2 Historical Setting: The Division of Korea, the Korean War, and the Evolution of Syngman Rhee’s Anti-Communist Policy

‘I feel strongly that now is the ... moment when we should take an aggressive measure ... to clean up them [the Communists] in Pyongyang ... Our people in the North want us to do it now ... I am sure we can all settle this question within a reasonably short time if we are only allowed to do it.’

(Syngman Rhee, 30 September 1949)

‘Now that the unification of China has been achieved, it is time to liberate the South. The South Korean people trust me and want unification. I cannot sleep at night, thinking of their aspiration for unification.’

(Kim Il Sung, 17 January 1950)

With the unconditional surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945, Korea was finally liberated from Japanese rule. But the internal and external circumstances that developed after the Liberation were far from what many Koreans had expected. At the conclusion of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union decided to divide Korea along the 38th parallel, and to occupy the southern and northern parts respectively in order to facilitate the surrender of the Japanese army. The division was supposed to be temporary. However, the subsequent rivalry between the two superpowers in the Cold War era, combined with the competition between the Communist forces and the right-wing conservative forces of internal Korean politics, brought about the establishment of separate governments in Korea. The division of the
Korean peninsula into North and South Korea eventually resulted in the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950.\footnote{State Security and Regime Security}

It was in this period from 1945 to 1953 that South Korea’s basic security environment had been set up. The source of the threat to South Korean security, the northern Communist regime, had been established, and it had indeed attacked the South. The United States, the most important security partner of South Korea, had become fully involved in Korea. Internally, public anti-Communist sentiment had been strengthened in the process of the division, and particularly during the war provoked by the Communists.

In examining the historical unfolding of the turbulent period from the Liberation to the Korean War, this chapter will focus on the evolution of Syngman Rhee’s position towards the Communists, and especially his ‘march north’ policy, which is a key variable in studying the internal and external security problems of the Rhee government in the post-Korean War era. The first section will study how, throughout the post-Liberation political struggles, Rhee persisted with his anti-Communist posture and his call for a separate southern government. Secondly, this chapter will examine the internal and external situation of South Korea after its establishment in 1948, which led Rhee to introduce his ‘march north’ slogan. The third section will analyse Rhee’s position towards the Korean War, and his anti-armistice campaign which considerably strengthened his domestic position. Finally, based on these examinations, this chapter will discuss the war’s impact on the internal and external security environments, which in turn had important implications for the post-war security situation of South Korea.

**THE POST-LIBERATION PROCESS OF CREATING SEPARATE POLITIES IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

In Korea, immediately after Liberation, a number of political organizations were spontaneously established. Among them, the strongest political force was the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI) organized by Yŏ Un-hyŏng, a left-wing nationalist leader. People’s Committees – organizational networks for self-government – spread all over the peninsula under the leadership of the CPKI. On September 6, Yŏ’s group announced the establishment of the Korean People’s Republic (KPR), and claimed jurisdiction over the whole nation. Although the KPR was composed of diverse political elements from left and right, its leading members were leftists. In