

May 06, 1950
**Cable, A. Ignat'yev to Cde. Gromyko, 'The Partisan
Movement in South Korea'**

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Summary:

Ignatyev discusses the partisan movement in the rural areas of South Korea.

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USSR Embassy

in Korea

Top Secret

Copy N° 1

6 May 1950 [handwritten]: 15/VII 95

[handwritten]:

to Cde. Kurbatov

[Stamp]:

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Cde. GRIGOR'YAN

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23/V 1950

THE PARTISAN MOVEMENT

In South Korea

(Memorandum)

After the failure of a number of attempts to suppress the partisan movement in South Korea at the end of 1949, at the beginning of 1950, the South Korean authorities continued punitive expeditions against the partisans and the civilian population, which sympathizes with them. Mass repressions occurred at the same time against supporters of the democratic camp and members of the Workers Party in particular. Reactionaries prepared conditions to hold elections to the so-called "National Assembly," striving to consolidate their dominance in the South and trying to give themselves a free hand to prepare for a vigorous struggle against the Korean People's Democratic Republic.

By February 1950, military units of the South Korean army thrown against partisans numbered 30,500, that is, one-third of the entire army¹.

¹ Information of the Labor Party CC

Thus, the command of the so-called "army of national defense" has created a 6:1 numerical superiority over the partisans. The advantage is considerably greater in the most important individual sectors.

The total strength of the partisan detachments, which have been active in South Korea, is 5,250.

The partisan strength by provinces is as follows:

Province	Partisan Strength
City of Seoul	50

Gyeonggi	90
North Gangwon	150
South Gangwon	50
North Jeolla	300
South Jeolla	1250
South Gyeongsang	500
North Gyeongsang	2050
Gangwon	810
Total	5250

A broader partisan movement has been developed in the northern regions of the province of North Gyeongsang, adjoining the province of Gangwon. There, the third group of partisan detachments was based in the cities of Taebaek and Samcheok which is commanded by Yi Ho-je [Ri Ho Je] (a member of the Labor Party CC). The first group of partisan detachments was based in the mountains of Mt. Jiri[Jirisan] and Mt. Deokyu [Deokyusan] (on the border of the province of South Jeolla and South Gyeongsang) under the command of Yi Hyeon-sang [Ri Hyon Sang] (a member of the Labor Party CC). The second group was based in the mountains of Mt. Songni [Songnisan] and Mt. Minjuji [Minjujisan] under the command of Pak Yeon-hak [Pak Yon Hak].

Communications between the Labor Party CC and the majority of partisan detachments and local Party organizations in South Korea were broken off in view of the increase of terror and repressions in the South and the vigorous operations of the reactionaries in March directed at suppressing the partisan movement. Therefore, there is no complete information about the state of the partisan movement in South Korea.

Kim Dal-sam [Kim Tal Sam], the Commander of the First Partisan Corps operating in the mountains of Taebaek and one of the most prominent organizers of the partisan movement in South Korea, arrived in North Korea from the South at the end of March. He is widely known in South Korea as the commander of partisan detachments operating on the island of Jeju, which heroically resisted the attack of units of the "army of national defense" from April 1948 to May 1949, during the period of the popular uprising on this island. Kim [Kim Dal-sam] has commanded a large partisan detachment (the so-called First Partisan Corps) operating in the eastern provinces of South Korea since the middle of 1949. South Korean army units and police began combat operations against Kim [Kim Dal-sam]'s detachment in September 1949. On 16 November 1949 the [Hapdong] Agency reported that Kim [Kim Dal-sam] was killed during one of the clashes in the mountains of [Irwolsan] (North Gyeongsang Province). At the end of March 1950, South Korean agencies broadcasted a report of the death of Kim Dal-sam a second time. The text of a report from Kim Dal-sam to the Labor Party Central Committee, which he wrote on arrival in the North, is given below in which he gives a brief description of the activity of the First Partisan Corps. In spite of a number of inaccuracies and contradictions, the report gives some idea of the partisan movement in South Korea.

The First Partisan Corps of the Region of Mt. Taebaek ²

Report of Kim Dal-sam [Kim Dal Sam]

3 April 1950

² Translated by [Ten Don Hek], edited by Z. K.

One of the most important tasks of the Corp's command was the establishment of ties with the Party CC and the aid of messengers for a report about the condition of the First Partisan Corps operating in the area of Mt. Taebaek and the receipt of new instructions. However, this task was not done because of a lack of time. The question of informing the CC became especially serious beginning in January 1950.

All the detachments of the Corps arrived in the village of Gisan, [Subi] District, at the beginning of February and stopped there for a long time. A meeting of the Corp's command was held on 23 February at which Commander-in-Chief [Ri Ho-jae], his First Deputy Kim [Kim Dal Sam], Commissar Pak Ji-u [Pak Ji U], and Chief of Staff [Seo Cheol] were present. A decision was made there to send messengers to the Party CC with information about the condition of the partisan detachments of the area of Mt. Taebaek

A Feature of Enemy Tactics

In July, August, and September, in connection with the publication of the appeal of the YeDOF [United Democratic Fatherland Front], the partisans of the area of Mt. Taebaek developed active operations and destroyed a number of police stations. At that time, the enemy was limiting himself to only passive measures against the partisans. His units were mainly on the defensive.

Taking advantage of this and inspired by the appeal of the YeDOF, the population left for the mountains en masse. At this time, false propaganda was spread locally among the population; the main point of which was that as soon as 20 September arrived, Korea would be completely liberated and the capital of the republic would be moved to Seoul. This false propaganda was believed not only by the popular masses but some Party members.

The command of the partisan detachments was not able to draw the people, who came to the mountains, into the partisan detachments and train them accordingly. As a result, when September 20 came and the enemy's autumn offensive against the partisans began, the population, including some Party members, came down from the mountains en masse and began to surrender to the enemy. Thus, the revolutionary spirit of the population, which had been raised to the hilt, began to gradually fall. By October, the population's disappointment was so great that it was even difficult to imagine.

For example, in spite of all possible measures taken to arouse the population on 2 October, during the large operation to capture the city of Andong, an extremely insufficient number of people rose to support the partisans. From this moment, the enemy began an active offensive against the partisans in accordance with their own plan, "autumn operation."

However, the main forces of the First Partisan Corps continued their combat operations after the Andong operation, destroying police stations and enemy army subunits. As a result, enemy punitive operations were not successful. The enemy then mobilized three infantry divisions to defeat the partisans. Kim Seok-won, the Commander of the 1st Division, was appointed the commanding general of the punitive expedition in the area of Mt. Taebaek; Song Ho-seong, Commander of the 2nd Division, [was appointed] the commanding general of the expedition in the area of Andong; and Lee Eung-jun, Commander of the 3rd Division, [was appointed the commanding general of the expedition] in the area of [Yeongnam]. The main headquarters of the enemy is located in the city of [Teden].

The enemy plan consisted of isolating the main forces of our corps from the partisan detachments of the area of Mt. Jiri, cutting off their path to the north and not allowing them to link up with the partisans operating in [Gyeongju], dislodging our corps in the area of the east coast and completely destroying it by the end of December. On the other hand, so-called "political departments" were created with the governors of the provinces of North Gyeongsang, Gangwon, and North Gangwon with the goal of "concentrating"³ the population.

³"Concentration" of the population consists of the destruction of small population centers in areas of partisan operations and forcible resettlement of the residents to large population centers. (Editor)

The punitive expeditions have continued to the present time. At the same time. the concentration of the population, the destruction of villages, and the mass annihilation of people continue.

Beginning in January, the enemy replaced Kim [Seokwon] with [Yu Jae-heung] and [Lee Eung-jun] with Kim [Baek-il] and increased offensive operations against the partisans using aircraft, tanks, and an additional 500 policemen of Gangwon Province. The 16th, 5th, 25th, and 22nd regiments participated in the autumn and winter operations. The 16th, 5th, 25th, and 21st regiments are taking part in them at the present time.

Before September 1949, in the majority of cases, the enemy committed a platoon into battle. In exceptional cases, they committed a company or a battalion. Beginning in October, the enemy started to step up offensive operations. In November, no less than a company was committed to battle. The enemy held each height with one platoon.

Recently, the enemy has used artillery in battle more often than previously. The soldiers are given 90 rounds per rifle and 1,500 for a light machinegun.

After a battle in the mountains, the enemy does not leave his positions even at night as long as the partisans do not withdraw. To avoid surprise attack from the partisans, when moving, the enemy cuts down trees at a distance of 5-100 meters from the roads.

Before September 1949, the police operated together with the army, but during the autumn and winter operations, the police were on the defensive. Police stations and units have been turned into sort of fortresses. Stone walls nine *cheok*⁴ high and six *cheok* wide have been erected around them. The ditches in front of the wall have been dug up [SIC] and barricades have been built behind them. Sixteen to eighteen posts have been set up around the police stations and guard duty is performed by young detachments. The police control the concentrated villages and the countryside of the mountainous regions.

⁴One *cheok* = 30.3 cm.

The Concentration of the Population and the Devastation of the Villages

From September to November 1949, the residents of villages in mountainous regions with 20-30 households were resettled to larger population centers located along highways. Peasants were resettled on a massive scale from November 1949 to February 1950.

Documents found on the body of Captain [Tsay], a battalion commander of the 25th Regiment, state the following:

1. Cut off the routes through which the partisans are supplied with food.
2. Leave only three or four population centers in each rural district where all the peasants of the remaining villages of the rural district can be gathered.
3. Permit each family to have a daily threshing of three to five *seung*⁵ of grain from the harvest.

⁵One *seung* = 1.8 liters

4. Severely punish people who supply food to the partisans.

Three-fifths of the villages in the districts of [Bonghwa], [Yeongyang], Andong, and [Cheongsong] have been resettled and so have three-fourths of the villages in [Yeongdeok], one half in [Uiseong], and three-fifths in [Yeongju]. The remaining peasant villages are being devastated or wiped from the face of the Earth in order to completely deprive the partisans of shelter. There is literally not a single dwelling within a distance of 40 *li*⁶ from any mountain. The enemy has burned all the forests in the mountains in the districts of [Yeongdeok], [Yeongyang], Andong, [Yeongil], and [Bonghwa] in order to deprive the partisans of natural cover.

⁶One *li* = 400 meters

No steps are being taken to provide housing for the peasants forcibly resettled to new places. Four or five families are being herded into one room. The living conditions of these peasants are hellish. There is a police station or a military unit stationed at each concentration point. Young detachments perform guard duty there. Earthen walls have been built around the concentration villages. The population centers with the most reactionary-minded population are supplied with models "99" and "38" [Japanese-made] rifles. The remaining population centers are being equipped with iron pikes and other primitive weapons. Messenger-signalmen are being placed on highways at a distance of 50-100 meters from one another. When a partisan appears they immediately signal this to a police station.

Residents do not have the right to go more than 150-200 meters from their village. Two copies of each person's identification are prepared with a photo identity card. One copy is kept at the police station and the other is issued in the established manner.

The harvest was conducted collectively guarded by soldiers. The grain that was collected there was taken away to the police station in a vehicle. The population's food is stored in the police station and is issued in accordance with a set norm.

Robbery, violence, and lawlessness rule in concentration population centers where there are military subunits.

The extermination of the population became more widespread during the autumn and winter punitive expeditions. For example, in the district of Andong 700-800 people were killed in three months, November and December 1949 and January 1950; 2,000 in [Bonghwa] district; 1,500 in [Yeongyang] district; 700 in [Yeongju] district; 2,500 in [Yeondeok] district; 1,000 in [Cheongsong] district; and 400 in [Yecheon] district. A total of 8,800-9,000 were killed in the seven districts.

In the village of [Byeongcheon], [Sonen] rural district of [Bonghwa] district, more than 20 people were shot at the same time just because partisans passed through this village.

More than 200 people from 200 households were shot in the village of [Hegudon], [Yeongdeok] district, because the residents had democratic sentiments. There are very many examples of such mass killings.

Eighteen people were killed who had family ties with the partisan [Pak Ben Do]. In the district of [Yeongdeok], all the relatives of our partisans were killed even down to second cousins.

Six of our comrades in the district of [Yeongyang], who had fallen into enemy hands, were handed over to German Shepherds to be torn to pieces.

In the district of [Bonghwa], the police walked our comrades to a bazaar, forced them to dig a pit in the presence of the population, and then shot them.

There were cases where the heads of our comrades who had died in battle were exhibited at a bazaar in the district of [Chunan].

The Activity of the First Corps

Before 2 October (before the Andong operation), the enemy was still operating passively, and the terror against the population was not so severe. We maintained close ties with the population with the aid of partisan organizations. We developed a partisan movement over an extensive territory of the districts of Andong, [Cheongsong], [Bonghwa], [Yeongju], [Uljin], [Samcheok], and [Mungyeong].

Large forces were thrown against the partisans during the winter campaign. Repression against the population intensified. The food supply of the partisans stopped completely in connection with the concentration of the population. Individual partisan detachments were isolated from one another. The danger of the defeat of individual detachments approached. It became almost impossible to get food without large armed forces. This forced us to change tactics, that is, grouping our forces to hit the weak spots of the approaching enemy and raiding concentrated villages to get food.

We set as our task during this period, not an expansion of the areas of operations, but the preservation of our strength and the consolidation of all detachments around the command to hit the enemy with relatively large strikes.

The consolidation of partisan detachments was accelerated in accordance with the orders of the Party Provincial Committee and in connection with the upcoming movement of detachments to the north. As a result, on 6 November all the detachments were assembled in the mountains of [Irwolsan]. However, the movement north was halted because of a lack of new recruits and the losses of Second Commissar [Son Ja-cheon] and other senior officials. By this time, the mountains of [Irwolsan], where we were located, were already surrounded by two or three rings of the enemy. The command then decided to take the city of Daegu where the enemy had only 500 men in a single attack and inspire a popular uprising throughout the entire province of North Gyeongsang. We moved south in the direction of Daegu in two groups. One group advanced through the districts of [Cheongsong] and [Yeongil] and the other through Andong and [Yecheon]. Reaching [Gyeongju], we were to have linked up with the [Gyeongju] partisan detachments and attacked Daegu with combined forces. However, this plan was not carried out because of a crushing blow received by the [Gyeongju] detachments. In the middle of December, both groups joined together in the mountains of Mt. Mudeung and steps were taken to preserve [our] strength.

Detachments of the 1st Corps conducted 23 large combat operations between mid-July 1949 and 2 March of this year. The detachments received 77 new recruits during this time with the aid of district Party committees. Partisans conducted combat and political training in the mountains of [Noryasan] for half a month. The partisans engaged in combat and political training in the village of [Gisan] for 20 days. Two issues of the newspaper "Zvezda [Star]" and five of "Pkhabyak" were published. Political work was conducted amongst the population continuously.

The Mood of the Workers

The partisan movement was not widespread in the cities. The partisans did not often have an opportunity to meet workers; therefore, we were unable to deeply study the condition of the workers. However, there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the workers hate Syngman Rhee and sympathize with the partisans. In the words of local partisan officials, the workers are ready to rise up at any time to fight the Syngman Rhee government.

The Mood of the Peasants

The peasants' desire to obtain land is great. Peasant support for the 1st Corps was enormous. They were deeply convinced that the partisans were a reliable support in their struggle for land. The peasantry of South Korea want to become the same masters of land as the peasants of North Korea. The peasants might rise up at any time to fight for land. There are many examples of when partisans appeared in a village, all the peasants went to meet them and held rallies.

The peasants of South Korea are impatiently waiting for the arrival of the People's Army. For example, when the 7th Partisan Detachment arrived from North Korea, the peasants rejoiced, considering the partisans soldiers of the People's Army.

The landowners do not live in the villages. They live in the cities or near police stations.

The partisans were not very worried about food until last September. The peasants brought the

partisans food themselves and provided information about the enemy.

Until October of last year, the peasants supported the partisans where the partisan organizations were strong. For example, from the end of September to the end of last October, our headquarters detachment, which numbered 100 men, was located in the area of [Yeongdeok]. During this time, the peasants constantly supplied our detachment with food.

Support from them almost stopped in connection with the resettlement of the peasants. However, in spite of savage repression, the peasants strive to support the partisans by all possible means. For example, in January, a partisan detachment of 40 men was in the mountains of [Yongdusan] near the village of [Jijeonli]. The peasants of this village secretly supplied the partisans with food. There are many such examples.

During resettlement to the concentration villages, the peasants buried surplus potatoes in the ground for the partisans, which helped them a great deal. When meeting partisans, the resettled peasants, with tears in their eyes, asked them to free them. Thus, the peasants might rise up at any time in the event of armed support from the partisans.

The petty urban bourgeoisie also hates the Syngman Rhee clique. They will unquestionably come over to our side when our forces are superior.

The soldiers of the enemy arms are extremely dissatisfied with service conditions. In the words of prisoners, the soldiers eat only twice a day. They are poorly clothed and their morale is low. They often refuse to attack partisans. In response to the question of why the soldiers do not rebel, one of the captured soldiers replied that "it is possible to revolt, but there is nowhere to go." In response to the question 'why do they not cross over to the partisan side,' the prisoner answered that in the mountains, it is cold and hard to live. This is the common sentiment of the soldiers. However, the officers are very reactionary. During attacks, the officers are always in front. The officers behave very badly in the villages. Robbery, violence, destruction, and murder are common occurrences. They often give commands in Japanese. They give the soldiers vodka before an attack. Revolts in enemy units are quite possible when our forces are strengthened.

Shortcomings in the Organization of the Partisan Movement

The biggest shortcoming is the lack of a particular base, a liberated area. Workers, peasants, and even soldiers, the entire people of South Korea impatiently await a revolution. The creation of a liberated area will be the incentive for the people to rise up to fight for a revolution in the South.

With the increase in repression against the population and the offensive against the partisans, it is becoming difficult to establish communications between partisans and the population. The partisans have to fight continuously. The food supply is causing difficulties, and there is no opportunity to treat the wounded. Therefore, the creation of a liberated area is an urgent task of the partisan movement. A liberated area should be created this summer by any means. The next shortcoming is the lack of communications equipment with the aid of which it would be possible to maintain communications with the Party CC and the partisan detachments of other regions. The immediate arming of partisan detachments with modern radios is needed. If there is no opportunity to simultaneously supply radios to all partisan detachments, then the first priority needs to be to at least supply the 1st Corps.

Some Mistakes

The 1st Corps has made many mistakes in its activity from the moment the 7th Detachment crossed to the South (in June 1949) up to the present time.

1. Relying only on Party organizations, the Corps took no steps itself to replenish its ranks. As a result, whereas, on 6 November 1949, the 1st Corps and the 1st Brigade numbered 420 men; on 2

March 1950, they numbered 370, that is, they were reduced by 50 men.

2. We have been too concerned about preserving the main forces of the partisans and paid little attention to a vigorous and bold offensive, thereby giving the enemy the ability to blockade the partisans and increase repression against the population. All the battles during the winter campaign were unexpected with the exception of the one [Yeongdeok] battle (21 January). We could not take the initiative into our own hands. We could not completely occupy the city during the Andong operation because of insufficient aggressiveness and boldness.

3. The agitprop work among the population, which we conducted, was insufficient. We did not manage to rouse the population to fight the forcible resettlement or against the terror and robbery, and we did not manage to organize and rouse the population to a massive armed rebellion. We are essentially cut off from the population.

In spite of an enormous numerical superiority, the South Korean authorities were unable to suppress the partisan movement or even weaken it during the period from September 1949 to February 1950. This is demonstrated by statements of officials.

On 21 January 1950 [Sin Tae-yeong, the acting Chief of the General Staff of the South Korean army, declared in Daegu that the punitive expedition "was not going satisfactorily." He pointed out that the partisans were especially active in the area of Andong (Haptong Agency).

On 24 January [Jeong Hyeon-mo], the Governor of the Province of North Gyeongsang, left office and [Jo Jae-cheon], Chief of the Police Directorate of this province, was appointed to replace him. This move was obviously connected with a desire to pursue more vigorous measures against the partisans in a province where they were especially active. The latter was indirectly confirmed by the statement of Sin Seong-mo, Minister of National Defense: "Right now, the matter of the defeat of Communist bands in North Gyeongsang and South Gyeongsang is going badly." However, they will soon be completely eliminated (Haptong Agency, 1 February 1950).

On 11 February, Deputy Chief of the Security Directorate [Tsan] declared during the UN Commission's consultations with him, "Recently, attacks by 'wild boars'⁷ have been constantly increasing" (Haptong Agency).

⁷ Meaning the partisans.

In spite of the failures during this entire time, the South Korean press and radio have continually published knowingly exaggerated and false information about the defeat of partisans. For example, on 29 January, Seoul Radio reported that 4,382 were killed and 1,645 partisans were captured during 16 months of battles in the area of Yeosu while the "army of national defense" had lost only 193 men killed.

The failure of punitive expeditions has forced the South Korea authorities to throw against the partisans even more police units, which, as Kim [Kim Dal-sam] writes, were previously on the defensive. On 7 February, [Baek Seong-uk] was appointed Minister of Internal Affairs, replacing Kim [Ho Seok]. On 16 February, Roberto, the head of the American military advisory mission, unexpectedly went to an unknown area of military operations...

The "army of national defense" and police managed to inflict a number of serious blows on the partisans during March, which can be judged even from the reports of South Korean telegraph agencies (which, as before, in a majority of cases were exaggerated and false).

On 9 March, the [Hanguk] Agency reported the defeat of the partisans in the area of Mt. Jiri.

On 14 March, [Sin Tae-yeong] reported that the punitive expedition against the detachment of Kim [Kim Dal-sam] was developing successfully ([Hanguk] Agency). On 22 March, the encirclement

was reported, and on 24 March, the "rout" of the detachment of Kim [Dal-sam]. Finally, on 25 March, it was reported that Kim [Dal-sam] had been killed.

On 27 March, Baek Seong-uk declared that "public order has already been established" in the regions of Mt..Taebaek and Mt.. Jiri ([Hanguk] Agency).

On 29 March, [Sin Tae-yeong] declared that "the punitive expedition against the partisans will end as soon as the detachment of [Yi Ho-je] is defeated".

On 3 April, the chief of the punitive detachment operating in the province of North Gyeongsang declared that "the army has completely eliminated the Communist bands" there and that "in the future the peasants will not be resettled from areas of combat operations and those already resettled are already returning to their places of residence" ([Haptong] Agency, 4 April 1950).

On 11 April, the defeat of the detachment of Kim Seon-ho Kim Son Hoin the Mt. Odae (Gangwon Province) was reported as was the defeat of the detachment of [Yi Ho-je] and his death on the 13th.

However, in spite of the number of blows inflicted on the partisans of South Korea in March, the partisan movement there has not been completely suppressed. This is demonstrated by a report (requiring verification) of the Korean Central Telegraph Agency (DPRK) which says, referring to the newspaper [Norektya], that during March, the partisans of South Korea conducted 1,038 operations as a result of which the enemy lost 570 soldiers killed.

The fact that the South Korean authorities could not suppress the partisan movement in more than six months demonstrates not only the political instability of the reactionary regime in South Korea but also the military weakness of the so-called "Korean republic."

The South Korean authorities managed to inflict some serious blows on the partisans in April. However, they could not completely defeat the partisan detachments. They only weakened the partisan forces. According to information available to us, [Yi Ho-je] is alive. The false reports about the death of Kim [Kim Dal-sam] and [Yi Ho-je] and also the enormous number of other exaggerated and false reports demonstrates the desire of the reactionaries of the South to mislead public opinion and create the impression of the complete defeat of the partisans.

The leaders of the partisan movement in South Korea have made a number of serious mistakes, which have led to a weakening of the movement and a number of failures. The following are the main ones:

1. The partisan detachments do not operate vigorously and aggressively. They do not sufficiently search for the enemy's weak spots. To a considerable degree their operations are defensive.
2. The most favorable time to launch a series of serious blows against the enemy (August and September 1949) was lost.
3. Communications between the partisans and local Labor Party committees and the CC and also ties with the local population were weak.
4. Partisan detachments were not organized from the local population. They are also poorly involved in existing partisan detachments as a result of incorrectly directed political work and because the majority of the South Korea population is not relying on their own strength but on liberation at the hands of the People's Army.

A number of disagreements inside the camp of the South Korean reactionaries, which have sharpened during preparations for elections, are undermining its position and creating conditions to raise a new wave of the partisan movement in the current year.

26 April 1950 /signature/ V. Kiselev

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