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January 21, 1954

Letter, General James A. Van Fleet to President Rhee

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Summary:

General Van Fleet first addresses the two sides of the Asian question. Should the US 1) try to "win back Asia" or 2) face the "reality" of the present conditions and should not recommence fighting in Korea? He advises Rhee to concentrate on expanding the ROK army and to leave reunification matters to the US and the United Nations.

Credits:

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English

Contents:

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KOREAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 21, 1954

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing this letter at your Embassy in Washington. It is the first time I have had an opportunity to write you confidentially. Dr. Han will put the letter in the pouch today.

Mrs. Van Fleet and I received at my home in Auburndale, Florida, your letter of 7 December and two from Mrs. Rhee dated 16 December and Christmas. We were happy to hear from you both.

The one of 7 December was forwarded from New York, but we did not receive it until our arrival in Auburndale on 14 January. I wrote you a letter in longhand about it from Auburndale the same day. I also received while in Florida your letter of 28 December and also a copy of the one you wrote to Mr. Cromwell also dated 28 December.

I am glad you are disclaiming any responsibility for the Cromwell suggested "Rhee Plan." It is not sound and as you have well said it should be presented as his plan or somebody else's plan, and be considered first by Mr. C. Tyler Wood in consultation with your Government. Mr. Cromwell has wanted to be named Ambassador to Korea and some months ago asked me for a recommendation. I told him I could not give it. I am afraid of him. I also thought at that time that Ambassador Briggs understood the Korean situation, had a genuine feel of it and would be your friend. Up to now I thought he was doing a good job, although I do not know the whole situation.



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I am in agreement with all that you have said in your letter of 28 December. I see as you do the many difficulties. I wish I could see you and the two of us could talk over the many problems in detail.

I think my Government would like to have me come out but I must tell them that I cannot use your close friendship for me to persuade you to approve measures that you do not believe in. And I cannot come to Korea to carry out a mission for my Government which I myself do not believe in.

Yesterday I had a brief chat with Admiral Radford and last night dinner and a private talk with David Lawrence. Admiral Radford is most hopeful of winning back Asia. He has won over many people in Washington to his point of view. David Lawrence is really sick about the whole situation. He is inclined to face the realities as they exist today. His opinion is that the American people would not support a renewal of the fighting in Korea and that the Republic of Korea army cannot win alone. He agrees with me that this is a tragic condition. Neither of us would like to see you go it alone and lose, no matter how right and honorable such action would be. The other alternative is to go along with the United States in rehabilitating the southern half of Korea and let the unification problem continue to be one of the major items for the United States and the United Nations to achieve peacefully. Of course we know that they will fail but at least the failure will be on them and not on you or your people.

The ROK military force of course must be greatly expanded so as to maintain your security. I believe the United States will support such a program. I am glad you are asking for it.

I am enclosing three items:

- 1) Article by Joseph Alsop entitled "Asian Illusions" published today as an advertisement by the International Latex Corporation.
- 2) Approved draft of my article which is appearing in the Reader's Digest for February.



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3) Manuscript of another article, which I have written, mostly concerning the failure of the U.N. as a security body.

I wrote the two articles as one beginning on my trip back from Korea last September. They have had many revisions and eliminations. I wanted to show that the Middle East and Asia were willing to fight for their freedom and that Europe was not; and that the U.N. and NATO itself were failing as security agencies; that the real way to stop communist aggression was to help those peoples who were willing to fight and die for their freedom. I particularly pointed out Greece and Korea as the models, because I have been there and know that these two countries are the top of the list in fighting for their freedom.

I hope you will forgive me for saying certain things about you. You will understand that I wanted to point out that you had always accepted responsibility and had inspired your people in their fighting. Such leadership is wholly lacking in Indo-China and in Europe. I thought it was better, as the editors also advised me, that I should not continuously praise you because my statements would go over better with the American public, would have a greater effect and the major points would be more readily accepted.

After eliminating the part about the U.N. I revised it to be submitted as a separate article. I gave it to both Life Magazine and the Saturday Evening Post but both of them felt that they could not publish it. Therefore I will use parts of it in my speeches about the country, one of which I will make in Miami on 30 January.

I will be in New York next week and will write you more from there. I agree with you that you need a better press especially with regard to the Japanese situation.

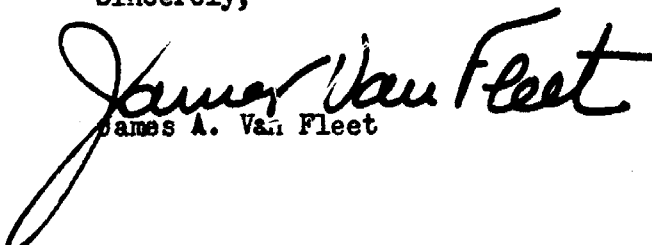
Dr. Han, your Counsellor, delivered to me the beautiful photograph inscribed by you. Mrs. Van Fleet and I will treasure this always and keep it prominently displayed in our home in Florida.

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This is hurriedly dictated as I have some other appointments I must make.

With every good wish for your country and its brave people, and my love and best wishes always to you and Mrs. Rhee,

Sincerely,


James A. Van Fleet

President Syngman Rhee
The Republic of Korea
Seoul

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