

The Jeju 4.3 Uprising and the United States: Remembering Responsibility for the Massacre

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Abstract

In conjunction with the seventieth anniversary of the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, more and more people have started to raise their voice calling for the United States to be also held accountable and for it to make an apology. People have started to critically view the American role in the Cold War, its policies regarding the Korean peninsula and its responsibilities related to the tragic massacre on Jeju Island. This essay seeks to go along side this movement by reviewing some historical facts. The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), in order to successfully hold the South-only election to advance US interests, sought to strongly clamp down on the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. However, it avoided becoming directly involved in the actual suppression. The USAMGIK, through various reports, intelligence sources or witness testimonies, knew that punitive forces composed of the police and the military were indiscriminately massacring civilians. The military advisors reported on the excessive brutality shown by the punitive forces but did not do anything to stop it even though they had enough authority to do so. On the surface, the United States called for American-style democracy and criticized the barbaric violence committed by Koreans. In reality, however, the United States abetted or even instigated the massacres in Jeju.

Key Words: Jeju, 4.3 Uprising, Cheju do, May 10 General Election, Separate Election, Unification, U.S. Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK), Colonel Rothwell Brown, U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)

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1. Introduction

Liberation at last. The day has come. The day—depicted by the poet Sim Hun in his poem: “The day when the Samgak Mountain shall stand up and dance; The day when the waters of the Han River shall churn and rise up”—has finally come.

From the morning of August 16, 1945, youths, students and citizens started to flock towards Kyedong, Seoul, where the headquarters of the Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence was located. “A crowd of around 5,000 people gathered in the sports field of Whimoon Middle School to listen to the speech of Yō Wun-Hyōng and cheered the country’s independence. Yō Wun-Hyōng, wearing a white suit and surrounded by the crowd, delivered a passionate speech. It was a moment when both legendary figures like the independence leader Yō as well as ordinary Koreans all expressed joy of being liberated and high expectations for a new society that would soon dawn.”

However, the raptures of liberation did not last long. The militaries of the United States and the Soviet Union advanced onto the Korean peninsula, and a shadow began to cast over it. The XXIV Corps, led by Lt. General John Hodge, landed in Incheon on September 8. The next day, Japan signed the surrender document. As of 4 p.m. that day, raising the Japanese flag in the southern half of Korea became illegal, and the Japanese flag that had been hoisted at the front door of the Japanese Government General Headquarters was lowered at 4:30 p.m. However, the flag that was replaced was not the Korean flag but the American one. With the 38th parallel between them, the two external forces who had advanced onto the Korean peninsula, as well as their proxies, colluded with one another to produce the inter-Korean division. The joy of liberation and the yearning for a new world disappeared like a momentary dream, coming and going as quickly as thunder. This was the case also on Jeju Island, on the southern tip of the Korean peninsula.

Although the Jeju 4.3 Uprising broke out at dawn of April 3, 1948, with several beacons simultaneously being raised on Mt. Halla and the surrounding volcanic cones, the start cannot be seen separately from the three-year period after liberation. This liberated space was filled with days where even ordinary people

were overwhelmed with aspirations to establish a new nation and where everyday life was intertwined with politics. The hopes of the Jeju islanders towards a better life after liberation permeated throughout this three-year period after liberation. It was also filled, however, with walls that barred them, resistance of the Jeju people to overcome those barriers and also with their frustration.

There were two main reasons behind the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. One was defensive in nature. The islanders were trying to defend themselves against the continuous suppression by the US military, right-wing groups and the police ever since the police opened fire at the Jeju people on March 1, 1947. The uprising also occurred as part of the political struggle to establish a unified government by opposing the election scheduled to take place only in southern Korea. The movement to protest the separate election scheduled for May 10, 1948 spread nationwide, and the one in Jeju is historically assessed to be the most well-organized.

However, the consequences were dire. The number of people who died and officially accounted for by the National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju 4.3 Incident and Restoration of Victims' Honour amounts to 14,028. The official number was well over 10,000. However, the *Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report* estimated the actual number of deaths to be between 25,000 and 30,000, which was approximately one tenth of the entire Jeju population. The report also noted that "80% of them were killed by the anti-guerrilla expeditions."

Considering that the official number was based on voluntary reports by the victims or their families, one can assume that many more were killed. One tenth of the Jeju population had been sacrificed amidst the clash between the uprising led by the mountain inhabitants and the punitive expeditions by the military and police. The majority of the people who were killed were civilians but were nonetheless brandished as communists, and Jeju was referred to as a red island. The anti-communist regime labelled the Jeju 4.3 Uprising as a communist rebellion, after which came forty years of silence and taboo over the incident.

The reason why so many people died was because of the hardline suppression implemented by the punitive forces led by the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and the Syngman Rhee regime. As soon as the Jeju 4.3 Uprising occurred, the USAMGIK mobilized the National Defense Guard (NDG),

the police and right-wing youth groups into punitive expeditions. The US military government and the punitive forces perceived Jeju to be an island of communists and cracked down harshly. The scorched earth operations that took place after the official establishment of the Republic of Korea (ROK) also led to the massacre of many Jeju residents. Even after a government was set up, the United States, through its Military Advisory Group, continued to exercise operational command, issuing orders regarding suppression operations and turning a blind eye to reality.

The responsibility for the massacre lay with the United States, represented by its military government in Korea, as well as with the Syngman Rhee government. However, American responsibility has not been properly raised as an issue until now. The Korean government's role was recognized and more or less settled when the Special Act on Jeju 4.3 Incident was legislated in 2000 and the governmental *Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report* concluded that the Jeju incident was a case involving "violation of human rights by public authority." Recently, in conjunction with the 70th anniversary of the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, more and more people have started to raise their voice calling for the United States to be also held accountable and for it to make an apology. People have started to critically view the American role in the Cold War, its policies regarding the Korean peninsula and its responsibilities related to the tragic massacre on Jeju Island. This essay seeks to go along side this movement by reviewing some historical facts.

2. The Outbreak of the Jeju 4.3 Uprising and the Response of the USAMGIK

At dawn of April 3, 1948, beacons lit on Mt. Halla and the nearby volcanic cones, heralding the start of an armed rebellion. One of the demands the rebels made was the stop to the election due on May 10 in calling for the establishment of a unified independent government. The general election scheduled for May 10 was to take place only in southern Korea and so there were already many struggles opposing this election around the nation, causing a dilemma for the USAMGIK.

Amidst the nationwide opposition to the South-only election, the USAMGIK

desperately needed to hold the election successfully and justifiably by ensuring the highest turnout possible. Thus, on March 3, 1948, Lt. General Hodge, the commander of the US forces, issued a statement that read, “The importance of the election must be emphasized to the Koreans so that Koreans who have reached adulthood realize that one must fulfill one’s duty as a citizen and that a person who forfeits one’s right to vote shall lose the right to criticize the actions and policies of the government that has been established as a result of the election.” Then on April 2, he sent a telegraph to all subordinate commanding officers warning them of the dangers posed by the activities of communists and other opponents of the election who sought to obstruct the election. The telegraph shows well how the USAMGIK perceived the May 10 election.

The upcoming election in Korea will be an important period during our occupation. Succeeding in this effort, whereby Koreans will elect their representatives through a fair election, is fundamental to the achievement of the US delegation to Korea. It is expected that communists, minor political parties opposing the election and organizations that do not have any hope of getting a candidate elected will be against the election. In light of the events that have taken place until today, it is likely that there will be considerable opposition from the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) in relation to the execution of the election.

The Military Governor is responsible for the US monitoring of the election. With such aim, the Military Governor and his representatives have been authorized to directly contact any military unit in the region should support, including personnel and transport, be needed in order to perform their role as observers together with civilians.... Patrols will proactively be operated in each area in order to oversee general circumstances on the day of the election, however, unless there is a need to maintain order, uniformed servicemen cannot enter the voting stations.¹⁾

1) “Orders promulgated by the US Army Command and the USAMGIK in regard to the election in South Korea – Military Advisors Group, Express Dispatch Document No. 85,” *Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report 9* (National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident and Restoration of Victims’ Honour, 2001), 171.

As such, the USAMGIK aimed to successfully establish a separate government only in southern Korea that would be faithful to US interests. To that end, the success of the May 10 election had to be ensured first and foremost, and it was the duty of the USAMGIK to make this happen. The USAMGIK initiated administrative and legal measures necessary to implement the election, such as amending the Election Act and the Criminal Procedure Act, and establishing an election management committee. The USAMGIK designated the secretariat of the Korean Provisional Government to be the department in charge of election management and appointed Brigadier General John Weckerling to be in charge of election related affairs on behalf of the Military Governor. Also, the USAMGIK transformed the police forces to befit the election and mobilized forces to respond to protests against the election. For Lt. General Hodge, there was no alternative than to strengthen the police force amidst the circumstances that were unfolding in South Korea because the police was the strongest centralized organization.

When the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, aiming to stop the May 10 south-only election, broke out, the USAMGIK prepared the police and the NDG while keeping a close eye on the island. On April 5, the USAMGIK responded immediately by setting up the Jeju Emergency Defense Command and placed travel restrictions by imposing a travel permit system on the islanders. On April 7, Ian Milner, Deputy Principal Secretary of the UNTCOK reacted sensitively to the security situation in Jeju and expressed concern over the UNTCOK's scheduled visit to Jeju on April 9, at which Brigadier General John Weckerling, the liaison officer, met him on April 8. Weckerling said, "Not only have the police ramped up their forces but the defense guard has also been stationed a reserve force. The situation is well under control." So the UNTCOK started its observation activities as planned (Hur 2002, 70). On April 10, the USAMGIK sent 100 candidates of the National Police Academy as the second round of supporting units. Also special forces under the 9th Regiment of the NDG were also dispatched to the areas of Jeju-Eup and Seogwipo to maintain security together with the police.

USAMGIK seemed calm on the outside, but the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, opposing the South-only election, was a big problem. So, on one hand, it tried to calm the UNTCOK, which was performing election observation activities, and on the other

hand, initiated hardline suppression campaigns to ensure a successful election on Jeju Island.

Following the attacks from armed rebels in the beginning and middle of April, the police and the USAMGIK started all-out punitive operations from late April. Military Governor William Dean issued an order for the Coast Guard and NDG to be deployed for operations in Jeju. The joint operation involved deploying to Jeju a battalion of the NDG with support from the Coast Guard by April 20 and preparing them for battle. The NDG was provided with machine guns, carbines and ammunition. Then on April 18, he ordered punitive operations to be further implemented by additionally “deploying two L-5 planes and one battalion of the NDG. Daily reports should be given over a radio transmitter.”

In addition, he issued an order to simultaneously implement pacification maneuvers, saying, “Before a major attack, contact should be made with the leadership of the illegal group and give them a chance to surrender.”²⁾ Such circumstances manifested in the form of the so-called “April 28th Peace Accord” that was signed on April 28, 1948 between Commander of the 9th Regiment of the NDG, Kim Ik-Ryöl, and the leader of the rebel forces, Kim Tal-Sam.

The report that Lt. Colonel M.W. Schewe, Deputy Chief of Operations, submitted to Colonel Christian Tychsen, Chief of Operations, at the time showed clearly the stance of the USAMGIK regarding the actual contents of the April 28 Peace Accord and the insurgency in Jeju.³⁾ Lt. Colonel Schewe’s report contained the results of the operations undertaken on April 27-28 and also the operations plan for the period from April 29 through May 1. The report showed that the USAMGIK was well aware of the situation on Jeju Island, including the activities of the police, the atrocities of the right-wing youth groups and the organization of the guerilla forces as well as their level of attack.

However, the reason Schewe’s report is worthy of attention is not so much because of the evaluation of the circumstances unfolding in Jeju at the time but rather because of the intention and the role of the USAMGIK hidden underneath

2) These orders were issued by Military Governor William Dean to the commanding officer of the 59th US Military Government Company on April 18, 1948. NARA, RG338, Entry No. 11070, Box No. 84.

3) “Report of Activities at Cheju do Island,” NARA, RG 338, Entry No. 1070, Box No. 68.

the surface. Under orders from Colonel Tychsen, Lt. Colonel Schewe went to Jeju Island on April 27, 1948. He consulted with Lt. Colonel John Mansfield, who was the commander of the 59th US Military Government Company, Colonel Rothwell Brown of the 20th Regiment, Lt. Commander Geist and Captain De Reus, advisor for the 5th Regiment of the Korean army, and implemented punitive expeditions against the guerillas. On April 28, there was the so-called Peace Accord talks, and on April 29, Military Governor Dean visited Jeju. Then on May 1, the punitive forces composed of the military and the police set Ora-ri on fire in order to hinder the peace talks. It was during this critical period that Lt. Colonel Schewe went to Jeju in person to consult the operations with Colonel Brown and other leaders of the punitive forces and then implemented the operations. This can be assumed from the contents of the report as follows.

Operational plan number 2, to be executed on April 28, was discussed thoroughly between Colonel Kim, Major Mun, Captain De Reus, Captain Burns who is advisor to the Korean police, and Mr Merritt. Lt. Colonel Schewe participated in these discussions at all times but he observed only. However, he did tell Colonel Kim that the US Commander took serious the fact that operations in Jeju must succeed, and furthermore, that the South Korean people were paying high attention to whether the military succeeded because it was responsible for the security in Korea. For these reasons, it was crucial Colonel Kim did not fail. Colonel Kim said he understood fully and that the NDG shall perform its role. (Emphasis added)

The USAMGIK, in order to successfully hold the south-only election to advance US interests, sought to strongly clamp down on the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. However, it avoided becoming directly involved in the actual suppression. Being under the spotlight of the international community, the US had to hide the panic it was feeling due to the possible disruption of the election. It had to remain behind the scenes and let its proxies – the Korean military and the police – do the actual suppressing of the rebellion. The orders from the US Forcesb Commander, which was delivered through Colonel Brown, specifically mentioned that “The US military must not become involved.”⁴⁾ In other words, the USAMGIK was not

to be apart of the field operations and act as the ‘invisible hand’ but nonetheless establish all operational plans and implement them through the NDG and the police.

In fact, the US military even filmed the burning of the Ora-ri village. The result was a documentary film titled *May Day*, made by the US Army’s communications unit.⁵⁾ The film was about “the police advancing onto the burning village and the villagers testifying about the arson.” Also, there were scenes filmed from US military planes of aerial views of Jeju Island, Military Governor Dean, Civil Administrator Ahn Chae-Hong, the landing of the Commander of the 9th Regiment of the NDG, Kim Ik-Ryöl, the lining up of US soldiers, views of Mt. Halla, conversation between Military Governor Dean and Lt. Colonel Mansfield, Governor Dean’s tour of the seas and villages in Jeju and him looking out onto the ocean.

The Ora-ri incident that was filmed involved the police setting a village on fire and killing the villagers but then fabricating the case so that the rebels would be framed as the perpetrators. The USAMGIK, which was under the limelight of the international community, had to successfully hold the election while hiding in the shadows. To do so, the rebellion had to be cracked down by the Korean military, police and right-wing youth groups. Major General Dean visited Jeju twice in order to eliminate any elements that were against US interests and to forge the basis for hardline punitive operations on the island.

The stance the USAMGIK had of Jeju Island was clearly expressed in the essays written by Ahn Chae-Hong, then Civil Administrator.

In the beginning of May 1948, there was a time I flew to Jeju together with the Director of the National Police Cho Pyöng-Ok, the NDG Commander Song Ho-Söng and Military Governor Dean. It was to suppress the Jeju riots, which were becoming more and more serious after they first erupted on 3rd April 1948. ... When

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- 4) a. The NDG must immediately perform its duty.
 b. Citizens must stop all disorderly behavior.
 c. Strong unity must be formed between NDG and the police in order to quickly weaken guerilla activities.
 d. The US military must not become involved.
- 5) “Cheju Do May Day” NARA, RG 111, ADC 7114.

we came back to Seoul, director of military advisor William Roberts called in Director Cho and Commander Song separately and said, “The United States needs Jeju militarily. So we’ve made an airbase at Mosŭlp’o on Jeju Island. The United States needs Jeju but not the Jeju people. We must secure Jeju even if it means killing everyone on it (Ahn 1965).”

For the USAMGIK, Jeju Island was merely a military base necessary in fulfilling the interests of the United States, and those who were living there were not a part of its consideration. In light of such view held by the leadership of the US military, it is of no surprise that violent suppression took place on the island.

Finally, the day after April 28, Major General Dean went to Jeju himself, and American families who were living there were evacuated. On May 5, he went back to Jeju leading the top leaders of USAMGIK, dismissed Lt. Colonel Kim Ik-Ryŏl for leading the peace talks, appointed Lt. Colonel Park Chin-Kyŏng and opted for all-out punitive operations.

3. Attempts to Stop the May 10 Election and the Response of the USAMGIK

As tensions in southern Korea escalated, between May 1 (May Day) and the election on May 10, the U.S. Department of the Army imposed a travel ban in Korea for families of its servicemen stationed in Korea. As of the afternoon of April 30 until the morning of May 3, Lt. General Hodge issued a special alert on US forces in South Korea, in response to possible left-wing insurgency. Through the alert, Lt. General Hodge ordered all military vehicles to be accompanied by armed convoys, security of major facilities strengthened and all Americans to abide by a curfew from 11 p.m. on April 30 to dawn of May 1.

On May 8, with the election just two days away, the US military command once again issued another special alert with regard to its forces stationed in South Korea. It was issuing this alert in order to support its Korean counterparts in their

attempts to stamp out any communist attacks targeting the election and stated that the police would fulfill its role. The alert also included measures such as mandating all Americans to carry weapons, patrol teams to always be armed and other forces to also prepare for any emergencies. On the day of the election, a cruiser and a destroyer entered South Korean territorial waters.

The police also transitioned to election mode. On April 30, the Director of the National Police, Cho Pyōng-Ok issued a statement regarding security and policing in preparation for the election and ordered the full mobilization of the *Hyangpotan* (Homeland Defense Corps) and the police to keep surveillance over major spots on the roads that led to and from voting stations and other important areas on the actual day of the election. Then on May 3, he set up an Emergency Police Command within the National Police, as well as in each administrative district, to prevent any interference to the election by anti-election forces. Then on May 7, Cho Pyōng-Ok announced the police's security measures for the day of the election.

The promulgated measures included, "First, each neighborhood shall be guarded by self-defense forces of the *Hyangpotan*. Second, in the high-risk areas located on the roads that linked villages and voting stations, the police and the *Hyangpotan* shall jointly be on guard. Third, in areas nearby the voting stations, the police and *Hyangpotan* shall jointly be on guard. Fourth, police squads shall guard the police station in their relevant jurisdiction and the newly organized squads shall patrol the precincts within the jurisdiction." On the day of the election, fully uniformed police officers were armed and hidden away from the eyes of the general public in groups of twenty nearby the voting stations, while plain-clothed detectives were also armed and placed in ones or twos at every voting station. Three squads of mounted police were also deployed in various areas on the roads. Special action units and bicycle units were formed and also placed.

As such, the May 10 election was held amidst the high alert status of the US military, and a forbidding atmosphere created by heavy guard by armed police, members of the *Hyangpotan* and right-wing youth groups.

However, the heavy security measures taken by USAMGIK and the police were not enough to stop the struggles by left-wing groups and the general public

opposed to the south-only election. In most areas around the country, there were attacks on election management offices, people were killed or injured, arsons were committed and anti-election protests were organized. On Jeju Island, many election-related civil servants, in fear of retaliation from the guerillas, rejected performing election-related duties such as checking the voter registration etc., leading to difficulties in implementing the ballot. In the case of Choch'ŏn-myŏn, around 50% of election management personnel quit. A total of sixty-five voting stations became dysfunctional on the day of the election, and in the case of around 50% of northern part of Jeju, military government officials had to step in and help out with distribution and collection of election-related material. The areas that recorded the highest level of violence were Jeju Island and the North Gyeongsang Province.⁶⁾

Table 1. Status of Election-Related Riots, May 5-May 11 (2 p.m.)

		North Gyeongsang	South Gyeongsang	North Jeolla	South Jeolla	Seoul	North Chungcheong	South Chungcheong	Gangwon	Gyeonggi	Jeju
Police	Dead	1	3		2					1	1
	Injured	2		1						4	21
	Missing										
Candidate	Dead					1					
	Injured							1			
	Missing										
Election officer	Dead	1	1		2						
	Injured		1								
	Missing		2								
Right-winger	Dead	8	1			2			2		14
	Injured	18	1	2		1		1	2	2	5
	Missing										
Communist	Dead	20			1	3			2	2	21
	Injured	4				2				3	
	Missing										
	Arrested	177	56			110		4	29	17	

6) Hq. USAFIK, G-2 Weekly Summary No. 139, May 7-14, 1948.

Attacks on police precinct	5	4		2	6			1	7	
Destruction of trains	17		2	1			2		1	
Cutting of rail tracks	2									
Destruction of bridges				5				1		
Cutting of phone lines	3	6	3	5			1	5		
Destruction of ballot boxes	1	2		60				1		
Loss of blank ballots (In 100's)	7									
Loss of ballots (In 100's)										
Strikes	11	2		3	2					
Cutting of electricity	3									
Attacks on voting stations	13	4			9			2	7	1
Arson	Homes	2					2	1		22
	Public buildings				1		2		4	
	Attacks on homes	1					1	8		

Source: Hq. USAFIK, G-2 Periodic Report No. 831, May 11, 1948.

Because of the seriousness of the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, which rose in opposition to the May 10 election, US soldiers directly had to get involved despite orders that Americans should not enter the voting stations. American soldiers had to work on the ground directly in relation to the election, performing analysis of places that have been attacked, taking surveys, transporting and checking the ballot boxes, collecting information, performing surveillance from military planes, among other things. In some villages, US soldiers had to transport the ballot boxes themselves to prevent them from being stolen (Jemin Ilbo Jeju 4.3 Uprising Reporting Team 1994, 202-212).

Furthermore, the USAMGIK dispatched election observation officers to various regions to keep an eye on the election. Three groups were formed to observe the election in the case of Jeju. Captain Spear, an officer with the USAMGIK, Captain Taylor and First Lieutenant Bernheisel were dispatched from Seoul to go to Jeju on May 5, observed the election together with the officers from the 59th US Military Government Company, and then returned to Seoul on May 15. They

submitted to USAMGIK their overall report together with the election observation report written by the three groups. The following is a summary of the report.⁷⁾

Lt. Colonel Mansfield, the Civil Administrator of Jeju, on May 6, which was the day after they arrived, allocated them to various areas so that they could perform their observation duties. First Lieutenant Bernheisel was placed in Kuchwa-myŏn, and Captain Kelly in Choch'ŏn-Myŏn. On May 7, these two officers visited the voting stations in their allocated areas and delivered the ballot papers to relevant district offices, however, the observation results for the two districts differed. Captain Kelly, in regard to Choch'ŏn-Myŏn (township) said, "It seems that the destructive groups have completely gained control. Choch'ŏn-Myŏn has fallen into a state of hopeless chaos in regard to regulatory election procedures." On the night before the election, anti-election leaflets were disseminated in many places in the *myŏn*, blockades were set up on the roads and telephone lines were cut in many places. On the other hand, election preparations in Kuchwa-Myŏn were assessed to have taken place excellently. All election procedures in Kuchwa-Myŏn were considered to have followed the general election enforcement ordinance.

Captain Spear was in charge of Aewol-Myŏn, Hanlim-Myŏn and Ch'ucha-Myŏn in North Jeju-Kun (county). The Captain, who visited Aewol-Myŏn and Hanlim-Myŏn on May 7, found all sorts of road blockades and leaflets distributed by the guerillas, and that residents of two villages had gone up to the mountains. After the election, on May 12, the residents of Aewol-Myŏn were confirmed to have come back down. The turnout of registered voters for Aewol-Myŏn was a mere 32% while for Hanlim-Myŏn, it was 70%.

Captain Taylor evaluated that the constituency of South Jeju-Kun performed well, enough for it to be considered the 'only' successful election among the three constituencies in Jeju at the time.

7) "Report of Election Observation-Cheju Do," NARA, Record of the Department of State Decimal File 895, LM 80, Roll 3.

These officers were limited in the sense they were only able to tour the voting stations and talk with some of the voters accompanied by an interpreter. Therefore, they could not get more specific details regarding the election. However, they seemed to have quite an accurate sense of how the election had been prepared in Jeju and how it went. They had detailed knowledge about which areas had witnessed intense opposition and which areas had not.

The movement to stop the south-only election of May 10 spread nationwide and the Jeju 4.3 Uprising has historically been assessed to be the most organized out of all the struggles that took place during this period.

The general election was opposed not only by the left-wing groups but also by some nationalist leaders including Kim Ku because it was to take place only in southern Korea. The question raised by the May 10 was not about who should be elected; rather, it was about whether such a separate election should take place at all. Therefore, whether to participate or not in the election was an important matter. The Jeju rebels placed their entire focus on stopping the election. As part of their activities to do so, the rebel leaders targeted people working in the election management committees, civil servants and candidates through terrorist acts. They also tried to stop the Jeju people from registering themselves as voters.

Ultimately, out of the three constituencies on Jeju Island, two in the northern region had their election nullified due to lack of voter turnout. Re-election was supposed to take place there on June 23, however, eventually the election was postponed indefinitely.

The USAMGIK, when the Jeju 4.3 Uprising calling for the stop to the south-only election erupted, did all it could in order to push ahead with the election on May 10, implementing punitive operations led by the NDG and also using pacification maneuvers. However, the attempts of USAMGIK turned out to be unsuccessful on Jeju Island, damaging the pride of the USAMGIK and the United States as a whole. Thus, the USAMGIK, in order to recover its fallen authority and to successfully launch a separate government in South Korea, continued to forcefully suppress the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. When the May election failed, the USAMGIK immediately deployed a destroyer to the coast of the island and sent Colonel Brown of the 20th Regiment of the 6th Division to Jeju as the highest

commander, with the mandate of overseeing the NDG and the police in their indiscriminate arrests of Jeju islanders.

4. The View of the USAMGIK after the Election and Hardline Suppression

Colonel Brown assumed the highest command over not just the military advisors in Jeju but also over the NDG and the police stationed on the island. He commanded and oversaw all operations there. Also, Lt. General Hodge of the US Forces Command ordered the 59th Military Government Company stationed on Jeju and all Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) units to support Colonel Brown using all possible means.

Colonel Brown, endowed with the highest commanding authority, visited Jeju in May 1948 and kept an eye on the situation there until the end of the June and submitted a report, entitled “Report of Activities on Cheju-Do from 22 May 48 to 30 June 1948” on July 1, 1948, to the commander of the USAMGIK.⁸⁾ This was a very important document in the sense that it showed quite clearly the stance of and the measures taken by the US and the USAMGIK in regard to the Jeju 4.3 Uprising in the wake of its eruption.

The report dealt with six topics—intelligence about the Worker’s Party of South Korea (WPSK) gained by interrogating Jeju islanders; possibility of links between the Jeju population and the WPSK; factors that led to the activities of the Communist Party being successfully manifested through the WPSK on Jeju Island before the May 10 election; factors behind the success of rebels in incapacitating

8) “Report of Activities on Cheju-Do from 22 May 48 to 30 June 1948,” NARA, RG 338, Entry No. 11070, Box No. 68. Reports by Colonel Brown (*Rothell H. Brown Papers*), including the abovementioned document, are archived not only in NARA but also at the US Military History Institute, located within the US Military War College, Pennsylvania. Documents written by General Orlando Ward (*The Orlando W. Ward Papers, Korea, 1946–1949 and Other Material*), who led the 6th Infantry Division, are also archived in the same institute. Although the *Rothell H. Brown Papers* consists of just one folder, it contains a lot of useful information about the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. There are also details about the Worker’s Party of South Korea. There are also two folders of letters written between 1950 to 1963, after he left his post in Korea. Colonel Brown, after he wrote the “Report of Activities on Cheju-Do,” was relieved from his position as the commanding officer of the 20th Regiment of the 6th Division and subsequently left Korea.

the election and rioting during election; measures taken on May 22, 1948 to crack down on riots; and recommended measures taken to prevent re-organization of riots”—and proved that USAMGIK at the time had a clear picture of what was happening on Jeju Island. Main points of the report can be summarized as the following.

In regard to the link between the Jeju islanders and the WPSK, Brown found that “It is estimated that not more than six trained propagandists and organizers had been dispatched from the main land in order to establish a WPSK organization in Jeju. Also, 500 to 700 supporters, including those who had an understanding of communist ideology and its aims, are estimated to be participating in activities together with these six special organizers. It is clear that the 6,000 to 7,000 residents who seem to have joined the WPSK did not do so with proper understanding of communist ideas nor under the wish of joining such an organization. They seemed to have been easily won over by the financial guarantees proposed by the WPSK because they were poor.” Furthermore, he pinpointed, as a factor that led the WPSK activities to succeed in Jeju, “the ignorance of civilian-duty officers of the 59th US Military Government Company regarding the Communist Party and their failure to maintain control over the Jeju police, corruption and unproductiveness of Korean government officials, poverty, and lack of cooperation between the US Military Government Company and the Counterintelligence Corps.” He also pointed out, “Excessively cruel acts of terror were committed by the reserve police forces that arrived in Jeju.”

Brown went on to recommend, that in order to suppress the riots, “First, one NDG regiment should be stationed in Jeju at least for a year. Second, the Jeju police needs to be reorganized to become more efficient and better trained. Third, US-style programs should be implemented in order to prevent the reoccurrence of the riots. Fourth, rid the administrative bodies in Jeju of corruption and inefficiency as much as possible.”

Colonel Brown knew, quite correctly, that one of the reasons behind the Jeju

4.3 Uprising was violent suppression by the police. However, his actual perception of the situation and his corresponding response were different. This following excerpt shows what Colonel Brown's real perception was of the situation.

I am well aware that there are differing opinions as to why the riots took place. I hope that my report will show the reality on Jeju Island as it is. One thing I can guarantee is that Jeju Island has been organized as the base camp of communists. Criticisms that the riots had occurred because of barbarism of the police or inefficient functioning of the government are minor compared to the intentions the communists have in regard to the island.⁹⁾

Colonel Brown ignored all other causes for the Jeju 4.3 Uprising and considered the rebellion to have taken place only because Jeju was the base camp for communists and that it was maneuvered only according to the intentions of the communists. He knew about the violence committed by the police and the Northwest (*Sōpuk*) Youth League, the poverty, yearning for reunification and other reasons for the rebellion. However, he intentionally ignored these factors. He had to brandish Jeju as an island of communists in order to justify the punitive operations. In other words, the stance of Colonel Brown was basically "I don't care why the Jeju 4.3 Uprising took place. My sole duty lies in suppression." This kind of perspective also resonated with the policies of USAMGIK.

Colonel Brown's stance and method of dealing with the situation, including turning a blind eye to the actual cause of the rebellion, were reflected first and foremost in his Pacification Plan, which involved combing through the entire island. The strategy was to isolate the mid-mountain regions and then implement indiscriminate punitive expeditions through the island, as if combing through it. As a result of this plan, from late May until late June 1948, 5,000 people were arrested and terror was instilled in the minds of the islanders.

As part of its pacification activities targeting the populace, Colonel Brown declared a plan to stop the summer grains collection program in 1948, after having

9) These words come from the *Rothell H. Brown Papers*, in a letter he sent to his superior, the commanding officer of the 6th Division, Orlando Ward. NARA, RG 338, Entry No. 11071, Box No. 2.

talks with Choi Ch'ŏn, commander of the Jeju Emergency Guard. He announced and assured on the same day, "Before I came to Jeju, I heard reports that there was no cooperation between the police, the army and the navy. That will no longer be the case. ... During the May 10 election, we didn't fare so well. But we will protect the people so that during the re-election of June 23, they will be able to truly freely elect their representative."

The appointment of Colonel Brown showed how USAMGIK was fully committed to forcefully suppressing the Jeju 4.3 Uprising because it had led to the failure of the May 10 election thereby bringing disgrace to the US. The authorities also wanted to ensure the success of the re-election. Thus, Colonel Brown initiated activities to prepare for the June re-election—the May election being the only failed election in southern Korea. After Colonel Brown's mid-mountain region isolation operation, the 11th Regiment led by Pak Chin-Kyŏng implemented a full-fledged arrest operation. Colonel Brown scoured the mid-mountain regions, receiving updates from the NDG and encouraging operations (Jemin Ilbo Jeju 4.3 Uprising Reporting Team 1994, 154-197). James Leadh, an operations chief, working under Colonel Brown, participated in and led majority of the operations.¹⁰⁾

Although Colonel Brown had guaranteed that the isolation of the mid-mountain regions and combing of the island should quell the circumstances on Jeju by the time of the re-election of June 23, his indiscriminate suppression operation was rendered unsuccessful. In the end, when USAMGIK failed to calm the situation enough to push ahead with the June re-election, it promulgated its Administrative Order No. 22 on June 10, indefinitely postponing the re-election in Jeju in order, it argued, to ensure peaceful and orderly election to represent the views of the people. It had decided that if the re-election took place without the chaos being completely clamped down, then the circumstances could deteriorate even further.¹¹⁾

With the re-election indefinitely postponed, USAMGIK cracked down even harder. Four battalions, each composed of one battalion and two companies of

10) Testimony by Charles L. Wesolowsky (advisor to the 9th Regiment at the time of the uprising), Florida, US, October 22-23, 2001.

11) GHQ. FEC, G-2 Intelligence Summary No. 2134, June 17, 1948.

NDG, were deployed in north, south, east and west of the island. An operation, involving all battalions marching inland towards the same target in the mountainous region, was implemented. As a result of this operation, 3,000 people were arrested, and 575 people were interrogated by four teams composed of NDG and the US military.¹²⁾

Amist the forbidding atmosphere ensuing the indefinite postponement of the re-election, on June 18, Colonel Pak Chin-Kyŏng, commander of the 9th Regiment, was assassinated. The assassination of Pak, known to be one of the best among commanding officers and field commanders in Korea, gained serious attention of USAMGIK. Therefore, not only Military Governor Dean but also Military Advisor Roberts and other chiefs all travelled down to Jeju. The CIC and the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and the police initiated a thorough investigation. The assassination of Pak by one of his subordinates led Brigadier General Roberts to take on even stronger measures. NDG members were disarmed and the military even underwent a purge. The purge in the wake of Pak's assassination was the first ever to take place in the Korean military.¹³⁾

In June, Roberts, a military advisor, dispatched First Lieutenant Wesolowsky as an advisor to the 9th Regiment of the NDG. The commanding officer of the 9th Regiment at the time was Song Yo-Chan, who used to be the deputy commanding officer of the 11th Regiment. Under orders from Brigadier General Roberts, First Lieutenant Wesolowsky became the operations advisor.

Wesolowsky had participated in several crack down operations together with the 11th Regiment and was proactive enough to participate in an operation even on top of the Witse-Orŭm. The terrain was rough, and they had to use cows to supply materials because it was inaccessible by vehicles. Although they had spent two to three weeks in a mop-up operation from the south towards Mt. Halla, they were unable to achieve anything.

With the government inauguration coming up, Major General Dean, based on reports by Colonel Brown, ordered the civil affairs minister for Jeju, Edgar A.

12) Hq. UAFIK, G-2 Weekly Summary No. 144, June 18, 1948.

13) *History of Wars in Korea: Liberation and Establishment of the Military* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense War History Publishing Committee, 1967), 441.

Noel, to fully implement all recommendations made by Colonel Brown, and at the same time, ensured that “all methods shall be mobilized” to protect the safety of the Jeju people. Also, he ordered all government ministries in South Korea to “prioritize the Jeju issue.”¹⁴⁾

Such perception and actions of USAMGIK showed that their operations on Jeju Island were not succeeding. The USAMGIK had to face establishment of the Republic of Korea after having experienced the failure of the May 10 election and lack of achievement from Colonel Brown’s crack down operations. For the United States, there had to be no hindrance to the inauguration, and so the Jeju situation was a dilemma.

Even after the formal establishment of the State, the US military continued to hold operational command over the Korean military, gained detailed intelligence on the situation in Jeju and led the operations there. Until the withdrawal of US troops on June 30, 1949, in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the US Forces Command continued to exercise commandship over the Korean military. Based on the SOFA, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG; Commanding officer: Brigadier General Roberts) was responsible for the organization, administration, equipment and training of the Korean Army, Coast Guard, National Police and other security forces.

After the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion of October 1948, tactics used in Jeju were switched to scorched earth operations. This switch was the result of a policy decision taken by the KMAG. American advisors stationed in Jeju remained there until the US troops withdrew, giving advice on operations and training Korean soldiers.¹⁵⁾ Colonel Fuller, an member of KMAG, pointed out that the US should continue to pay attention to the operations and intervene, saying, “The Jeju rebels are slowly being suppressed due to the proactive advancement of Lt. Colonel Song Yo-Chan. If the US troops withdraw, advisors must act as replacement.”¹⁶⁾

14) *Brown Report*.

15) “From Brigadier General Roberts to the US Military Commander—Weekly Activities of KMAG, 3rd September 1948,” *Jeju 4-3 Incident Investigation Report* 8 (National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident and Restoration of Victims’ Honour, 2001), 71.

16) “From Head of MMAG to the US Military Commander—Weekly Activities of KMAG, 6th December 1948,” *Jeju 4-3 Incident Investigation Report* 8 (National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident and Restoration of Victims’ Honour, 2001), 74–76.

The report did note, in several places, concerns over the NDG's hardline operations. However, Brigadier General Roberts approved of such measures on December 20 to the extent, "The scorched earth operations of the NDG under the commandship of Song Yo-Chan should be praised and be made known through the media and the President."¹⁷) Even during the spring of 1949, when armed struggles were nearly over, the United States continued to pay attention to the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. On March 10, 1949, Drumright, counselor at the US Embassy, sent a letter regarding Jeju to Brigadier General Roberts and told him, "Jeju is facing a serious situation and proactive measures to overcome the situation have to be taken."¹⁸) Roberts said that he had "sent a strongly worded letter to the Korean president and the prime minister regarding the guerillas and the military operations on Jeju Island."¹⁹)

US Ambassador to Korea, John J. Muccio, met President Syngman Rhee on April 4, 1949 and expressed his views on the suppression in Jeju, saying, "Korea must eliminate the guerilla groups that are rampant on Jeju Island and in South Jeolla Province, train security forces and thereby strongly establish its position in South Korea." These words, which nuanced Muccio's hardline stance, were also manifested through the distorted view he had over the Jeju 4.3 Uprising in the report he submitted to the Secretary of State.²⁰)

The fact that Jeju has been selected as a place for the Soviet Union to exert its major efforts and to commit terrorist acts and cast South Korea into chaos has been made all too clear by the propaganda that has poured out from a Soviet-controlled radio broadcaster. Such operations (commit terrorist acts and cast South Korea into chaos) are also taking place in South Jeolla Province and South Gyeongnam

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- 17) Brigadier General Roberts wrote in official **documents that** there was perfect cooperation with the Jeju people under the command of Song Yo-Chan, commanding officer of the NDG 9th Regiment.
- 18) "From Drumright to General Roberts," *Jeju 4-3 Incident Investigation Report* 10 (National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident and Restoration of Victims' Honour, 2001), 102-103.
- 19) "From Brigadier Roberts to Drumright," *Jeju 4-3 Incident Investigation Report* 11 (National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident and Restoration of Victims' Honour, 2001), 4-66.
- 20) "From Special Envoy Muccio to the Secretary of State, 9th April 1948," NARA, RG319, Entry No. 57, Box No. 59.

Province, which are parts of the mainland peninsula just north of Jeju. Under such circumstances in the posterior regions of the Republic of Korea, President Rhee has no other choice but to decide decimation of the riots and other elements leading to insecurity. Only then can we prevent wasting away the defense guards at the 38th Parallel in massacres that communists want to continue on the Korean stage.

It is all too clear that Soviet agents are infiltrating the island without any difficulty. Minister Sin Söng-Mo has argued that majority of them had landed (in Jeju) after sailing from North Korea in small fishing boats. Although the Korean Coast Guard is trying to patrol the coastline of the island, Sin Söng-Mo claims that with the small number of crew on board the coast guard vessels, it is impossible to set up a complete block (to the island). During the time this issue was being debated between the Prime Minister and Minister Sin, and also in the National Assembly, there were constant reports that Soviet vessels and submarines were circling the coasts of Jeju.

Muccio said, “The USSR chose Jeju Island to be its base camp for terrorist activities in South Korea, and Soviet agents are infiltrating the island without any difficulty.” Such perception was completely different from that of USAMGIK in regard to the rebellion. Until then, the only connection USAMGIK made between left-wing forces and the Jeju 4.3 Uprising was that the insurgency was instigated by the SKLP. Or, if a slight exaggeration is to be made, then the connection could extend a little further to North Korea. Jeju had never been considered a satellite base of the USSR. Although even the advisors working on the ground in Jeju had said they had seen no signs of external forces having infiltrated the island, these words of Muccio gave President Rhee even more legitimacy to implement punitive operations on the island.

After President Rhee’s visit to Jeju Island, the US Embassy reported to the State Department, “The full-fledged mop-up operations that had started in March have, *de facto*, come to an end by late April, and most of the rebels and their supporters have either been killed or arrested, and have converted their ideology.” The

situation on Jeju was reported to the State Department on a regular basis. Present status of the rebels and the islanders, food levels, the re-election that took place on May 10, 1949 among other issues were checked upon. Ultimately, after about a year of operations, the armed struggle on Jeju Island came to an end, and on May 10, 1949, a re-election took place.

As John Merrill has pointed out, the very fact that a rebellion had taken place showed that the occupation policy of the United States—claiming it would develop a resilient political system in South Korea and establish democracy befitting actual circumstances—had failed. Never before anywhere in the world has there been such a fierce popular resistance against an occupying force during the post-war period as there was in Jeju (Merrill 1988, 74).

The price that was paid for the insurgency was harsh. People died not just as a result of cross-fire. Many civilians were massacred. The USAMGIK, which was busy behind the scenes, were not as readily apparent as the Korean police and the military. Nonetheless, the United States cannot be absolved from the responsibility for the massacre in Jeju.

5. Conclusion

The United States submitted the Korean question to the UN on September 17, 1947. By transferring the Korean question to the UN, which was under American influence, the United States sought to address the Korean question in a way that would serve its interests. As a result, the resolution of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, which sought to establish an independent and unified Korean state based Soviet-American agreement, came to be abandoned. The UN, at its General Assembly on November 14, 1947, formed the UNTCOK and resolved that a demographically proportional general election encompassing both North and South Korea would take place.

On January 8, 1948, the UNTCOK came to South Korea. However, the Soviet Union and North Korea rejected entry of UNTCOK, stating, “An autonomous provisional government has to be set up after the withdrawal of both American

and Soviet troops.” The UN then passed a resolution to hold an election where it was possible at its Interim Committee meeting on February 26. The date for the election was set to be May 10.

The news that a separate election would take place only in the South was a shock to Koreans who had dreamt of an independent state. It was not just the left-wing factions or centralists who were against the election being held only in South Korea. Right-wing national leaders like Kim Ku and Kim Kyu-Sik were also strongly against the south-only election. There were struggles against South-only election and South-only establishment of government all around the nation, the most well-organized of them being the one in Jeju. And it was there that an armed uprising took place at dawn of April 3, 1948 calling for a stop to the South-only election.

The American submission of the Korean question to the UN was represented a breach of the agreement with the Soviet Union at Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers. The United States faced the burden of having to make the separate election in southern Korea successful, especially given the amount of international attention on it. Therefore, the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, which essentially was a movement resisting the separate election, was disturbing for the United States to say the least.

Just after the rebellion broke out, Military Governor Dean maintained a hardline stance and constantly delivered his view to those on the ground in charge of Jeju through his communications officers that the only way to resolve the Jeju issue quickly was scorched earth operations. The United States held commanding authority over the suppression operations executed on Jeju Island, and Colonel Brown also dealt with Jeju firmly. In fact, the mass deployment of members of the Northwest Youth League, which played the role of a vanguard in perpetrating the massacre in Jeju, would not have been possible without the approval of the USAMGIK.

The role of the US military continued even after the formal establishment of the Republic of Korea. The operational command the US forces had over the Korean military was articulated through its Military Advisory Group and the operations to suppress the Jeju 4.3 Uprising. At the time scorched earth operations were being enforced in Jeju, provision military advisors, the Counter-intelligence

Corps, as well as a company of the USAMGIK were stationed on the island. The US mission to Korea and the embassy also remained wary of the situation unfolding there and continuously reported to the State Department. They sometimes fabricated intelligence, such as spreading rumors that an unknown ship had emerged on the shores of Jeju or that the Soviet Union considered Jeju to be its satellite, thereby prompting the Syngman Rhee government to take stronger action.

The USAMGIK, through various reports, intelligence sources or witness testimonies, knew that punitive forces composed of the police and the military were indiscriminately massacring civilians. Even Colonel Brown, who became infamous for his words, “I don’t care why the Jeju 4.3 Uprising took place. My sole duty lies in suppression,” had at one time pointed out the indiscriminate violence inflicted by the police.

However, the USAMGIK turned a blind eye to the rampant killings by the punitive forces. The military advisors reported on the excessive brutality shown by the punitive forces but did not do anything to stop it even though they had enough authority to do so. In fact, the United States provided justification for the violent suppression, for example, by demanding complete crack down on any riots taking place in Korea when President Rhee asked for aid. On the surface, the United States called for American-style democracy and criticized the barbaric violence committed by Koreans. In reality, however, it abetted or even instigated it. In fact, such attitude of the United States could be considered obvious since South Korea was viewed as its base camp for its anti-communist activities during the Cold War. Of course, as was intended, US remained behind the scenes. The suppression of the Jeju 4.3 Uprising as well as the mass killings were perpetrated by Koreans. As a result, the island of Jeju became isolated and became the *samtato* (三多島; literally meaning the island of three abundancies—originally wind, stones and women) of blood, tears and dead bodies.

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