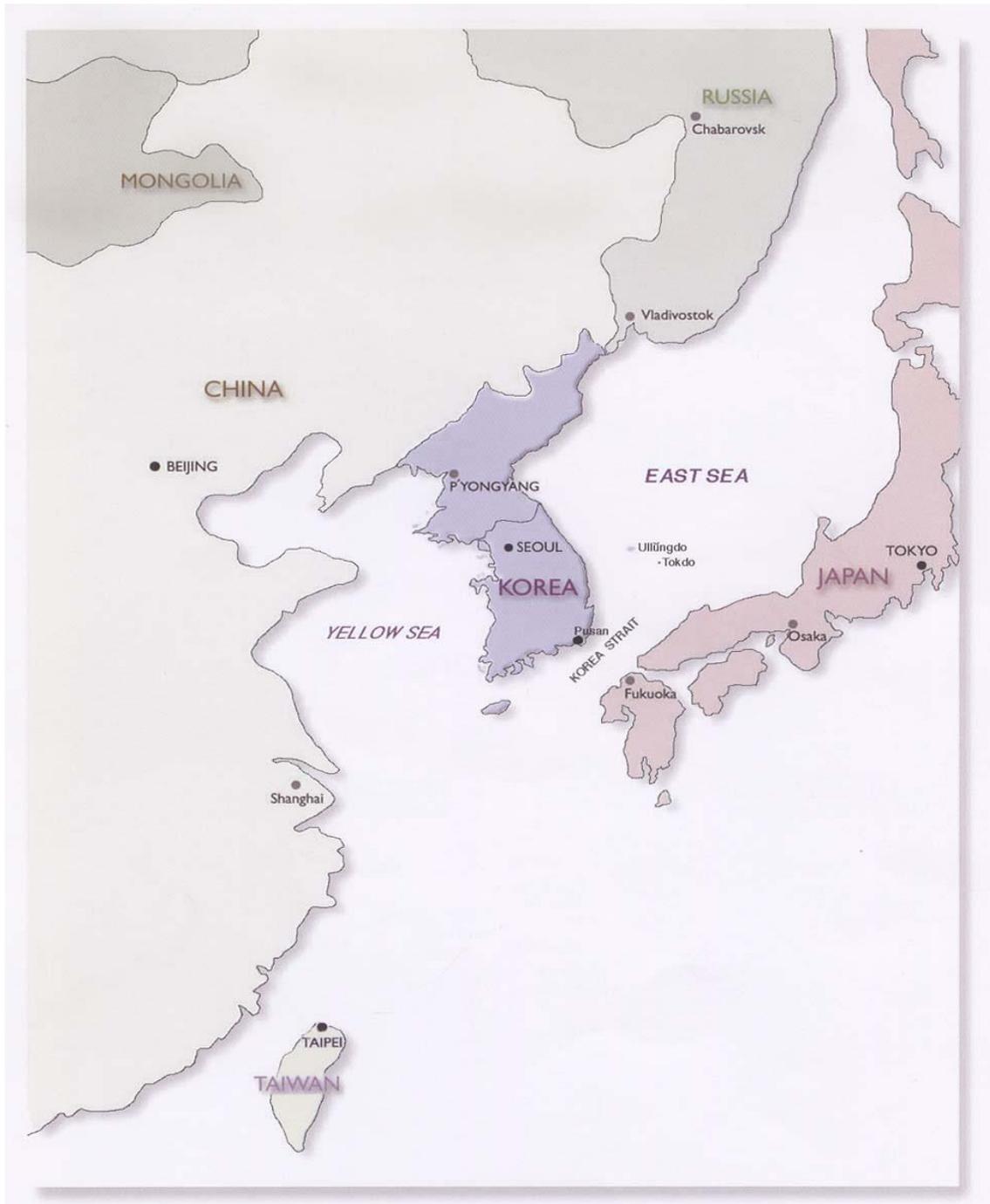
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX B

MAP 2: KOREA AMONG EAST ASIAN NATIONS



Source of the map:

https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/korea_eastsea01.jpg

APPENDIX C

MUCCIO ARRIVES IN KOREA. AUGUST 23, 1948



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX D

MUCCIO AT HIS DESK IN BANDO HOTEL. SEPTEMBER 13, 1948



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX E
VISIT OF THE SENETE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE,
DECEMBER 30, 1949.



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX F

WAITING FOR MACARTHUR'S ARRIVAL, JUNE 29, 1950.



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX G

DISCUSSING THE WAR WITH MACARTHUR, JUNE 29, 1950.



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX H

**MUCCIO ADRESSES KOREANS FOR THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY
OF INDEPENDENCE. AUGUST. 15. 1950.**



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX I

MUCCIO DELIVERS HIS SPEECH AFTER THE LIBERATION OF
SEOUL FROM NORTH KOREANS. SEPTEMBER 29, 1950.



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX J

MUCCIO WITH RHEE AND MACARTHUR AFTER THE
RELOCATION CEREMONY. SEPTEMBER 29, 1950.



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX K

**PRESIDENT TRUMAN PRESENTS MUCCIO THE U.S. MEDAL OF
MERIT. OCTOBER 14. 1950.**



Source: Harry S. Truman Presidential Library. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph->

APPENDIX L

**PRESIDENT RHEE RECEIVES ARMY AND NAVY MEDAL FROM
MUCCIO. APRIL 3, 1951.**



Source: National Archives of the U.S.

APPENDIX M

**MR. AND MRS. RHEE GREETED BY GEN. VAN FLEET, MARCH 21,
1952.**



Source: National Archives of the U.S.