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August 26, 1954

Letter, General James A. Van Fleet to Syngman Rhee

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Summary:

After the Korean War, General Van Fleet informs President Rhee that U.S. will bear the cost of rebuilding Korean military forces in order to facilitate the withdrawal of American troops from the Korean Peninsula in the future.

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August 26, 1954

His Excellency, Dr. Syngman Rhee
President, Republic of Korea
Seoul, Korea

Dear Mr. President:

I returned to Washington from Florida this week and have your letter of August 20. I have had several conferences with Mr. Paik, Minister Sohn, Generals Lee and Chung. Now I am in New York with Mr. Zeckendorf and will be leaving for Florida again at the end of the week.

I expect to see Mr. Paik, Minister Sohn and General Chung tomorrow and will give this letter to General Chung who, I believe, is leaving soon for Korea. He will give you a further report of anything which takes place at the last moment.

I do not believe that anything more can be accomplished in Washington at this time. Congress has adjourned, the President is in the West for six weeks or more, and even Mr. Wilson and many other leaders in the government are on vacation too.

All in all, I think we got a fairly good deal, except perhaps for the additional active divisions. But possibly this will come later as the American divisions are withdrawn.

Minister Sohn will be able to advise you about increases which Washington granted. While we are at present disappointed that no additional Korean division has been authorized for active duty, Mr. Wilson has approved the addition of ten divisions on a Reserve status. Of course, many divisions would not be effective for some time and when the Reserve divisions are fully activated and organized, they can be called to active duty for such periods of training as is essential and to meet any emergency.



Dr. Syngman Rhee

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The greatest gain, I believe, is in the allotment of sufficient money so that the cost of the Korean military forces is borne entirely by the United States. This will allow adequate pay and rations for your boys who are now suffering and will also permit the full amount of the economic aid to be applied to a recovery or building program.

I am most happy as regards this condition because I believe the most important thing now for Korea is a large building program for shelter. I have discussed this again in Washington and with Mr. Zeckendorf in New York and we are so pleased that the four engineers and contractors are on their way. I will keep in touch with this program which is so vital.

I do not know when I will be able to come to Korea, but possibly in the late fall. I may go to Iran and Pakistan in November and will include Korea in such a trip.

Mrs. Van Fleet was called to California due to the illness of her sister. She is better now and I expect Mrs. Van Fleet will be coming East about the 20th of September and we will be together again in Florida.

Your trip and position are still being talked about in the highest of terms. History will prove you right even though the United States does not see its way clear to back you and other Allies in limited wars.

I am publishing an article in the "United States News and World Report" in September and I hope to write some other articles for publication in the fall.

This is just a hurried note which General Chung will bring to you. With it comes our continued affection and highest regards.

Cordially,

James A. Van Fleet
James A. Van Fleet

JVF/ef