

May 20, 1961

Cable from the Chinese Representative Office in the UK, 'Britain's Reaction to the South Korean Military Coup'

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Summary:

The Chinese Diplomatic Representative's Office in Britain reports that the US had no prior intelligence about the South Korean military coup, which the British public believes to be a result of repression under Jang Myeon and growing corruption rather than American interference. While Britain doubts that the coup clique will be able to run South Korea, it has no power to intervene because South Korea falls within the United States' 'sphere of influence.'

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Translation - English

Telegraph to the Foreign Ministry

[...]

Britain's Reaction to the South Korean Military Coup

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1) It appears from Britain's reaction that the U.S. had no prior intelligence about this South Korean military coup. They were greatly surprised and even alarmed by the coup's sudden occurrence. Thus, following the coup, the Charge d'Affaires ad interim at the U.S. embassy in South Korea, Green, and commander of U.S. forces in South Korea Magruder, immediately expressed full support for the Jang Myeon puppet regime, intending to intimidate the junta. But when they saw the Jang Du-yeong coup clique swiftly gain control of the situation, they turned around and intimidated Jang Myeon into resigning. The U.S. State Department spokesman also formally announced the continuation of U.S. military and economic aid to South Korea; [they] intend to win some over and divide them. The current provisional representative of the U.S. embassy in South Korea is now in close contact with Jang Du-yeong.

2) British public opinion holds that there were political and economic reasons for this South Korean military coup. On the political side, due to the fact that the pro-American Jang Myeon - in his political debut following last April's overthrow of the Syngman Rhee puppet regime - continued the Syngman Rhee regime's persecution of democracy, implemented police terrorist rule, intensified the exploitation of the people and bowed to the American imperialist legacy, South Koreans, especially young adult students and intellectuals, grew even more dissatisfied; this caused the rapid rise of a new democratic upsurge among the South Korean people, with the movement to oppose America and win freedom growing by the day. The military coup clique made use of this mood; this is one of the reasons for the coup's rapid success. Secondly, on the economic side, the U.S. occupation, the puppet government's corruption, and intensified exploitation made life intolerable for the people, leaving them cold and hungry. Within less than a year of Jang Myeon's rise to power, people's living standards fell another 30%; one out of every 9,000 people in cities lost their jobs or became underemployed, and 1.5 million urban residents had to beg for food in order to survive. This sparked extreme displeasure among South Korea's workers, peasants and vast numbers of people from all different classes, upsetting the Jang Myeon puppet regime's ruling status.

3) According to the available data here, coup clique head Jang Du-yeong is basically still a pro-American and strongly anti-Communist element: he has received American military training, visited the U.S. three times, and has a definite degree of association with the U.S. After the coup succeeded, he announced the implementation of a political program, saying that the new government would from now on strengthen the anti-Communist reunification front, and maintain so-called friendly relations with the U.S. Thus, in nature he is similar to Syngman Rhee and Jang Myeon, but at this time the coup clique still appears to feel a certain degree of apprehension and ambivalence toward the U.S. It seems South Korea's military dictatorship will hold for a time, but if the coup clique continues down the road of betraying the nation and opposing democracy, instability and overthrow by the South Korean masses is still inevitable for the military dictatorship.

4) South Korea is an American "sphere of influence"; Britain has long been unable to intervene in this region, and still cannot interfere now. With the exception of the Communist Party, Britain has no objections about who rules South Korea. But Britain has not missed the chance to scathingly criticize the failure of American policy in South Korea, seeing this incident as yet another new crisis and test the U.S. faces in the Asian region. Besides this, Britain continues to express doubt that the coup clique

can successfully address and put to rest the South Korean people's mood of dissatisfaction. British newspapers believe that America's support of a liberal regime in South Korea is, of course, what the West needs, but that they cannot secure their position unless they at the same time pay attention to implementing social and economic reform measures.

The special report above is supplied for reference.

(Chinese) Diplomatic Representative's Office in Britain
20 May [1961]