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Signature:

Matthew Dale Kim

December 1, 2010
Date

Syngman Rhee, David Ben-Gurion, and the United States

By

Matthew Dale Kim
Master of Arts

History

Fraser Harbutt, PhD.
Advisor

Marion Creekmore, PhD.
Committee Member

Gordon Streeb, PhD.
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, PhD.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

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Matthew Dale Kim

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Abstract

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Cold War history is often reduced to two monoliths commanding the allegiance of Third World countries. In such depictions, Third World leaders occupy only a minor role in international affairs. In contrast, Tony Smith's "pericentric view" of the Cold War shifts the focus to these smaller actors. Smith suggests that some American allies frequently flouted U.S. authority and that, despite their failures to establish democratic rule and comply with American foreign policy, they drew substantial concessions from Washington. The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it attempts to determine whether pericentrism aptly describes the relationship that the United States had with South Korea's Syngman Rhee and Israel's David Ben-Gurion. Second, the thesis examines how Rhee and Ben-Gurion developed these pericentric relationships.

In order to disprove the notion that Washington dictated Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's foreign policies and to suggest that pericentrism applies to South Korea and Israel, the thesis first examines their undemocratic, strong-armed tactics. The thesis then examines how Rhee and Ben-Gurion flouted American policy during the Korean War and Suez Crisis respectively. Their questionable tactics and refusal to follow American orders suggest that they were not simply being "used" by the United States. Moreover, in spite of their disagreements with Washington, the thesis notes that they drew significant concessions from the U.S.

The second half of the thesis is devoted to understanding what allowed Rhee and Ben-Gurion to influence American policy despite their transgressions. The first and obvious reason is their anti-Communist stance, which motivated the United States to support them because of the greater Communist threat. Secondly, their regimes fit Fareed Zakaria's idea of "liberal autocracy" in which founding fathers use strong-armed tactics to stabilize their regimes in preparation for future democratic rule. Therefore, Washington overlooked their liberal autocracies, in hopes of a future democracy.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that not all Cold War history is a history of monoliths. There was a period immediately following 1948 in which junior members of the international system could play a significant role.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who taught me how to love, my father, who taught me how to live, my older sister, Diane, who taught me how to care, and my younger sister, Grace, who taught me how to share.

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List of Abbreviations

AIPAC – American Israel Public Affairs Committee

IDF – Israel Defence Force

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

POW – Prisoners of War

ROK – Republic of Korea

UN – United Nations

UNEF – United Nations Emergency Force

US – United States

I. Introduction

Cold War history is commonly reduced to the story of two competing monoliths vying for the loyalties of Third World countries. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Western scholars considered Soviet expansionism as the primary factor driving the Cold War rivalry. This perspective, known as “orthodoxy” or “traditionalism,” was challenged by “revisionism” in the late 1960s and 1970s. Revisionists believed that rather than Soviet expansionism, American imperialism served as the catalyst behind the Cold War conflict. In the 1970s and 1980s, “postrevisionism” challenged revisionism by suggesting that rather than any specific country’s foreign policy, the international system after World War II and the nuclear arms race were responsible for the East-West struggle.¹ However, all three of these larger perspectives overlook the influence of charismatic Third World leaders fighting for their fledgling countries. Neglecting these peripheral stories results in an incomplete depiction of the Cold War in which Third World leaders are merely “following the logic of some script other than their own” and being “used” by the two superpowers.²

Historian Tony Smith calls for a new “pericentric view” of the Cold War.³ According to Smith, pericentrism is the idea that Third World leaders on the periphery of world affairs were not necessarily “used” by the superpowers. Instead, they frequently collided with the wishes of their patrons and influenced the policies of the superpowers rather than being controlled by them. He writes, “An important reason the superpowers

¹ Tony Smith, “New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 24, issue 4 (2000): 567.

² Smith, “New Bottles,” 590.

³ Smith, “New Bottles,” 568.

extended their involvement around the globe was because of the deliberate policies of junior actors in the international system, which in effect pulled Moscow and Washington into situations they might otherwise have avoided.”⁴ His thesis is built on the well-known assertion that “once an alliance is formed, weaker members may be better able to determine the conduct of stronger actors than common sense might immediately understand.”⁵ The weaker members of such alliances were

...fearful and defensive but just as often as determined nationalists, hardened realists, principled idealists, high-rolling risk takers, committed ideologues, brazen manipulators and opportunists able to use the world crisis for their own ends. Their names alone suggest we should expect no less: Bevin and DeGasperi, Kim and Mao, Fidel and Che, Somoza and the Ortegas.⁶

Such leaders were “charismatic individuals of heroic proportion determined to put their stamp on history.”⁷ By shifting the historical focus from the Great Power conflict to the impact of such smaller actors offers new insights into the nature of the conflict. A view from Seoul and Tel Aviv rather than Washington or Moscow, a view from Third World countries rather than the central Cold War conflict in Europe, suggests that junior members of the international arena were not “pawns or hapless victims, unable to control the forces set in motion by the titanic struggle,” and instead, they played an important role in the development of the global conflict.⁸

This thesis applies Smith’s idea of pericentrism to two world leaders from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Syngman Rhee and David Ben-Gurion. To what extent did they defy American expectations of proper democratic governance and pursue foreign

⁴ Smith, “New Bottles,” 572.

⁵ Smith, “New Bottles,” 569.

⁶ Smith, “New Bottles,” 570.

⁷ Smith, “New Bottles,” 571.

⁸ Smith, “New Bottles,” 569.

policies diverging from American objectives? To what extent did they influence American policies and draw concessions from Washington? While an examination of only one of the two leaders would merely suggest a unique occurrence of pericentrism in a specific setting with unique individuals, a comparative study of the two leaders and the resulting similarities between them suggest a general pattern of pericentrism in Cold War relations among the United States and its junior partners during the 1940s and 1950s.

There are many reasons for focusing particularly on Rhee and Ben-Gurion rather than other Third World leaders. First of all, they were both the founding fathers of their respective countries. Founding fathers are often powerful figures because state building is an ad hoc process with no set pattern. Charismatic leaders often dominate modern day state building by forming a cult of personality to garner the loyalty of their people. Rhee and Ben-Gurion were no different in this manner. By personifying their country's independence, they both entered into office in 1948 to lead a nation of people who had existed for centuries without a sovereign state. To a large extent, one could argue that their personal influences shaped the fates of South Korea and Israel.

Second, both leaders were profoundly influenced by the United States. They advocated liberal democracy championed by the United States and were heavily dependent upon American assistance. Rhee lived in the United States from 1913 to 1945 and received a formal education from George Washington University, Harvard University, and Princeton University.⁹ He married Francesca Donner, an Austrian-American in 1935. Upon assuming the Korean presidency in 1948, he relied on American military and economic assistance before, during, and after the Korean War.¹⁰ After his exit from

⁹ Richard C. Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee: An Unauthorized Portrait* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1960), 29.

¹⁰ Robert Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960: A Personal Narrative*

office in 1960, he spent the rest of his life in Hawaii. Similarly, Ben-Gurion also lived in the United States where he married his Jewish-American wife Paula Munweis in 1917.¹¹ He relied on American Jewry and the American government for economic and diplomatic support in the creation of Israel. Both Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's dependence on the United States stands in direct contrast to the more ambivalent stance of many other national leaders during their time, such as Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, who openly courted both the United States and the Soviet Union.

The third reason for comparing these two leaders is that, although they both espoused principles of liberal democracy, they tested the limits of their executive powers by adopting strong-armed measures. In light of the apparent disparity between their espoused dedication to democracy and their questionable tactics, it could be argued that the two leaders were authoritarian and that their rhetorical commitment to democracy was disingenuous.

In addition, unlike other Third World leaders in the mid-20th century, both leaders guided their countries through major wars on their soil shortly after assuming national leadership. The Korean War erupted two years after Rhee assumed his first term in office.¹² Meanwhile, the day after Israel declared its independence, Ben-Gurion led his country through the first Arab-Israeli conflict.¹³ Again, in 1956, Ben-Gurion led Israel through the Suez Crisis. Wars typically allow for an expansion of executive powers, and these wars allowed them to take greater command over their respective countries, which differentiate them from many other founding fathers. The fact that Eisenhower's

(Seoul: Panmun Book Co., 1978), 292.

¹¹ Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: A Biography* (New York: Adama Books, 1986), 35.

¹² Allen, *Korea's Syngman*, 114.

¹³ Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, 142.

administration forced the resolution of both the Korean War and the Suez Crisis against their explicit desires to continue fighting makes the comparison between the two leaders even more compelling.

Unlike many of America's former Cold War allies, both South Korea and Israel continue to have relevance today as strategic geopolitical allies for the United States. With threats posed by North Korea and radical Muslim terrorists of the Middle East, the two states are seen as significant assets by the American military. The roots of the close strategic relationships can be traced back to the pro-American foreign policies adopted by Rhee and Ben-Gurion.

Therefore, based on the numerous similarities, the following study compares Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's relationships with the United States during the Cold War in the 1940s and 1950s. In order to determine whether pericentrism is applicable, it is essential to first explore the counterevidence that challenges the very notion of pericentrism. Therefore, the thesis begins by examining the evidence that suggests Rhee and Ben-Gurion relied on the U.S. and that Washington heavily influenced their foreign policies. Next, in order to disprove the premise that Washington dictated their foreign policies and to suggest that pericentrism characterizes the relationships they shared with the U.S., this study examines several undemocratic measures and strong-armed tactics that they used to secure their power. Such tactics suggest that they did not always use democratic means, which Washington desired from its allies. In addition, the thesis examines how both leaders flouted American foreign policy when it conflicted with their national interests throughout their respective tenures during the Korean War and the Suez Crisis. The strong-armed tactics and refusal to follow American orders ultimately suggest that they

were not simply “used” by the United States. Also, the thesis suggests that, despite their disagreements with Washington, they drew significant concessions from the United States in accordance with Tony Smith’s notion of pericentrism. In other words, they pulled as much as they were pushed by the United States.

The latter half of the thesis is devoted to understanding what it was that allowed Rhee and Ben-Gurion to develop their pericentric relationship and gain American concessions, despite their transgressions. Two major reasons are given. The first and obvious reason is their anti-Communist stance, which motivated the United States to support Rhee and Ben-Gurion, regardless of their shortcomings, because of the greater Communist threat. The second reason for pericentrism is that their regimes were “liberal autocracies.”¹⁴ This thesis suggests that their regimes fit Fareed Zakaria’s 21st century idea of liberal autocracy in which founding fathers must use strong-armed tactics to stabilize their regime in preparation for democratic rule. Because there was hope for future democratic rule, alluded to by both Rhee and Ben-Gurion in their justifications for questionable decisions, Washington overlooked their strong-armed tactics and excused their defiance of American foreign policy. Had their regimes been other than liberal autocracies and anti-Communist, it is unlikely that Washington would have made so many concessions to South Korea and Israel.

Ultimately, the thesis answers three central questions regarding the theory of pericentrism as applied to Rhee and Ben-Gurion. Did they adopt strong-armed tactics and flout U.S. authority? Did they receive American assistance nonetheless? And finally, what allowed them to successfully influence American policy to support their regimes despite

¹⁴ Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, issue 6 (1997): 22-43.

their defiance? The historical implications of their pericentric relationship with the United States are profound. It confirms the notion that not all Cold War history is a history of monoliths. There was a period immediately following 1948 in which junior members of the international system could play a major role, a period in which tyranny by the weak was possible. Pericentrism also has relevance to the modern day. With floundering American state building efforts throughout the world, Rhee and Ben-Gurion are comparable cases of Washington supporting questionable regimes in recent history.

In regards to Rhee, this study relies on his personal letters stored in the Syngman Rhee Materials Room at the Yonsei University Archives in Seoul, South Korea. Robert T. Oliver, a close personal friend and recipient of many of his letters, claims that these letters are extremely reliable in delving into Rhee's true thoughts and intentions. As a close advisor to President Rhee throughout his political career, Oliver writes that "no other world statesman has ever bared his soul more nakedly than Rhee did in these letters. No one could strive harder to reveal himself with complete candor and openness."¹⁵ Oliver also suggests that the letters "stand as the most convincing evidence upon which the historical judgment of his character and his program should be formed."¹⁶ In addition to his personal letters, this study is based on domestic and international press reports concerning the nature of his presidency. The secondary works of the aforementioned Oliver as well as Young Ick Lew,¹⁷ Henry Chung, and Bruce Cumings also feature prominently throughout the work. For materials concerning Ben-Gurion, this work relies

¹⁵ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 140.

¹⁶ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 140.

¹⁷ Dr. Young Ick Lew, of Handong University in Pohang, South Korea, is the leading revisionist historian on Syngman Rhee. He argues that Rhee was responsible for the Americanization of South Korea and suggests that Rhee was dedicated to the development of democracy. In *The Reexamination of the Legacy of President Syngman Rhee*, he argues that Rhee's autocratic tactics were employed due to the circumstances of war.

on Ben-Gurion's own recollections published in 1970, which reveal the reasoning behind his controversial decisions.¹⁸ This study is also based upon the secondary works of historians specializing on Ben-Gurion, mainly Ronald W. Zweig and Isaac Alteras. Finally, this thesis heavily relies on the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, a collection of diplomatic records published by the U.S. State Department's Office of the Historian.

As with every historical explanation, this study has its limitations. First of all, this is a comparative study. When varying historical, political, and social circumstances confronting South Korea and Israel are taken into account, and when personal differences inevitably arise from examining two very unique individuals, the comparison becomes imperfect. In the words of historian John Elliott, "The movements involved in writing a comparative history are not unlike those involved in playing the accordion."¹⁹ Rhee and Ben-Gurion are squeezed together for their similarities only to be pulled apart again by their differences. Their resemblances may not be as close as they seemed at first sight, and their differences may be unwittingly overlooked in the search of more compelling evidence for their similarities. Yet, none of this invalidates the project. For the comparative aspect of this study ultimately provokes new questions about the Cold War and offers significant historical implications about the turbulent time period from 1948 to the early 1960s. Therefore, every attempt has been made to present an accurate picture and to not exaggerate the similarities or dismiss the dissimilarities. The resulting depictions of the two men are remarkably similar especially in their tenacious willpower when faced with impossible decisions.

¹⁸ David Ben-Gurion, *Recollections* (London: Macdonald Unit Seventy-Five, 1970).

¹⁹ John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xviii.

The study is also limited by the fact that the primary subjects, Rhee and Ben-Gurion, are recent figures. Consequently, few historians have found the necessary detachment to write objectively and dispassionately.²⁰ The discussion surrounding Rhee has especially strong political overtones in South Korea. However, every attempt has been made to remain as objective as possible. This study does not intend to repudiate Rhee and Ben-Gurion as dictators or venerate them as extraordinary leaders. At the same time, it does not excuse them for their mistakes or understate their achievements. Instead, by delving into their lives, the thesis draws general conclusions about their pericentric relationship with the United States.

In the following pages, the study suggests that pericentrism is a valuable framework for examining the relationship that the United States had with its junior partners. While this story is interesting and important simply in terms of relations between the three states involved, the careers of Syngman Rhee and David Ben-Gurion taken together have larger historical implications. Their resemblance suggests that historians should not reduce Cold War history simply to the story of the United States versus the Soviet Union, but need also to take into account Third World leaders leveraging their power to sway the will of giants. Despite their many differences, “what they nonetheless had in common was the will and the ability to use their position in the superpower contest to leave their own mark on global history.”²¹

²⁰ Ronald Zweig, “Preface,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 7.

²¹ Smith, “New Bottles,” 591.

II. Challenges to Pericentrism

In order to determine whether pericentrism aptly characterizes the relationship Rhee and Ben-Gurion had with the U.S., it is important to first examine evidence that suggests the contrary. South Korea and Israel relied on the United States for military and economic support, and it is often assumed that because the two countries relied on the United States, their leaders complied with American demands for democratic governance and adopted policies in line with American foreign policy. Even before the formation of the two states, they lobbied the United States to support Korean independence and a Jewish homeland. Upon the establishment of their respective states, they began formal diplomatic relations with the United States during their tenures as heads of state. It would have been logical for Rhee and Ben-Gurion to have kept their policies generally in line with American foreign policy, and the following briefly examines the conventional line of thought that challenges the notion of pericentrism as applied to South Korea and Israel.

To begin, historian Bruce Cumings, an authoritative figure in modern Korean history, argues that Rhee was an American puppet who was largely ineffectual in forming Korean policies. He believes that the American government had as much influence over Korean policies as Rhee and that the entire South Korean government was an “American creation.”²² Completely funded by the American government and protected by the American military, the South Korean government was a product of American foreign policy. Various aspects of the Korean Constitution were modeled after the American Constitution. Moreover, some features of the Korean government, such as the

²² Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), xxvi.

centralization of power to the presidency, American style of military training, and universal primary education, are also similar to the American government.²³ Cumings' notion that Rhee served as a puppet for the American government also coincides with North Korean government propaganda.²⁴

Meanwhile, Rhee's political rivals in South Korea also criticized his westernized manners, religious beliefs, and political philosophy. He was a firm believer in Christianity, which was considered to be a foreign Western religion among most Koreans. His opponents politicized the fact that Rhee spent a significant portion of his life from 1913 to 1945 in America, married an Austrian-American, Francesca Donner, in 1934, and spoke impeccable English. Oliver suggests that because of his time in the United States, Rhee "felt so much a part of America that he unconsciously behaved like an American citizen."²⁵ Therefore, his personal background supports the claim that he was heavily influenced by the United States.²⁶

His willingness to concede control over Korea's armed forces also suggests his dependence and compliance with American demands. Before the Korean War, he voluntarily offered that if the "U.S. might desire a naval base on Cheju Island," then he would "permit the establishment of such base."²⁷ When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, Rhee was more than willing to commit the Korean military to the command of General Douglas MacArthur. He wrote in July 15, 1950 that he was "happy to assign to you [MacArthur] command and authority over all land, sea, and air forces of the Republic

²³ Young Ick Lew, *Reexamination of the Legacy of Syngman Rhee* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2006), 122.

²⁴ Robert Tarbell Oliver, *A History of the Korean People in Modern times: 1800 to the Present* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 193.

²⁵ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 189.

²⁶ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 183.

²⁷ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, March 30, 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1948, vol. 6, 1163.

of Korea during the period of the continuation of the present state of hostilities.”²⁸ The fact that Rhee was willing to forfeit his executive powers as the commander and chief during wartime and allow American troops to create a naval base on Korean soil during a time of peace is strong evidence of Washington’s influence over his policies.

Above all, his administration yielded to American pressures for a ceasefire of the Korean War, which again suggests that the American government had significant influence over his decisions. Many Koreans faulted Rhee for not having been able to convince Washington to continue fighting for reunification. During the ceasefire negotiations, Rhee himself stressed that as a matter of policy, every South Korean diplomatic official should consistently “emphasize the closeness of the relations between Korea and the United States, and show that our interests in Asia are the same.”²⁹ Such evidence implies that he was used by Washington, instead of developing a pericentric relationship.

Israel and Ben-Gurion were also dependent upon American support, and such dependence may suggest that Ben-Gurion complied with Washington’s demands. Ben-Gurion’s relationship with the United States began during his involvement in the Zionist movement as a young adult. In 1915, Ben-Gurion believed that the establishment of a Jewish state would require the assistance of American Jewry, and he moved to New York City where he raised awareness among Jewish Americans, collected major donations, and created a substantial lobbying force. During his time in America, the prominent Zionist Chaim Weizmann accused him of naively relying on the United States and claimed that Ben-Gurion mistakenly believed that “the world begins and ends with the United

²⁸ Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 338.

²⁹ “Memorandum,” n.d., file 993:10570137, Syngman Rhee Materials Room, Yonsei University Central Library, Seoul, South Korea (hereafter Syngman RMR).

States.”³⁰ After securing independence, Ben-Gurion continued to believe that the U.S. was the most important factor in preserving Israel. Meanwhile, Israeli politicians accused Ben-Gurion of gaining very little, yet sacrificing much for the U.S.-Israeli relationship.³¹

Ben-Gurion’s deep admiration and appreciation for President Truman also suggests his subservience to Washington. After declaring statehood, Ben-Gurion personally thanked Truman saying that his recognition of the state of Israel and support for the new state had earned him “an immortal place in Jewish history.”³² After becoming prime minister, Ben-Gurion also told President Truman that Israel had an “effective army of two hundred and fifty thousand capable and anxious to help the United States” fight Communist aggression.³³

Ben-Gurion’s compliance with American policy is also highlighted by his 1956 withdrawal from Sinai and Gaza during the Suez Crisis. Much like Rhee, whose failure to prevent the armistice of the Korean War suggests his compliance to the United States, Ben-Gurion’s withdrawal suggests that the U.S. had a strong influence over his foreign policy. The withdrawal of Israeli troops and the immediate reentry of Egyptian troops into Gaza left a sense of unnecessary defeat among the Israeli population. Many Israelis believed that they had won a great military victory but were not able to secure the territory because of Ben-Gurion’s diplomatic defeat. This sentiment was especially strong among the Israel Defence Force (IDF), who had sacrificed precious lives to achieve a

³⁰ Yosef Gorny quoting Chaim Weizmann, “Ben-Gurion and Weizmann during World War II,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 92.

³¹ Issac Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel: U.S.-Israeli Relations 1953-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 77.

³² Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 1.

³³ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 18.

definite victory only to retreat months later.³⁴

Thus, there are strong suggestions that Rhee and Ben-Gurion yielded to American pressure, which makes evident the extraordinary degree of influence many would expect America to have had over its junior partners during the Cold War. The Korean War and the Suez Crisis were resolved at Washington's insistence despite their protests. However, important questions remain: Did Rhee and Ben-Gurion simply yield to American pressures or did Washington have to make significant concessions to convince Rhee and Ben-Gurion to end the wars? On whose terms were the wars resolved? Did Rhee and Ben-Gurion follow American guidelines of proper democratic governance according American wishes? Such questions must be addressed in order to understand the true nature of the relationship between the American chess master and its pawns, and the answers reveal that, to the "the bewilderment of the chess master...pawns often disturbingly assume a life of their own."³⁵

³⁴ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 284.

³⁵ Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 176.

III. Pericentrism in South Korea and Israel

A closer examination at their domestic and foreign policies reveals that Rhee and Ben-Gurion were not simply used by the American government. Rhee diverged time and time again from American demands, adopted autocratic measures, and often undermined American foreign policy objectives in East Asia. Similarly, Ben-Gurion was not always compliant to the demands of the American government and pursued his own policies for Israeli interests. He adopted strong-armed measures and openly conflicted with American wishes. Though it is undeniable that they relied upon the United States for assistance, reliance did not always indicate obedience. Furthermore, in keeping with the idea of pericentrism, their transgressions did not result in a reduction of American assistance, but instead, they were able to draw additional concessions from Washington. They were able to influence American foreign policy to a greater degree than one would expect.

Rhee adopted various autocratic policies to secure his power, policies not in line with American values of democracy and representative government. That Rhee's rule was authoritarian is a widely accepted historical assumption, especially among Western scholars. Richard Allen and Gregg Brazinsky are prominent historians who have generalized the notion that Rhee adopted autocratic tactics during his rule from 1948 to 1960.^{36,37} The notion of Rhee's autocracy can be further traced to preliminary media reports by American correspondents criticizing Rhee as an autocrat. Western journalists created the image of an autocratic dictator, which shaped contemporary public opinion

³⁶ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation-building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4.

³⁷ Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee*, 203-215.

and the consequent historical depiction.³⁸

As an immigrant in Hawaii from 1913 to 1941, Rhee was ruthless in his quest for power.³⁹ Throughout this time, he was fighting for Korean independence from Japan, and he frequently collided with the Provisional Government of Korea located in Shanghai. After being elected, in absentia, as the prime minister of the Provisional Government in 1919, Rhee overstepped his executive authority to assume control over the national funds and attempted to dictate every course of action from Hawaii. Although the Provisional Government elected him the prime minister and thereby made him answerable to the parliament, he assumed the title of president and denounced the suggestion that he was subject to the Provisional Government. Eventually, the Provisional Government deemed his actions authoritarian and moved to impeach him in 1925. Such autocratic tactics foreshadowed how far he would be willing to diverge from American expectations of democratic governance as the president of South Korea.

Rhee's autocratic tactics came to full view upon his rise to power under the American Military Government in South Korea. After Korea became independent from Japanese rule, the American government invited Rhee to return to Korea in 1945. His efforts to establish an extraordinarily powerful executive branch were apparent in the provisions of the South Korean Constitution, which he helped draft for the next few years until 1948. The Korean Constitution set out guidelines for a state-controlled economy in which the president had significant control.⁴⁰ After being elected president in 1948, he insisted upon controlling all branches of the government and dictating its policies. He

³⁸ Manuscript of Dr. Henry Chung's "The Americans come to Korea," file 991:01660001-01660234, Syngman RMR.

³⁹ *Korean History Channel*, "Syngman Rhee Special," June 16, 2009 (originally aired August 30, 2008).

⁴⁰ Harold Sunoo, *American's Dilemma in Asia: the Case of South Korea* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 110.

frequently replaced his cabinet members starting with Home and Foreign Affairs Ministers as early as January 27, 1949, only months after assuming office.⁴¹ As president, he frequently used his power to replace high ranking government officials including the South Korean Prime Minister, fourteen Supreme Court justices, and executives of state-run broadcasters.

Most of all, media reports shortly before and during his presidency claimed that he frequently denied Communist factions basic rights such as the freedom of assembly and the freedom of speech.⁴² His autocratic tactics were highlighted during the Communist insurrection on Cheju Island off the coast of the Korean peninsula. On April 3, 1948, Soviet agents entered Cheju without great difficulty to instigate a violent Communist uprising.⁴³ Rhee ordered South Korean authorities to engage in a scorched earth campaign against the Communist guerilla forces.⁴⁴ For the next two months, the fighting between Communist sympathizers organized by the Communist Worker's Party and the South Korean army resulted in the deaths of over sixty thousand people, one fifth of the island's population.⁴⁵ Many of these deaths were the result of mass executions bordering on the side of massacre. Although Communist sympathizers were responsible for the deaths of many innocent civilian lives, South Korea's Truth Commission officially reported in 2003 that South Korean security forces were responsible for eighty six percent of the deaths and that armed rebels were responsible for less than fourteen percent. Later, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, approximately two thousand and

⁴¹ The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, January 27, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 947.

⁴² "Fists Fly in Seoul," n.d., file 993:10540038, Syngman RMR.

⁴³ The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, April 9, 1949, *FRUS 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 983.

⁴⁴ George Wehrfritz, "Ghosts of Cheju," *Newsweek*, June 19, 2000.

⁴⁵ Wehrfritz, "Ghosts of Cheju."

five hundred leftist survivors of the Cheju Uprising were preemptively apprehended and executed under his orders.⁴⁶

In 1952, in the midst of the Korean War, it became clear that Rhee's party did not control the parliament and that he would most likely lose the upcoming election under the Constitutionally-mandated parliamentary vote to determine the president.⁴⁷ However, outside the Korean National Assembly, the Korean people considered him a national icon and a hero of the independence movement. Therefore, he decided to amend the Constitution and institute a popular vote for the president. He first declared martial law in the city of Pusan on May 24, 1952 and arrested forty politicians of the opposition party in the Korean National Assembly by May 27.⁴⁸ American diplomats were indignant that they were not "informed or consulted in advance of the decision for martial law" and were concerned by his "use of the army for political purposes."⁴⁹ Regardless of American concerns of autocracy, Rhee forced the assemblymen into the Assembly Hall and ordered the police to guard the exits until they passed the amendments. Such autocratic tactics forced the assemblymen to yield to his demands, reelect him for his second term, and eventually pass the amendments. During his second term, in 1954, he introduced and passed another Constitutional amendment calling for a two term limit for the presidency but only after including a grandfather clause that would allow him, as the incumbent, to be exempt from the two term limit. Such strong-armed measures demonstrate that Rhee was not the democratic leader that American policymakers desired from their allies.

⁴⁶ Wehrfritz, "Ghosts of Cheju."

⁴⁷ Sunoo, *American's Dilemma*, 103.

⁴⁸ Telegram 1160, May 26, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 242.

⁴⁹ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 27, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 252.

When he finally stepped down from office in 1960, his decision was caused by widespread student protests against his autocratic regime. The American Ambassador, Walter McConaughy, reported to the State Department that the student protests caused by his autocratic measures made his future as president untenable.⁵⁰ *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that a mob, angered by his autocratic measures, “toppled Dr. Rhee’s statue and desecrated the home of Vice-President-elect Lee Ki Poong [Rhee’s running mate].”⁵¹ Historians commonly depict the closing chapter of his life as a usurped autocrat fleeing to Hawaii in exile.⁵² *The New York World Telegram and Sun* portrayed him as a man who did not know when to relinquish power.⁵³ Similarly *The Washington Post* criticized Rhee’s “own arbitrariness and power fixation, his insulation and his habit of surrounding himself with stooges and sycophants,” which “inevitably led to the debacle after an egregiously fraudulent election.”⁵⁴ Thus, Rhee’s exit from office again highlights his autocracy.

Ben-Gurion similarly adopted strong-armed measures to secure his power. Although he claimed in his memoirs that Israel’s “democracy never suffered from the pressure of events” and that “Israel has always remained true to its founding principles,”⁵⁵ he too resorted to strong-armed measures against American wishes of democratic governance. Zionist Chaim Weizmann characterized Ben-Gurion as a “petty dictator” whose methods “were even more tyrannical than Jabotinsky’s.”⁵⁶ Historian Dina Porat also accused Ben-Gurion of “feeling no need to keep abreast of public

⁵⁰ Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 26, 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, vol. 18, 640-644.

⁵¹ “South Korea Faces Tests of New Era,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 27, 1960.

⁵² Allen, *Korea’s Syngman*, 241.

⁵³ “The Tragedy of Rhee,” *New York World Telegram and Sun*, June 1, 1960.

⁵⁴ “After Dr. Rhee,” *The Washington Post*, April 28, 1960.

⁵⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 90.

⁵⁶ Gorny, “Ben-Gurion and Weizmann,” 95.

sentiment—or to submit to it.”⁵⁷

After declaring Israel’s statehood in 1948, Ben-Gurion controversially assumed the positions of Prime Minister and Defense Minister simultaneously on May 17. Immediately, he overstepped his executive authority on May 26, 1948 by issuing an executive order calling for the establishment of the IDF and the dissolution of all other preexisting armed forces in Israel. It was not until May 31 that the cabinet legally approved the order, and the IDF began to take form. As the IDF became more powerful, Ben-Gurion’s critics claimed that the Israeli army posed a danger to Israeli democracy because it was centralized to one man and because it instilled a militaristic spirit and expansionist aims unbecoming of a liberal democracy.⁵⁸ Throughout his administration, Ben-Gurion continued to have a disproportionately large role in developing the IDF and employed strong-armed measures to strengthen his hold over it.

In developing the IDF, he required every Israeli citizen, male and female, to fulfill a compulsory military service, which was perceived as a particularly controversial demand. Women were required to serve in active duty for twenty one months and men for thirty six months. This period of active duty was followed by service in the reserves force, which required men to report until they were fifty one years old and single women to report until they were twenty four years old. Ben-Gurion’s decision to conscript women was and still is controversial, and even today, Israel is the only country in the world that requires compulsory military service from its female citizens.

Ben-Gurion also adopted strong-armed tactics when Zionist paramilitary groups disobeyed his orders to either join the IDF or lay down their arms, which resulted in the

⁵⁷ Dina Porat, “Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 166.

⁵⁸ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 84.

infamous *Altalena* Affair on June 21, 1948. When the 1948 Arab-Israeli War broke out immediately after Israel declared its statehood, a paramilitary group called Irgun refused to lay down arms and decided to engage incoming Arab forces as a separate paramilitary group, independent from the IDF. Menachem Begin, later the sixth prime minister of Israel, led the Irgun forces and awaited the arrival of *Altalena*, a military transport ship carrying nearly one thousand Israeli soldiers and substantial weapons imported from France. Ben-Gurion ordered the IDF to confiscate the cargo and engage the Irgun if necessary. When General Begin refused to cooperate, the IDF shelled the ship on Tel Aviv beach in accordance with Ben-Gurion's orders. After the deaths of sixteen Irgun fighters and three IDF soldiers, the Irgun surrendered, and Ben-Gurion followed up the attack by arresting two hundred Irgun fighters and sinking *Altalena*. Rather than seeking a peaceful solution, Ben-Gurion controversially used strong-armed measures against a fellow Jewish force in the midst of a war against the Arabs. In retrospect, his decision nearly caused a civil war among the Jews themselves,⁵⁹ and it is plausible that he deliberately used autocratic measures against the Irgun in order to demonstrate his absolute authority over the nascent state.

Ben-Gurion's strong-armed measure to bomb *Altalena* was also mirrored in his decision to dissolve the Palmach. The Palmach was an organization of elite soldiers of the Haganah, an underground paramilitary organization of the Jewish community in Palestine during the British Mandate of Palestine. They fought for the independence of Israel, and by 1948, the Palmach had over two thousand experienced soldiers. During the early stages of the 1948 War, the Palmach led several successful military campaigns such as

⁵⁹ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 92.

Operation Nachshon, Operation Yiftah, and other retaliation raids against the Arabs. Most importantly, because the Palmach was already highly organized before the war, it played a major role in holding off Arab armies while the IDF mobilized and prepared for combat. These vital contributions made the Palmach very popular among the Israeli population, and Ben-Gurion's forced dissolution of the Palmach was very controversial. To make matters even worse, several senior officers of the Palmach were opposition members to Ben-Gurion's ruling political party. The dissolution of the Palmach essentially removed his political opposition from positions of power through an undemocratic fashion. Later, when the Palmach was integrated into the IDF, Ben-Gurion promoted his close followers to senior army posts of the newly integrated Palmach, and the once highly respected generals of the Palmach never regrouped to recover from their fall from power. These strong-armed measures to dismantle political opposition were unbecoming an American ally.

Ben-Gurion's treatment of the Palestinians was also controversial and bordered on autocracy. Although Ben-Gurion declared upon the founding of Israel that the nascent state would "uphold the full social and political equality of all of its citizens," historians argue that this has not been the case towards the Palestinians.⁶⁰ Four major waves of Palestinians left Israel for neighboring Arab states once the 1948 War began, and afterwards, Ben-Gurion legally sanctioned the evacuation and destruction of the remaining Palestinian communities. The estimated number of Palestinian towns destroyed by the IDF during the 1948 War varies from 369 to 531.⁶¹ In addition, Palestinians who attempted to return to their homes after fleeing the country were

⁶⁰ Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 257-276.

⁶¹ *Ruling Palestine, A History of the Legally Sanctioned Jewish-Israeli Seizure of Land and Housing in Palestine*. (Geneva: COHRE & BADIL, 2005), 34.

considered to be illegal.⁶² By the end of the war, there were growing concerns that the displaced Palestinian refugees would not be accepted by Arab states as citizens or welcomed back into Israel.⁶³ The UN intervened in 1948 and passed a resolution granting Palestinian refugees the right to repatriation. It resolved that:

The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible.⁶⁴

However, returning Palestinians found that Jewish immigrants had taken their land under Israel's Absentees Property Law. The law, which was enacted during Ben-Gurion's administration, was not in keeping with his promise of equal rights and suggests that he did not always meet American desires for democratic governance.

Tensions between Palestinians and Israelis eventually culminated in the Qibya Massacre in October 1953 when the IDF fired on suspected Palestinian infiltrators gathered in Qibya. Ariel Sharon, later the eleventh prime minister of Israel, led the attack and personally ordered his troops to use the "maximal killing and damage to property" in order to set an example to other Palestinian infiltrators.⁶⁵ Many of the casualties were unarmed Palestinian refugees trying to reunite with their families, and the UN issued the "strongest possible censure" on Ben-Gurion's IDF.⁶⁶ However, Ben-Gurion chose not to

⁶² The Consul at Haifa (Lippincott) to the Secretary of State, June 23, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 1137-1138.

⁶³ Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator in Palestine, September 16, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 1401-1406.

⁶⁴ United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution 194 (III) and 513 (VI) Concerning the 1947-1948 Refugees," December 11, 1948, in *Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator 1948* (A/810), Official Record, New York, 1948, pg. 21-25.

⁶⁵ Morris, *Israel's Border*, 257-276.

⁶⁶ Morris, *Israel's Border*, 257-276.

prosecute Sharon for the incident. Although Ben-Gurion's direct involvement in the Qibya Massacre is not definite, the fact that his army engaged in such brutal tactics and that he pardoned Sharon suggests the extent of his autocratic measures despite American protests.

In addition to their strong-armed tactics, Rhee and Ben-Gurion did not always comply with American demands in determining their foreign policy. Their disregard for American wishes suggests that they were not used by the United States, and instead had a pericentric relationship in which they were relatively free to make their own decisions independent of American desires.

When the American Military Government welcomed Rhee back to Korea in 1945 to establish the Republic of Korea, Washington expected him to be a ceremonial figurehead or a symbolic Elder Statesman considering his advanced age of seventy.⁶⁷ However, as the years went by, his unexpected tenacity frustrated American politicians. Historian Henry Chung writes that the central mistake of American foreign policy in Korea was the "failure to appraise accurately the caliber and character of Syngman Rhee the man. He was made of sterner stuff than the puppets found in Communist satellite countries. Neither threats nor cajolery could move him."⁶⁸ Years later, Truman wrote in his memoirs that Rhee "is a man of strong convictions and has little patience with those who differ with him."⁶⁹ Similarly, some members of the international press regularly denounced Rhee as "forceful" or stubborn.⁷⁰ A *Time Magazine* editorial during the Korean War simply described him as, "The Uncrackable. Syngman Rhee is the walnut of

⁶⁷ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 28.

⁶⁸ Manuscript of Dr. Henry Chung, Syngman RMR.

⁶⁹ Harry Truman, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 329.

⁷⁰ *Washington Star*, n.d., file 993: 10540039, Syngman RMR.

Asian politics. Brown, wrinkled, iron-shelled, he calmly resists the tremendous pressure of managing his tragic country.”⁷¹ Other editorialists sympathized with the “brave little South Korean President, who has the courage to defy the United States, the United Nations and all comers.”⁷² In the end, most of them agreed that Rhee was not simply used by the United States.

His propensity to challenge the American government began during the formative stages of the interim South Korean government in 1945. A particular incident in December 1945 involving General Archibald Arnold of the American Military Government foreshadowed the conflicts the United States would have with Rhee. General Arnold challenged Rhee by claiming that Rhee was not a legitimate representative of Korea since he had not yet been elected by the Korean people. Rhee responded by calling the entire nation to go on a “national holiday,” and Koreans immediately refused to carry out any physical labor. The citizens of Seoul staged a massive two mile long parade making any type of activity in the capital city impossible. The furnace men carted off the coal so that radiators froze in hotels and offices. After three days, General Arnold conceded defeat and never again challenged Rhee’s legitimacy to lead the Korean people.⁷³

Similar to this particular incident with General Arnold, many conflicts ensued from his tendency to challenge American policy throughout the founding of South Korea. At the end of the World War II, America’s main Far East foreign policy objective of installing a friendly Japanese government was already secure, and there was a strong sentiment in Washington to forfeit the southern half of the Korean peninsula to the

⁷¹ “Korea: The Walnut,” *Time Magazine*, May 9, 1953.

⁷² Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Free Press*, June 20, 1953.

⁷³ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 35.

Soviets in order to achieve other gains in Europe. Owen Lattimore outlined American foreign policy as to “let South Korea fall [to the Communists], but not to let it look as if we pushed it.”⁷⁴ He recommended that, “The United States should disembarass itself as quickly as possible from its entanglements in South Korea.”⁷⁵ While it is difficult to definitively prove the possible intentions of Washington policymakers to forfeit Korea, it is clear that South Korea was not a major priority. Thus, Oliver notes that one of tragic ironies of America’s post-World War II foreign policy was that Washington was so preoccupied with addressing the post-war needs of defeated enemies such as Japan and West Germany that it overlooked liberated allies such as Korea.⁷⁶ While the Communist Party was under fire in the United States, the American Military Government ironically did not curb Communist activity in Korea.⁷⁷ General John Hodge, the American military governor of Korea, welcomed cooperation with the Communists and believed that only cooperation could bring about a lasting, legitimate governing body. In the spring of 1946, the United States created a Soviet-American Joint Commission in Seoul to determine the fate of Korea. When Soviet representatives in the Commission stalled the negotiations, the U.S. State Department declared that, “We are prepared at any time that the Soviet Government will do so to resume discussions of the Commission.”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Rhee consistently objected to any governing coalition involving the Communists and threatened “open disobedience and mass strikes which would probably force [the] U.S.

⁷⁴ Owen Lattimore, *New York Post*, July 17, 1949.

⁷⁵ Lattimore, *New York Post*, July 17, 1949.

⁷⁶ Oliver, *A History of the Korean People in Modern Times*, 170.

⁷⁷ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 151.

⁷⁸ The Political Advisor in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State, August 30, 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, vol. 8, 734.

government to remove Hodge.”⁷⁹ While America wanted to take a conciliatory stance towards the Soviets in Korea, Rhee adamantly challenged American policy and refused to cooperate with the Communists.⁸⁰

When the American government and the Soviet Union proposed the popular four-power trusteeship of Korea, Rhee once again opposed any type of concession to the Communist or any international body that would challenge the full sovereignty of a democratic Korea.⁸¹ He reasoned that a trusteeship would simply result in Koreans trading one colonial master, Japan, for another in the form of the Soviet Union.⁸² By the summer of 1947, Rhee’s relationship with the American Military Government reached a low point, and the U.S. military cancelled his radio addresses and held him incommunicado. General Hodge eventually placed him under house arrest leading up to the first presidential election in 1948.

After assuming the presidency, Rhee battled with American officials concerning South Korea’s endorsement of the Pacific Pact of 1949.⁸³ The Pacific Pact called for a military alliance among Asian states and the U.S. against the spread of Communism in Asia, similar to the NATO treaty that the United States had made with its European allies.⁸⁴ The Pacific Pact was endorsed by the Filipino President Elpidio Quirino and the Chinese President Chiang Kai Shek. However, Washington wanted separate bilateral

⁷⁹ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, February 10, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1099-1101.

⁸⁰ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, January 15, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1085.

⁸¹ Young Ick Lew, “Syngman Rhee and the Establishment of the Republic of Korea, 1945-1948” (lecture, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, CA, April 4, 2009).

⁸² Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 15.

⁸³ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, May 17, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 1029.

⁸⁴ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, May 16, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 1023.

agreements between the U.S. and each Asian state, rather than a coalition of states, because American policymakers feared that such an alliance would be a political liability. Americans did not want to entangle themselves into military commitments abroad, and Secretary of State Dean Acheson believed that, while NATO was a product of a historic alliance between the United States and Western Europe, the Pacific Pact would be an unprecedented one-way U.S. guarantee.⁸⁵ The proposed Pacific Pact eventually failed without American endorsement, but Rhee's support and advocacy for such a pact demonstrates his willingness to diverge from American foreign policy and pursue initiatives according to his national interests.

The greatest issue of contention between Washington and Rhee before the Korean War was the withdrawal of American troops and the buildup of the South Korean army. Rhee repeatedly stressed that "the United States has a real moral obligation to retain some U.S. troops in Korea."⁸⁶ He believed that the U.S. army's plans to withdraw from South Korea was a serious strategic mistake and requested that the troops remain until South Korea could organize a respectable defense force. Realizing the inevitability of American troop withdrawal in February 1949, Rhee asked for more arms and equipment for Korean troops.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, he commissioned his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Heung-Koon Lee, to visit the United States and plead with the "utmost candor and sincerity" for American military aid in order to secure a "stronger and better Korea."⁸⁸ In a letter to Oliver, Rhee wrote that Korean soldiers did not have arms

⁸⁵ David Mabon, "Pacific Pact Proposals," *Pacific Historical Review*, (May 1988): 151.

⁸⁶ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, February 10, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1100.

⁸⁷ Memorandum of Conversation by the Special Representative in Korea, February 25, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 958.

⁸⁸ "Text of Statement by General Heung-Koon Lee," n.d., file 62:03390001-03390075, Syngman RMR.

to defend themselves and were at the mercy of their North Korean counterparts.⁸⁹

According to Rhee, Americans did not entrust Koreans with light arms and refused to train Korean officers properly for heavy combat.⁹⁰ Appealing to a higher authority, Rhee then sought UN assistance to help convince Washington to delay American troop withdrawal. In December 1948, he finally issued a press statement asking whether the United States would come to the defense of South Korea if North Korea were to launch a major military assault.⁹¹ The U.S. State Department responded that his attempts to force Washington to commit more military troops by exploiting the international media did not further his cause but rather discredited it. In the end, the State Department incorrectly believed that the South Korean army was strong enough to repel North Korean Communist aggression, which would be heavily dependent upon a reluctant Soviet Union. The American Ambassador in Korea, John Muccio, wrote that “South Korean forces [are] considered adequate [to] maintain internal stability, cope with infiltration from north and before long adequate [to] prevent even open invasion [by] known North Korea forces.”⁹² American forces withdrew on June 28, 1949 leaving behind an ill-equipped South Korean military, but once again, Rhee’s continuous protests and appeals to the UN and the international media suggest that he was more than willing to openly challenge American policies.

Less than one year after Americans withdrew, North Koreans invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, and Rhee’s boldest divergence from American policy came

⁸⁹ “Correspondences with Dr. Robert T. Oliver,” n.d., file 81:01250001-01250056, Syngman RMR.

⁹⁰ “Correspondences with Dr. Robert T. Oliver,” n.d., file 82:00240027-00240030, Syngman RMR.

⁹¹ The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1344.

⁹² The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, January 27, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 947-952.

during the Korean War. When North Korean troops surged southward, Rhee moved the government to the port city of Pusan on the southeastern tip of the peninsula. From Pusan, Rhee saw UN forces reclaim Seoul in September 1950. Upon establishing status quo antebellum, Rhee joined General MacArthur in strongly urging for a UN offensive to reunify Korea.⁹³ Rhee informed the State Department that:

He [Rhee] had taken the position that the Republic of Korea no longer recognized the existence of the 38th Parallel... that his government would not be satisfied with any solution which did not envisage the complete subduing of the Communist military forces and the removal of the North Korea Communist military forces and the removal of the North Korea regime.⁹⁴

However, the U.S. was against a northern offensive. Assistant Secretary of State, and later the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk replied that “the United States could not now assume a definite position upon the problem of the 38th Parallel and, at this stage, would not support any predetermined line of action in relation to it.”⁹⁵ In a National Security Council meeting, Secretary Acheson urged caution by citing the dangers of pushing forward:

We must consider Korea not in isolation but in the world-wide problem of confronting the Soviet Union as an antagonist... General MacArthur has a new situation. We should be sure he understands his directive. He seems to have thought he had to occupy the northeast part of Korea. Perhaps we should tell him that from the UN and US point of view he need not occupy that territory... We want to achieve a termination of this involvement... We should not say that we must push forward. We should hold the line and turn it over to the ROK [Republic of Korea] as soon as we can.⁹⁶

⁹³ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, September 11, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 723.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation by the Officer in Chargé of Korean Affairs (Emmons), September 8, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 709-711.

⁹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation by the Officer in Chargé of Korean Affairs (Emmons), September 8, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 709-711.

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup), November 28, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 1242-1249.

When the northern offensive was delayed against his wishes, Rhee threatened a unilateral northern offensive by the South Korean army, which prompted American officials to make every effort to discourage Rhee.⁹⁷ Due to his bold unilateral threat despite American desires to hold the line at the 38th Parallel, it is clear that he did not shy away from openly confronting American policymakers and forcing the United States to make substantial commitments.

By early November 1950, MacArthur's forces having meanwhile advanced into North Korea, the Chinese entered the Korean War and pushed the UN forces southward back to the 38th Parallel. On July 10, 1951, the Communists and the UN Command began ceasefire talks, which Washington welcomed but Rhee adamantly opposed.

Unsurprisingly, Rhee did not buckle under American pressure and refused to sign the "death warrant."⁹⁸ Instead, he reiterated his desire to reunify the country and to continue fighting unilaterally if necessary.⁹⁹ Despite his protests, it became increasingly clear by June 1953 that the international political climate favored a ceasefire and that only the issue of prisoners of war repatriation remained unsettled. Rhee took an extraordinary unilateral action on June 18, 1953 by freeing twenty seven thousand North Korean prisoners of war under South Korean custody in order to disrupt the armistice negotiations.¹⁰⁰ This unilateral decision completely startled Washington. The memorandum of a National Security Council meeting the following day recounts President Eisenhower's shock at Rhee's unilateral decision to free the prisoners:

The President's first remark concerning the release by President Rhee of North

⁹⁷ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, September 26, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 785.

⁹⁸ "Notes on Conversation between the President and Mr. Walter S. Robertson," n.d., file 835:10570246, Syngman RMR.

⁹⁹ "Notes on Ambassador Briggs' Visit," n.d., file 835:10570001-10570131, Syngman RMR.

¹⁰⁰ "Notes on Ambassador Briggs' Visit," n.d., file 835:10570001-10570131, Syngman RMR.

Korean prisoners of war, was that we seemed to have acquired another enemy instead of a friend. President Rhee had welched on his promise not to take unilateral action with the UN Command. Moreover, the action in freeing some 25,000 North Korean POW's was deliberate, carefully planned in advance, and carried out in defiance of the UN Command.¹⁰¹

Rhee showed no remorse and followed up his decision of releasing prisoners with his usual threats to withdraw Korean forces from the UN Command upon any impending armistice agreement.¹⁰²

Due to his refusal to cooperate with the United States during the Korean War, the American government considered forcefully removing Rhee from the presidency and installing a political figure ready to comply with the wishes of the United States.¹⁰³ The plan was titled Operation Everready, and it first called for the American military to place Rhee under protective custody and then establish an interim government.¹⁰⁴ Assuming the South Korean army's loyalty to its deposed leader, Operation Everready also called for cutting off communication with the Korean army, seizing control over all Korean civil and military communications, and declaring martial law in the name of the UN.¹⁰⁵ Although the plan was eventually not implemented, the fact that American policymakers even considered Operation Everready suggests the extreme degree to which Rhee challenged American policies.

In regards to the actual armistice, he refused to sign it but agreed not to take unilateral action. Therefore, contrary to the popular assumption, South Korean officials

¹⁰¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 150th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 18, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 2, 1200-1205.

¹⁰² The Ambassador to Korea to the Commander in Chief United Nations Command, June 20, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 2, 1225-1227.

¹⁰³ Bernard Gwertzman, *The New York Times*, August 4, 1975.

¹⁰⁴ The Commander in Chief United Nations Command to the Chief of Staff United States Army, April 26, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 942.

¹⁰⁵ Paper Submitted by the Commanding General of the United States Eighth Army, May 4, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 966.

did not participate in the signing of the armistice between North Korean, Chinese, and American officials. Even after the armistice, he openly condemned American policy in Korea as “an international blunder of the worst kind” and claimed that “there can be no security for us [Koreans] and no stability in Asia until this blunder is rectified.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, Rhee was anything but subservient to the wishes of the American government. Instead, he made clear that cooperation with the global superpower did not necessarily imply obedience,¹⁰⁷ a lesson that American policymakers slowly realized and some Cold War historians have frequently neglected.

Similarly, Ben-Gurion challenged American foreign policy in the Middle East. When Ben-Gurion unilaterally declared the sovereign state of Israel on May 14, 1948, it was met with strong objections by officials in the U.S. State Department. Dean Rusk claimed that the American Delegation in the UN reacted with “pandemonium.” He wrote, “When I use the word pandemonium, I think I am not exaggerating.”¹⁰⁸ Ben-Gurion’s unilateral action “cuts across what our [American] Delegation has been trying to accomplish in the General Assembly [of the United Nations].”¹⁰⁹ Rusk’s concern was matched by Secretary of State George Marshall, who felt compelled to send Rusk to New York in fear for the U.S. delegation taking drastic action regarding Ben-Gurion’s unilateral declaration of statehood.¹¹⁰

Fortunately for Ben-Gurion and the nascent state of Israel, President Truman quickly recognized Israel. However, soon afterwards, Truman found that Ben-Gurion was

¹⁰⁶ “Memorandum,” n.d., file 835:10570136, Syngman RMR.

¹⁰⁷ “Summary Record of the Conference Held between President Rhee and Secretary Dulles,” n.d., file 835:10570139, Syngman RMR.

¹⁰⁸ Dean Rusk to William M. Franklin, May 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 992.

¹⁰⁹ Dean Rusk to William M. Franklin, May 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 992.

¹⁰⁹ Dean Rusk to William M. Franklin, May 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 992.

¹¹⁰ Dean Rusk to William M. Franklin, May 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 5, part 2, 992.

not afraid to openly challenge American wishes. As Palestinian Arabs fled the new state of Israel, Truman asked that Israel repatriate the two hundred thousand refugees. Truman also asked Ben-Gurion to comply with the UN resolution of December 11, 1948, to return all territorial gains in the Negev, which Israel had made during the 1948 War. Ben-Gurion refused to bow to these demands and forced the negotiations of the Palestinian refugee issue into a stalemate. American diplomats feared that due to “Israel’s intransigent attitude as exemplified by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion’s uncompromising refusal [to comply with American demands]... the stalemate seems likely to continue indefinitely.”¹¹¹

Truman also asked Ben-Gurion to place Jerusalem under international trusteeship. Again, Ben-Gurion flouted American demands, and instead, promised to be vigilant in “safeguarding and guaranteeing free access to places sacred to all mankind.”¹¹² The Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Walter Eytan, said, “Jerusalem is an inseparable part of Israel and her eternal capital. No UN vote can alter this historic fact. Ben-Gurion feels nothing more now need be said.”¹¹³

Bitterly disappointed by Ben-Gurion’s refusal to yield to American wishes, Truman sent Ben-Gurion a note of disapproval detailing that, “The Government of the U.S. is seriously disturbed by the attitude of Israel with respect to the territorial settlement in Palestine and to the question of Palestinian refugees.”¹¹⁴ He wrote,

The U.S. Government and people have given generous support to the creation of Israel because they have been convinced of the justice of this aspiration. The U.S.

¹¹¹ The Minister in Syria (Keeley) to the Secretary of State, May 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1031.

¹¹² The Ambassador of Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, December 5, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1521-1522.

¹¹³ The Ambassador of Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, December 11, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1532-1533.

¹¹⁴ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Israel, May 28, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1072.

Government does not, however, regard the present attitude of the Israeli Government as being consistent with the principles upon which U.S. support has been based. The U.S. Government is gravely concerned lest Israel now endanger the possibility of arriving at a solution of the Palestine problem in such a way as to contribute to the establishment of a sound and friendly relations between Israel and its neighbors.¹¹⁵

Truman's stern letter had little impact on Ben-Gurion, who responded by telling the American Ambassador in Israel, James McDonald, that, "The U.S. is powerful and we are weak; we could be destroyed; but we do not intend to commit suicide."¹¹⁶ His bold refusal to comply with American demands during Truman's administration suggests that Ben-Gurion had a pericentric relationship with the United States.

Following Truman's presidency, Eisenhower adopted a pro-Arab stance with a "friendly impartiality" towards Israel because the U.S. relied on Arab states for its oil supply.¹¹⁷ However, similar to Truman, Eisenhower found a stubborn Ben-Gurion refusing to yield to the same U.S. demands of withdrawing from the Negev and placing Jerusalem under international rule.¹¹⁸ Ben-Gurion argued that the borders were the result of the 1948 War, which was a war initiated by Arabs with the purpose of annihilation. According to Ben-Gurion, it was unthinkable that the Arabs had the right to reclaim their lands after their aggression.¹¹⁹ Therefore, American State Department officials during Eisenhower's administration became increasingly concerned that Ben-Gurion's stubborn belief, that the "only language the Arabs understand is that of force," would inhibit

¹¹⁵ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Israel, May 28, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1072.

¹¹⁶ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, May 29, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1074-1075.

¹¹⁷ The Ambassador in Israel (Davis) to the Department of State, January 28, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1107-1109.

¹¹⁸ Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

¹¹⁹ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 64.

American objectives in the Middle East.¹²⁰

When Eisenhower asked Israel to restrict the flow of Israeli immigrants and repatriate Palestinian refugees in 1953, Ben-Gurion refused again, even though the U.S. government had provided one hundred million dollars in economic aid specifically for the rehabilitation and resettlement of new immigrants.¹²¹ Ben-Gurion claimed that the vacuum left by the Palestinian exile was now filled with 1.4 million Jewish immigrants and that Palestinian repatriation would destroy the country's security and economy.¹²² Because Jewish immigrants filled the ranks of the Israeli military, created new settlements in the Negev, and provided the backbone for a modern economy, Ben-Gurion refused to comply with American demands. He also reasoned that slowing down the influx of exiles would question the very need for a Jewish state, which was to gather the Jewish Diaspora. In May 1953, American diplomats' hopes were further dashed when he capriciously withdrew an overdue offer to repatriate a tenth of the one million Palestinian refugees.¹²³

Ben-Gurion's decision to invade Egypt in 1956 further highlights his tendency to challenge American policy. He began to plan for a war against the Egyptians unbeknownst to the United States. After a period of unease and small border clashes, tensions between the Arab states and Israel escalated in the early 1950s. Gamal Abdul Nasser overthrew Egyptian King Farouk in a military coup, nationalized the Suez Canal, blocked Israeli ships from passing through, imposed an Arab embargo on Israeli goods, and built up arms for the purpose of war against Israel. Meanwhile, a wary Eisenhower

¹²⁰ Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

¹²¹ Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

¹²² Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

¹²³ Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

expressed his concerns that, despite American warnings, Ben-Gurion was “an extremist who might go the whole way, even war to achieve his goals.”¹²⁴

While preparing for war, Ben-Gurion gave false assurances in order to distract Nasser and Eisenhower from his true motives. On July 27, 1956, he told the American Ambassador to Israel, Edward Lawson, that the U.S. “has no ground for worry that we [Israelis] will do anything to disturb the peace.”¹²⁵ Again, on August 9, while Egypt was in a state of political instability, Ben-Gurion assured Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that he had promised Nasser that “Israel would not take advantage of the present situation to attack Egypt.”¹²⁶

Only nine weeks later, Ben-Gurion launched a decoy attack against the Jordanians on October 10 and 11, 1956. The attack on Jordan was part of his larger plan to distract Eisenhower and Nasser from the impending attack on Egypt, and his use of force against Jordan was also the first major divergence from U.S. demands. Eisenhower warned Ben-Gurion not be under the illusion that Israel’s attack on Jordan would not draw U.S. objections.¹²⁷ Despite his warnings, however, Ben-Gurion’s willingness to challenge American demands became increasingly apparent in the following weeks.

As war planning continued in secret, Ben-Gurion formed an alliance with the British and the French, and together, they stopped all communication with Washington concerning their imminent attack on Egypt. Secretary Dulles noted with serious concern the “complete blackout of information from the French and British with us regarding

¹²⁴ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 155.

¹²⁵ Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, July 27, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 22-23.

¹²⁶ Memorandum of Discussion at the 292nd Meeting of the National Security Council, August 9, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 165-176.

¹²⁷ Abraham Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 59.

Middle East matters.”¹²⁸ Washington only had suspicions of an impending war through “conclusive but highly secretive evidence that [the] French have supplied Israelis with more than double [the] number of Mystere-4 planes which was reported.”¹²⁹ The fact that Ben-Gurion planned the war in collaboration with France and Great Britain, both close allies of the United States, without American consent or awareness was in and of itself a significant divergence from American wishes.

October 28, 1956, on the eve of Israel’s preemptive attack on Egypt, President Eisenhower was notified of the mobilization of Israeli armed forces and sent an urgent personal message, warning Ben-Gurion against taking aggressive action in the Middle East. He wrote, “Mr. Prime Minister, I feel compelled to emphasize the dangers inherent in the present situation and to urge your Government to do nothing which would endanger the peace.”¹³⁰ Despite the fact that the IDF would launch an invasion in a matter of hours, American officials were assured by Ben-Gurion, who “reiterated the claim that Israel would not provoke a war and that the Israeli mobilization was purely defensive and precautionary.”¹³¹ In retrospect, American records state that “collusion and deception did exist and that it was directed not only against Egypt but also the U.S. Government.”¹³²

On October 29, 1956, the IDF launched an attack on Egypt and started the Suez Crisis. Ben-Gurion ordered General Moshe Dayan to attack the Mitla Pass and

¹²⁸ Telegram From the Department of State in France, October 29, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 815-816.

¹²⁹ Telegram From the Department of State in France, October 29, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 815-816.

¹³⁰ Message From President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, October 28, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 801.

¹³¹ Record of Events Leading to the Israeli and Anglo-French Attacks on Egypt in Late October 1956, December 5, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1250-1271.

¹³² Record of Events Leading to the Israeli and Anglo-French Attacks on Egypt in Late October 1956, December 5, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1250-1271.

preemptively engage the Egyptian army. Eisenhower reacted with the utmost vehemence. An American editorial reported that, upon hearing the full scale of Israel's military mission, Eisenhower filled the White House with "barracks room language the like of which had not been heard since the days of General Grant."¹³³

Ben-Gurion followed up the resounding victory of the Suez Crisis with a four month long diplomatic struggle from November 1956 to March 1957 concerning Israel's eventual withdrawal, which required extraordinary tenacity and willpower to challenge the United States.¹³⁴ Although Great Britain and France quickly buckled under American pressure and withdrew, Ben-Gurion boldly chose to use the territorial gains as bargaining chips to gain concessions from the United States. Contrary to the notion that Ben-Gurion withdrew because of U.S. pressures, he made the ultimate decision for withdrawal and set the terms of the withdrawal.¹³⁵ An examination of the diplomatic struggle makes clear that he had the upper hand in the negotiations as American diplomats struggled to answer Ben-Gurion's legitimate concerns of national security and America's refusal to sell Israel arms.¹³⁶ He wrote to Eisenhower that "The denial of defensive arms to Israel jeopardizes its very survival. In the absence of a positive response from the U.S. we find it well-nigh impossible to get arms from any other free country in the free world... No Arab country is ever likely to make peace with a defenceless Israel."¹³⁷ President Eisenhower responded in an ambiguous letter nearly two weeks later, which said that he had given Israel's request for arms thoughtful consideration, but ultimately, could not sell arms to

¹³³ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 229.

¹³⁴ Ben-Zvi, *The United States*, 49-76.

¹³⁵ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 245.

¹³⁶ Message From Robert B. Anderson to the Department of State, January 23, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 15, 51-56.

¹³⁷ Letter From Prime Minister Ben Gurion to President Eisenhower, February 14, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 185-187.

Israel or suggest an alternative way to resolve the crisis.¹³⁸

Through the course of the ceasefire negotiations, Ben-Gurion continued to make significant demands for agreeing to withdraw from the occupied territories in Sinai and Gaza.¹³⁹ Ben-Gurion had made it clear from the beginning of the war that Israel had no territorial ambitions and that maintaining the territory gained was not a priority.¹⁴⁰ Rather than keeping the territory, conceding the territory was to serve the greater purpose of securing the true objectives of the war, which was to abolish the economic boycott against Israeli goods, disperse the fedayeen terrorist incursions, neutralize the Egyptian threat, and end the blockade in the Suez Canal.¹⁴¹ By using Sinai and Gaza as bargaining chips, Ben-Gurion also avoided the significant economic costs of a long-term occupation and the threat of domestic insurrections from occupied territories. To a reluctant General Dayan, Ben-Gurion said, “If our enemies were smart they would let us have Gaza. The danger in staying there is both economic and political. Economically, we will have to feed two hundred and fifty thousand refugees.” He continued, “But still the real danger is political. There can be no doubt that the refugees and others will carry out terrorist attacks against us.”¹⁴² It is clear, therefore, that Ben-Gurion did not forfeit occupied territories because of American demands but instead used the territorial gains in Sinai and Gaza as bargaining chips for diplomacy.

Thus, both Rhee and Ben-Gurion were not controlled by the United States. They

¹³⁸ Letter From President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, February 27, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 242.

¹³⁹ Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, December 3, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1244-1248.

¹⁴⁰ Message From Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to President Eisenhower, November 8, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1095-1096.

¹⁴¹ Message From Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to President Eisenhower, November 8, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1095-1096.

¹⁴² Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 283.

developed a pericentric relationship with the U.S. in which they fought for their national interests and openly challenged American foreign policy in the process. Unlike the simplified Cold War depiction of the United States assuming the all-powerful voice of the free world, the policies of Rhee and Ben-Gurion demonstrate that through their bold defiance and courageous pursuit of national interests, smaller states were able to pursue their own interests even within the context of the Cold War.

Furthermore, despite their disregard for American expectations of democratic governance and compliance to Washington's foreign policy, Rhee and Ben-Gurion influenced American policy by drawing significant concessions. It is important to elaborate on the concessions made by Washington to Rhee and Ben-Gurion because such concessions suggest that the two allies pulled as much as they were pushed by the United States. Therefore, the following examines major concessions drawn by Rhee and Ben-Gurion despite their defiance of American wishes.

First of all, America many made concessions to Rhee during the founding of South Korea. The aforementioned acrimonious relationship between Rhee and General Hodge eventually resulted in Washington shifting its policies in favor of Rhee's demands. Although the American Military Government was originally willing to seek a compromise with the Communists, Rhee's refusal caused Washington to abandon all attempts at compromise. Instead, the U.S. endorsed a separate democratic state on the southern half of the peninsula.¹⁴³ Upon Rhee's rise to the presidency, the U.S. government replaced General Hodge from his post as the head of American forces in South Korea in May 1948. The State Department realized that it was "highly desirable

¹⁴³ The Secretary of State to the Acting Political Advisor in Korea, January 6, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1083.

that General Hodge be replaced, for that relationship [between Rhee and Hodge] could be allowed to jeopardize the success of negotiations.”¹⁴⁴ In the following years, Rhee’s constant badgering caused the United States to drastically reverse its position on South Korea, which originally stated in April 1948 that the American government would “not become so irrevocably involved in the Korean situation that any action taken by any faction in Korea or by any other power in Korea could be considered a *casus belli* for the U.S.”¹⁴⁵

Before the Korean War, Rhee’s insistence for the American government to increase military funding and delay the withdrawal of troops did not postpone the withdrawal, but his protests did have an effect on American policy. Instead of a complete withdrawal, Washington reaffirmed its commitment to Korea and “intensified and improved training of Korean security forces, and provided adequate equipment and supplies.”¹⁴⁶ When John Foster Dulles visited South Korea in 1950 shortly before the Korean War, Rhee effectively demonstrated the need for American troops, and shortly after, President Truman made the decision to keep American troops stationed in South Korea on a longer basis.¹⁴⁷ Rhee’s administration also secured one hundred million dollars annually in economic assistance from Washington.¹⁴⁸ By the start of the Korean War, the State Department had already implemented the broad objective “to assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy and education system as essential bases

¹⁴⁴ Replacement of Lieutenant General Hodge, May 11, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1193.

¹⁴⁵ Report by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States With Respect to Korea, April 2, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1169.

¹⁴⁶ The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, January 27, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 947-952.

¹⁴⁷ “Summary Record of the Conference Held between President Rhee and Secretary Dulles,” n.d., file 835:10570139, Syngman RMR.

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas, September 7, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1295.

of an independent and democratic state.”¹⁴⁹

Rhee’s divergences from American military strategy during the Korean War also resulted in several important strategic decisions being made according to his wishes. Despite President Truman’s hesitancy, Rhee’s threat to make a unilateral offensive across the 38th Parallel in September 1950 encouraged Truman to engage in a northern offensive and to help convince American allies of the need to reunify Korea.¹⁵⁰ In the later years of the war, when the United States grew weary of the casualties and the lack of progress, Rhee was not able to persuade Eisenhower’s administration to continue fighting, but through his resolute stance against the ceasefire and threats of unilateral military action, he was able to guarantee significant American assistance afterwards. The Eisenhower administration had to go to extraordinary lengths to buy Rhee’s support for the armistice, and the need to convince Rhee effectively allowed him to set the terms of the negotiations with the U.S. He dallied and delayed his decision concerning the armistice and added additional terms unexpectedly.¹⁵¹ Secretary Dulles later reported that “one of the most difficult tasks we have had has been to get Rhee to go along with an armistice.” Dulles also said that to win Rhee’s endorsement, Washington “had done some things in the common interest which we did not want to do but...we had to pay the price.”¹⁵² In addition to the ten thousand tons of relief food, the U.S. government eventually promised two hundred million dollars for relief “due to the signing of the armistice.”¹⁵³ By finally

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas, September 7, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1295.

¹⁵⁰ The United States Representative at the United Nations to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, vol. 7, 826.

¹⁵¹ The Commanding General United States Eighth Army (Taylor) to the Commander in Chief Far East (Clark), June 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 2, 1159.

¹⁵² United State Minutes of the Second Meeting ANZUS Council: First Session, September 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 2, 1506.

¹⁵³ “Summary Record of the Conference Held between President Rhee and Secretary Dulles,” n.d., file

agreeing to honor the terms of the armistice, Rhee persuaded the American government to rebuild the Korean infrastructure and propel the South Korean economy to unprecedented heights in the following decades.

Furthermore, the United States also agreed to a mutual defense treaty with South Korea in 1953, which was the first of its kind in Asia and which effectively reduced the possibility of another war.¹⁵⁴ The fact that Rhee was able to sign a mutual defense treaty with a major power such as the United States on equal terms was an extraordinary diplomatic achievement. In addition, the United States agreed to help build a substantial Korean defense force using seven hundred million dollars, which included funds for the expansion of the Korean army to seven hundred and twenty thousand personnel, vessels for the Korean navy, and modernization of an independent Korean air force.¹⁵⁵ It is very possible that, without his strong stand against the ceasefire, the American government could have quickly forced the armistice, and South Korea could have been continually threatened by the possibility of Communist invasion.

Thus, Rhee secured significant concessions from the United States despite his autocratic tactics and his defiance of American policy in the Far East. Rather than being swayed by the American government's power and global influence, Rhee influenced American policy regarding Korea and convinced Washington to rebuild South Korea after the Korean War.

Similarly, Ben-Gurion effectively influenced American foreign policy to adopt policies favorable to Israeli interests, despite his strong-armed measures, unilateral

835:10570139, Syngman RMR.

¹⁵⁴ Dwight Eisenhower to Syngman Rhee, June 7, 1953, Public Papers of the President, The American Presidency Project, Santa Barbara, CA, 1.

¹⁵⁵ United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Korea, December 29, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 2, 1944.

declaration of statehood, collusion leading up to the Suez Crisis, and unyielding tenacity during the ceasefire negotiations. First and perhaps most significantly, Ben-Gurion convinced the U.S. to provide significant sums of economic aid for Israel. When Israel faced a serious financial crisis in the early 1950s, Eisenhower expressed his concern that his administration was failing to be as “tough with the Israelis as with any other nation,” but nonetheless, he granted an additional one hundred million dollars in economic aid.¹⁵⁶ While Eisenhower’s administration continued to provide support for Israel, Ben-Gurion “would come back again and again for handouts from the United States, with no prospect of permanent stabilization or improvement.”¹⁵⁷ The relative ease with which Ben-Gurion was able to win American economic assistance demonstrates the extent of the pericentric relationship he had with the United States.

On the issue of Palestinian refugees, Ben-Gurion’s refusal to repatriate them eventually changed Washington’s stance. Originally, Secretary Dulles tried to convince Israel to end its “ambitious immigration program” of the Jewish Diaspora and repatriate Palestinian refugees because “this would do more than anything else to ease tension between Israel and the Arab States.”¹⁵⁸ Ben-Gurion did not budge. When Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey suggested the United States threaten Israel that persistent immigration would end American economic assistance, Dulles replied that he had already tried, and “the question was, can we maintain this stand?”¹⁵⁹ By 1952, Ben-Gurion’s persistent refusal paid off. Eisenhower concluded that Arab refugees “live an entirely

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum of Discussion at the 153rd Meeting of the National Security Council, July 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 2, 394-398.

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum of Discussion at the 153rd Meeting of the National Security Council, July 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 2, 394-398.

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 153rd Meeting of the National Security Council, July 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 2, 394-398.

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 153rd Meeting of the National Security Council, July 9, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 2, 394-398.

different kind of life from the Israeli people; they were content to live in the desert, while Israel was building a modern economy. The refugees should be integrated into the Arab countries.” Thus, Ben-Gurion’s refusal eventually resulted in a change in American attitude on the Palestinian refugee issue.

America’s refusal to sell arms to Israel also shifted, which allowed Israel to gradually increase its military expenditures and maintain its military superiority over Arab states.¹⁶⁰ Originally, in 1953, when Israel asked for military aid against the Arab threat spearheaded by Egypt, Eisenhower told his advisors that,

While recognizing the legitimacy of Israel’s concern, the United States position has been that the best possibility of peace in the Near East at present is through Egypt’s Premier General Naguib...For this reason Egypt has been found eligible for grant military assistance for training...We are prepared in principle to offer Israel grant aid, but we cannot do it now without jeopardizing present tendency of Arabs.¹⁶¹

Despite such reservations about supplying Israel with arms, Ben-Gurion convinced Secretary Dulles that without arms, Israel would be driven to hopelessness. In the months leading up to the Suez Crisis, Eisenhower approved the sale of French fighter planes and interceded with Canada to sell Israel F-86 Sabre jet fighters.¹⁶² Later in 1959, the United States again agreed to provide Israel with one thousand recoilless guns and provided financing for Israel to purchase of tanks from Great Britain.¹⁶³ In 1960, the U.S. Department of Defense approved the direct sale of defensive military equipment to Israel.¹⁶⁴ The seemingly irrational shift in policy to provide Israel with military support,

¹⁶⁰ Mohamed El-Khawas, *American Aid to Israel: Nature and Impact* (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1984), 28.

¹⁶¹ Department of State Position Paper, May 5, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-195*, vol. 9, part 1, 1188-1199.

¹⁶² Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 178.

¹⁶³ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 313.

¹⁶⁴ Letter From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Dabney) to

despite Ben-Gurion's refusal to comply with American demands, suggests that the U.S.-Israeli relationship was pericentric and that Ben-Gurion was influencing Washington's policy rather than Washington controlling Ben-Gurion's.

In addition, Ben-Gurion successfully drew American concessions through the negotiation process of the Suez Crisis. At first, U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, believed that Israel should withdraw, much like Great Britain and France, who quickly withdrew after an unconditional surrender.¹⁶⁵ However, Ben-Gurion left a strong impression on Eisenhower and convinced him that his motives for war differed from the Europeans.¹⁶⁶ Eisenhower realized that the British and French were attempting to maintain control over their colonial possessions in Egypt, mainly the Suez Canal. He concluded that, "The French and the British do not have an adequate cause for war."¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, Israel was fighting for its survival against a legitimate Arab threat embodied by Egypt. Therefore, Eisenhower eventually supported Israel's demands for a security guarantee in the form of a UN Emergency Force (UNEF).¹⁶⁸ When Washington finally convinced Ben-Gurion to withdraw from the Sinai, he had secured the promise of a permanent UNEF presence to secure the area and prevent further hostilities between Israel and Egypt.¹⁶⁹ The UNEF was a resounding diplomatic victory for Israel because the threat of a sudden Egyptian attack on Israel was effectively eliminated. Other additional concessions that Ben-Gurion drew during the ceasefire agreements was the freedom of navigation, which resulted in eleven years of relative tranquility. This

the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Hare), June 14, 1956, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, vol. 13, 336-337.

¹⁶⁵ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 253.

¹⁶⁶ Alteras, *Eisenhower*, 242.

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conference, October 30, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 851-855.

¹⁶⁸ Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, 256.

¹⁶⁹ Telegram From the Mission at the United Nations to the Department of State, November 27, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 1205-1209.

tranquility became the setting for Israel's economic growth much like South Korea's economy improved after Rhee secured a security guarantee from the United States.

Finally, Ben-Gurion reduced the political backlash for Israel's preemptive attack by refusing to yield to American pressure and holding out for the UNEF security guarantee. Instead of international censure and an arms embargo from the United States, Ben-Gurion's demand for security guarantees, withdrawal from occupied territories, and support for the UNEF presence suggested to American policymakers that he was committed to building peace rather than waging war, despite being the preemptive aggressor. If Ben-Gurion had simply buckled under U.S. pressure to withdraw, it is likely that the international community would have viewed Israel as the aggressor state wholly deserving of condemnation, much like its view of the French and the British.¹⁷⁰ Instead, Ben-Gurion defied the premise that aggressors could not set the conditions for their withdrawal through his pericentric relationship.

In summary, America did not control Rhee and Ben-Gurion. Each acted according to his interests, which resulted in policies that America did not fully approve. Through various strong-armed tactics and defiance of American foreign policy, they demonstrated that they were not being "used" by the United States. Washington found itself shifting its policies, moderating its stance, and overlooking the autocratic measures of its two allies. Although Rhee and Ben-Gurion could never openly challenge America, and in fact desperately relied on American assistance, they developed a pericentric relationship with the United States and forced Washington to make significant overseas commitments. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower found themselves unable to bend the

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum of Conference, October 30, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. 16, 851-855.

will of two Third World leaders, who simply refused to give in. The next question is how these two Third World leaders were able to establish their pericentric relationship and consequently shape the will of a superpower.

IV. Reasoning Behind Pericentrism

Numerous factors caused America to make significant concessions to South Korea and Israel. General MacArthur's insistence on defending South Korea as he would California and the strength of the Jewish Lobby are few of many reasons that contributed to the pericentric relationships. In particular, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is considered one of the most powerful lobbying groups in the United States and undoubtedly played a major role in American policymaking by supporting Ben-Gurion and giving him the political leverage to influence American policies. While not dismissing such factors, this study concentrates on two of Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's personal contributions that made these pericentric relationships possible: their anti-Communist stance and their liberal autocracies. Their anti-Communist stance caused Washington to recognize them as necessary allies against Soviet expansionism despite their shortcomings. In addition, their rhetoric about the need to adopt strong-armed measures in order to establish stability gave American policymakers hope that South Korea and Israel were not dictatorships but liberal autocracies in transition to democracy. These two personal characteristics are by no means the only factors that influenced American policymaking and do not necessarily stand in isolation. However, taken together, the two personal characteristics contributed to developing the pericentric relationships and convincing Washington to yield at crucial moments to the demands of smaller states.

During the 1950s, there was a strong anti-Communist sentiment in the United States, and the American public felt the need to oppose Communism at all costs.

Historian Michael Hunt describes the strong anti-Communist dimension of American foreign policy towards Third World leaders as follows:

Better to support a rightist strongman in a time of unrest than to allow a leftist takeover that would permanently foreclose the prospects for freedom...Once the doors were closed to the heirs of the Bolshevik Revolution, these new nations could move with greater assurance and security toward the creation of that condition of 'ordered liberty' that John Adams and all his heirs had extolled.¹⁷¹

Despite his stubborn attitude and refusal to yield to American demands, Rhee fit the profile of a staunch anti-Communist and earned the trust of Washington policymakers, who viewed him as a vital ally against Communist expansion. He was so anti-Communist that, at one point, a few American policymakers feared that he was “fanatically anti-Communist” to the point of becoming a political liability. Rhee simply retorted, “Yes, I was and still am that [fanatically anti-Communist].”¹⁷² The retort was undoubtedly appealing to conservative American politicians.

Before the founding of South Korea, Rhee understood that the volatility of the Korean political climate made it susceptible to Communist infiltration. The economy was in ruins after decades of Japanese misrule. Across the border, the Chinese Civil War raged on, and the Communist leader, Mao Zedong, was making significant gains against his democratic opponent Chiang Kei Shek. Rhee’s Communist counterpart, Kim Il Sung, was solidifying his control in the northern half of Korea with the help of the Soviet Union. In such a precarious background, Rhee recognized the threat that Communism posed to the proper development of liberal democracy and refused to support any type of coalition with the Communists.¹⁷³ Rhee was so clearly anti-Communist that the American Military

¹⁷¹ Hunt, *Ideology*, 161.

¹⁷² “Conversation between the President and General Clark,” n.d., file 835: 10570262, Syngman RMR.

¹⁷³ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, March 30, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6,

Government specifically chose him in the summer of 1946 to campaign throughout the southern half of the peninsula despite serious threats against his life.¹⁷⁴ Oliver argues that Rhee's anti-Communist campaign became the roots of the Korean democratic movement.¹⁷⁵ His popular saying during his campaigns for democracy, "Communism is cholera" and "You can't compromise with cholera," became well-known throughout the South.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, because of his anti-Communist stance, he also advocated for holding separate elections in order to preserve democracy in at least the southern half of the peninsula even though it could permanently split the Korean nation in half.¹⁷⁷ Such anti-Communist beliefs persuaded American policymakers to support his autocratic regime even though he did not always meet their expectations.

The aforementioned suppression of Communist rebels of Cheju Island also demonstrates his strong anti-Communist stance. He understood that losing Cheju Island to rebels, who openly waved North Korean flags, posed a great threat to liberal democracy in South Korea. The Cheju Uprising took place in April 3, 1948, only a month before the first general election to elect the parliament of South Korea and at a critical time that would officially split the Korean peninsula in two.¹⁷⁸ At that time, Soviet-sponsored North Korea refused to allow UN supervisors to conduct elections in North Korea. Meanwhile, South Korean leader Kimmu Kiusic opposed the election and

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¹⁷⁴ The Political Advisor in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State, May 14, 1946, *FRUS, 1946*, vol. 8, 678.

¹⁷⁵ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 352.

¹⁷⁷ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea (Jacobs) to the Secretary of State, February 13, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1109.

¹⁷⁸ Memorandum of conversations, by the Chief of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs, March 9, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1146.

advocated a policy of appeasement towards North Korea.¹⁷⁹ South Korea did not have an established constitution, a recognized government, or an elected body of representatives. South Korea was little more than an idea sponsored by the American government, and Rhee's strong anti-Communist stance at Cheju brought him the favor of the American government and allowed him to establish a pericentric relationship with Washington.

On the other hand, Ben-Gurion also had a strong anti-Communist stance that made him an indispensable ally, deserving of American concessions, despite his autocratic tactics and defiance of American wishes. Although he had Communist sympathies during his early years,¹⁸⁰ Ben-Gurion had a gradual change of perspective. His close advisor and the eighth Prime Minister of Israel, Simon Peres, argues that although Ben-Gurion admired Lenin, he slowly became disenchanted with Leninist Communism after visiting an agricultural exhibition in the Soviet Union during the early 1920s. Ben-Gurion's perspective on socialism was that of a class of workers working together, rather than engaging in a class struggle. In simpler terms, Ben-Gurion's socialism was constructive, not revolutionary.¹⁸¹ His own views of constructive socialism were published after his death in a work titled *From Class to Nation*, which outlines his dislike for Lenin and an even stronger aversion to Stalinism in a long series of strongly worded essays.¹⁸² Peres cites *From Class to Nation* to claim that Ben-Gurion considered "Communism as the antithesis of Judaism."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ The Acting Political Advisor in Korea to the Secretary of State, February 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1120.

¹⁸⁰ Israel Kolatt, "Ben-Gurion Image and Reality," in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 19.

¹⁸¹ Simon Peres, "Ben-Gurion as I Knew Him," in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 13.

¹⁸² David Ben-Gurion, *Mi-Ma' amad le'Am/From Class to Nation* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved ve Keren Ha-Negev, 1974). An English translation of the book does not exist.

¹⁸³ Peres, "Ben-Gurion," 13.

Peres' evaluation of Ben-Gurion's anti-Communist sentiment also resonates in Ben-Gurion's involvement in the Rightist Poale Zion. Although Ben-Gurion began his political career in Poale Zion, a Marxist Zionist Movement, when the Poale Zion split into two factions in 1919, he joined the right wing, which abandoned the Marxist roots of the original movement. Under the leadership of Ben-Gurion, the Rightist Poale Zion became the Mapai political party, which is the predecessor to the modern day centrist Labor Party. Ben-Gurion also worked with his colleague Berl Katznelson to free the Israeli labor movement from the pull of the Communist revolution. Peres believes that Zionism would have been swept by the Communist revolution without the influence of Ben-Gurion and Katznelson during the 1920s.¹⁸⁴ Ben-Gurion's opposition to Communism also caused the Left Poale Zion to threaten secession during his term as the secretary-general of the Histadrut, an influential organization of Jewish labor unions during the British Mandate of Palestine.¹⁸⁵

After becoming prime minister, Ben-Gurion assured American Ambassador McDonald that the U.S. had no need to worry about Communists establishing a regimented society in Israel. He said empathetically, "For three thousand years we Jews have refused [to] accept regimentation and have repeatedly fought it at risk [of] national extermination. Today we are still Jews and still fight regimentation."¹⁸⁶ When the Vatican feared the expansion of Communism into Israel, again Ben-Gurion responded that "Rome will be Communist before Jerusalem."¹⁸⁷ Ben-Gurion effectively convinced

¹⁸⁴ Peres, "Ben-Gurion," 13.

¹⁸⁵ Kolatt, "Ben-Gurion," 19.

¹⁸⁶ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, December 5, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1521-1523.

¹⁸⁷ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, December 5, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 6, 1521-1523.

Secretary Dulles that his anti-Communist stance made Israel an important ally in the Middle East against Communist expansion. Ben-Gurion told him that, “Israel historically, culturally, and spiritually part of the free world, was the only country in the area besides Turkey willing and able to fight for freedom and determined to defend its democratic way of life regardless of the prospects of victory.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, Ben-Gurion’s anti-Communist stance helped establish a pericentric relationship in which Israel assumed a voice Washington could not ignore.

In addition to their strong anti-Communist beliefs, Rhee and Ben-Gurion did their part in justifying their autocratic tactics. According to Fareed Zakaria, after World War II, many nascent nation-states were able to establish durable democratic institutions because they did not become democratic immediately. Instead, they underwent a gradual evolution from “liberal autocracy” to eventually liberal democracy.¹⁸⁹ Gregg Brazinsky, who applies the idea of liberal autocracy to the study of South Korea’s later president Park Chung Hee, summarizes Zakaria’s thesis as follows:

Liberalizing autocracies, according to Zakaria, were regimes that developed the economy, preserved order, and liberalized the rights of worship and travel before surrendering power. By doing so, they inadvertently created an environment in which democracy could thrive.¹⁹⁰

By sacrificing certain aspects of democratic governance, Rhee’s and Ben-Gurion’s liberal autocracies guaranteed stability, which was necessary for democratic development in nascent states. Moreover, although the term “liberal autocracy” did not exist at the time, Rhee and Ben-Gurion justified their autocratic tactics along the lines of securing stability

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum of Conversation Prepared in the Embassy in Israel, May 14, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 36-40.

¹⁸⁹ Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” 22-43.

¹⁹⁰ Brazinsky, *Nation-Building*, 4-5.

for future democratic rule. Rhee's justifications, and to a lesser extent Ben-Gurion's justifications, helped placate American policymakers to support to their regimes despite their strong-armed measures.

It should be noted that some Cold War historians have questioned whether American policymakers truly cared whether their allies were autocrats or dictators, as long as they were anti-Communists. Even if such suggestions are true and if Washington were willing to support anti-Communist dictators, it does not change the fact that evidence of liberal autocracy would have helped justify Washington's support of questionable regimes to the American people. Therefore, the following pages suggest that both Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's regimes were not the result of a mad drive for dictatorial control but the result of a conscious decision to establish a liberal autocracy and secure stability.

Rhee's rhetoric reveals that he justified his autocratic tactics to American policymakers by citing that the Korean people were wholly unfamiliar with the concept of liberal democracy. When he first assumed office, American diplomats also recognized that,

The efforts of the U.S. to foster the establishment of a democratic and sovereign Korea are handicapped by the political immaturity of the Korean people. The tendency of Korean political elements to polarize into extremes of right and left and to pursue their ends through the use of violence acts as a serious detriment to the achievement of political stability *on a democratic basis in Korea* [emphasis added].¹⁹¹

The framers of the Korean Constitution also agreed that the Korean people, much like Americans of the late 18th century, were not sufficiently educated to make informed

¹⁹¹ Report by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States With Respect to Korea, April 2, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1166.

political decisions, especially since many Koreans were illiterate.¹⁹² In order to establish political stability, “it was his [Rhee’s] duty as protector of democracy to take necessary measures.”¹⁹³

After he assumed the presidency, he forced through the aforementioned Constitutional amendment in 1952 to change the method of presidential elections. As previously discussed, his methods were autocratic, but he justified them as necessary measures to ensure the gradual transition to democracy against rampant corruption in the government. According to Rhee, the Korean Assembly was corrupted by bribes and Communist infiltrators. The Deputy Chief of Mission in South Korea, E. Allan Lightner, reported to the U.S. State Department that, “Facts were that [a] group of gangsters had obtained majority in [the] National Assembly, many bribed with funds through traitorous connections with Korea’s enemies...They had determined to seize government. They already had plans for electing their own gangster president.”¹⁹⁴ By using strong-armed tactics to pass the amendments, which transferred the vote for the president from the parliament to the people, Rhee claimed to be “the champion of democracy in Korea.”¹⁹⁵ The United States realized that condemning Rhee’s tactics would “not prevent further high handed actions” and would most likely be followed by “mob violence.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, Washington came to view his regime as a liberal autocracy and his autocratic tactics as an attempt to transfer the vote to the Korean people and establish stability in South Korea.

¹⁹² Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea*, 388.

¹⁹³ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 30, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 266.

¹⁹⁴ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 27, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 254.

¹⁹⁵ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 27, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 254.

¹⁹⁶ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 27, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 255.

Several American editorials also recognized that Rhee's autocratic methods were justified attempts to restore stability rather than to establish a dictatorship. In June 1952, an American editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* said that, in the extraordinary circumstances of founding a democratic state, "the sounder—yes, and more democratic cause—is to stand clear and let Rhee, with the solid backing of the people and the Army, revise the Constitution in his own way, even though his means appear to outsiders the very antithesis of the democratic process."¹⁹⁷ The *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial further argued that the Constitutional amendment was not completely without legal sanction and that with the 1952 amendment, the sovereignty of Korea would finally reside in its people. Similarly, a *New York Times* editorial reported on May 28, 1952 that the arrested members of Korea's National Assembly had "far reaching Communist connections" and that the appropriate authorities were simply "taking steps to make a thorough investigation of the case."¹⁹⁸ The same editorial also noted that allegations of Rhee's misuse of power could be based on "unfair stories and unfounded rumors."¹⁹⁹ On June 1, 1952, *The New York Times* issued a special editorial on South Korea titled "South Korea Political Row."²⁰⁰ It concluded that, "For all the sharp criticism of President Rhee, nobody seems to be able to think of a single person who can replace him."²⁰¹ Furthermore, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that, "President Syngman Rhee has the reputation of being cranky but the chaos has been so great that frequently his [voice] has seemed the only voice of reason."²⁰² A *Time Magazine* editorial suggested that the

¹⁹⁷ Sunoo, *American's Dilemma*, 104.

¹⁹⁸ Murray Schumach, "Van Fleet Confers with Rhee on Acts," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1952.

¹⁹⁹ Schumach, "Van Fleet Confers with Rhee on Acts," May 28, 1952.

²⁰⁰ "South Korea Political Row," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1952.

²⁰¹ "South Korea Political Row," June 1, 1952.

²⁰² Walter Simmons, "Falling Apart of South Korea Creates Alarm," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1952.

reason that South Korea did not have a democratic figure like Thomas Jefferson was because, “the political climate of Korea is against the free development of such a typically democratic figure,”²⁰³ and not because of Rhee’s strong-armed tactics.

Rhee’s own words concerning the 1952 Constitutional crisis were that, “The real struggle for power is between the entire nation and a group of assemblymen. There is no one more anxious than I am to see this country firmly established as a truly independent and democratic state. This has been the sole objective of my lifelong career.”²⁰⁴

According to Rhee, it was not him but corrupt members of the National Assembly who were “betraying the will of the people.”²⁰⁵

In addition, since Rhee had the backing of the Korean army, he could have easily dissolved the National Assembly as many other contemporary dictators have done in order to secure their absolute control. However, Rhee never dissolved the Assembly. He later confessed that he “called off the dissolution of the National Assembly” because he did “not wish to set an example of the Republic of Korea’s first President dissolving the National Assembly.”²⁰⁶ Therefore, although Rhee’s method of arresting assemblymen and forcing their votes may have been autocratic, his liberal autocracy is demonstrated by his refusal to dissolve the Assembly. His self-control characterizes his regime as a liberal autocracy, which American policymakers and the American media understood and accepted as a prerequisite for democracy.

Furthermore, the outline for Rhee’s liberal autocracy is reflected in the five resolutions set forth in 1942 by the Provisional Government of Korea in China before the

²⁰³ “Korea: The Walnut,” *Time Magazine*, May 9, 1953.

²⁰⁴ Sunoo, *American’s Dilemma*, 104.

²⁰⁵ “Threat to Oust U.N. Bodies Made by South Koreans,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1952.

²⁰⁶ “Rhee Delays Assembly Action,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 1952.

official establishment of South Korea. The first resolution, above all, stressed the establishment of a democratic state modeled after the United States. In order to establish a liberal democracy, the resolution emphasized the necessity of centralized power around a strong leader for a period of ten years, during which the Korean people would be educated in the ways of democracy. Similar to the subsequent framers of the South Korean Constitution, the Provisional Government was concerned about the lack of democratic political culture and the illiteracy of the Korean people. The Congress determined that a central figure should dictate policy until Koreans were prepared for self-rule. Rhee believed that he was one of the few truly dedicated leaders, capable of assuming central leadership in the turbulent years following independence to work foremost for the welfare of the Korean people.²⁰⁷ Other Korean politicians, he believed were “hopelessly incompetent for the job” since many were associated with gangs and susceptible to bribes.²⁰⁸ Thus, the resolutions of the Provisional Congress also suggest that his autocratic tactics were a premeditated decision to establish a liberal autocracy for stability rather than a dictatorship.

In addition, American officials recognized that Communist aggression made his strong-armed measures necessary for stability.²⁰⁹ Before the Korean War, the Communist threat of North Korea created great political uncertainty. There were widespread Communist guerilla activities in mountainous regions of South Korea, and the leftist South Korea Labor Party effectively organized teachers and students in urban centers.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and Syngman*, 392.

²⁰⁸ Sunoo, *American's Dilemma*, 110.

²⁰⁹ The Chargé in Korea (Lightner) to Department of State, May 30, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 15, part 1, 266.

²¹⁰ The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State, January 27, 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, vol. 7, part 2, 947-952.

The North Korean government had a wealth of natural resources and hydroelectric power to supply its industries, which fared better than South Korean industries.²¹¹ The North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung formed a cult of personality and had full control over the North Korean government. With Soviet support, Kim also enjoyed superior military capabilities to strike South Korea.²¹² Considering the threat from North Korea, Rhee found it necessary to employ autocratic tactics to secure South Korea's future liberal democracy against the Communist threat.

Finally, an examination of Rhee's early writings and educational background supports the argument that Rhee established a liberal autocracy in order to secure stability for democracy. In 1904, when he was imprisoned while fighting for Korean independence against Japanese occupation, he wrote *The Spirit of Independence*, which ultimately became the Bible for the Korean independence movement.²¹³ The book had a similar influence on Koreans as the writings of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson had on the American colonists in instilling ideas of liberal democracy and independence.²¹⁴ In the work, Rhee emphasized the virtues of American-style liberal democracy. He believed that it was the best political system conceived by mankind because it maximized individual liberty.²¹⁵ Rhee espoused that Koreans should be inspired by the American story and should pursue the same individual liberties under democratic rule so that they too could

²¹¹ Report by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States With Respect to Korea, April 2, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1167.

²¹² Lieutenant General John R. Hodge to the Secretary of State, February 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, vol. 6, 1110-1111.

²¹³ Syngman Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence: A Primer of Korean Modernization and Reform*, trans. Han-Kyo Kim (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 89. Robert Oliver refers to Rhee's work as the Bible for the Korean independence movement in *Syngman Rhee: The Man behind the Myth* (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1960), 55.

²¹⁴ Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man*, 55.

²¹⁵ Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 89.

reach their utmost potential.²¹⁶ His democratic political philosophy became even clearer through formal education from top American universities after his release from prison. He obtained a master's degree in political science from Harvard University in 1908 and a doctoral degree in political science from Princeton University in 1910. In a 1950 letter to Oliver, he outlined his own version of liberal democracy for the Korean people embodied by the principle of *Yilmin Chuyi*, which means "one standard or equality between the people (equality between the nobility and commoner, the rich and poor, man and woman, and the people of the north and south)."²¹⁷ Rhee believed that Korean democracy had to be built upon such a principle of responsibility and equality previously nonexistent in Korean history.

Hence, it is clear that Rhee believed in America's version of liberal democracy. At the same time, he was fully aware of the difficulties of establishing a stable democracy without a strong, central figure to guide the country through the early phases. Therefore, he opted to assume the role of an autocratic leader and establish a liberalizing autocracy. Because of this reasoning, he was able to placate Washington policymakers to support his autocratic regime.

Ben-Gurion also alluded to a future democracy in his justifications for strong-armed measures. Similar to Rhee's regime, Ben-Gurion's tenure can be characterized as devoted to the creation of an eventual democracy through the use of temporary strong-armed measures. He employed questionable tactics for the survival of Israel and the evolution towards a liberal democracy. Although his tactics may not have been extreme enough to cause Washington to question his democratic commitments as they did with

²¹⁶ Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 97.

²¹⁷ "Correspondences with Dr. Robert T. Oliver," n.d., file 83:01260048, Syngman RMR.

Rhee's regime, it is certain that if his regime was not a liberal autocracy and if his methods were simply autocratic in order to secure his own dictatorial power, America would have had greater difficulty supporting his regime. The remaining pages demonstrate that Ben-Gurion's regime was in fact a liberal autocracy and his strong-armed tactics the means to secure stability for a democratic future.

First of all, Ben-Gurion's heavy involvement in developing a strong military and the absolute control he exercised over it suggest an autocracy tilt, but he claimed to be securing the nation's future for democracy against Arab threats. He reasoned that "the Israel Defence Forces pose no threat to our [Israelis'] internal freedom"²¹⁸ and that Israelis were obliged to commit to developing a strong army because they faced the constant threat of war. With a very small territory, stretching only nine miles wide in some regions, a strong IDF was essential to fend off the attacks of Israel's hostile neighbors. During Ben-Gurion's tenure alone, the IDF was responsible for defending Israel in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the 1956 Sinai War. The IDF has since been involved in numerous major conflicts including the 1967 Six-Day War, the War of Attrition, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Operation Litani, the 1982 Lebanon War, Operation Defensive Wall, the 2006 Lebanon War, Operation Cast Lead, and the First and Second Intifadas. Considering the nearly constant state or threat of war, Ben-Gurion's heavy involvement in developing the IDF into a capable military force could be argued to have been essential for the nation's stability, despite suggestions of autocracy.

Ben-Gurion's autocratic control over the IDF also allowed Israel to become the only nation in the Middle East in which the military plays no role in politics.²¹⁹ The IDF

²¹⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 96.

²¹⁹ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 105.

is solely an instrument of the state, which is exceptionally rare for a nascent state like Israel that is heavily dependent upon its army for survival. Similar to Eisenhower, some military leaders in Israel have moved into positions of power in the Israeli government, but they have forfeited their rank in the military in the process and maintained a strict civilian control over the military. Although many factors may have played a role in why the IDF has remained submissive to civilian leaders, Ben-Gurion's complete authority over the army, while retaining his status as a civilian leader in the early years of the IDF's development, began the IDF's tradition of committing to civilian rule.

In addition, Ben-Gurion's insistence on compulsory military service, while limiting certain civil liberties, served a larger secondary purpose of integrating Jewish immigrants from various parts of the world into a unified Israeli nation. Even if permanent peace were to come and Israelis could discard their uniforms and scrap their weapons, Ben-Gurion argued that Israel would still need an institution to integrate the immigrants and educate the younger generation.²²⁰ The IDF's compulsory service integrated citizens from all walks of life, taught them Hebrew, and introduced them to basic techniques to inhabit the desert. The IDF's conscription policy taught both male and female citizens democratic principles of civic responsibility and promoted a sense of nationalism among a diverse group of immigrants. Therefore, Ben-Gurion's strong-armed insistence on compulsory military service stabilized the nascent state.

The *Altalena* Affair of 1948 should not simply be interpreted as Ben-Gurion's autocratic use of power to secure his own leadership but a strong-armed measure that demonstrates his liberal autocracy. By June 1948, Israel had only recently declared its

²²⁰ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 104.

statehood, and its Arab neighbors considered the state of Israel an illegitimate authority. Meanwhile, world leaders questioned whether Jewish immigrants in Palestine had the “maturity to be a nation, to belong to a family of civilized nations.”²²¹ In this climate of uncertainty, Ben-Gurion needed to demonstrate that the nascent state had the necessary unity and maturity. He needed to show that his government was the legitimate ruling party with centralized command over its armed forces. If he were to allow the Irgun and Begin to flout his authority and unload arms from the *Altalena*, world leaders may not have recognized Ben-Gurion’s authority or his legitimacy to rule. Thus, his strong-armed decision to sink the *Altalena* helped secure the new government’s status as a legitimate ruling power.

Ben-Gurion’s autocratic decision to bomb the *Altalena* and dissolve the Palmach also established order in the Israeli armed forces. In the midst of war, there must be central command, and without a central source of command, it was impossible to conduct organized battles against invading Arab armies. The Irgun was also responsible for inhumane attacks on Palestinian civilians, such as the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948. Ben-Gurion’s strong-armed measures demonstrated that the IDF would have complete control over the nation’s military in order to pursue coordinated operations and prevent unnecessary brutality against innocent civilians. Once again, his strong-armed actions secured stability for a democratic future.

The shelling of the *Altalena* and the dissolution of the Palmach also sent an internal message to Israeli citizens and factional groups. By allowing the IDF to use force to bring the Irgun and the Palmach into submission, Ben-Gurion prevented paramilitary

²²¹ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 91.

forces from undermining the legitimacy of the nascent state in the eyes of Israeli citizens. Rather than asserting his authority, Ben-Gurion was establishing the government's authority while dismantling potential factionalism. In his own memoirs, he argues that his seemingly harsh decisions to bomb a Jewish ship and dissolve rivaling Jewish armies created stability and order necessary for democracy down the road.²²²

Also, Ben-Gurion's strong-armed treatment of Palestinian refugees during wartime were to assure stability rather than establish authoritarian control. During and after the 1948 War, Ben-Gurion took harsh measures against Arab infiltrators who engaged in theft, vandalism, marauding, and kidnapping. Ben-Gurion reasoned that "war calls up the worst in men" and claimed that hostile infiltrators were among the Palestinian refugees.²²³ It appears that these infiltrators did create instability immediately following the war.²²⁴ From July 1949 to April 1952, there were over six thousand cases of Arab raids into Israeli territory, and in over three hundred cases, infiltrators opened fire on Israeli citizens killing nearly seventy and wounding nearly eighty.²²⁵ In light of the violence caused by Arab infiltrators, Ben-Gurion reasoned he had no choice but to adopt strong-armed tactics. He claimed that "Israel, as always, has endeavored to have full recourse to United Nations machinery... [However] this recourse has been denied to Israel...and indeed the use of United Nations machinery has not shown any results or brought about any form of improvement." American diplomats too recognized the threat

²²² Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 92.

²²³ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 168.

²²⁴ The Israeli Embassy to the Department of State, April 22, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1175-1177.

²²⁵ The Israeli Embassy to the Department of State, April 22, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1175-1177.

and hoped that the parties involved would “exercise patience of Job.”²²⁶ Therefore, considering the very serious threat posed by infiltrators and the lack of other options to quell the attacks, Ben-Gurion adopted strong-armed measures in order to eliminate the threat of Palestinian terrorists and ensure political stability, which resembles a liberal autocracy rather than a dictatorship.

In addition, even while adopting such strong-armed measures, Ben-Gurion allowed innocent Palestinian civilians to retain significant rights. He argued that his government’s treatment of Palestinians was far better than the treatment of the Jewish Diaspora under other Arab states. Ben-Gurion claimed that during his term, Palestinians in Israel enjoyed an economic standing far superior to their former condition under British rule and the economic condition of other Arab groups in the region. Ben-Gurion also allowed Palestinians the full scope of free speech and free press, which were in line with his commitment to liberal democracy.²²⁷ During Ben-Gurion’s term, not a single Arab terrorist was sentenced to death, even if the terrorist acts had cost Israeli lives. Such generous treatment suggests that his other autocratic measures during the war were to secure stability for future democratic rule.

Both Syngman Rhee and David Ben-Gurion employed strong-armed methods in securing their objectives. However, an examination of the context reveals that they justified their tactics as necessary to establish political stability. Their regimes, therefore, can be described as liberalizing autocracies in which their autocratic rule secured the foundations for a democratic future. For Rhee, this reasoning clearly placated American policymakers and allowed him to secure American concessions. On the other hand, it is

²²⁶ The Ambassador in Jordan (Green) to the Department of State, April 23, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 9, part 1, 1179-1180.

²²⁷ Ben-Gurion, *Recollections*, 168.

less clear if Ben-Gurion's strong-armed methods caused the same degree of concern for American diplomats. However, if his strong-armed methods were to secure his own dictatorial power rather than a liberal autocracy, it is almost certain that Americans would have had greater difficulty supporting his regime. Thus, Rhee and Ben-Gurion were able to convince the United States to support their regimes because their regimes were liberal autocracies rather than dictatorships.

V. Conclusion

In closing, Rhee and Ben-Gurion were staunch anti-Communists and established liberal autocracies to secure stability in a time of great uncertainty. This made them valuable allies for American policymakers, who consequently overlooked their autocratic tendencies and questionable policies that diverged from American wishes. As allies, Rhee and Ben-Gurion were able to effectively influence American policy and draw concessions despite their shortcomings. Ultimately, the similarities between Syngman Rhee and David Ben-Gurion provide profound insights into the period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s.

The 1940s to the 1960s was a unique time in history when new nation-states were being formed. It was essentially a historical watershed that offered opportunities for bold leadership throughout the world. Historian Israel Kolatt notes that traditionally “history contains various aspects for its makers” to help make decisions,²²⁸ but in 1948, both Rhee and Ben-Gurion knew that the choices for forming a nation-state in the 20th century were not clear cut. “History stood mute, offering no guidance, providing no solution.”²²⁹ Each important dilemma—how to foster a liberal democracy, how to fend off external military threat, how to satisfy American wishes, how to secure American aid in the midst of an unprecedented superpower conflict—were all new questions for Rhee and Ben-Gurion. Without the lessons of history, world events shifted according to their decisions. Thus, 1948 to 1960 was a brief window of time when charismatic leaders of nascent states had an extraordinary degree of influence on the future of their countries.

²²⁸ Kolatt, “Ben-Gurion,” 20.

²²⁹ Kolatt, “Ben-Gurion,” 20.

The period from the 1940s to the 1960s was also critical for the development of democracy in South Korea and Israel as well as many other Third World countries. Without a history of sovereign democratic rule, many nations were unprepared for democracy, and both Rhee and Ben-Gurion had to take drastic steps to secure the survival of their states and their democratic principles. While some of their measures were autocratic, these strong-armed tactics secured the survival of their countries and their subsequent transition to liberal democracy. History may simply remember them and many other Third World leaders as “strong men” with questionable means, but these questionable means paradoxically ensured the development of democracy. In the words of Fareed Zakaria, the period saw the rise of liberalizing autocracies, which eventually resulted in democracies throughout the world.

The late 1940s to the early 1960s were also a period in which tyranny by the weak was possible. Third World leaders such as Rhee and Ben-Gurion could take advantage of shaky developments in international relations with their tenacious refusal to yield to American demands. They convinced superpowers into making significant military and economic commitments. The Korean War embroiled America to commit over thirty six thousand lives and extraordinary security and economic assistance afterwards. The diplomatic outcome of the Suez Crisis effectively proved that the United States could not always simply demand its allies to stand down. By standing tall instead of buckling under pressure, both Rhee and Ben-Gurion gained significant concessions from the United States that are generally not recognized in a simplified historical depiction of the Cold War.

For the most part, the pericentric framework has made this analysis possible, and

the obvious conclusion is that junior members helped shape Cold War history. Therefore, additional junior actors should be examined within this framework. Within America's sphere, the pericentric perspective may also be applied to the study of Japan's Shigeru Yoshida, who was the inaugural prime minister of the modern Japanese government until 1954, and to the study of Germany's Konrad Adenauer, who was the German Chancellor of the Federal Republic until 1963. An examination of other founding fathers during this period, including Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, North Korea's Kim Il Sung, and Cuba's Fidel Castro, may draw additional insights into our thinking about the Soviet sphere. A pericentric framework for understanding the founding fathers of non-aligned countries, such as India's Jawaharlal Nehru, is also promising. In the midst of the Cold War, each founding father had a significant influence over his country's future, regardless of his political beliefs or method of rule. Most relied on a superpower yet were often faced with demands that compromised national interests much like those Rhee and Ben-Gurion faced. What each of these figures did as leaders of Third World nations may have changed the course of the Cold War.

A reexamination of numerous flashpoints during the Cold War through a pericentric framework is also promising. Rhee's and Ben-Gurion's decisions to defy American foreign policy during the Korean War and the Suez Crisis may be mirrored by the decisions of other Third World leaders in various conflicts in Vietnam, Cuba, and Afghanistan. Rather than a push from the United States or the Soviet Union, perhaps a pull from the Third World better describes the character of international politics during the Cold War. Ultimately, it is clear that Cold War history cannot be fully understood without a pericentric framework in which the tail can, at times, successfully wag the dog.

Even today, many Third World leaders are struggling to achieve stability and democratic governance. Although “history stood mute” for Rhee and Ben-Gurion, their legacies now stand as invaluable precedents. In March 1957, Rhee addressed leaders like Ben-Gurion and “all those many small nations who will gladly rally behind a constructive program to enforce justice.”²³⁰ His message resonates today to Third World leaders, who still seemingly lack the power to determine their own destinies and appear to be overshadowed by the giants of our time. “Let us be wise before the event and not merely desperate after it. Our destiny is in our own hands if we but have the courage and wisdom to guide it.”²³¹

²³⁰ Syngman Rhee, *Syngman Rhee*, 21.

²³¹ Syngman Rhee, *Syngman Rhee*, 21.

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