

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

28 April 1960

PART I
OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

SOUTH KOREA

Although no popular alternate leader to South Korea's former President Rhee has emerged, acting chief of state Ho Chong may become a power in his own right in the caretaker administration that will oversee new elections. Ho is a former prime minister and associate of Rhee, but more recently has been at odds with



the regime. He enjoys considerable popular prestige in Seoul, where he served as mayor in 1958-1959. His interim government is almost certain to require continued military support, since the populace, encouraged by the success of mass action, probably will continue to be easily aroused to violence if its expectations for reform are disappointed.

President Rhee sent his formal resignation to the National Assembly on 27 April following a new outbreak of

antigovernment demonstrations in Pusan, South Korea's second largest city. At the height of antigovernment violence in Seoul the day before, Rhee had announced that he would resign the presidency "if the people want me to do so," oust his chief political lieutenant, late Vice President-elect Yi Ki-pung, from all political offices, hold new elections, and amend the constitution to create a parliamentary form of government.

The rioting in Seoul on 26 April, which took some 20 student lives and wounded an estimated 136 other persons, appears to have been caused by Rhee's equivocal response to public demands for reform and redress of grievances. Rhee had appeared to be stalling, while attempting under the umbrella of martial law to consolidate his power.

Whether Rhee will attempt to succeed himself may depend on whether his supporters in the National Assembly are able, when the constitution is amended to establish a parliamentary form of government, to alter the election procedures to provide for the indirect election of the president by the legislature. The situation is further complicated by the demands of some opposition Democratic party lawmakers that an election for a new assembly should have priority over revision of the constitution. In any event, South Korean constitutional authorities have pointed out that new elections for the presidency and vice presidency must be held

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

28 April 1960

within 90 days or not later than 27 July to meet legal requirements.

Meanwhile, Ho Chong has moved ahead to appoint an interim cabinet. Rhee already had appointed Yi Ho and Kwon Sung-yol as home minister and justice minister respectively. While Yi is an improvement over his predecessor, Kwon's selection is questionable. Ambassador McConaughy has observed that those subsequently selected by Ho to fill out the cabinet are generally reputable figures who should be able to begin the cleaning-up process expected by the public, although Ho reportedly had difficulty finding men of top quality willing to serve in a caretaker government.

Ho is worried over whether he will be able to move fast enough to satisfy public expectations for reforms, should his administration fail to meet such expectations, or if Rhee should go back on his promise to retire from office, public disappointment and indignation could result in new and more violent demonstrations. For the time being, however, Seoul is reported returning to normal.

Lt. Gen. Song Yo-chan has ordered martial law relaxed, and students are cooperating with the authorities to restore order. The government has ordered all students and opposition political prisoners released by the police. The reopening on 27 April of the Kyonghyang Sinmun, South Korea's second largest newspaper which was closed last year for criticism of the government, is the first specific example of the redress of past wrongs.

During the demonstrations in Seoul on 25-26 April, the relationship between the populace and the troops responsible

for maintaining order was almost friendly. The latter scrupulously avoided shooting at the demonstrators and allowed their ranks to be breached and in some instances their tanks to be overrun by the crowd.

By contrast, the police have had to flee and hide and have been hesitant to reappear for fear of public reprisals. The students have demanded that those guilty of atrocities be punished. Members of both political parties have called for the police to be politically neutralized, and the new home minister has said this will be done. Until major organizational and personnel reforms are undertaken, it appears that the police will be incapable of carrying out even the normal functions of maintaining law and order.

The National Assembly has formed a nine-member bipartisan committee, including one independent member, to draft the constitutional amendment for establishing a parliamentary government, and has agreed that the election and controversial local autonomy laws should be amended immediately. The latter law substituted appointed for elected local executive officials, giving the regime direct control over almost every aspect of local life. The legislators also called for the resignation of members responsible for the fraudulent 15 March presidential elections.

The speaker of the National Assembly, Vice President-elect Yi Ki-pung, died along with the rest of his family at the presidential residence on 28 April. All allegedly were shot to death by Yi's elder son, the adopted son of President and Madam Rhee, who then shot himself.

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

28 April 1960

Although the opposition Democratic party has virulently attacked Rhee in the legislature and called for reforms and an end to repression, it has not as yet captured the loyalty of the general public. Factional strife has been resumed between the followers of party leader Chang Myon and the late Cho Pyong-ok. Party leaders have announced that the Democrats will not participate in any coalition.

There have been no indications that any government likely to emerge from the debacle of the Rhee regime will be unfriendly toward the United States. No incidents of anti-Americanism have been reported. Ambassador McConaughy has commented on the "genuinely warm and enthusiastic" reaction of the crowd to the role of the United States in the situation.

With the possible exception of a reaction by North Korean interceptors to an inadvertent violation of the demilitarized zone by a South Korean F-86 aircraft on 27 April, there have been no recent significant developments within the North Korean military establishment which can be linked to the situation in South Korea.

Pyongyang continues to devote its full propaganda attention to events in South Korea. Emphasis has shifted, however, from earlier expressions of sympathy for the demonstrators to attempts to influence the shape and direction to be taken by the emerging political authorities. North Korea demands the withdrawal of all American forces and the abolition of the whole South Korean government structure, stating that under present conditions even new general elections would only result in another "puppet regime."

Pyongyang requests talks between Koreans on both sides, establishment of a joint economic commission, and national general elections to set up a unified government. These elections should be held "without foreign interference," presumably meaning without international supervision. All the foregoing proposals suggest that North Korea is setting the stage to profess dissatisfaction with whatever type of government emerges from the present situation, while hoping its propaganda for unification on Communist terms can make some inroads during the existing confusion. [REDACTED]