

### **Abstract**

**In 1945-1946, the U.S. imported a significant amount of aid to its southern occupation zone in Korea to quickly mitigate starvation. Consequently, much literature, drawing heavily from reports and accounts from the U.S.-administered southern Korea, somewhat gloss over the food shortages in this time period, and they do not detail conditions in northern Korea to the same extent, especially due to the relative dearth of literature from the Soviet side. This paper examines reports of Soviet rice requisitions, migrations, and famine in the Soviet Union to illustrate the underreported prevalence of food shortages in northern Korea. It then investigates the Soviet demand for food at the preliminary conference of the Moscow Conference, in order to reveal that the Soviets were actually greatly in need of food assistance for both itself and its occupation zone in northern Korea. Lastly, it displays the Soviets' suspicion of the U.S. and how their ultimatum (of requiring U.S. food as a precondition for further negotiations) further demonstrates how badly the Soviets needed food. This paper ultimately infers that the north experienced a much more severe food shortage than the south did. The Soviet occupation of Korea generated severe hardships for the north, contrary to the misconception that the Soviet occupation of northern Korea ran more smoothly than the U.S.'s administration did in the south.**

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### Brief Timeline of Relevant Events

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|-----------------------|--|
| Feb 4-11, 1945        | Yalta Conference: Roosevelt and Stalin discuss Korea's future, resulting in no concrete plan for implementing joint trusteeship <sup>1</sup>   |
| Aug 15, 1945          | U.S./U.S.S.R. agree on the 38th parallel division, splitting the north and south into separate administration zones  |
| Sep 2, 1945           | Japan formally signs surrender agreement with the U.S.   |
| Sep 8, 1945           | U.S. troops enter southern Korea and begin to set up the military administration of Korea  |
| Nov 3, 1945           | U.S. states it can trade a significant amount of food to northern Korea  |
| Dec 16-27, 1945       | <b>Moscow Conference</b> - At the end, both U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agree to meet at a <b>preliminary conference</b> and also establish a <b>Joint Commission</b> to arrange the details for the future reunification of Korea |
| Dec 28, 1945          | US declares rice in critical demand, formally recognizing the food shortage  |
| Jan 5, 1946           | The Soviets show signs of abandoning the united front strategy <sup>2</sup> in Korea, by placing the leader it had groomed, Cho Man-Sik, under house arrest  |
| Jan 16 - Feb 5, 1946  | <b>Preliminary Conference</b> - Results in little of note, when the U.S. cannot meet the Soviet demand for sending rice to the north   |
| Mar 20 - May 8, 1946  | <b>1st Joint Commission</b> - Stalls over what the provisional Korean government should look like  |
| May 21 - Oct 18, 1947 | <b>2nd Joint Commission</b> - Ends over disagreement regarding which Korean political organizations should participate in the provisional government   |
| May 10, 1948          | UN elections occur in the south, but the north boycotts these elections, due to the Soviets' belief that UN elections were dominated by U.S. influence.  |
| Aug 15, 1948          | Republic of Korea proclaimed in the south  |
| Sept 9, 1948          | Democratic People's Republic of Korea established in the north   |

<sup>1</sup> U.S. briefing papers essentially described trusteeship, "There should be in Korea, following the period of occupation and prior to the establishment of Korean independence, some form of international administration or trusteeship, such administration or trusteeship to function until such a time as the Koreans are able to govern themselves." *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, Ed. Bryton Barron, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), 360-361.

<sup>2</sup> For communists, the united front policy effectively involved allying with moderate, non-communist parties in order to present a coalition against "bourgeoisie" elements. Once the coalition gained enough influence, the communists would slowly dominate important positions within the coalition.

## Introduction

Following the Second World War, U.S. analysts were well aware of how crippled the U.S.S.R. was at the time.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. knew of allegations that the Soviet Union was appropriating United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) relief to Ukraine and Belorussia for its own uses, implying critical vulnerabilities. The Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 is also well documented<sup>4</sup>, and the U.S. did not view the Soviet Union as a serious threat. On the other hand, availability of food in northern Korea from 1945-1946 is not as clearly documented at this point. This paper will look at conditions in Korea in conjunction with the more prevalent literature regarding famine in the Soviet Union to definitively establish that a severe food shortage did exist in northern Korea too. Additionally, the preliminary conference of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (henceforth “Moscow Conference”) of December 16, 1945 presents a unique look into how bad conditions were in the north.

Regarding rice requisitions and starvation, this paper will detail the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 that was taking a heavy toll on the Soviet Union even before 1946. Facing starvation at home, the Soviet occupation force in its occupation zone in northern Korea exacted heavy requisitions upon harvested rice and exported it back to the Soviet Union to mitigate the famine. As a result, many Korean farmers in the north had little left to sustain themselves, and the Koreans in turn experienced a food crisis. Additionally, Soviet authorities in the north quickly ushered out refugees who would be a drain on northern Korea’s limited supplies, further implying that northern Korea had very limited quantities of food for feeding its own local

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<sup>3</sup> “After the war, analysts made clear that the Soviet government would avoid conflict against a superior US force with vast economic resources, the strongest navy in the world, and a monopoly on the atomic bomb. In November 1945, The Joint Intelligence Staff concluded that, due to losses of manpower, the destruction of industry, and a variety of other factors, the USSR would not risk a major war for at least 15 years. As late as 1949, CIA estimates supported this conclusion.” Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 102.

<sup>4</sup> See V.F. Zima’s *The Famine of 1946-1947 in the USSR: Its Origins and Consequences* and Nicholas Ganson’s *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective*.

populace.<sup>5</sup>

The Moscow Conference<sup>6</sup> also acts as an important piece of evidence in support of this paper's argument that famine in the north was highly prevalent. It stipulated a preliminary conference to discuss urgent problems, such as trade of raw materials, as well as a Joint Commission for negotiation a Korean provisional government.<sup>7</sup> This paper will focus on the Moscow conference's preliminary conference, at which the Soviets demanded a significant amount of rice, that the U.S. had previously stated would be available for trade to northern Korea.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. was suddenly unable to fulfill this due to unforeseen shortages in its own southern occupation zone<sup>9</sup>, but the Soviets viewed the U.S. reversal with suspicion. Relations between the two had steadily been in decline<sup>10</sup>, and this paper argues that Soviet intelligence reports from the south relayed no such information regarding food shortages or starvation. So, the Soviets made an ultimatum, requiring any future talks contingent upon the U.S.'s ability to deliver the rice.<sup>11</sup> This paper proposes that this ultimatum reveals how important U.S. food was to the Soviets.

This paper is split into three major parts. Part I will establish that the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 led to starvation in Korea as well, due to heavy Soviet rice requisitions. Part II will demonstrate why rice aid was the important factor that ultimately caused the talks to end in

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<sup>5</sup> This paper's Part I: Sections I & III will more extensively explain how the Soviet famine indirectly affected Korea, in terms of requisitions and refugee policies, as well as provide sources and citations.

<sup>6</sup> The primary purpose of the Moscow conference was to create a concrete framework for the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to establish a trusteeship, essentially joint supervision which would culminate in finding a provisional democratic Korean government for eventually reunifying northern and southern Korea.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 138.

<sup>8</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI*, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1108.

<sup>9</sup> Please see this paper's Part I Section III for further details and sources.

<sup>10</sup> Please see this paper's Part II Section I for details and sources.

<sup>11</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII*, Eds. John Reid and Herbert Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 477.

failure. Part III will detail Soviet suspicions of the U.S.'s inability to send rice and argue that the Soviets' ultimatum represents how desperate the situation in the Soviet Union and in northern Korea had become. These three parts will show that northern Korea faced severe starvation, requiring the Soviets to desperately seek U.S. rice.

## **Part I: Starvation in the Soviet Union and in Korea**

This part will confirm that the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 played a direct role in contributing to starvation in Korea. This part is broken up into three main sections. First, the Soviet Union was undergoing a nationwide famine, and this pushed the Soviets to export large amounts of food from its occupation zone in Korea, leading to starvation there. Second, the U.S. zone simultaneously underwent a food shortage, and examining the reasons behind the U.S. zone's struggles yields multiple factors that also likely affected northern Korea. Third, the Soviets facilitated rapid migration out of its occupation zone, and one likely explanation was that the Soviets did not want to spend limited food resources on refugees, who were a drain on food stockpiles as they contributed little to production or labor. Altogether, these three sections reveal that the food shortage was indeed a dire problem in the north.

### **Section I: The Soviet Famine of 1946-1947**

First, the entire Soviet Union was experiencing a severe food shortage, which would result in the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947. Russian fatality estimates of the famine claim approximately one million dead.<sup>12</sup> The food shortage was actually more serious in 1946 than during World War II; a Soviet report written in January 1946 states, "The Agricultural Section of

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Williams Davies, *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 64.

the Central Committee allowed the Commissariat of Procurements to process grain with second-degree infestation – something it had not done even during the war – and to use it for local consumption. The decision to resort to such a drastic measure suggests the extraordinary nature of the postwar circumstances and the extensive disruption that the war brought to the Soviet economy.”<sup>13</sup> The report does not provide the actual date the weevil policy changed, but it does demonstrate that at least by 1946 and possibly earlier, the Soviet government was aware of the critical need for relief by the time of the preliminary conference in January 1946.

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union had emerged as one of the victors, but the war had severely damaged much of the country’s agricultural and industrial production capabilities. In his book regarding the Soviet famine, Robert Davies writes that in 1945, Soviet agricultural production was down by a third, and with significant numbers of the country’s men killed during the war, the agricultural sector had limited labor. Furthermore, many farmers had to resort to scattering seed by hand; in Orel oblast, only 10% of the spring sowing was done by machinery, due to the war’s effects on the nation. Thus, with insufficient labor due to reduced manpower and lost machinery, large amounts of the already small 1945 harvest actually rotted in the fields. This led to a vicious cycle, in which the inadequate 1945 harvest led to starvation in the workforce and further reduced the number of workers available for the next harvest. Consequently, the 1946 grain harvest was also meager, compounding the famine’s detrimental effects on the Soviet Union.

Additionally, the Soviet Union faced severe transportation shortages, and it had trouble transporting grains to starving regions. With the end of the war, Moscow had reinstated centralized food distribution, but this also coincided with the concurrent massive demobilization

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 16.

of the country's wartime posture. Richard E. Lauterbach describes the Soviet Union's vulnerable status, "The inability to provide enough trains for the transport of grain, while partly a reflection of government priorities and poor planning, was a result of demand outstripping supply."<sup>14</sup>

Trains were simply in short supply, as far too many materials of all kinds needed to be transported for reconstruction purposes. As such, a significant portion of available grain rotted awaiting transportation to starving populations.

Worsening the situation was the U.S.S.R.'s exportation of grain to foreign countries to help the Soviets regain some of their pre-war industrial capabilities. The government shipped 900,000 tons of grain to Poland (from 1946-1947), 600,000 tons to Czechoslovakia (1947), and 500,000 tons to France between April and June of 1947. These exports total 1.8 million tons of grain, which equates to ten percent of all the grain procured in 1946.<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Ganson notes that the grain exports served as a currency that could allow the Soviet Union to purchase industrial machinery abroad, as it did in the 1930's. However, the Soviets emplaced these exports before fully understanding the severity of the famine, and they likely did not receive the benefits (industrial machinery) of these exports until after the famine had already passed. Thus, this export of grain further damaged the Soviet Union's ability to feed its own population at a critical time.

Overall, the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 was a severe crisis for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's production and industry had suffered significant damage throughout the course of WWII, and various factors led the Soviet Union's agricultural productivity to drop precipitously. The Soviets' change in policy regarding weevils demonstrates the severity of the situation, in which insufficient labor (both manpower and machinery) and transportation shortages decreased

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 104-105.



agricultural output, leading to further starvation and reduction of the available workforce. By the time of the Moscow Conference and the preliminary conference in the beginning of 1946, the Soviets were acutely aware of the food shortage at home. Therefore, with the context of a nationwide famine, their demand for rice at the preliminary conference was genuine.

### **Section I (continued): Soviet Famine's Effects on Korea**

As a result of the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947, the Soviet Union likely imported much rice from Korea in order to mitigate starvation at home and shifted the burden to Korean farmers instead. G-2 reports provide a large number of accounts from refugees reporting food shortages in the north. While refugee accounts may include biases and speculation, the volume of such material consistently referring to the food situation lends credibility to these accounts. Furthermore, some of the requisitions may have been a result of Soviet occupation forces' excesses, but the military's generally impoverished state suggests that the requisitions were primarily earmarked for export to the Soviet Union.

Rice redistributions occurred inconsistently, and significant portions of the Korean population in the north failed to receive anything. A correspondent in Hungnam district in the north writes to a friend in Seoul, "Persons in the first three classes do receive distributions of food, but those in the fourth class often get none. Because of this... many people are planning to move to South Korea."<sup>16</sup> On March 1, 1946, the Soviets instituted a grouping system that determined the amount of rations an individual received, wherein individuals who were able-bodied and were gainfully employed received more rations than dependents and such did. The Soviets redistributed small amounts of rice back to the Koreans through the class system, but

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<sup>16</sup> May 17, 1946 G-2 G-2 Report. USAFIK [United States Armed Forces in Korea] HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 295.

even here, they left out portions of the population that did not contribute as much as the first three classes, as there was not enough rice to go around for everybody. October 1946 radio broadcasts from the north (of questionable credibility, due to their utility as propaganda) state that workers producing 100% labor output receive 21.25 oz./day, 16.66 oz. for white collar workers, and a minimum ration of 12.5 oz. per day. However, according to a United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK<sup>17</sup>) agricultural report, no rations were issued to unemployed persons between ages 14 and 60, and large-scale unemployment in the Russian zone was widely known.<sup>18</sup> Thus, although some Koreans allegedly received a substantial amount of rice for their daily rations, a potentially large percentage of the population received nothing.

Refugees consistently blamed excessive Soviet requisitioning for their lack of access to sufficient food. Farmers were forced to sell rice to the Soviets at far lower prices, approximately two-thirds below the average market price.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, farmers had no power over how much rice they could retain for personal consumption. One refugee account from November 1945 notes that the Soviets were highly efficient in setting requisition quotas; the refugee hypothesizes that the Soviets were roughly aware of each farmers' agricultural output capacities and set quotas accordingly.<sup>20</sup> Even farmers with friendly leanings towards the Soviets openly criticize the excessive requisitioning. One such account argues, "The Russians have not mistreated the people. Even after the demonstration [an anti-People's Committee student demonstration in Sinuiju that turned violent] there was no change in the Russian attitude. The main thing against

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<sup>17</sup> The USAMGIK was the interim U.S. military administration for the southern half of Korea, from September 8, 1945 to August 15, 1948, until a suitable Korean government could take over.

<sup>18</sup> "This [agricultural] report was prepared in the summer of 1947 with extensive use of files of the USAMGIK department of agriculture as well as interviews of key personnel in agricultural activities in South Korea." Harold Larson, formerly Chief Historian of XXIV Corps. United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 311.

<sup>19</sup> January 30, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 607.

<sup>20</sup> November 20, 1945 G-2 Report. *Ibid.*, 307

the Russians is that they have conscripted most of the rice.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, even those with favorable biases towards the U.S.S.R. show concern about the sustainability of such exorbitant requisitions.

Various refugee accounts also decry the Soviets’ deception in telling farmers that the majority of the requisitions would be returned for Korean consumption. The Soviets claimed that only a quarter of rice requisitions went to the Soviets, while the other three quarters became rations for redistribution to Koreans.<sup>22</sup> Koreans disputed the Soviets’ estimate of their rice requisition allocations. One account from Hangyong-Namdo province claims that Soviets had been requisitioning large amounts of rice from farmers, leaving just enough to last until February 1946. The Soviets had allegedly promised the farmers that after February, the farmers would receive rice from “Mr. Stalin’s granary in Moscow”, but no redistribution actually occurred.<sup>23</sup> Another refugee from Kunsong says that he left for the south because the Soviets did not leave enough rice for the farmers to even subsist on, while also failing to deliver on promises of redistributing rice at a later date.<sup>24</sup> Many refugees point to the Soviet requisitions and the resulting lack of food as the reason for their departure from the north. These accounts’ consistency in opposing Soviet requisition practices shows how important rice requisitions were in pushing Koreans to starvation.

Granted, it is possible that these requisitions went to the Soviet military, a belief expressed by people such as Benninghoff, who argues that the Soviet occupation forces consumed a disproportionately large portion of available rice due to their excesses. He writes in September 1945 to the Secretary of State, “Constant reports of indiscriminate rape, pillage and

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<sup>21</sup> December 1, 1945 G-2 Report. Ibid., 363.

<sup>22</sup> November 30, 1945 G-2 Report. Ibid., 357.

<sup>23</sup> February 26, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 44.

<sup>24</sup> March 11, 1946 G-2 Report. Ibid., 90.

looting are received from all areas occupied by Soviet forces.”<sup>25</sup> Later in December, he notes that the Soviets “have requisitioned large amounts for their troops in northern Korea, which are living off the country, thereby presumably creating a food shortage in that area.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, there is some support for attributing such harsh requisitioning to the Soviet military’s excessive consumption.

However, the Soviet military in Korea during this period shows signs of being poorly supplied, according to various G-2 reports. Soviet patrols routinely violated the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and ventured into the south, apparently to forage. Reports show that they ventured as far south as Pocheon and Dongducheon in order to barter for food and clothes. They also utilized old military clothing left by the Japanese, showing their reliance on supplying themselves through looting and foraging. These reports portray an ill-equipped fighting force having to scrounge for food and clothing in order to survive the coming winter. Additionally, in January 1946, the Soviets apparently began to clamp down on Soviet border violations; they asked Korean policemen to report soldiers crossing the border to the Soviet military police.<sup>27</sup> This shows that none of these border crossings were sanctioned by the Soviet military hierarchy. The fact that Soviet patrols risked punishment and travelled long distances to secure supplies suggests that the Soviet military in Korea lacked adequate provisioning. Although some of the requisitions undoubtedly went to the local Soviet military, their foraging and reliance on scavenged goods shows that they too were undersupplied.

Given the context of the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947, it seems reasonable to deduce that

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<sup>25</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1051.

<sup>26</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1152.

<sup>27</sup> January 3, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 510.

the Soviets mostly exported these rice requisitions home. This conclusion is corroborated by a number of Korean eyewitness accounts that describe instances of Soviets shipping rice out of Korea back to the Soviet Union. In Manchuria, food became scarce due to Soviet requisitions, and the Soviets shipped the rice (as well as machinery removed from Korea) to Siberia.<sup>28</sup>

Another account details requisitions being sent to Vladivostok, with telecommunications deliberately shut down in order to prevent knowledge of this from spreading.<sup>29</sup> Several others describe the Soviets' use of the Boan Dai, an armed police force under People's Committee control, to confiscate rice and then ship the rice away unseen at night.<sup>30</sup> In summary of this section, the Soviets faced a worsening famine at home, and they relied on Korean rice to mitigate the famine's impact. However, this meant that the Soviets would have to requisition exorbitant amounts of rice and leave insufficient amounts to sustain the Koreans. In this way, the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 directly contributed to famine in Korea.

## **Section II: Food shortage in the U.S. Occupation Zone**

The USAMGIK's own struggles with food shortages in the south is worth looking at in order to gain insight into the severity of conditions in the north. In late 1945, the U.S. occupation zone was beginning to see acute deficits in rice stockpiles. A USAMGIK agricultural report details the various factors that contributed to the rice shortage in the south. Some are related to poor policies by the U.S. government, such as setting price ceilings (which discouraged farmers from selling rice to the proper authorities and led to smuggling and a black market), and therefore these policies are unique to the south due to USAMGIK mismanagement. Some other

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<sup>28</sup> November 23, 1945 G-2 Report and December 7, 1945 G-2 Report. Ibid., 325, 391.

<sup>29</sup> November 30, 1945 G-2 Report. Ibid., 358.

<sup>30</sup> February 25, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 40.

factors, however, are not unique to the south. The Korean peninsula faced significant reductions in fishing productivity, labor force, and fertilizer availability. Most importantly, Koreans engaged in excessive consumption of rice due to a celebratory mood.

First, the south suffered from a major decline in its fishing industry. The USAMGIK agricultural report notes that Korean fishermen were puzzled by the decline in sardine catches from 1937 to 1943. Japanese fishermen fleets had positioned themselves on the sardine population's migration movements and caught them before the sardines could reach their spawning grounds.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the sardine population in 1945 was still well below normal levels. Canneries closed due to lack of materials, and the war stripped others of vital equipment. By the end of 1946, only ten canneries were still in operation. Additionally, the Japanese requisitioned large portions of Korea's fishing fleets, leading to a 1945 fleet in poor condition with no supplies and producing virtually nothing. The Japanese took approximately half of the fishing fleet in order to evacuate personnel and food to Japan, and by the end of 1946, less than ten percent were returned.<sup>32</sup> The fishing industry's decline adversely affected Korea's ability to feed its population, and this likely impacted the north as heavily as it did to the south.

Further compounding the food shortage was insufficient fertilizer. Korea faced a shortage of fertilizer chemicals, and this contributed to a noticeable decline in agricultural output. The USAMGIK agricultural report notes, "Lack of fertilizer caused yields to drop 18 percent below the 1940-44 average during a year of abundant rainfall when a bumper crop might otherwise have been expected."<sup>33</sup> Throughout World War II, the heavy chemical demands of the Japanese armed forces had siphoned away chemicals needed for fertilizer production. Upon liberation, the

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<sup>31</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 351.

<sup>32</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 362.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

Korean farmers had expected a greatly increased supply of chemical fertilizer for the 1945 fall and 1946 spring plantings, but they never received this fertilizer.

Another common factor leading to starvation was an inadequate labor force, and one way this manifested was in the overall deficiency in the number of work animals. The Japanese war demands meant that by 1945, Korea had only 60% of work cattle, 50% of poultry, and 50% of the hogs that it had had in 1943. Overall, Korea's amount of livestock in 1945 was only half of what it had been two years earlier.<sup>34</sup> During the wartime years, Koreans preferred to slaughter and eat their animals rather than let the livestock starve, due to lack of feed, which was prohibitively expensive. This dearth of livestock meant a significant loss in labor potential. A Farmer's Weekly digest from April 1946 suggests that six men could substitute for one work cow.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the loss of a significant asset to Korea's agricultural labor force negatively affected both north and south's agricultural output during 1945 and 1946.

In addition to the shortage of animals, the productivity of those working the fields dropped noticeably in the early months of U.S. occupation. This was from the Koreans' "holiday" spirit due to their liberation from the Japanese. The USAMGIK agricultural report sharply criticizes the Koreans, "It seemed that to Koreans 'Freedom' as brought by the Americans meant 'Freedom from work,' with the result that production diminished and the planted area of fall grains declined from 2,372,713 acres (average for 1940-1944) to only 1,747,193 acres in the fall of 1945."<sup>36</sup> Exacerbating this problem was that apparently, the 200,000 Japanese troops in pre-liberation Korea had also been engaged in agricultural pursuits, and their departure meant significantly fewer field laborers.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the overall agricultural

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 344-346.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 292.

output of Korea suffered due to this deficit in manpower.

The most important common factor, however, is the excessive consumption of rice in the early months of occupation, due to the aforementioned “holiday” spirit. The USAMGIK agricultural report provides statistics, which reveal that the Koreans, on average, consumed far more rice (28 ounces of rice/day) than allowable under normal rationing (10 ounces of rice/day, during winter months).<sup>38</sup> At this rate, the Koreans would have consumed the entire crop in a few months and then faced famine until the next harvest. By the time the U.S. put rice collection plans into place in January 1946, more than half of the 1945 rice crop had already been consumed, leading the U.S. occupation authorities to lower individuals’ rations from 10 oz./day to 5 oz./day. Such low allotments extended past June 1946, after the summer harvest had somewhat mitigated the situation.<sup>39</sup> G-2 reports as early as February 1946 convey U.S. suspicions that the Koreans greatly squandered the rice, through practices such as using rice to feed pigs and chickens or to make alcohol.<sup>40</sup> One report uses Mok’po as an example; this city of approximately 90,000 had over 2,000 sake shops.<sup>41</sup> In this manner, Koreans actually wasted significant amounts of food, and overconsumption was clearly a major factor in reducing the available stockpile of rice.

In summary, looking at the reasons for the U.S. zone’s food shortage reveals factors that likely existed in the north as well. In the early days of liberation, the fishing industry was virtually nonexistent, while lack of fertilizer, animals, and manpower led to a decreased harvest yield. A revealing statistic summarizes the problem in its description of Korea’s barley planting, in which the 1940-44 average of 2,458,042 acres declined to 1,471,769 acres, due to “a shortage

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 291-292.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>41</sup> February 19, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 26.



of farm supplied manure, absence of chemical fertilizer, and failure of farmers to plant.”<sup>42</sup> Most importantly, however, in the south, the Koreans consumed far more than the U.S. had calculated for, and the USAMGIK agricultural report stresses the extent of the damage that overconsumption caused. In the south, the USAMGIK managed to stave off the worst of the famine by importing a stated average of 32,000 tons of grain per month (see footnote for further details).<sup>43</sup> The Soviets, in the midst of a major nationwide famine, could not afford to similarly provide such substantial aid. Overall, the U.S.-administered southern Korea’s food shortage suggests that the north also experienced starvation.

### **Section III: Soviet Encouragement of Outward Migration**

The last major piece of evidence that hints at famine in the north is the migration trend of displaced Japanese people in northern Korea. The Soviets seemed to have facilitated the quick outwards movement of refugees, and they relaxed the border for those moving southwards, while limiting the flow of people in the opposing direction through stringent security checks. By quickly ushering out large groups of its population, the Soviets limited the refugees’ drain on limited food supplies. A mid-December 1945 G-2 report refers to a Japanese refugee leader claiming that the Soviets had recently ordered all Japanese to leave the Soviet occupation zone. The G-2 report noted a corresponding sharp influx of small boats arriving from the north carrying Japanese refugees.<sup>44</sup> The Japanese refugee leader estimated that there were roughly 200,000 Japanese in the north, and he claimed that they would cross the border at a rate of 2,000

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<sup>42</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 271.

<sup>43</sup> A USAMGIK press release disclosed the importation of 4.275 million bushels of U.S. wheat, 15,655 tons of corn, 8,200 tons of flour, 4,367 tons of candy, and unnamed thousands of tons of army surplus by November 8, 1946, with six more shiploads of wheat and flour incoming. *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>44</sup> December 19, 1945 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 457-458.

per day. The G-2 reports do not support the leader's claim of 2,000 refugees per day, but his first estimate of the number of Japanese refugees in the Soviet zone is more reasonable. Overall, from December 1945 to September 1946, the statistics provided by U.S. military intelligence account for 153,605 Japanese refugees crossing from northern Korea into the south, whether by land or sea.<sup>45</sup> The number of Japanese refugees from the north was significant, and they represented a large number of mouths to feed.

The Soviets likely saw these refugees as a drain on the north's dwindling food supply, as these refugees would not contribute to the north's economy, industry, or agriculture in any meaningful way. In the U.S. occupation zone, the USAMGIK had to deal with feeding an unexpectedly high number of Japanese refugees, who crowded areas near ports and waited for ships to repatriate them to Japan. Therefore, these refugees did not contribute to the south's production capabilities (i.e. by farming), and one of the USAMGIK's driving goals was to quickly repatriate all Japanese refugees. With the Japanese refugees draining limited resources, the USAMGIK actually ran into its own food shortage in the south, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the Soviets, by expelling all of these Japanese refugees, passed the burden of feeding them onto the U.S.<sup>46</sup> In fact, U.S. intelligence found evidence of Russian assistance in the Japanese refugees' border crossings. In one G-2 report (May 1946), a Japanese refugee leader (formerly the head of the Railway Transportation Bureau's Finance Department, in Pyongyang) gives an account in which he states that Soviet officials were quick to issue passes to his group of 2,600 refugees, and they also provided soldiers to guide refugee groups to the border.<sup>47</sup> By facilitating

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<sup>45</sup> Found by subtracting number of "Japanese civilians arriving from N of 38<sup>th</sup>" in two G-2 Reports (December 2, 1945 and September 16, 1946): (226,170 - 72,565 = 153,605 Japanese civilians).

<sup>46</sup> The Soviets reportedly confiscated hard currency (i.e. jewelry) from refugees moving southwards, while allowing them to carry Korean *won* and Japanese *yen*. Allan Millett suggests that this might have been a deliberate attempt to further destabilize the south's economy by means of inflation. Allan Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas UP, 2005), 59.

<sup>47</sup> May 28, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon,

rapid movement of refugees out of the north, the Soviets minimized the number of days these refugees would spend in the north while relying on government aid.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was relatively easily crossable southwards, contributing to a net reduction in the north's population, which in turn meant fewer mouths to feed. The main reason for this border policy is largely political, as a significant number of emigrants were Koreans who did not want to live under Soviet influence or a communist-dominated government. Bruce Cumings incorrectly portray the Soviet-Korean relationship in the north as the ideal example of a foreign power gradually relinquishing political power to the locals (he had limited access to information at the time of writing). In reality, it seems those who were dissatisfied with the north's governance "voted with their feet" by simply leaving.<sup>49</sup> The Soviets recognized that the departure of dissatisfied Koreans could actually help the communists gain power in the united front policy, as these Koreans' departure eroded the opposition parties' support bases. Thus, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel served as a one-way gate, in which those leaving the north encountered little trouble, at least in 1945 and early 1946. The significant number of refugees who permanently left the north also meant that the Soviets had that many fewer people to feed. With starvation such a pressing problem in the north, it seems logical to deduce that the Soviets saw the benefit in having fewer people to feed. In this way, the Soviets' encouragement of southward migration actually hints at starvation in northern Korea.

In comparison, the border was disproportionately difficult for those seeking to cross into the north. G-2 reports provide accounts of a large number of Koreans who crossed the border regularly for work purposes. In many of these accounts, Koreans consistently noted that the

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Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 330.

<sup>48</sup> Granted, the Japanese government had insisted upon the rapid repatriation of Japanese refugees from northern Korea, and this may have also played a part in their speedy outward migration.

<sup>49</sup> Bradley Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York City: Macmillan Publishers, 2007).

Soviet and northern Korean border security questioned entrants regarding their affiliations with American or Korean nationalist organizations, sometimes even leading to injuries and unreasonably long incarcerations. In a specific example, an October 1945 G-2 report describes the plight of 300 non-Japanese refugees at Kaesong (near the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel); they were apparently labor conscripts from Manchuria who had been sent to southern Korea due to World War II. They sought to return home to Manchuria by passing through the Soviet zone, but Soviet guards consistently refused them entry, despite their ostensibly innocuous purpose for entering the north.<sup>50</sup> The most likely reason for the Soviets' careful scrutiny of northward-bound Koreans is undoubtedly the fear of admitting violent individuals who would incite unrest and threaten the Soviets' gradual domination of northern politics. However, as stated earlier, food considerations may have also played a role in deciding the Soviets' stance towards refugees. By scrutinizing and limiting northward refugees, the Soviets not only hampered the entrance of violent political dissidents, but they also created a population flow deficit that helped the Soviet zone deal with its food shortage by encouraging the outward flow of people.

Overall, these three sections show that northern Korea was indeed experiencing a food shortage at this time. Given the context of the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947, the excessive Soviet requisitions make sense, as Soviets sought to mitigate the disaster in the Soviet Union by shipping rice home. Additionally, the Soviet zone likely experienced similar effects that led to food shortages in the south, and one of the major factors that hit the south was overconsumption, which likely existed in the north as well. Lastly, the Soviets' encouragement of outward migration, as well as its border policies, reduced the number of people dependent on government aid. Although the immediate motivation for these border controls may have been political in

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<sup>50</sup> October 2, 1945 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 102.

nature, a net decrease in population also meant fewer people to feed. In conclusion of this first part, the Soviet requisitions, reduced agricultural output in the north, and migration trends all suggest food shortages in the north.

## **Part II: The Preliminary Conference and the Soviets' Demand for Rice**

This next part will demonstrate how the Soviets' demand for food at the preliminary conference provides further evidence of food shortages in the north. This part is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the increasing mutual distrust prior to the preliminary conference in order to provide the historical context behind both sides' approaches to these talks. Understanding this adversarial relationship between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. will also be important in Part III in explaining why the Soviets viewed the U.S.'s inability to ship food with suspicion. The second will detail the preliminary conference and the primary reason that it gridlocked in failure: the U.S.'s reversal of its offer of food. The third will highlight the substantial size of the U.S. offer of available food for trade, and how important this food would have been for the Soviets.

### **Section I: Increasingly Adversarial Relations**

Relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had become much more adversarial towards one another by the time of the preliminary conference. The U.S. had adopted a much more anti-communist stance especially after President Roosevelt's death.<sup>51</sup> President Roosevelt's

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<sup>51</sup> Han Mu Kang notes that Roosevelt tended to rely on personally-known individuals, rather than on the existing administrative tools (i.e. War Department, State Department). In keeping the State Department out of the loop, Roosevelt essentially made his plans of trusteeship more difficult to continue after his death, since the State Department was not included as much as it should have been. Han Mu Kang, *The United States Military Government in Korea: 1945-1948: An Analysis of Its Policy* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Xerox University Microfilms, 1970), 13.

successor, Harry Truman, was much more hostile towards the Soviets, and increasing fears of communism set the tone for the U.S.'s tense relations with the U.S.S.R. These fears of communism held some merit, as the Soviets' expansion into Eastern Europe in 1944-1945 led U.S. officials to fear that the Soviets had recommitted to its communist ideology, dedicated to overthrowing capitalism throughout the world.<sup>52</sup> The administration increasingly believed in the "domino theory", in which conceding any territory to the U.S.S.R. would only give it even more power to further expand its sphere of influence.<sup>53</sup> By 1946, American leaders had adopted a new policy towards the Soviets, in which "expansionist moves by the Kremlin would be resisted, even at the risk of war. Negotiations would continue, but future concessions would have to come from Moscow."<sup>54</sup> This anti-communist stance was well-entrenched within the U.S. forces in the Pacific theater as well, as made apparent by Truman's military appointments of two anti-communist military leaders, Douglas MacArthur and John Hodge, in the Pacific theater.<sup>55</sup>

Numerous baseless accusations in the G-2 reports against communist insurrection belie the

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<sup>52</sup> Stalin encouraged cooperation from the West by cultivating the hope that the U.S.S.R. had given up its disruptive goal of exporting communism. However, as the Soviet military pushed east towards Germany during 1944, it denied self-determination among the Eastern European countries. The Soviets apparently abandoned communism's popular front strategy in favor of forcibly emplacing communist-friendly institutions. This denial of self-determination suggested to the West that the U.S.S.R. might return to a more belligerent stance towards its non-communist neighbors. John Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941-1947*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1972), 354-355.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Grew, the Under Secretary of State in 1944-1945, believed that a future war with the Soviets was certain. He was a significant advocate of the "domino theory", in which losing Mongolia, Manchuria, or Korea would empower the Soviets enough to potentially gain exclusive influence over even China and Japan. Joseph Grew was a key adviser to Truman, and he conferred often with two other key advisers (Stimson and Forrestal, the secretaries of War and the Navy respectively). He even recalled in later years that he and the President held no fundamental difference in opinion on any issue. Thus, Grew's strongly adversarial view towards the Soviets reflected the increasingly anti-communist stance of the U.S. Seung-young Kim, *American Diplomacy and Strategy toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882-1950 and After: Perception of Polarity and US Commitment to a Periphery*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 90.

<sup>54</sup> John Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941-1947*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1972), 356.

<sup>55</sup> General MacArthur was widely known as a staunch anti-communist prior to his appointment as the commanding general in the Pacific region. As for General Hodge, he opined in a 1948 report to the secretary of state that a "cold war" had existed between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. from the start of the USAMGIK occupation in September 1945. Jongsoo Lee argues that General Hodge's actions and pronouncements since the occupation's start reveal an anti-communist perspective. Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 48.

USAMGIK's anti-communist stance.<sup>56</sup> Overall, the U.S. developed a much more adversarial stance towards its former ally, and the prospects of a successful trusteeship in Korea were much worse by late 1945.

The Soviets also demonstrably viewed the U.S. as a competitor, even before Japan had surrendered in August 1945. Stalin hoped to leverage Soviet involvement in the war for significant gains. At the 1945 Yalta Conference, Stalin demanded the southern portion of Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands from Japan, port and railroad rights in Manchuria, and warm-water ports in Korea as requirements for Soviet involvement in the Pacific theater.<sup>57</sup> Stalin also planned his campaign in a manner that would ensure that the Red Army was occupying key positions prior to Japan's surrender.<sup>58</sup> However, the U.S.'s use of the atomic bomb disrupted Stalin's plans, and the Red Army entered the war mere days before the Japanese surrender and failed to occupy its objectives.<sup>59</sup> When the U.S. proposed the administrative division of Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on August 15, 1945, Stalin quickly agreed<sup>60</sup>, since the Red Army was actually in no position to push farther south anyways, due to the unexpectedly quick defeat of Japan.<sup>61</sup> In this way, the Soviets and the U.S. began to view one another as adversaries even

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<sup>56</sup> The military authors of these G-2 intelligence reports tended to attribute a disproportionate amount of unrest and criminal activity to communists, despite there being little evidence supporting their claims. Bruce Cumings describes this paranoia in both *Korea's Place Under the Sun* and *Politics of Liberation*, and he even notes that some Americans believed that all Russian and Korean communists were under the Comintern's command, despite the Comintern's dissolution in 1943. Bruce Cumings, *The Politics of Liberation: Korea, 1945-1947, Parts I & II* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1975), 461.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 44.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 55.

<sup>60</sup> Stalin accepted the demarcation line since he feared that the U.S. might airlift a token force from Okinawa to Seoul, leading the Japanese occupation forces to surrender Korea to the U.S. In doing so, the U.S. would effectively be in control of all of Korea, since the Japanese would surrender exclusively to the U.S. Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 64.

<sup>61</sup> In fact, the U.S. also lacked the ability to enforce the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Dean Rusk, at the time a colonel on the staff of the U.S. War Department's elite Operations Division, later wrote, "I had thought [the Soviets] might insist on a line farther south in view of our respective military positions." He notes that the U.S. overestimated Soviet military power in Korea and feared that the Soviets would occupy the entirety of Korea. Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38.

before WWII ended.

Even regarding achieving trusteeship, which was the fundamental goal of the Moscow Conference and the preliminary conference, neither side was particularly optimistic of its probability of success, due to mutual suspicions. The U.S. evidently did not support trusteeship. Even on the eve of the Moscow Conference, General Hodge (the military governor of the USAMGIK) privately spoke out against trusteeship.<sup>62</sup> The U.S. delegation came unprepared to discuss higher-level issues, i.e. implementing trusteeship, and they did not even have a proposal ready.<sup>63</sup> A later Soviet commentary relates the Soviet delegation's perspective of the conference, and it notes that the Soviets interpreted the U.S.'s unpreparedness and hasty agreement to the Soviet terms as a desire to save face, rather than a sign of willingness to pursue trusteeship. They believed that the U.S. sought to avoid the negative publicity of being viewed as responsible for causing a permanent division by rejecting trusteeship outright.<sup>64</sup> President Truman's reaction to the Moscow Conference's results further reveals the U.S. position. He was extremely displeased with the U.S. representative (Secretary of State James Byrnes) as well as the outcome of the conference<sup>65</sup>, and he even reneged on parts of the Moscow agreement.<sup>66</sup> Clearly, by the Moscow

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<sup>62</sup> On the eve of the conference, General Hodge argued for scrapping trusteeship talks and engaging in bilateral talks with the U.S.S.R., while excluding Koreans from the decision-making process. He believed that the Koreans as a whole were not educated enough in Western democracy, and that factionalism was too severe an issue among the Koreans. *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Evidently, the U.S. delegates had hoped to solve smaller, more manageable problems such as resolving economic and administrative issues, rather than the more important, larger issue of establishing trusteeship and a single Korean government. The proposal that they submitted the following day, in response to Soviet criticism of the U.S.'s apparent lack of enthusiasm for trusteeship, was obviously hastily prepared. The U.S. delegation was aware that the Soviets wanted a limited trusteeship with a maximum duration of five years, but their proposal still suggested ten years. Jongsoo Lee interprets this as at best, U.S. indifference regarding trusteeship, and at worst, possibly a deliberate attempt to sabotage talks by forcing the Soviets to reject such an extended trusteeship. *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>64</sup> When the Koreans became aware of the Moscow Conference's results, they organized disturbances and demonstrates, decrying the "selling out" of Korea to foreign powers. They perceived the Soviets as being the primary backer of trusteeship, and General Hodge did nothing to dispel the false rumors at first. This supports the claim that the U.S. was highly concerned about saving face and maintaining its reputation. Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 145.

<sup>65</sup> Truman believed Byrnes had made unauthorized concessions to the U.S.S.R. on issues such as the Soviet occupation of Iran, U.S. recognition of pro-Soviet governments in Romania and Bulgaria, and an increased Soviet role in the Control Commission in Japan, which would direct Japan's reconstruction and future growth. Truman



Conference in December 1945, the U.S.'s support for trusteeship was questionable.

The Soviet stance towards trusteeship is harder to define, due to the overall lack of historical documents released by Russia, but there is reason to suspect that the Soviets were initially somewhat supportive of it. Korea was strategically very important to Stalin as a buffer against a resurgent, hostile Japan.<sup>67</sup> After the war ended, Stalin failed to gain any meaningful involvement in determining Japan's future<sup>68</sup>, and so Korea came to serve as a buffer against a potentially dangerous Japan. Logically, therefore, he viewed securing a friendly Korea as a critical objective, and trusteeship was an alternate path to achieve this. Due to Korea's geographical proximity to the Soviet Union, in the long run a unified Korea resulting from trusteeship would likely have become friendly.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that Stalin considered trusteeship with serious intent, and the Soviet occupation's early policies (or lack thereof) hint at this. The Soviet military's initial occupation of Korea was marked by indecision and hesitance to act

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wrote, "Byrnes... had taken it upon himself to move the foreign policy of the United States in a direction to which I could not, and would not agree. Moreover, he had undertaken this on his own initiative without consulting or informing the President." Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 85.

<sup>66</sup> Truman reneged on concessions regarding expanding the Soviet role in the Control Commission in Japan as well as U.S. recognition of pro-Soviet governments in Romania and Bulgaria. Ibid., 191.

<sup>67</sup> Professor Kathryn Weathersby examines an official reference paper (June 1945) of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Second Far Eastern Department, and she puts forth the conclusion that the Soviets absolutely did not want a Korea under Japanese influence, as it would then constitute a constant threat to the eastern U.S.S.R. During WWII, Stalin had seen the Korean peninsula as a springboard for invasion into the U.S.S.R. Ibid., 62, 76-78.

<sup>68</sup> Stalin had sought an expanded Soviet role in the Control Commission in Japan, but due to the atomic bomb and the hastened Japanese surrender, the Soviets failed to contribute much to the Pacific theater. Consequently, the Truman administration did not feel obligated to include Stalin in a significant way. After Truman reneged on the Moscow Conference and failed to expand the Soviet role in the Control Commission for Japan, a bitter Stalin recalled General Derevyanko, who had served as the Soviet representative at Japan's surrender ceremony, from Tokyo in January 1946. This recall hints at Stalin's recognition that the Soviets would not control Japan's reconstruction. Ibid., 77.

<sup>69</sup> During the Soviet occupation of northern Korea, the Soviets established schools in Korea while also sending young Koreans to college near Moscow in order to teach communism. Aided by a constant flow of people to and from the Soviet Union, northern Korea's communists developed strong ties with the U.S.S.R. Through such indoctrination, the Soviet Union hoped to be able to cultivate a cadre of communists friendly towards the U.S.S.R. (USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 3, 380.)

without guidance from its political leaders<sup>70</sup>, and the Soviet commander lacked the authority even to negotiate at the local level.<sup>71</sup> The Soviets also supported a broad coalition national front between nationalists and leftists (until January 1946)<sup>72</sup>, and this was a significant step towards creating a moderate political body that would tangibly assist in the implementation of trusteeship. Therefore, trusteeship may have been a viable option for Stalin, and the U.S.S.R.'s stance regarding trusteeship was arguably more supportive than the U.S.'s.<sup>73</sup>

However, in the face of American unwillingness to genuinely adhere to the Moscow Conference, whatever support for trusteeship that the Soviets may have had vanished. On January 5, 1946, the Soviet Union abandoned its plans for a united front in northern Korea<sup>74</sup>, and it adopted more adversarial policies against the U.S.-administered southern zone, both military<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> On October 11, 1945, General Chistiakov removed his military liaison team in Seoul with the United States Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). He rejected the possibility of negotiations at the military-level until higher-level agencies more concretely decided Korea's future. Instead, he suggested that special trips be made between the Soviet and the U.S. headquarters whenever the situation merited it. See USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.2.12)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 156.) and *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI*, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1071-1072.

<sup>71</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI*, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1106.

<sup>72</sup> The Soviets attempted to groom Cho Mansik, highly respected and without any collaborationist background, to become the leader of an outwardly legitimate, moderate party. Cho Mansik consistently resisted allowing communists into key positions within the party, which would have given the communists undue influence, and the Soviets became disillusioned with Cho Mansik. With the Moscow Conference's conclusion, Cho Mansik predictably refused to support trusteeship, and on January 5, 1946, the same day that President Truman rejected tenets of the Moscow agreement, the Soviets placed Cho Mansik under house arrest and effectively ended its united front strategy in northern Korea. Allan Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas UP, 2005), 68-69.

<sup>73</sup> Some scholars disagree with the possibility that Stalin was amenable towards trusteeship. They believe that Stalin would never have risked control over his territories to the whims of popular elections, and they point to Stalin's tight control over Soviet-controlled Eastern European countries as evidence. *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> G-2 reports from March 1946 relied on multiple Korean sources to conclude that the Soviets were fortifying the border with tunnels, bringing in field guns, and conducting unusually high amounts of night movement. Additionally, refugees from Pyongyang claimed that they were forced to build air-raid shelters and foxholes in and around the city. A February report also added, "The Russians are beginning to show new interest in US activities along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. February 15, March 5, and March 13, 1946 G-2 Reports. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), pages 12, 69, 98.

and economic<sup>76</sup> in nature. Thus, by the time the preliminary conference began on January 16, both sides increasingly regarded one another with suspicion, and given this context, it is unsurprising that the Soviets did not trust the U.S. when it backtracked on its statement of food availability.

## Section II: The Preliminary Conference

This section will quickly summarize the preliminary conference and detail the primary reason for its failure: the issue of food. The purpose of the preliminary conference (January 16 – February 5, 1946) was to resolve any urgent issues requiring discussion across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, but given the mutual distrust described in the previous section, the preliminary conference failed to produce anything of note. The Soviets and the Americans approached the conference very differently; while the U.S. sought to establish joint administration and long-term economic union, the Soviets came prepared primarily to discuss ad hoc agreements regarding urgent issues. The Soviets perceived the U.S. requests as an attempt to unfairly extend southern influence into the north, thereby dominating all of Korea. Ultimately, however, the key divisive issue for the preliminary conference was the matter of rice. The Soviets claimed that starvation was taking its toll in the north, and they eventually made the U.S.'s delivery of rice to the north a prerequisite

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<sup>76</sup> G-2 Reports from February 1946 report that General Chistiakov (the commander of the Soviet occupation forces) allegedly ordered Soviets along the border to prevent the trade of non-crucial items, such as lumber. Resupply trucks for U.S. troops stationed at Onjin had to use a road that extended north across the border at points. Previous arrangements between the Soviet border guards and their American counterparts included the provision that lumber from a former Japanese installation in Onjin could be transported south on the resupply convoy's return trip. However, in February, the Soviets at the border informed the Americans that only military supplies would be allowed in and out of Onjin across the border." Additionally, a CIA report from December 1947 reveals that the Soviets induced "a decrease of electric-power supply to South Korea in order to cause unemployment and widespread unrest. Another G-2 report corroborates this CIA report, when it cites Koreans who alleged that Soviet soldiers claimed they could cut off the supply of electricity for the American zone if the U.S. failed to supply rice for starving Korean farmers in the north. [February 15, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 12.] [A Center for the Study of Intelligence, *CIA Daily Summary Excerpt, 9 December 1947, Korea: Future Soviet Tactics in Korea* (Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years; [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)), Document 50.] [December 6, 1945 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 386.]

for further talks.

Regarding both sides' varying approaches to the preliminary conference, the U.S. sought to achieve an economic union in Korea, and it decried the Soviets' unwillingness to discuss these matters. In Political Adviser in Korea Benninghoff's report to the Secretary of State, Benninghoff largely attributes the conference's failure to the Soviets' unwillingness to yield control of assets to joint administration.<sup>77</sup> The U.S. delegation sought to remove the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel border and consider the two occupation zones administratively as one state. For example, the U.S. proposed to put the railroads of Korea under a joint administration, in order to operate the railroads more efficiently as a unit. Regarding trade of commodities, the U.S. saw a longer-term economic union as a more realistic solution than making ad hoc arrangements. Benninghoff criticizes the Soviet delegation's insistence on trading commodities on a "quasi-barter basis, with exchanges to be kept approximately equal and with no advancing of credit."<sup>78</sup> He notes that the Soviets were ready to supply raw materials from northern Korea, whereas the U.S. delegation could not immediately produce manufactured commodities for trade, since the raw materials would first have to be processed in the south. Thus, from the U.S. delegation's perspective, the Soviets were simply narrow-minded and unwilling to compromise.

The Soviet delegation's assessment of the conference was quite different, however. They blamed the conference's failure on the U.S.'s apparent desire to place the north's administration under the south's control, giving an unfair amount of influence to the U.S.-dominated south. The Soviets saw the U.S. request to create an economic union as beyond the scope of the conference. V.I. Petukhov, one of the Foreign Ministry officials, notes that the conference was technically "supposed to deal only with solving urgent problems in the administrative-economic sphere" and

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<sup>77</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII, Eds. John Reid and Herbert Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 477.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Document 477.

“reach agreements on organizing exchanges of goods between the two zones.”<sup>79</sup> He accuses the U.S. of trying to prematurely effectuate the country’s reunification (through an economic union), even though the upcoming U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission would be the proper forum for that discussion. From the Soviet delegation’s perspective, the U.S. came unprepared to deliver any commodities. Even the difference in rank across the Soviet and U.S. delegates implied that the U.S.S.R. was more invested in the conference, as the Americans respectively held less experience, rank, and authority than their Soviet counterparts.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Soviets were suspicious of the U.S.’s intentions, as they believed the U.S. only wanted to gain favorable short-term economical and administrative arrangements while delaying the more difficult negotiations regarding Korea’s future.

From both accounts, the Soviets’ mistrust of the U.S. becomes understandable, as they feared yielding administrative control over any assets would lead to their domination by the more heavily populated, U.S.-led southern zone. With the U.S. rejection of the Moscow agreement, the Soviets had begun focusing on building a separate state in its northern occupation zone, rather than striving for joint trusteeship and future reunification. Yielding administrative control would only have hindered establishing a strong separate state. Distrusting the U.S., they rejected the U.S. delegation’s proposals for an economic union.

Interestingly, however, the main reason for the conference’s failure was the U.S.’s inability to send rice northward. Benninghoff writes:

*“The most important problem considered by the conference, and that on which the*

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<sup>79</sup> Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 89.

<sup>80</sup> Van Ree describes the disparity in rank, “The Soviet delegation was of a higher level than the American. Major-General Arnold, chief of the American delegation, was a high-ranking officer within the American occupation forces. Shtykov (Chistiakov’s superior) was one level above the Soviet occupation army. Political Advisor Benninghoff could not be compared in status to Tsarapkin [a very high-ranking Soviet diplomat, who would later become the second highest Soviet diplomat residing in Washington D.C.].” Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin’s Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 190.

*conference virtually collapsed, was the Soviet demand for rice from the south in exchange for raw materials and other commodities from the north. It soon became evident that General [Shtykov] was sent to the conference with instructions to get as much rice as possible and to refuse to agree to any exchange of other commodities unless rice was forthcoming.”<sup>81</sup>*

General Shtykov of the Soviet delegation noted “catastrophic” food situation in the three northern provinces as well as an overall dire shortage of rice, the staple crop.<sup>82</sup> In response, when the U.S. delegation explained that the south could not furnish rice and after much fruitless discussion, the Soviets submitted a statement on February 4, which effectively served as an ultimatum stating that the Soviets could not continue discussions of the exchange of commodities unless the U.S. could guarantee the delivery of rice.

In summary of this section, the Soviet and U.S. delegations could not agree on much. The Americans had attempted to establish joint administration over trade and such, but the Soviets perceived these as an attempt to unfairly creep U.S. dominance into the northern zone’s affairs. However, the primary issue that stalled and ended the preliminary conference was the Soviets’ ultimatum regarding U.S. delivery of rice.

### **Section III: Importance of U.S. Delivery of Rice**

The U.S. had stated months earlier that it would have an estimated 4 to 5 million bushels of rice ready to ship northwards, in return for unspecified commodities. In a telegram from Secretary of State Byrnes to Ambassador (U.S.S.R.) Harriman on November 3, 1945, Byrnes

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<sup>81</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII, Eds. John Reid and Herbert Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 477.

<sup>82</sup> Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin’s Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 192-193.

writes that Hodge had estimated 4 to 5,000,000 bushels of rice to be available by the first quarter of 1946.<sup>83</sup> A later telegram (received December 28, 1945) from Benninghoff to the Secretary of State reverses Hodge's estimate and writes that with the deteriorating food situation in the south, the U.S. would no longer be able to provide rice.<sup>84</sup> He recommends that the Secretary of State relay this information to Ambassador Harriman in the Soviet Union, but there is no extant document of such communication occurring. Nor is there any evidence that the U.S. notified, in a timely manner, the Soviet Union of its newfound inability to provide rice after this December 28 telegram. The Soviets likely entered the preliminary conference with the preconception that they would be able to trade commodities such as raw materials and electricity in exchange for a substantial amount of food. The Soviets at the preliminary conference may have been hearing of the U.S. reversal for the first time.

Additionally, the amount of rice that the U.S. initially stated that it could ship north was quite a significant amount that would surely have mitigated starvation in Korea. (See footnotes for calculations, conversions, and justification for the use of certain values). Byrnes notes the availability of 4 to 5,000,000 bushels of rice, which is approximately equivalent to 4,200,390,000 to 5,250,487,500 ounces of rice.<sup>85</sup> The USAMGIK allotted 10 ounces of rice per day for individuals' daily rations<sup>86</sup>, and at that rate, the rice shipment could have supported between 1,150,791 and 1,438,489 individuals for an entire year living at 10 ounces of rice per

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<sup>83</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1108.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1152.

<sup>85</sup> A single bushel (a volumetric unit of measure) is equivalent to 148.95 cups, and one cup of white short grain rice weighs ~200 grams, or ~7.05 oz. Data pulled from Calorie Lab's nutrition database. <http://calorielab.com/foods/rice/21>

<sup>86</sup> During the worst of the famine in the south, the USAMGIK reduced the daily allotted rations to 5 oz./day. Additionally, a later Korean source (see November 8, 1945 G-2 Report) says Korea's food is plentiful, and adds that the new daily ration was about 9.87 oz of rice/day. Thus, using the 10 oz./day ration seems to be a generous estimate of rice per day, in calculating how many people this rice would actually feed. Additionally, the Japanese also used the quota of about 10 ounces per day. United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 279.

day! Given a very rough estimate of the 1946 population in North Korea (~9.3 million, not counting foreigners or refugees), U.S. aid would have supported between ~12.4% and ~15.5% of the north's Korean population!<sup>87</sup> For comparison's sake, the stated average U.S. aid of 32,000 tons of grain per month supported about 3,084,456 individuals for a year at the equivalent 10 oz./day ration.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the amount of food that the U.S. had said it was prepared to send northwards represented about 37% to 47% of the aid that the U.S. was providing its own occupation zone. In summary, the rice would have supported about 1/7 of the northern population for a year, and the U.S. reversal meant the Soviet Union unexpectedly found itself unable to feed a significant portion of the population.

Overall, this rice that the U.S. had earlier stated would be available for trade to the north represented a substantial contribution to mitigating famine in northern Korea. The Soviets expected to be able to barter for this food, which constituted an "urgent" ad hoc arrangement that it had been hoping to secure. Consequently, it is no wonder that the Soviets viewed continuing the preliminary conference as pointless, if it could not receive food.

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<sup>87</sup> Estimated 19.36 million in South Korea, and 9.3 million in North Korea (does not take occupation governments or foreigners into account, and unknown how refugees are factored in), according to Tai Hwan Kwon, *The Population of Korea* (Seoul: Seoul National University, 1975), 7.

<sup>88</sup> Grain and rice carry different nutritional values, so I must determine how much grain yields the same number of calories from rice. "Grain" is a category, not a specific type of seed, so I will use the caloric value of wheat, which is the principle cereal grain grown in the U.S. Hard red wheat is the most common among exported cereal grains, and it has a caloric value of about 328 cal/100mg, while white rice is about 358 cal/100mg. Thus, the wheat has approximately 91.62% of the number of calories for the equivalent weight. The calculation also assumes the monthly aid remains the same year-round, and that a ton is 2,000 pounds.



### **Part III: Ultimatum as a Stalling Tactic or a Genuine Request?**

At first glance, the rice ultimatum may seem like a stalling tactic in order for the Soviet delegation to prematurely adjourn the preliminary conference. Given the Soviets' increasing pessimism towards trusteeship, an alternate explanation for the Soviets' ultimatum is that it gave the Soviet delegation an excuse to end the preliminary conference on the pretext that the U.S. had failed to uphold its end of the negotiations. Indeed, the U.S. delegation expressed its doubts at the veracity of Soviet claims of starvation, and they said that the northern zone should have been as self-sufficient as the south was in terms of foodstuffs. In reality, however, the Soviets sincerely believed that the U.S. was actually capable of sending rice northwards, and the ultimatum was not a stalling tactic. The stalling tactic theory applies only if the Soviets were sure that the Americans could not meet the demand; however, the Soviets (mistakenly) believed it was a reasonable, fulfillable request. Therefore, the Soviets made this ultimatum out of genuine intent, implying that receiving food was absolutely critical to them.

This part of the paper will seek to show that the Soviet Union saw the U.S. reversal of its statement of available rice as a sign of deceit and hostility, rather than as an honest mistake. As made clear in Part II Section I, the Soviets were increasingly suspicious of U.S. intentions by this point. The Soviets had multiple methods of gathering information from the south<sup>89</sup>, but even in January 1946, the Soviets continued to receive intelligence that failed to report the looming food shortages in the south. Broken into three sections, this part will first detail the abruptness with which the food shortages struck the south, as the U.S. only began to take action mere weeks

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<sup>89</sup> Van Ree notes three major groups among the Koreans that served as sources of intelligence for the Soviets. First were Soviet-trained Korean communists, who sought to build the communist party within Korea during Japanese rule as well as afterwards. The second was the large population of Soviet Koreans, many of whom went to the Soviet-occupied northern Korea in August 1945. The third was the group of Korean communist partisans in Manchuria, including key persons such as Kim Il Sung. Eric Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 22-24.

before the preliminary conference. Thus, the Soviet Union had even less time to notice the food shortage that the U.S. had only just recognized. Second, the Soviet consulate in Seoul relayed information to the Soviets, and its key source of information was the Korean press. However, the news tended to reflect the widespread belief among the Korean public that sufficient rice did exist in the south. Third, it will link the Soviets with the Korean communist movement, in order to show that the Soviets received a large amount of intelligence through the communists. The communists were not in an ideal position to recognize, let alone predict, the deteriorating rice situation. As with the Korean press, the communists saw much rice hoarding in the countryside, and they attributed any food shortage to hoarding. Therefore, two major sources of intelligence, the consulate and the communists, provided an inaccurate picture of the south. This led the Soviets to believe that sufficient rice did exist in the south, contrary to the U.S.'s claims.

### **Section I: USAMGIK's Surprise at the Shortage**

First, the food shortage caught even the USAMGIK completely by surprise, and this suggests that the Soviets had even less time to confirm the U.S.'s claims of food shortages in the south. The USAMGIK began its administration believing that Korea was a rice surplus country, when in fact, the opposite was true. Historically during the Choson Dynasty and for most of the twentieth century, peasants typically struggled with poverty and starvation in the early spring, when rice from the fall harvest ran out but their spring harvest (typically barley) was not yet ready for harvest.<sup>90</sup> The USAMGIK agricultural report adds that the area of arable land had concurrently only increased slightly from 1910 to 1945<sup>91</sup>, which was further compounded by the

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<sup>90</sup> Yun-Shik Chang, *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea* (London: Routledge, 2006), 347.

<sup>91</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 273-274.

fact that the population almost doubled during that time from 13,750,000 to 27,275,000 people.<sup>92</sup> During the Japanese occupation, the Japanese had actually more than offset Korea's rice exports to Japan by importing large quantities of "inferior" grains from China and Manchuria.<sup>93</sup> The report concludes that even disregarding the "holiday" spirit's overconsumption, smuggling, and hoarding by farmers (wishing to sell on the more lucrative black market), there would still have been barely enough rice to feed everyone to begin with, despite strict rationing.<sup>94</sup> The USGMK entered Korea believing that rice would be plentiful, but in reality, there was barely enough rice to go around in an ideal situation.

The U.S. noticed the looming food shortage and took action far too late, due to its erroneous assessment of Korea's rice production capabilities. As late as November, the G-2 reports still cited statements of Koreans who claimed that Korea would have enough rice. One source says that Korea did not need to worry about food, thanks to an apparently bountiful harvest, and he points out that the daily ration had actually increased from approximately 9.165 to 9.87 ounces of rice per day.<sup>95</sup> With such optimism extending into the end of 1945, the U.S. mobilized for action very late. On December 28, 1945, the USAMGIK finally began to take drastic action, when it issued an order declaring rice to be in critical demand as well as enplacing new retail price ceilings.<sup>96</sup> Benninghoff advised Secretary of State Byrnes on that same date of the newly discovered inability to provide 4 to 5 million bushels of rice to the north. Thus, the USAMGIK only began to take drastic action a little over two weeks before the

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<sup>92</sup> A.G. Vinogradov, *The Population of the Countries of the World from Most Ancient Times to the Present Days* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 52.

<sup>93</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 291.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>95</sup> November 8, 1945 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 256.

<sup>96</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 290.

preliminary conference started. The U.S., despite its direct administration over the south and relatively strong intelligence gathering capabilities, still could not react to the south's food shortage in a timely manner. Therefore, the U.S.'s reversal of its offer in January made little sense to the Soviets, who still perceived the south as fully capable of delivering crucial food northwards. In this way, the Soviet Union's suspicions of the USAMGIK's claims of food shortages becomes understandable.

## **Section II: Soviet Consulate and Korean Press**

Second, the Soviet consulate in Seoul was a key source of intelligence for the Soviets, but it provided inaccurate information. Jongsoo Lee links the establishment of the consulate general in 1925 with the Soviet Union's newfound interest in spreading communism in its program of world revolution.<sup>97</sup> The Comintern began to extend additional aid to revolutionaries fighting for independence, and the consulate provided a foothold that increased Soviet influence in Korea. In this manner, from its beginnings the consulate served not only as a diplomatic center but also as a base of sorts, to help facilitate Soviet influence and guidance of communists. According to Kathryn Weathersby, in 1942 the Soviet consulate began to send reports to the Soviet Union regarding economic resources that could potentially be marked as "enemy property" for future confiscation<sup>98</sup>, which was later carried out post-liberation in multiple instances, regarding property as diverse as hydroelectric dam equipment, printing presses, and other such machinery.<sup>99</sup> In this way, the consulate regularly sent reports to the north, contributing to Soviet

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<sup>97</sup> Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 22.

<sup>98</sup> Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives" *Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series*, Working Paper #8, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: November 1993), 21.

<sup>99</sup> October 12, 1945 G-2 Report and November 23, 1945 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 139, 325.

intelligence of the south.

The USAMGIK allowed a wide margin of freedom for the consulate to conduct its abilities, and these facilitated its abilities to disseminate information to the north. The U.S. actually suspected the Soviet consulate of serving more as an intelligence gathering asset rather than a diplomacy-oriented arm of the government.<sup>100</sup> General Hodge conveyed his suspicions in a telegram (October 1945), “It is considered possible that the Consul General is assisting the Korean Communist movement in Seoul, and is trying behind the scenes in apparent attempts to discredit the United States and its occupation policies in the eyes of the Koreans.”<sup>101</sup> Although the U.S.S.R.’s reluctance to reciprocate and allow a U.S. listening post in the north was the primary reason for Hodge’s decision to close the Soviet consulate in Seoul, he used its illegal distribution of Soviet film as the justification for its closure.<sup>102</sup> Given American paranoia regarding communism and Soviet involvement in inciting unrest, the U.S.’s accusations of the consulate’s intelligence-gathering purposes may be over-exaggerated. Nonetheless, the U.S. did provide a remarkable amount of freedom for the consulate<sup>103</sup>, and the Soviet consulate was in a prime position to relay intelligence to the north.

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<sup>100</sup> Inside the consulate property lay a Greek Orthodox Church that lay under the jurisdiction of the Moscow patriarchy. A G-2 report quotes several different Koreans from both Seoul and North Korea who allege that the Soviets planned to train Koreans as missionaries and return them to the South to obtain information for the consulate as well as the communist movement. (February 13-14, 1946 G-2 Reports. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), pages 3, 7-8.

<sup>101</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1072.

<sup>102</sup> The USAMGIK was highly suspicious that the Soviets were using film to increase Soviet influence and cultural relevance among the Soviets, and General Hodge ultimately used the Soviet’s use of film as the final justification for closing the Soviet consulate. (Charles K. Armstrong, “The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 62, No. 1. Pp. 71-99. February 2003. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3096136.pdf>)

<sup>103</sup> General Hodge notes that the U.S. had provided more than adequate amenities for the members of the consulate (and their families) along with special privileges such as special train and air transportation to and from the north as well as Tokyo. The Consul General and Vice Consul could freely speak with Soviet military officials as well. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, Volume VI, Eds. John Glennon, N. O. Sappington, Laurence Evans, Herbert Fine, John Reid, and Ralph Goodwin (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), pg 1072.

Korean newspapers were an integral source of information for the Soviet consulate, and Weathersby writes, “All reports to Moscow on the political situation in South Korea were based only on Seoul press and radio.”<sup>104</sup> Understanding the political situation in the south was of utmost importance to the Soviet Union, since it would determine whether a Soviet-friendly Korea was possible, or if anti-Soviet right-wing groups would dominate politics. Thus, it is surprising that the only source of intelligence regarding the political situation came from press and radio, and this illustrates the importance of Korean media in the Soviets’ intelligence gathering activities. The exchange between Stalin and Harriman in January of 1946 reveals that the U.S.’s rejection of the Moscow agreement first became apparent to Stalin through the Korean newspapers, which printed the erroneous story that the U.S.S.R. had pushed for trusteeship while the U.S. had opposed it.<sup>105</sup> In reports sent north, the consulate utilized Korean media in attempting to paint an accurate picture, and Stalin’s citation of press shows that press was an important, easy way for the Soviet Union to gain intelligence.

However, some of these newspapers tended to reflect public opinion, and they were far from immune to the influence of public sentiment. Thus, what the consulate perceived in Korean media gave the Soviet Union an accurate idea of what the Korean public saw, not necessarily the truth. In line with widespread Korean distrust of the U.S. rice collection efforts, Korean media attacked U.S. policies with speculations and outright falsehoods.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Korean media was very

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<sup>104</sup> Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series*, Working Paper #8, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: November 1993), 22.

<sup>105</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII, Eds. John Reid and Herbert Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 468.

<sup>106</sup> In one example, newspapers, including both the leftist-leaning and the supposedly unbiased, blasted U.S. rice collection efforts, claiming that the U.S. was exporting rice while importing inferior Indian corn and wheat flour to feed the Koreans, leading to sickness and malnutrition among the weak and elderly. In another false account, a Korean reporter claimed to have seen a gasoline drum on an American truck fall and burst open, revealing not fuel, but rice. All of these accounts damaged the USAMGIK’s reputation to such an extent that the USAMGIK conducted a tour of twenty-two Korean newspapermen on January 24, 1946, to witness the unloading of U.S. cargo ships,

susceptible to publishing baseless newspapers, without sufficiently rigorous verification of facts. They also incited unrest and even violence at times, as shown by the USAMGIK's suspension of a right-wing news organization. General Hodge made an example out of the Dai Dong Press in mid-May 1946 with a temporary suspension, for committing such careless reporting. A week earlier, he had noted a growing trend among the Korean press that reflected the false belief among Koreans that from the start, foreign powers had established the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to permanently divide the country among themselves for exploitative purposes.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, ultra-right organizations and youth groups used violent tactics in intimidating leftists, and right-wing press not only incited such action but openly endorsed it. He issued a public statement which said, "Some organs of the press of various shades of opinion have frequently abused their rights, have slandered members of the Allied Nations, have violated the elementary rules of libel and have on occasion tried to incite the public to hatred and violence including murder and have praised attempts at murder."<sup>108</sup> Overall, Korean press, relatively new to free press as well as its ensuing responsibilities, sometimes reflected Korean sentiment over accurate reporting, and the reports that the consulate sent north indicated Korean public opinion more than accurate facts.

Regarding the rice shortage, the Korean press continued to place the blame on the USAMGIK. The USAMGIK's drastic measures (declaring rice in critical shortage and implementing rice collection plans) in late December 1945 and early January 1946 could have signaled to the Soviets that the USAMGIK was truly facing an unexpected rice shortage. However, at this point, everyone attributed the food shortages to USAMGIK mismanagement

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which were laden with millions of pounds of refrigerated food. Even communist-leaning newspapers provided favorable coverage of this tour. United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 321, 323-324.

<sup>107</sup> March 9, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 85.

<sup>108</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII, Eds. John Reid and Herbert Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 514.

rather than to the possibility of an actual shortage. On January 21, 1945, Korean officials in the province of Cholla stated their doubts that their province would be able to meet its quota set by the USAMGIK's newly implemented (January 16, 1945) mandatory rice purchasing program. They felt that the shortage was due to the fact that large quantities had already been shifted to the black market, which farmers preferred due to its much higher profits.<sup>109</sup> Other people believed any rice shortages were due to farmers' withholding of grain.<sup>110</sup> Koreans vocally complained to newspapers, which led scouting parties that "discovered that the bulk of the [rice] was held in small amounts by scattered farmers and land-owners."<sup>111</sup> From the Korean perspective, any shortage of rice was actually a result of poor USAMGIK economic policy, leading farmers to funnel rice towards more lucrative avenues instead of towards hungry citizens.

In truth, excessive consumption of rice due to the "holiday" spirit had already halved the 1945 harvest in a mere few months (October to December). Thus, although the Korean public's belief that the USAMGIK's mismanagement had led to mass hoarding and smuggling was true to an extent<sup>112</sup>, it did not take into consideration the possibility that most of the rice was simply gone. The USAMGIK agricultural report succinctly notes, "The majority believed that rice still existed somewhere in South Korea. Politicians debated as to where it could be; the Leftists saw it in the bins of the land-owners; the Rightists saw it in the households of the small farms. Military Government, which had the fullest picture, did not see it in all of Korea."<sup>113</sup> The USAMGIK itself did not understand that Korea was not a rice surplus country until at least December 1945,

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<sup>109</sup> January 21, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 571.

<sup>110</sup> A G-2 report attributes unrest in Taegu (January 5, 1946) primarily to farmers hoarding rice due to the current ceiling price January 5, 1946 G-2 Report. *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>111</sup> United States Army Far East Command, Military History Section, *History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea* (Microfilm), 290

<sup>112</sup> USAMGIK mismanagement did indeed contribute to the rice shortage problem, by leading to hoarding and smuggling out of Korea. However, this was more or less negligible, at 90 tons per month (assuming each bag is approximately 50 pounds of rice). *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.



and only in February 1946 did it first speculate that Koreans' overconsumption was the reason all of the rice was gone.

Any news that the consulate might have heard prior to the preliminary conference reflected widespread belief that the rice still existed in the south. With such reports, the Soviet Union would have believed that the south did have enough rice for the U.S. to fulfill its offer of food, and that the USAMGIK's current inability to provide rice was a result of its incompetent management of rice collection efforts.

### **Section III: Communists' Ties to the U.S.S.R.**

The Soviet Union likely utilized the Korean communist movement as another key source of intelligence. The Soviets' influence over the north's communist party is already well established by a variety of authors, and this paper will not go into detail on this matter.<sup>114</sup> However, the Soviets' ability to gather intelligence through the south's communist party is not as clear. A variety of U.S. intelligence hints at a constant exchange of information, communist cadre, and supplies back and forth from the north, and the north's communist party was likely well connected with the south's. Therefore, the Soviets arguably could gather intelligence from the south's communist movement. However, just as the Korean press relayed news stories that tended to blame the USAMGIK's mishandling of rice collection, the communists in the south also were not in position to relay the severity of the south's food shortage. Consequently, the Soviet Union would not have believed the validity of the U.S.'s excuses for its reversal of its offer.

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<sup>114</sup> Kathryn Weathersby finds in newly available Russian archives evidence of "assistance the Soviet Union provided in training cadres and technical workers and in establishing propaganda mechanisms and Soviet-style social organizations." Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives" *Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series*, Working Paper #8, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: November 1993), 22.

First, the communist parties in the south and the north worked closely with one another as well as the Soviet Union. Andrei Lankov writes that the southern party was technically “an independent body, but this was on the whole a fiction, and the line between the North and South Korean parties and their institutions was often blurred. Both depended greatly on the Soviet authorities.”<sup>115</sup> He then argues that all major decisions of the south’s communist parties were made in close consultation with the Soviets. Jongsoo Lee agrees and notes that contrary to Bruce Cumings’ conclusion of Soviet passivity in the south’s communist movement, the Soviets were quite involved in supporting the left in the south during 1945-1948.<sup>116</sup> In her examination of new evidence from Russian archives, Weathersby also finds many signs of “continued Soviet attempts to set KCP policy in the south.”<sup>117</sup> A multitude of G-2 reports corroborates the assertion that the south was dependent on the north’s worker’s party.<sup>118</sup> Although these G-2 reports lack some credibility, due to the U.S. military’s anti-communist bias, their detailing of factual events does reveal a pattern of communication between the north and south.

The indoctrination of communist cadre across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel further demonstrates close ties between the communist groups in the north and south. Communists in the south sought to send prospective cadre northwards for education while receiving supplies and weapons from their northern counterparts.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, communists from the north played an important role

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<sup>115</sup> Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002), 83.

<sup>116</sup> Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 167.

<sup>117</sup> Weathersby cites Soviet document RTsKhIDNI, Fond 17, Opis 128, Delo 1119. Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series*, Working Paper #8, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: November 1993), 22.

<sup>118</sup> Several G-2 reports note that People’s Committee’s regularly received funding from the north, and the counterfeiting scandal that embroiled the communists in the south potentially involved a batch of 200,000 yen that came from the north. Others cite captured documents detailing close ties between the north and south’s communist groups. March 15&27; May 13&29; June 15&27, 1946 G-2 Reports. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallim UP, 1988), pgs 105, 107, 275, 329, 379.

<sup>119</sup> The U.S. military discovered coordination between the north and south’s workers’ parties in sending prospective

in leading movements in the south, as captured protest leaders were sometimes not local Koreans but imported cadre from the north.<sup>120</sup>

This network of indoctrinating Korean communists hints at Soviet ties as well. The Soviets opened a college in Pyongyang, ostensibly to indoctrinate Koreans in communism.<sup>121</sup> In addition, the Soviets facilitated travel of Korean communists to study in Moscow and acquire proper education. The travel of Korean communists across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as well as the Korean/Soviet border for educational purposes illustrates a close relationship between the Soviet Union and the communist parties in the south and north. Soviet influence and control become very apparent in a memorandum from the Soviet occupation forces to A. A. Zhdanov, then secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow (see footnote for details).<sup>122</sup> This memorandum essentially reveals Soviet power over the south's communist movement<sup>123</sup>, and it shows that the Soviets not only had plans for the communist movement in the south but also the means to fulfill said plans. The most telling piece of evidence for Soviet influence over the south's communist movement is the fact that the Soviets coerced many leftist organizations in

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students to North Korea for indoctrination, and these arrangements involved issues such as quartering and traveling, as well as distributing weapons among communists in the south. June 27, 1946 G-2 Report. Ibid., 414.

<sup>120</sup> A report from February 1946 found that in Kwangju, which had been experiencing strikes over the past few months, seven of nine strike leaders were from the north and had arrived as late as December 1945. This same report cites a "reliable" Korean source who says that at a "Brain Trust" meeting of the Communist Party in the south, communists had discussed bringing in properly educated young Koreans from the north. March 1, 1946 G-2 Report. Ibid., 55.

<sup>121</sup> June 15, 1946 G-2 Report. Ibid., 380.

<sup>122</sup> Zhdanov's memorandum advocates facilitating the southern unification of the Communist Party, the People's Party, and the New People's Party, and it suggests three measures, of which the first two are relevant in showing Soviet influence. The first demands support from the south's Yo Un-hyong and his People's Party (조선인민당) in uniting the left-wing parties of the south. In the case he refuses, Ho Hon would instead become the alternate leader of the united party in the south. This reveals the Soviets' interference in southern politics, as they sought to assimilate the south's People's Party, by attracting Yo Un-hyong with the promise of leadership. Second, it suggests publishing in the press the decisions of the Communist Party and the New People's Party. The second measure shows that the Soviets already had control over both of these organizations, since the Soviets could implicitly dictate the two's press statements and decisions. (Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002), 83.)

<sup>123</sup> In the north, the communists depended on the Soviet occupation authorities for their political survival, since the communists had not yet consolidated power. Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 151.

both the north and south into supporting the trusteeship in December 1945.<sup>124</sup> Communists in the south had to accede to the Soviets' orders despite the unpopularity of trusteeship, showing how influential the Soviet Union was in the south.

Implicitly, the communists remained in contact with the Soviet Union; however, as with the Korean press, the communists were likely ignorant of the severity of the south's rice shortage. Mainly, the communists were primarily based in the rural regions with the peasantry. Korea lacked the significant urban proletariat that orthodox Marxism used as the primary vehicle for social revolution, as it was overwhelmingly a peasant society. Consequently, communism in Korea did not take root in the cities to the extent that it did in the countryside.<sup>125</sup> In the countryside, farmers were hoarding rice while the USAMGIK authorities sought to meet its quotas. Farmers refused to give up their rice to the rice collection agents unless they received a guarantee that enough rice would be left for their communities.<sup>126</sup> From the communists' perspective, the food shortage was a result of hoarding and poor management by the USAMGIK. Even when starvation began to hit the cities, with unrest in Taegu first appearing on January 5, 1946, the agitators blamed rice collection and USAMGIK policies.<sup>127</sup> The USAMGIK had initially favored the right-wing for assistance in setting up its governance of Korea, but this meant that the communists were generally excluded.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, when the USAMGIK first began to suspect overconsumption, the communists were not in a position to hear and relay that

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<sup>124</sup> Regarding the south, a G-2 report from February 1946 contains a survey of People's Committees and Korean People's Republic affiliates. The survey's results disclose that many communist-inspired organizations lost much popularity and membership due to orders from the Central People's Committee in Seoul to advocate the trusteeship. February 23, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 35.

<sup>125</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Politics of Liberation: Korea, 1945-1947, Parts I & II* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1975), 147.

<sup>126</sup> April 3, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 2 (1946.2.13-1946.9.16)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 153.

<sup>127</sup> January 5, 1946 G-2 Report. USAFIK HQ, *G-2 Periodic Report Vol. 1 (1945.9.9-1946.9.15)* (Chuncheon, Republic of Korea: Hallym UP, 1988), 516.

<sup>128</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Politics of Liberation: Korea, 1945-1947, Parts I & II* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1975), 2.

information to the Soviet Union.

Overall, the communists served as another intelligence gathering arm of the Soviet Union, as demonstrated by the Soviet Union's close supervision of the communists in both north and south. The Soviet Union had enough influence to force some communists to reverse their stances and support trusteeship, and the pattern of interaction of the communists between north and south implies that the Soviets' tight control over the north's communists existed to an extent in the south as well. However, the communists failed to provide a more accurate portrayal of events in the south than the Korean press could. With their base of support in the countryside and their general lack of participation in the USAMGIK's administration, the communists could not have known of the real reasons behind the rice shortage. Consequently, any information they relayed to the Soviet Union only strengthened the U.S.S.R.'s suspicions arising from the U.S. reversal of its offer to send food.

In summary of Part III, the Soviets' intelligence gathering from Korea did not report the increasingly dire food shortages in the south. The communists were in no position to see the real reasons for the rice shortage, and the Korean media that the consulate relied upon attributed any food shortages to USAMGIK mismanagement. Even the USAMGIK was unable to properly discover the extent of the food shortage until December. As a result, the Soviets continued to hold the belief that the south was able to furnish rice for trade, and they continued to insist on U.S. delivery of this rice. The fact that the Soviets genuinely believed the south had this rice implies that the ultimatum was not a stalling tactic due to pessimism regarding trusteeship. Instead, the ultimatum was a genuine demand and hints at the absolute priority that the Soviets attached to receiving food to help fight starvation.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, food shortages were definitely prevalent in Soviet-occupied northern Korea. The Soviet Union was already facing daunting reconstruction following the Second World War, and the Soviet Famine of 1946-1947 greatly impaired its ability to feed its own people. As a result, the Soviets enacted stiff requisitions from its northern Korean occupation zone, contributing to food shortages in Korea as well. In addition, they also hastened the departure of migrants, who would only drain the north's limited food stores.

Additionally, the Soviets' demand for food at the Moscow Conference's preliminary conference hints at the high priority of receiving food to feed its populations in both the Soviet Union and in northern Korea. The Soviet delegation at the preliminary conference made clear that its occupation zone in northern Korea was facing catastrophic conditions. As such, they were expecting the U.S. to be able to send north the rice that the U.S. had previously stated would be available. This rice would have been a major contribution to the Soviets' ability to mitigate the food shortage in northern Korea.

Upon the U.S.'s sudden inability to deliver the rice, the Soviets met the U.S. reversal with skepticism, due to the worsening relations between the two. Unfortunately, the Soviets' intelligence provided an erroneous picture of the food situation in the south. The food shortage in southern Korea had caught even the U.S. by surprise, and the Soviets, relying upon inaccurate intelligence from its sources in the south, continued to believe that conditions in the south were better than they actually were. Consequently, the Soviets suspected that the U.S. was deliberately withholding rice. Amidst mutual distrust, the Soviet delegation essentially established an ultimatum, which made continuation of negotiations contingent upon U.S. delivery of food. This ultimatum was not a stalling tactic stemming from pessimism towards trusteeship, but rather a

genuine, albeit misguided, attempt to force the U.S. to deliver upon its earlier offer of food aid.

Altogether, the reports of starvation and requisitions in Korea (Part I), the importance of rice at the preliminary conference (Part II), and the Soviets' establishment of the ultimatum (Part III) portray a picture of major food shortages in northern Korea. This paper has demonstrated that food shortages in northern Korea were a much more serious issue during this period than current scholarship notes. Through heavy requisitions of food, the Soviets essentially shifted starvation from the Soviet Union to Korea. Thus, the Soviet occupation brought its own share of hardships to northern Korea, and it is perhaps a mistake to contrast the USAMGIK's struggles in southern Korea with an overly optimistic view of the Soviet occupation in the north.

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