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August 20, 1954

Letter, Syngman Rhee to General James A. Van Fleet

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Summary:

Syngman Rhee writes to General James A. Van Fleet to express his dissatisfaction with the United States' defense commitment to South Korea and the rest of the free world. After describing his own "plan for military action" on the Korean Peninsula, Rhee also touches on South Korea's delicate relationship with Japan.

Credits:

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20 August, 1954

My dear General Van Fleet:

Since our return we have been working hard to send letters of thanks to our many friends and are still doing so.

The announcement made by U. S. radio that America will withdraw four divisions out of six in Korea has disturbed the Korean people very much.

We count on you, dear General, Ambassador Bullitt and Senator Knowland to continue to follow up work in America so that the proposal I made may not be misconstrued.

Now I think I should write a statement saying that I went to the U. S. with a definite plan for military action which would work, I believe, successfully in our effort to drive out the Communist Chinese forces beyond the Yalu River without risking another world war. When I suggested I had such a plan which I would reveal secretly to anyone the President might appoint, no one seemed to take any interest at all. On the contrary I was told that U.S. would not think of renewing the war in any way. I found that the U.S. would not fight Communism anywhere in the world so I told them that I would not reveal my plan to anyone.

I begin to regret that I believed the U.S. would not hesitate to go to any extent to defend her democratic principles and freedom of man, and now am getting disillusioned. I see no hope in defending any of the so-called free nations anywhere in the wide world and I feel that I should tell this whole story to the Korean people and let them decide whatever they want to do. If they deem it wise to open negotiations with the Communists, I will not interfere, but let them decide their own fate. I think they will be unified instead of waiting for America to sell them out as were the Chinese. I think Americans will never learn until the enemies bring the war into their own backyards.

I heard from our Minister in Tokyo that Ambassador Allison returned from Washington and told him that Japan will not make the 85% property claim again. I do not know whether the high level leaders have agreed to support our position in our relationship with Japan or not. At least Minister Allison told Mr. Kim that the Japanese are wrong. I told Kim that if the Japanese definitely agree in writing not to mention that preposterous claim again, and also to say they will withdraw the Kubota statement, we will attend the Conference again.

Vent.
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When Admiral Soha came to Los Angeles I outlined several points for his dealings with the U. S. negotiators and told him to consult with you before any new move was made. He reported he went directly to New York but you had gone to Florida and he was hoping you would return.

We are getting four engineers and contractors ready to leave in a few days for New York. They will go directly to Dr. Rusk and Mr. Zeckendorf.

I do hope Mrs. Van Fleet is well. It was so good to see you all again. We certainly enjoyed meeting the family and your many kindnesses to us are so much appreciated.

With good wishes.

Cordially yours,

General James A. Van Fleet,
Route 1, Box 114,
Auburndale,
FLORIDA.