

# Japan's defeat

[History](#)



Japan's defeat on August 15, 1945 marked a substantial change in Korea's social, economic, and political organization: the structure simply collapsed. There was no government to take over when the Japanese withdrew because Korea had been a colony since 1905. This rendered the undertaking of reorganization nearly unfeasible and escalated confused political activity among the Koreans. External conflict was brought in by the intervention of the United States and the Soviet Union who wanted to reconstruct the Korean society.

However, because the Korean environment was unlike that of Japan's, the result was unexpectedly different. (1) With the implementation of the communist regime of Soviet Russia by Kim Il Sung and the democratic one of the United States by Syngman Rhee, two opposing governments eventually came to power and the opposite and conflicting ideologies led to civil war. The national aspiration of the Koreans was to become a united nation under one government. International rivalry between the United States and Soviet Russia extended the problem of disunity.

The first agreement between the United States and Russia was the arbitrary division of the country into the North and South so as to have equal influence in the changes of Korean society. This arbitrary line was the 38th parallel. Soon this line acquired political connotations and separated the two spheres of influence; the democratic sphere of the Americans in the South and the Communist sphere of the Soviets in the North. (2)

In December 1945, a meeting was held in Moscow that determined a 5-year trusteeship over Korea by the four Great Powers (Russia, United States,

China and England). 3) Furthermore, an American-Soviet conference was planned for March 1946, to discuss the implementation of a provisional Korean government. A conflict arose between Russia and the United States in March. The Russians insisted that only the political parties that had supported the trusteeship be permitted to take part in the selection of the provisional government. The Americans however, noting that few anti-Communist political groups had been interested in the trusteeship (because it was associated with Communists), contended against the Soviets' proposal.

The Americans claimed that allowing only those parties that had been initially interested would defeat freedom of speech(4). In fact, many riots were held by the South Koreans against the trusteeship. On December 30, 1945, during these riots, Song Chin-u, a primary leader of the Conservative Nationalist Group was assassinated(5). No compromise was negotiated by May 1946 when the joint conference ended. One year later another meeting was held, and yet again the conflict could not be settled. In September 1947, the Americans decided to pass the negotiations over to the United Nations (U. N. ).

The outcome reached was more in agreement with the American ideology than the Soviets'. It declared: (6) The Korean question ... is primarily a matter for the Korean people themselves and concerns their freedom and independence, and this question cannot be correctly and fairly resolved without the participation of representatives of the indigenous population. (7) Quickly the United Nations Temporary Korean Commission was created under which general elections were to be held. Outbreaks of violence were

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becoming more common and the political situation was elevating unrest among the Koreans.

Although the United States and Russia were convening at the joint conferences to unify the country under one government, each was promoting their own ideological principals in their area; the Russians promoted communism and the Americans promoted capitalism. The diverging principals were resulting in chaotic behaviour among the Korean people. (8) North Korea and Soviet Russia Meanwhile in July 1945, the North Korean Democratic People's Front was formed, alongside the communist oriented North Korean Labor Party.

On March 5, 1946, land reforms were carried out in North Korea. During which almost 15, 000 houses, and millions of acres of orchards, farms, and forestland were confiscated. The North Koreans fled to the South away from oppression; historian Andrew C. Nahm considered this oppression to be worse than that of the Japanese rule(9). The land was redistributed among tilling farmers, and almost 800, 000 farming households freely, however, government tax on the land was set as a quarter of the farmers' production.

Steadily from then on the percentage of farming Koreans decreased. Some of the workers that left the urban life of farming began to work in factories and small businesses. The slow urbanization and industrialization results could be detected in the economy's new progress. (10) With the increasing industrialization in the North, labor laws were employed in May 1946, and equality laws on June 20 of the same year. These new decrees altered the

wages and workday for the North Koreans. Now there were equal wages and a more tolerable 8-hour workday.

The idea of workers unions, like the General Federation of Trade Unions became popular and could award special bonuses in compensation or pay. The ideologies of Soviet Russia and communism were the new pillars upon which the North Korean society was rebuilt. Also in accordance with the industrial growth, a law was formed to permit the nationalization of major industries in August 1946, called " The Law Concerning Nationalization of Industry, Railroads, Transportation, Communication, and Banks". (11) This law gave state ownership to 90% of all industry in North Korea.

Production increased and the North Korean economy started to turn around. (12) Although the economy was benefiting from the new government controls and laws, the people of North Korea were being oppressed by the communist regime lacking a constitution. The societal structure grew stronger as order was re-established formally by a draft constitution announced in February 1948. By September, the general elections for The Supreme People's Assembly had been held and the results concluded that Kim Il-sung would be Premier under the constitution that was accepted.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was recognized by the Soviet Union and later by other Soviet block members. (13) South Korea and The United States Russia wasn't alone in applying their country's ideology to Korea. The United States, without consent or consideration of the Soviets' opinions of their actions, also applied their ideology of democracy to the South. When the Americans handed the negotiations of qualification for

possible candidates for the Korean provisional government to the U. N. they would not accept a counter-compromise that the Soviet Union suggested.

This proposal was to remove their troops and the Americans' and let the Koreans take care of themselves the way they would like to. (14) A possible reason for rejecting Russia's proposal could be if it had been accepted, the Korean government most likely would have become communist due to the order and economic growth that the North Korean regime had already established. Also the North already had instilled Kim Il-sung as leader and the South had yet to hold elections.

Instead, the U. N. supervised the general elections and claimed that this voting would determine the government that would govern over all of Korea. Of course the Soviets were not in agreement with these accommodations and therefore insisted that North Korea not take part in this election.

Besides, the North had already been developing a basis for government that was completely different than the South, which would not agree with their policies. The election was held in May 1948, and a National Assembly was instituted in June.

A constitution was drafted in July under which Dr. Syngman Rhee, an anti-Communist, was leader. (15) The United States, Britain, France, Nationalist China, and the Philippines recognized The Republic of Korea. (16) The American government's comments on the newly established Korean government were: It is the view of the United States government that the Korean government so established is entitled to be regarded as the Government of Korea envisaged by the General Assembly resolution of

November 14, 1947. (17) Due to Northern Korea's abstention in the election, the Republic of Korea only was in control of Korea south of the 38th parallel.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North, led by Kim Il-sung, and The Republic of Korea, led by Dr. Syngman Rhee in the South, both decided that their government, because it was recognized as the Korean government by different countries, ruled over all of Korea. The South was justified in believing that it was the rightful government because it ruled over a majority of the population of Korea. In a democratic society the opinion of the majority of the population is what is followed. The Northern government also had justified their control over the whole peninsula.

They had been recognized and had already established laws and order in the North that could be seen in their growing economy. To break this structure might spiral the North into economic hardships again. Of course this misunderstanding could lead to conflict between the United States and Soviet Russia. Therefore, after the governments were founded, the two countries removed their troops from Korea, having completed their duty to construct a government that could rebuild the economic and social structure that had collapsed only three years earlier. (18)

The Rise of Kim Il-sung: Leader of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea  
The leader of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Il-sung, took his name from a legendary Korean guerilla who, like himself, had fought the Japanese. (19) After defeat in Manchuria by the Japanese, Kim joined the Soviet army. In the Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 - February 1943), Kim was a captain who served with honor for the Soviets. The Soviets recognized

his contributions and when Kim Il-sung returned to Pyongyang, Korea, he was recognized as a "national hero".

On October 15, the North Korean Bureau was instituted and Kim Il-sung became the First Secretary of the 4, 530 member group. Once in office he started to sway the Koreans to follow the ideals of communism by forming regional Communist factions. Kim's persuasiveness led to violent disturbances between opposing political factions in North Korea. The deaths from these discords amounted to more than 1, 000. Kim Il-sung supported the callous removal of nationalists from North Korea for the reason that they opposed the system and if he were to be in an election, the nationalists may ruin his chance to govern Korea.

As a result the North Koreans lived under an "atmosphere of fear... a new form of terrorism"(21). The government that the Soviets had installed and their policies perpetuated and heightened the magnitude of oppression under which the Koreans lived. Tension among the people and anxiety began to lead them to rebel. With the assistance of Major General Romanenko, Kim Il-sung fortified his reputation with the Soviets. In February 1946, the North Korean Provisional People's Committee replaced the Five Provinces Administration Bureau and became the central government of North Korea: Kim Il-sung became the chairman.

By August 1946, the group had merged with the New People's Party, renamed themselves The North Korean Workers' Party, and within a year their affiliates totaled more than half a million. The first of a series of elections being held in November of 1947 resulted with supporters of Kim Il-



sung taking most of the positions. This improved the opportunity of Kim being elected as leader of the government. So on September 3, 1948, when Kim was elected as premier of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), he was not shocked.

The Rise of Syngman Rhee, Leader of The Republic of Korea In 1945, the majority of Koreans did not hold right-wing political ideologies. Most of the nation wanted an extremely different regime than the one that Japan had ruled with. This opposite regime was more socialist and communist than capitalist. Due to the looming communism, the Americans tried to disperse the Korean People's Republic and The People's Committees but in opposition to the Americans' attempts, by 1947, a guerilla war had developed in South Korea.

The United States, needing to install a leader for the provisional government in Korea, chose Syngman Rhee(23). He had been representing a government-in-exile while living in America and hence, had developed a relationship with the Americans already(24). Rhee was an active and powerful anti-Communist despite his age (in 1947, he was seventy-two years old, more than twice the age of the youthful Kim Il-sung who was in his thirties). In February 1946, Rhee was appointed head of The Representative Democratic Council that was appointed by the American military government.

At this time, the Americans took action to prevent a leftist government from winning the upcoming election and suppressed all left ideological groups. Violence was used to subdue the leftists. Was this not against the policy of

democracy and equality rights? The politics of the South remained chaotic when Rhee was in power. The isolated elections meant that there was no consensus on what Korea's governing policies should be. Rhee viewed this discord as the factor that would permanently divide the country.

Syngman Rhee urged the Americans for more artillery once the foreign occupation had been terminated in fear that the Northern Koreans would strike against the South to unite under a communist regime and they would not be able to defend themselves. The Americans refused contending that Rhee may strike against the North Koreans if he had more armaments. Unfortunately in the spring of 1950, the arms of North Korea were increased and in attempts to make up for the extra weapons, the Americans gave arms aid to South Korea.

Rhee sustained US policy of excluding leftists from political groups, but they rebelled with force against the suppression. In the guerilla war tactics, and uprisings, it was affirmed that over 100, 000 people had been killed since the end of the Second World War. The Korean population was living in fear under Rhee's rule, which was supposed to be democratic. He imprisoned any subject who was suspected of being a traitor, including people who served in the government and had sworn by the democratic ideologies.

His aging state and now paranoid approach to ruling South Korea implanted the population with doubt about Rhee's leadership. The population slowly began to revert back to an uncertain and unstructured society. Soon after, civil war erupted throughout the peninsula, eventually leading to the Korean War. (25) Both Leaders How did these men and their governments lead to

the civil war? Both men were initially strong in purpose. Syngman Rhee was originally seen as a man of age who was wise in the world of political principles(26).

Kim Il-sung was viewed as a radical young man who had an ambition to run a government(27) . Faults can be seen throughout the actions of both men. Used as puppets, the two followed orders and the political regimes with strictness. In the event that someone did not conform, it was more useful to execute or imprison him than deal judicially with the innumerable uprisings against the dual regimes. The terror under which the Korean people lived drove chaos, paranoia, anxiety and confusion back into their lives, similar to when the Japanese withdrew the governmental structure.

These men to a large extent were responsible for the initiation of the civil war. With the opposing political philosophies, the country was divided in two and ruthlessly ruled over. Without compromise and co-ordination throughout the peninsula, war would predictably occur, it was only a matter of time and the appropriate situation which would spark an irreversible uprising that could not be suppressed and hidden like the minor preceding resistance. Culmination The Korean society desperately needed government structure when the Japanese withdrew.

Although the Soviets and Americans rushed to their aid, the Koreans may have been better without the help. The establishment of the thirty-eighth parallel was only the beginning of the wedge that slowly split Korea into two opposing worlds. The vulnerable Koreans eagerly accepted change and reform from their past oppressive rule while Soviet Russia and the United

States took advantage of their helpless position. Had the two diverging regimes agreed on a compromised ideology, the now independent Korea could be ruled with a common government throughout the peninsula.

Without the influence of the foreign occupation, extreme leftist and rightist views existing would be presumably rare. The choice of the leaders of the political factions was also malformed. With a man near death on one side and a man not yet aged with wisdom of experience on the opposite, both were risky choices. The older Syngman Rhee had been laboriously active since his twenties and the younger Kim Il-sung was new to the realm of politics. Kim had used force since his teens to get things done in battles.

The Soviets should've recognized a more experienced politician to sway the minds of the Koreans towards the communist regime rather than cause them to flee. The actions of these foreign countries and their decisions on how to unify Korea (a country that the United States didn't want Soviet Russia to have control over considering it's proximity to the Western coast of the United States) were often fleetingly made and in the process the Korean people suffered. With all the conflicting messages they were receiving, it is comprehensible why the Koreans lashed out against the system and each other in the summer of 1950.