

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

21 April 1960

PART I

OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

CIVIL UNREST CONTINUES IN SOUTH KOREA

Despite the suppression of large-scale violence by the imposition of martial law in Seoul and other major population centers, there may be further mass upheavals. The spontaneous violence that has ripped the capital and other major population centers stems from public outrage over the Rhee regime's increasing use of police-state tactics during the past year, culminating in the rigged presidential elections on 15 March. The regime now must decide whether to continue, and perhaps increase, harsh repressive measures or to make concessions which may endanger its existence.

At the height of the rioting in Seoul, an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 students and other persons battled police and attempted to break into the presidential palace. About 100 were killed and well over 500 wounded by police gunfire. Only after the arrival of troops was a semblance of order restored. In South Korea's second largest city, Pusan, some 15,000 demonstrators attacked police.

Following the brutal police suppression of opposition demonstrators, including a great many students, in the southern port city of Masan on election day, Rhee accepted the resignation of the unpopular home minister and made other token concessions to public indignation. As late as 19 April, however, Rhee gave American Ambassador McConaughy no indication of recognizing the basic issues or of making any effective conciliatory moves.

On the contrary, he has been isolated from the true state of the crisis by his advisers and seemingly continues to believe that the mass rioting during the past month is the work of a small group of hoodlums and agitators manipulated by the Communists. Rhee has been "deeply impressed" by the concern shown by McConaughy, President Eisenhower, and Secretary Herter over his personal "welfare and safety."

Rhee on 21 April accepted the resignation of his cabinet, thus attempting to place himself above the debacle by having his subordinates take the responsibility. Reportedly slated for key positions in the new cabinet are Yi Pom-sok, former strong man of the disbanded National Youth Corps; Pyon Yong-tae, a political nonentity who once served as prime minister, and Ho Chong, a highly competent politician and former mayor of Seoul and adviser to Rhee who has been out of favor with the President for a number of years. The inclusion of Yi Pom-sok lends credibility to a reported Rhee statement of 20 April that he did not contemplate any easing of police-state methods, and that those who took part in the demonstrations would be treated as traitors to their country.

Leaders of Rhee's Liberal party have been divided between the advocates of a harsh policy and those who propose moderation. Many of the latter, however, have closely supported the government's repressive tactics and are now only maneuvering for increased power within the party.

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The US Embassy in Seoul has previously noted that many observers believed the regime was "deliberately and inexorably" moving toward absolutism. One [REDACTED] party member has stated that the backbone of the new party structure built for the elections was patterned on the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang.

The resentment which led to the present violence probably will remain deep-seated throughout the nation until reforms are effected. Ambassador McConaughy has observed that nothing short of new, fairly conducted national elections, at least for the vice presidency, will cope with the mounting resentment. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] speculated that vice President - elect Yi Ki-pung might resign.

Motivated by frustration over their future and outraged by recent police torturing and shooting of their companions, college and high school students have been in the forefront of the demonstrations and violence. The government has announced that 56 persons seized by the police in Masan were tortured. After the proclamation of martial law on 19 April, Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Song Yo-chan admitted receiving reports of police "reprisals" against the demonstrators. He stated that although he ordered such activities stopped immediately, he did not know if his orders were carried out. He added that during the rioting, the police "lost their heads" and "were in a frenzy."

Since the populace presumably bears less animosity toward the military forces than toward the police--the people of one Seoul area reportedly look on

the troops as protectors--efforts of the troops to maintain order are less likely to provoke further violence.

In any event, the armed forces are strong enough to impose the will of the government. The South Korean Army counter intelligence corps, however, has shown some concern over the loyalty of the junior officers and enlisted men, and some general officers have expressed regret over the army's role in the elections. There is a possibility that in the absence of constructive action by Rhee and with continued unrest, the armed forces might intervene to establish a temporary government acceptable to the people and to provide eventually for free elections.

During the disturbances there were no reports indicating anti-American sentiment, although the government seemingly had attempted to imply American support for its actions. The police announced on 17 April that the tear-gas bombs used to restore order in Masan were obtained through the US aid program. In a similar maneuver last year, the authorities based the closing of the outspoken pro-opposition Kyonghyang Sinmun, the country's second largest newspaper, on a US military government ordinance rather than on the then newly revised National Security Law. The administration had been strongly condemned for resorting to force to pass the revised law, which gave it virtually summary powers to suppress all criticism of the government.

Although the authorities--including President Rhee--have attempted to attribute the violence to Communist subversion, there has been no reliable

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evidence of Communist involvement. Some American observers, however, believe that the Communists may soon intervene unless the situation improves.

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Since the Masan riots, Pyongyang has concentrated on reporting and publicizing South Korean disturbances. Reporting has been quite factual and tailor-made to substantiate North Korean statements that the Rhee regime is corrupt, venal, and hated by the populace. Other Communist powers, including the USSR, have picked up South Korean police announcements that American Army supplies, particularly tear gas,

were used to quell the rioters in Seoul. A North Korean broadcast stated, "The weapons of the US imperialists are for suppressing the people." Pyongyang's commentary, although pledging sympathy and support for the demonstrators, has given no indication that the riots were Communist inspired or that North Korea intends to intervene.

There were some indications that the North Korean Air Force and air defense organizations were placed on an alert status during the riots, but by 21 April their activities had returned to normal. There have been no other reflections of a North Korean military reaction to the disturbances, and the air activity probably consisted of precautionary defensive measures rather than preparations for aggression. [REDACTED]

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