

March 6, 1954
Letter, James A. Van Fleet to President Syngman Rhee

Citation:

"Letter, James A. Van Fleet to President Syngman Rhee", March 6, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, B-012-019, Official Correspondences, President Rhee's Correspondences, Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118280>

Summary:

General Van Fleet addresses his concern for the Far East. While some Americans are calling for US withdrawal from South Korea, he insists that the US has a "morale and a material obligation" in the Peninsula.

Credits:

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Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan



Auburndale, Florida

March 6, 1954

President Syngman Rhee
Republic of Korea
Seoul, Korea

Dear Mr. President:

Here I am again at my home in Auburndale, Florida. It is always nice to get back here from the busy and frustrating centers of Washington and New York. It is like leaving Seoul and arriving at your beautiful and restful Chinhae.

I arrived on Tuesday and it is already Saturday and I am leaving in a few hours for Miami where I will meet Mrs. Van Fleet arriving by plane from New York this afternoon.

During the week I have been out in West Florida looking at a large tract of pine land - over 52,000 acres. You would love it and I thought of you all the time I was inspecting beautiful pine forests. Mr. William Zeckendorf wants me to select for him a large acreage of Florida land. It may be that we will form a Florida branch of his corporation and I will manage it and have part interest. It is something I love to do because it keeps me outdoors and I believe there is a great future here in Florida.

In Miami Mrs. Van Fleet and I will see several friends, including Mr. and Mrs. Spyros Skouras of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

I have talked several times with Mr. Skouras concerning making a motion picture of Korea and he is very much interested. The only drawback is the right story. Mr. Skouras says it should be a wonderful story, uplifting and portraying the greatness of the people in their hard struggle for freedom. I think perhaps I have located the right author. He is Mr. Edison Marshall, one of my old friends. I hope to see him the latter part of this month at his home in Augusta, Georgia. I will tell him all about Korea and endeavor to interest him in going to Korea with me where he can become acquainted with the people, their history and present-day struggle, and in this way get background for his story. He is a beautiful writer who has made millions selling books to the motion picture industry. Some of his stories have been great hits. To me he is superior to Ernest Hemingway.

The first thing, of course, is the story. You and Mrs. Rhee and I can help with that so that there is an interesting plot. Edison Marshall can put it together. Spyros Skouras, I am sure, will buy it.

I spent considerable time in New York City with the



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American Korean Foundation. We have at long last gotten it better organized with Dr. Howard Rusk taking care of its management and administrative operation. We have elected him President. I will continue to be Chairman of the Board, devoting such time as I can spare to matters of policy and good will.

We have recently secured the services of Mr. Henry C. Alexander, president of J. P. Morgan and Company, who will become the Chairman of the National Campaign Fund for 1954. We have set a goal of ten million dollars which I feel will be needed during the next year in our work for health, education and welfare in Korea.

In the spring we hope to operate a number of "Friendship Trains" across the country - perhaps one leaving from Plymouth Rock, one from The White House and one from Florida. They will gather lots of gifts in goods and good will and will place them on "Friendship Ships" in San Francisco for further delivery to Korea. I hope I may be able to be in Korea when they arrive.

From New York I gave you a brief report of my visit to Washington. Before leaving New York I talked again by telephone to several persons in Washington, including William C. Bullitt. I had hoped that developments would come fast which would support a greater effort in the Far East. However I could find out very little and Mr. Bullitt himself was very gloomy. But I am still very hopeful that a really comprehensive plan is being worked out by my government.

I do not know whether or not they will send me to the Far East. I have told them I will go only in the event that I could work on a larger plan that would win back China, including of course, North Korea. My position is that we should prepare all the Nationalist forces bordering on China and coordinate their efforts to strike back at the earliest possible moment. I include in these Nationalist forces those of Formosa, Indo-China, Thailand, Burma and The Philippines, as well as those of the Republic of Korea. I am sure that such a position represents the views of many Senators and other warm supporters in the government and throughout the United States.

I feel that the minimum position should be -

1. A continued build-up of the Korean forces to maximum strength.
2. Continued United States air, naval and logistical support.
3. A continued United States forces in Korea with no less than two or three United States Divisions to be maintained in Korea as long as the country is divided, or as long as United States forces are continued in Europe. It is the same situation and



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it is unthinkable that all United States forces should be withdrawn from Korea unless they are also withdrawn from Europe.

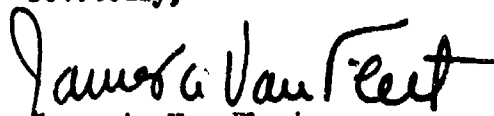
I say this now because only the other day General Mark W. Clark (RETIRED), made the statement from his new post as president of the little school of Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, that "the United States should get out of Korea fast." He is not a friend and such statements are completely detrimental to the interests of the United States as well as Korea. We must never get out of Korea as long as the country is divided, because the United States has a very moral and material obligation. I think it is your only course of action to say that the U.N. forces may go if they wish to, but surely they should not leave in toto.

After a few days in Miami I hope to be back here in Auburndale and will return to Washington and New York for the fourth week in March. Whenever in Washington I will, of course, contact Ambassador Yang and Dr. Han.

I hope spring has come to Korea and that you and Mrs. Rhee are enjoying good health.

With love to you both,

Devotedly,


James A. Van Fleet
General, U. S. Army, (Ret.)

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