

The Reliable Promise of Middle Power Fighters: The ROK Military's COIN

Success in Vietnam and Iraq

by

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## ABSTRACT

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is a long process that even great powers struggle with. Nevertheless, South Korea as a middle power was successful with COINs in Vietnam and Iraq. What were the drivers for the Republic of Korea (ROK) military's success? This dissertation maintains that the unusual nature of missions coupled with political/socio-cultural advantages are sufficient conditions for success of the middle power COIN. COIN missions are seen as unusual to middle powers. A rare mission stimulates military forces to fight harder because they recognize this mission as an opportunity to increase their national prestige. COIN mission success is also more probable for middle powers because their forces make the best of their country's political/socio-cultural advantages.

The ROK military's COINs are optimal cases to test these hypotheses. The ROK military's COIN in Vietnam was an extremely rare mission, which increased its enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was converted into appropriate capabilities. By identifying battleground dynamics, the ROK forces initially chose an enemy-oriented approach based upon the method of company-led tactical base, and then later introduced a population-led method. South Korea's political/socio-cultural advantages also contributed to its military success in Vietnam. The Confucius culture that South Koreans and Vietnamese shared allowed the ROK forces to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese population.

The mission in Iraq was also a rare and important one for national prestige. Accordingly, South Korean forces were equipped with pride and were enthusiastic about missions in Arbil. They changed their organization from a rigid

one to a more flexible one by strengthening civil-military units. The ROK military possessed the ability to choose a population-centric approach. South Korea's political and cultural climate also served as an advantage to accomplish COIN in Iraq. The culture of *Jung* allowed ROK soldiers to sincerely help the local Iraqis.

This project contributes to developing a theory of the middle power COIN. The findings also generate security policy implications of how to deal with contingent situations led by the collapse of the North Korean regime and how to redefine the ROK military strategy for the future.

## DEDICATION

To my family (Soomi, Hyuntae, and Jihee), military, and country for everlasting  
encouragement and inspiration

This dissertation is especially dedicated to South Korean warriors who fought for  
freedom.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOA	Area of Operation
ASPAC	Asian and Pacific Council
CAP	U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon
CIMIC	Civil Military Center
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
G-20	Group of Twenty
IA	Iraqi Army
ING	Iraqi National Guard
IR	International Relations
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JSA	Joint Security Area
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KNA	Kurdistan Parliament
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MDL	Military Demarcation Line
MOFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MNF-I	Multinational Forces-Iraq
NLL	Northern Limit Line
NVA	North Vietnamese Army

OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OPCON	Operational Control
PROVN	Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
ROK	Republic of Korea
MND	Ministry of National Defense
ROKFV	Republic of Korea Force in Vietnam
ROKMFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ROKMND	Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense
RRT	Regional Reconstruction Team
SCM	ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SVA	South Vietnamese Army
TAOR	Tactical Area of Responsibility
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WMS	Weapons of Mass Destruction

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

COIN is a **complex** effort that integrates the full range of civilian and military agencies. It is often more **population-centric** (focused on securing and controlling a given population or populations) than enemy-centric (focused on defeating a particular enemy group). Note that this does not mean that COIN is less **violent** than any other conflict: on the contrary, like any other form of warfare it always involves loss of life. It is an extremely **difficult** undertaking, is often highly **controversial** politically, involves a series of **ambiguous** events that are extremely difficult to interpret, and often requires vastly more resources and time than initially anticipated.

– *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, January 2009

There has been growing concern about counterinsurgency (COIN) in the world, particularly because the U.S. lost the COIN mission in Vietnam historically, and also because the U.S. currently struggles with COIN in Afghanistan and Iraq. COIN is more difficult and requires more time than conventional war because various factors other than kinetic weapons, such as political and cultural variables, affect the trajectory of COIN success, which has led great powers to lose COIN in history. Nevertheless, the Republic of Korea (ROK) made great COIN achievements in Vietnam and Iraq. Thus, this study is aimed at tracing the underlying logic of the ROK COIN success.

### I. The Korean Peninsula and the ROK Military Doctrine

In a celebration speech for Armed Forces Day on October 1, 2009, President Lee Myung-Bak emphasized that the ROK military has to prepare for global threats as well as national threats.<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Korea (ROK) currently

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<sup>1</sup> President Speech on October 1, 2009, in the Office of the Republic of Korea President (Cheong Wa Dae), [http://www.president.go.kr/kr/president/speech/speech\\_list.php](http://www.president.go.kr/kr/president/speech/speech_list.php) (Accessed February 26, 2010).

seeks an outward-seeking national strategy due to the growth of internal resources and the growing demand of unconventional warfare from the changing international environment. The ROK military strategy, however, still focuses on an inward-oriented conventional war with the North Korean army (state actor's forces). The ROK Ministry of Defense lacks a special office or command that assumes the center role of unconventional missions.<sup>2</sup> Major exercises are based on the operations necessary to effectively carry out traditional war campaigns. There are only two exercises that are related to promoting the military's unconventional missions among thirteen major exercises that the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) introduced in the *Defense White Paper 2008*.

The ROK military has paid a tremendous attention to the conventional threat from the North Korean military on the peninsula ever since the Korean War. Three foundations have driven the ROK military's overemphasis on conventional war: 1) historical foundation (the experience of the Korean War), 2) structural foundation (the last frontier of the Cold War), and 3) military organizational culture (officers' overemphasis on conventional war).

First, the two Koreas experienced a harsh symmetric war during the Korean War. The Korean War led to about 2.5 million casualties. The Korean society had to struggle to rebuild its infrastructure decimated by war for a long time. Thus, this historic event pushed its military to see conventional war as the most important mission. Furthermore, despite the official end of the Cold War in 1991,

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<sup>2</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, *The Defense White Paper 2008*, (Seoul: Daehan Planning Printing Co., 2008), 362-3.

the Korean peninsula is still a legacy of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> More important, the historical and structural factors forced the ROK military to fully arm itself with modern conventional weapons and doctrine to prevent conventional war against North Korea and defeat it when it occurs. As a result, the conventional way of fighting experienced in the Korean War is firmly embedded in the ROK military organizational culture.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence, the ROK military has considered external security on the Korean peninsula its routine mission. By the same token, it has paid less attention to unconventional warfare or asymmetric warfare. In the meantime, international politics forced Seoul to engage in unconventional warfare in Vietnam and Iraq. These missions were not routine works but unusual tasks assigned to the ROK military.

## **II. The ROK Military's Performance in Vietnam and Iraq**

The ROK military conducted COIN operations in Vietnam and Iraq. COIN is recognized as a difficult task even to great powers. Despite the difficult nature of COIN, the ROK military, a middle power, achieved remarkably successful

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<sup>3</sup> Democratic South Korea and Communist North Korea are still fighting with each other in the last-remnant battlefield of the Cold War. In this vein, the longest Cold War in the world has been on the Korean peninsula; long tension between democracy in the South and communism in the North has existed for over 60 years. This structure has embedded the conventional way of fighting logic in Korean society.

<sup>4</sup> Korean officers prefer the study of traditional war and see asymmetric warfare as secondary. Their Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is based on the traditional North Korean threat and they resist the current SOP's innovation. This conventional war-oriented posture of the ROK military organization causes the inward military strategy to continue to dominate, and in doing so, it clashes with the ROK outward national strategy.

outcomes in these two unusual missions. It might be difficult to accept that the Vietnam War and the Iraq War could be successful politically or strategically. However, there are successful accounts on a tactical level within this strategic quagmire. The ROK military effectively suppressed the Viet Cong in its area of responsibility. It also played an influential role in stabilizing the city of Arbil in Iraq, which is under the control of the Kurdish government, by gaining the hearts and minds of the local Kurdish population. In this vein, the ROK COIN forces were substantial players.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. Research Question and Its Significance**

The ROK military's missions in Vietnam and Iraq offer interesting empirical cases in the sense that the ROK military which has heavily engaged in conventional warfare achieved remarkable successes in unconventional missions. What were the drivers for the ROK military's success in these missions? To put it another way, what made the ROK military fight well in its unusual COIN missions in Vietnam and in Iraq?

This puzzle is not only interesting but also important on both scholarly and policy dimensions. The scholarly dimension encourages examination of the potential to extend the role of non-great powers for international security simply

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<sup>5</sup> Newnham (2008) argues that other countries' coalitions with the U.S. in the Iraq War were mostly driven by economic and security incentives; the U.S. provided its partners with economic and military aid. In addition, the participation of Eastern European countries in the Iraq War was intended to obtain U.S. support against a Russian resurgence. This statement presupposes that they are not major players but symbolic players. Randall Newnham, "Coalition of the Bribed and Bullied? U.S. Economic Linkage and the Iraq War Coalition," *International Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2008): 183-200.

beyond external security on the Korean peninsula. The cases of the ROK military show that non-great powers are able to play a significant role in managing COIN rather than participate in great powers' affairs only symbolically or with political or economic incentives. In particular, this puzzle asks International Relations (IR) scholars to recognize the extended role of middle powers in the world managed mostly by great powers.

The puzzle also aids in devising appropriate policies for the future. Instability in North Korea can be considered an international security problem as well as a regional security problem in North East Asia in the sense that the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) possesses nuclear weapons. The North Korean Regime leader, Kim Jong Il, is often reported to be in bad health.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the United States and the ROK are concerned with the potential collapse of the nuclear-armed Kim regime. Both countries together have developed Operational Plan (OPLAN) 5029, preparing for such a collapse.<sup>7</sup> QDR Report 2010, issued by the U.S. Department of Defense, shows that the collapse of a WMD-armed state, such as North Korea, is the US's most troubling concern.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their concerns, the U.S. and the ROK currently do not have detailed plans or scenarios for how to restabilize uncertain security on the Korean peninsula when and if the North Korean regime collapses. Although OPLAN

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<sup>6</sup> *The Economist*, "Kim Jong Il or Kim Jong Well?" September 13, 2008, 49.

<sup>7</sup> *The Korea Herald*, "N.K. blasts S.Korean-U.S. scenario on emergency," March 30, 2010, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20091109000075> (Accessed on June 3, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington DC, 2010), 9.



5029 recently has been improved from a conceptual plan to an executable plan, it is far from a plan to deal with the COIN task on the Korean peninsula.<sup>9</sup> A power transitional period in North Korea, however, is likely to promote sudden insurgencies similar to insurgencies in Vietnam and Iraq. In this vein, lessons from Vietnam and Iraq may shed light on how to deal with contingent situations on the Korean peninsula.

This puzzle is also important for the other policy implication: the future strategy of the ROK military. Lessons from Vietnam and Iraq need to be integrated into ROK military planning and doctrine to achieve other similar missions in the world. These external missions' successes would be crucial for Seoul's external strategy.

Moreover, changing international security environments will tend to increase opportunities for the ROK military to engage in unconventional external missions, considering the alliance relationship between Seoul and Washington. A large scale kinetic fight between great powers has been declining in the post-Cold War era. By contrast, non-state actors have been the center stage in international security in the post-911 era. Under the changing international environment in the post-911 era, the U.S. will have to engage in more unconventional operations drawn from failing or ill-functioning states.

Thus, South Korea, as both a growing middle power and a reliable ally of the U.S., will also have to engage in more of these different missions. As a

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<sup>9</sup> *The Hankyoreh*, "Editorial: An alliance feeding regional conflict," October 11, 2010, at [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_editorial/443213.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_editorial/443213.html) (Accessed on November 26, 2010).

consequence, the “demand” *vis-à-vis* unconventional warfare will increase in the coming years. Successes in Vietnam and Iraq must be integrated into doctrinal and strategic levels for the military for their future challenges.

#### **IV. Drivers for Mission Successes of the ROK Military**

While conventional warfare has been the ROK military’s normal mission, unconventional warfare, particularly COIN, was its rare mission. Conventional warfare is intended to destroy enemy infrastructure required for continuous military operations (the logic of destruction), whereas counterinsurgency is intended to gain security in the region (the logic of protection). In addition, conventional warfare is large scale violence between two opposing military forces, whereas there are four actors in counterinsurgency: COIN forces (state actors), their population, insurgent groups (non-state actors), and their population.

These different natures of COIN compel COIN forces to struggle with adaptation costs. For success, it is crucially important to minimize adaptation costs in the first phase of COIN. Conventionally and heavily armed military soldiers from great powers take a longer time to adjust to unconventional missions, leading to increased adaptation costs. At the same time, the first-impression tactics end in failure because COIN forces tend to lose the opportunity in the first phase to make overall situations on the battleground favorable to them.

Two axes contributed to helping the ROK military reduce the adaptation costs in Vietnam and Iraq: the logic of rare missions and positional advantages. First, the COIN mission which was unusually important rendered the ROK military more willing and capable to effectively cope with its crucial missions

which were expected to contribute to national prestige and maximize national utilities. The ROK military's mission in Vietnam had been its first ever overseas military operation. The ROK military's mission in Iraq was the most important overseas operation in around 30 years after its participation in the Vietnam conflict. More importantly, it was the first major activity for South Korea as a growing middle power. Thus, both missions in Vietnam and Iraq were important, and so the ROK military was eager for the challenge. Since both unusual missions were considered as highly important to increase national prestige, the ROK COIN forces were equipped with high morale and pride. Moreover, their high degree of willingness was converted to a high degree of capability by dispatching the ROK's best units/soldiers to the new missions.

The other axis of the ROK COIN success was drawn from several positional advantages that South Korea had. First, the ROK military which came from non-great power was seen less as an occupier in both Vietnam and Iraq. Second, the ROK military's fighting experience against communist partisan groups in the early 1950s also helped its success in Vietnam and Iraq in two ways. The ROK forces better understood the different nature of COIN, and by doing so, they reduced adaptation costs in developing tactics appropriate for fighting guerillas. They also better understood the local population's desire for security based on the ROK's prior experience. Third, unlike a weak power, South Korea was equipped with an organized military which offered enough resources to manage COIN. Finally, South Korea was better positioned for cultural understanding. The ROK COIN forces understood Vietnam's Confucius culture.

Furthermore, South Korea also has a community ethic similar to Iraqis and unlike Western countries' emphasis on individualism. These cultural alignments made the ROK military's missions conducive to success.

By reducing the adaptation costs, particularly driven by crucial missions and positional advantages, the ROK military was able to adopt appropriate tactical options. The South Korean military first adopted an enemy-centered approach and later introduced population-centered activities in Vietnam because insurgent groups were dominant in the area. By contrast, the South Korean military adopted a population-centered approach because insurgent groups were less strong in the area. In a nutshell, the nature of unusually important missions and positional advantages, taken together, were sufficient conditions for COIN success.

## **V. Plan of the Dissertation**

In chapter 2, I will review the extant literature on COIN. In the literature review, first of all, I examine the differences between conventional warfare and unconventional warfare (particularly COIN). COIN is different from conventional warfare particularly in terms of the number of players. Conventional warfare is a large-scale kinetic fight between opposing regular forces which represent contending countries. When it comes to COIN, however, there are other actors who affect the trajectory of success beyond military or militant actors. What makes COIN different from conventional warfare is that the state actors – COIN forces – not only have to fight against non-state actors – guerillas – but also need to understand the impacts on local and domestic populations. The success of

COIN is significantly affected by the interplay among four actors – COIN forces, their population, insurgent groups, and their population.

Second, using four actors, I will review the literature on COIN. The literature review is intended to shed light on a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Hypotheses on COIN remedies learned from the literature review are used as basic tools for the comprehensive framework. The COIN literature on the four actors boils down to two big general remedies *vis-à-vis* COIN. COIN remedies based on both COIN forces and insurgent groups are enemy-centered approaches. In contrast, population-oriented approaches highlight both one's own domestic population and the host country's population.

The identification of caveats or missing points in the current COIN literature can add to the comprehensive framework. Current literature is outcome-oriented, not process-oriented. It rarely examines the impact of the interplay among the four actors on COIN effectiveness from the viewpoint of process. Moreover, most literature focuses exclusively on the role of great-powers. By doing so, it takes non-great powers as merely symbolic players for COIN.

In chapter 2, I will also create a framework to explain the ROK military's successes in Vietnam and Iraq. South Korean COIN forces were not a symbolic player but a substantial / reliable player in Vietnam and Iraq. I argue that there are two strategies in COIN. The first strategy is initially an enemy-based remedy followed by a population-oriented approach. The second strategy is initially population-centered supported by an enemy-oriented method. Both strategies require time to work with local populations as well as respond to battleground

situations for COIN success. Similarly, they show that combined approaches are more likely to be effective in managing COIN. What matters most is that the tempo of both processes is important.

I argue that the minimization of adaptation costs for the ROK COIN forces worked because of two logics: the nature of missions (rare and crucial tasks) and positional advantages (political and socio-cultural merits of South Korea). The crucial natures of missions in Vietnam and Iraq increased willingness and capability of the ROK COIN forces, and by doing so, the ROK military was able to minimize adaptation costs. Equally important, political and socio-cultural positions of South Korea, such as better understanding the Confucius tradition, gave the ROK military an advantage in COIN. Using these two logics, I will propose three general hypotheses. The latter part of Chapter 2 details methodology and measurement which will be used to test a proposed theoretical framework. That framework is process tracing.

In chapter 3, I will test the proposed theoretical framework empirically with the case of the ROK COIN in Vietnam. I start with Chapter 3 by providing an overview of the Vietnam conflict that the ROK military joined in COIN activities. This overview will be followed by assessment of the ROK military's success in Vietnam. This assessment will be used to confirm the outcome of the dependent variable – the mission's success or failure.

Additionally, I will examine how much the ROK military displayed by a high degree of willingness and capability in its attempt to fulfill its mission. This allowed the ROK military to adopt the first process option: the initial use of an

enemy-oriented approach and the later use of a population-based approach. Furthermore, using process tracing, I will trace how high morale was transferred to a high degree of capability. Finally, the function of political and socio-cultural advantages that South Korea possessed, such as a cultural alignment between South Korea and Vietnam, will be explored.

In chapter 4, the case of the ROK COIN in Iraq will be explored. I start by providing an overview of the Iraq conflict that the ROK military joined in COIN activities. Then, I will assess the ROK COIN forces' success in Iraq. The assessment will be followed by the examination of two key variables (willingness and capability) under the logic of the rare mission. I will investigate how the ROK military initially adopted a population-centered approach and the supportive use of an enemy-based approach. Finally, the function of political and socio-cultural advantages that South Korea possessed, such as community-based society similar to Iraq, will be explored.

The concluding chapter will discuss scholarly and policy implications of the project findings. When it comes to IR scholarly implication, it will be discussed what South Korea's success tells us about the enhanced role of a middle power in COIN. When it comes to policy implications, two important policies will be produced: Asian security and the ROK's future military strategy. For example, if there is a violent power transition in the North Korean regime leadership, the ROK will require an effective political/military policy to deal with this contingency.

The findings will show that if this happens, the major player should be the ROK military rather than external militaries because it will be best able to cope with an unstable North. Second, the findings will also show that the ROK military's remarkable achievements in Vietnam and Iraq need to be developed on a strategic and doctrinal level to deal with unconventional missions elsewhere. I will conclude with some thoughts about the directions of future research on middle power COINs, the management of the post- Kim regime situation, and future military strategy of South Korea.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### I. Literature Review of Counterinsurgency

#### A. Conventional Warfare vs. Counterinsurgency

Before discussing the distinction between conventional warfare and COIN, the general concept of insurgency and COIN needs to be described.<sup>10</sup> What is insurgency? The U.S. military Field Manual conceptualizes an insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* defines an insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”<sup>12</sup> Insurgents’ organized movement implies that they do not accept the state as a legitimate political entity. Thus, COIN is inherently different from conventional war, which can be defined as large-scale organized violence between states.

What is COIN? The U.S. military Field Manual defines COIN as “political, economic, military, paramilitary, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Field Manual stresses that

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<sup>10</sup> I summarize the difference between conventional and COIN operations in my published article. Kil-Joo Ban, “The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency,” *Asian Politics and Policy* 3, no. 2 (2011), 228-9.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006), 1-1.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, January 2009, 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, 1-1.

COIN forces “understand the broader strategic context within which they are operating.”<sup>14</sup> *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* conceptualizes COIN as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”<sup>15</sup> *U.S. Government COIN Guide* recognizes the distinction between conventional war and COIN. It defines COIN as “the blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously contain insurgency and address its root causes.”<sup>16</sup>

COIN is different from conventional warfare in two big dimensions: its inherent nature and tactical actions. The nature of conventional warfare and COIN can be distinguished over four categories: actors, a managing logic, a goal, and a battleground situation (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Inherent Distinction between Conventional Warfare and COIN

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Conventional Warfare</b>	<b>COIN</b>
Actors	Two or more regular armies	Four
Logic	Destruction	Protection
Goal	Territorial control The expansion of the sphere of influence	Maintaining security State building Functioning state
Battleground	Clear Easy to identify enemy - Regular and uniformed armies - Clear battlefield	Murky Hard to identify - Various guerillas - No specific battleground

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-15.

<sup>15</sup> *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 2.

There are only two players in conventional warfare, whereas there are four players in COIN.<sup>17</sup> The number of players in COIN is different from the number in conventional warfare. Conventional warfare is large- scale violence between two opposing military forces which stand for their countries. However, there are four actors in COIN: COIN forces (state actors), their population, insurgent groups (non-state actors), and their population.

A difference in the number of players leads to other key distinctions. First, the logic in COIN is opposite from the one in conventional warfare. Since conventional warfare is a kinetic fight between heavily armed regular forces, it is intended to destroy the infrastructure of the adversary which is required for continuous military operations. Thus, the logic of destruction dominates conventional warfare. Galula (1964) states that “the strategy of conventional war prescribes the conquest of the enemy’s territory, the destruction of his forces.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast to conventional warfare, he argues that “a victory [in COIN] is not the destruction.”<sup>19</sup> Since a local and/or domestic population affects the trajectory of mission success, COIN is intended to maintain and build overall

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<sup>17</sup> America’s commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, traces the logical difference between conventional war and counterinsurgency, particularly in terms of recruiting dynamics from the local population, which is a different player from the one in COIN. He argues that “In a conventional war, killing two enemy soldiers among a group of ten leaves just eight to deal with.” However, he points out that in counterinsurgency “ten minus two could equal zero (if the survivors decide to stop fighting); or, more often, it could equal 20 (if the dead men’s vengeful relatives join the struggle.” *The Economist*, “Obama’s faltering war.,” October 17, 2009, 32.

<sup>18</sup> For a classical work comparing conventional warfare and COIN, see David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1964), 50-60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

infrastructure in an attempt to gain security in the region. Thus, the logic of protection works in COIN. In addition, regular big forces which represent their countries have to fight against non-state insurgent groups.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the nature of actors is inherently different.

Second, COIN has a different goal from conventional warfare.

Conventional warfare is intended to gain territorial control on the battlefield and to expand the sphere of influence. However, COIN has a long-term goal of maintaining security on the battleground. In many aspects, COIN is related to state building rather than state destruction. Third, COIN has different battleground situations from conventional warfare. Battlefield situations in conventional warfare are relatively tangible and visible. It is easy to identify an enemy because opposing enemy soldiers wear military uniforms. In contrast, battleground situations in COIN are relatively intangible and invisible. It is difficult to identify insurgents because they do not wear uniforms. Moreover, since they often live with a local population at the same place, it is extremely difficult to tell the difference between insurgents and civilian residents while managing COIN. To put it another way, there is neither clear nor specified battlegrounds in COIN.

The aforementioned inherent distinction renders the process of conducting COIN operations different from carrying out a conventional war. This can be described under four categories: effective approach, key assets, military organization, and applicability of remedies to other warfare (see Table 2). First,

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<sup>20</sup> Galula (1964) defines asymmetry in a revolutionary war as “the disproportion of strength” between counterinsurgent forces and insurgent groups. *Ibid.*, 3.

military forces that conduct conventional warfare have to rely on an enemy-based approach in their attempt to neutralize the enemy's military capability. This is not an option but a necessary approach for both opposing military forces which have to conduct large-scale conventional operations. In contrast, COIN forces need to carefully focus on two approaches – enemy-centered or population-centered approach – depending on battleground situations. Which one is adopted will seriously affect the overall trajectory of mission success.

Second, since conventional warfare relies on an enemy-centered approach against regular armies, the military forces have to be equipped with technological equipment/weapons and a large number of soldiers for mission success. Kinetic power and firepower are crucial for winning conventional warfare: the stronger, the better. Unlike conventional warfare, there are more actors involved in unconventional operations. COIN actors are population and non-state fighters. Thus, COIN forces cannot achieve a successful outcome only with firepower. Firepower is simply one of many assets that COIN forces have to possess. Rather than heavy weapons, COIN forces need small weapons for small scale operations, such as jungle operations. They also need to understand the culture surrounding the battleground which is embedded in a local population. The infrastructure building capability is often more important than physical fighting capability for COIN forces.

Third, organizational setting of COIN forces should be different from conventional military forces'. In conventional warfare, a top-down setting is more effective for success. The military organization needs to be hierarchically

arranged in order to carry out large scale operations and a variety of units/platforms. By the same token, unified command is always recommended, and the role of the highest military commander is more important. In contrast, a bottom-up setting is often more effective for COIN forces. Unified command is maintained but a differentiated sub-organization is also needed. The role of on-scene commanders, such as junior officers is often more important because COIN forces carry out their mission on a small unit basis.

Table 2

The Tactical Distinction between Conventional Warfare and COIN

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Conventional Warfare</b>	<b>COIN</b>
Effective Approach	No option - Enemy-centered remedy	Options - Enemy-centered remedy - Population-centered remedy
Assets	Kinetic power and firepower - Big weapons and large army	Various assets - Light equipment - Cultural understanding - Infrastructure building ability
Organization	Top-down approach - Hierarchical organization - Unified command	Bottom-up approach - Less hierarchical organization - Unified but separate activities
Persistency of remedies	Persistent - Applicability of one SOP - Inflexibility	Less persistent - Less applicability of remedies - The crucial nature of flexibility

Finally, there is a difference between COIN and conventional warfare in terms of applicability.<sup>21</sup> In most cases, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

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<sup>21</sup> Nagl (2006) makes the distinction between conventional warfare (persistent military strategy) and counterinsurgency (situational/adaptable military strategy) in terms of the application of experience to other warfare. John A. Nagl,

used for conventional warfare can be applied to other conventional warfare management because the phases of warfare are persistent. In this vein, consistency is better to cope with conventional warfare. In contrast, COIN forces have to confront different types of warfare in every COIN mission because the phases of warfare are not persistent. Thus, flexibilities *vis-à-vis* organization, tactics, or strategies are mandatory rather than optional for mission success.

The two axes of distinction – inherent nature and required remedy – fundamentally spring from the different number of players who affect the trajectory of mission success, which I described in the first item of Table 1. As a consequence, the extant COIN literature can be categorized according to these four actors.

#### B. The Extant COIN Literature: Four Actors of COIN

The special nature of COIN has encouraged scholars to examine many types of remedies to better deal with it, particularly according to four actors-based analyses: COIN forces, insurgent groups, local population, and domestic population. The first school examines COIN forces' capacity: military weapons / their size, doctrine / organization, the use of local forces or allies, soldiers' will to fight, and proper intelligence. Some examine which weapons are more effective for unconventional warfare. Dunlap (2008) stresses the effectiveness of traditional technological weapons, such as air strike, for reducing violence on the COIN battleground.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Bennett (1988) stresses the effectiveness of small

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"Foreword," in Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, vii.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Dunlap, "We Still Need the Big Guns," *The New York Times*. January 9,

arms for anti-partisan soldiers.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Nawroz and Grau (1995) support the importance of small weapons. They contend that the Soviet Army lost the Afghan War because it relied on large weapons, such as artillery and air strikes, rather than small weapons for close combat.<sup>24</sup> The proper troop size is also considered. Quinlivan (2005) asserts that if COIN aims at stabilization, the troop size needs to be determined by the size of the population and the territory.<sup>25</sup>

Some stress the importance of doctrine or organization. Avant (1993) contends that successful COIN requires doctrine that highlights unity of command and the minimum use of force.<sup>26</sup> In terms of organization, Nagl (2002) stresses that the military organization should be a learning institution for effective COIN.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, McMichael (1989) argues that the Soviet Army lost the Afghan War due to its slow learning process.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see in the recent COIN efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the COIN leader country mobilizes other forces – indigenous forces or allies. The effectiveness of indigenous forces or allies is often dubious. Byman (2006) argues that local forces are mostly effective but often cause more problems because they

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2008.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Bennett, “The German Experience,” in Ian F.W. Beckett, ed., *The Roots of Counter-Insurgency* (Reed Business Information, Inc, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Mohammad Yahya Nawroz and Lester Grau, “The Soviet War in Afghanistan: History and Harbinger of Future War?” *Military Review*. September (1995).

<sup>25</sup> Jame T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” *Parameters* (Winter 2005): 59-69.

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Avant, “The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine: Hegemons in Peripheral Wars,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1993): 409-30.

<sup>27</sup> John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Scott McMichael, “The Soviet Army, Counterinsurgency and the Afghan War,” *Parameters* (December 1989): 21-35.



have different interests than the COIN leading country, and soldiers of allies have poor leadership.<sup>29</sup> Pottier (2005) acknowledges the effectiveness of indigenous forces, but at the same time, he points out that it took a long time to train the native forces.<sup>30</sup> Gortzak (2009) also argues that indigenous forces can be effective if great powers understand society on the battleground, and there are good junior officers in indigenous forces.<sup>31</sup>

This school also regards soldiers' will to fight as vital. Mack (1975) examines COIN forces' lack of willingness to fight, particularly interest asymmetry. He argues that the big actor, COIN forces from great powers, has a lower interest in winning than the small actor, insurgent groups, because winning is not critical for a great power's survival.<sup>32</sup> In addition, this school regards reliable and manageable intelligence as one of the most important capabilities of COIN forces. Tuck (2007) stresses the importance of good intelligence and minimum use of force.<sup>33</sup> In a nutshell, the examination of this school is intended to determine COIN forces' own capacities. Thus, remedies are oriented to increase COIN forces' capacities required to carry out unconventional missions.

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Byman, "Friends like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 79-115.

<sup>30</sup> Phillipe Pottier, "GCMA/GMI: A French Experience in Counterinsurgency during the French Indochina War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 16, no. 2 (2005): 125-146.

<sup>31</sup> Yoav Gortzak, "Using Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations: The French in Algeria," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 330-331.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175-200.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Tuck, "Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counterinsurgency," *Defense and Security Analysis* 23, no. 2 (2007): 165-183.

The second school explores insurgent groups' dynamics: psychological causes of insurgency and recruiting dynamics. Psychological factors are examined because they offer insurgents motivation to join insurgent groups. Gurr (1968) examines psychological variables, such as frustration, that affect civic uprising.<sup>34</sup> Some pay attention to the recruiting dynamic of insurgent groups. Kilcullen (2009) argues that massive military attack–led remedies allow insurgent groups to easily mobilize insurgents because they encourage the uncommitted to become accidental guerrillas.<sup>35</sup> By the same token, Desker and Acharya (2006) and Abrahms (2008) highlight the identification of recruiting dynamics of non-state fighters.<sup>36</sup>

Insurgent groups also benefit from corrupt or unreliable government because its mismanagement encourages the uncommitted to join insurgent groups. *The U.S. COIN Guide* reveals that “the government threatened by a nascent or active insurgency is the most important actor in COIN.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, insurgent groups intend to force COIN forces to perpetuate indiscriminate violence, leading to civilian casualties that make the logic of mobilization favorable to insurgent groups. By the same token, they welcome a corrupt government to make the uncommitted support their insurgency more. Salary may also support insurgent

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<sup>34</sup> Ted Gurr, “Psychological Factors in Civil Violence,” *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (1968): 245-278.

<sup>35</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Barry Desker and Arabindra Acharya, “Countering the Global Islamist Threat,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 18, no. 1 (2006): 59-83. Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 78-105.

<sup>37</sup> *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 29.

recruitment. For example, with the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban pays insurgent fighters more than the Afghan Army pays soldiers. In Iraq, the U.S. forces turned over all responsibility to the Iraqi government. As a result, the Awakening Council grew disillusioned because the Iraqi government slowed and reduced pay.

Basically, COIN remedies based on actors of both COIN forces and insurgent groups are an enemy-based approach. However, an enemy-based approach of COIN fighters is different from an enemy-centered approach of conventional fighters because COIN fighters struggle with non-state insurgents. Thus, COIN fighters already have huge asymmetrical power against insurgent fighters. However, light weapons are more effective than heavy weapons. In addition, COIN fighters should be concerned about recruiting dynamics of insurgent groups unlike conventional fighters.

The third school pays attention to the local population aspect: its focuses on personal security, the “hearts and minds,” and population control. Local residents see their physical survival as vital. Kalyvas (2006) argues that individuals on the battleground seek to maximize their personal security by tracing the logic of denunciation and defection.<sup>38</sup> The most dominant approach within this school focuses on how to gain the hearts and minds of the domestic population. As opposed to the aforementioned first group of scholars’ skepticism about the effectiveness of the indigenous force, Cassidy (2006) argues that the use of local forces is effective for gaining the hearts and minds of the local population. He

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<sup>38</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

contends that the French COIN forces achieved some success in terms of gaining the hearts and minds of the local Algerians under the innovative plan of the SAS detachments, “whose officers were experts in Arabic and Arab affairs,” during the 1957-1958 COIN missions.<sup>39</sup>

Population control and political or economic incentives are seriously considered as well. Markel (2006) argues that the British COIN forces defeated the Malayan insurgency with a strategy of population control under an effective “hearts and minds” campaign.<sup>40</sup> Kahl (2007) also pays attention to local population by stressing the minimization of civilian casualties.<sup>41</sup> By the same token, Newsinger (2002) stresses the importance of the establishment of political and economic infrastructure for the domestic population by examining the Mau Mau uprising.<sup>42</sup>

The fourth school examines how domestic actors constrain or prevent their military forces’ behavior. Some emphasize the political or diplomatic roles of domestic actors, such as political elites beyond simply military operations on the ground in order to achieve a successful COIN outcome. Catignani (2005) argues that COIN is not attainable exclusively with military force, but rather, requires political activities, such as diplomacy for the successful outcome of the IDF

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<sup>39</sup> Robert M. Cassidy, “The Long Small War: Indigenous Forces for Counterinsurgency,” *Parameters* (Summer 2006): 59.

<sup>40</sup> Wade Markel, “Draining the Swamp: The British Strategy of Population Control,” *Parameters* (Spring 2006): 35-48.

<sup>41</sup> Colin H. Kahl, “In the Crossfire or in the Crosshairs? Norms, Civilian Casualties, and U.S. Conduct in Iraq,” *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 7-46.

<sup>42</sup> John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 60-83.

(Israel Defense Force)'s COIN operations by examining the IDF COIN campaign during *Al-Aqsa Intifada*.<sup>43</sup>

Some also treat the COIN actors as strongly constrained by domestic actors. Arreguin-Toft (2001) sees the operational scope of COIN forces constrained by domestic groups. He argues that the big actor, confronted with guerrilla war, has to conduct a long war, but it is difficult to persuade the domestic population to wait for long-delayed victories.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Merom (2003) examines the battleground at home. He argues that democratic big actors lose small wars against the small actors because a democratic society and democratic institutions prevent forces from using extreme measures and taking/inflicting the casualties required to win this type of war.<sup>45</sup>

COIN remedies based on actors of both a domestic population and a local population is the population-oriented approach. This approach focuses more on making the local and/or domestic populations favorable to COIN success. However, there is no clear cut between an enemy-centered and a population-centered approach because one approach is closely related to the other for tactical and/or strategic level success.

### C. Pitfalls of the Current COIN Literature

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<sup>43</sup> Sergio Catignani, "The Strategic Impasse in Low-Intensity Conflicts: The Gap Between Israeli Counter-Insurgency Strategy and Tactics During the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 57-75.

<sup>44</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93-128.

<sup>45</sup> Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Which problems or pitfalls does the current COIN literature reveal? What needs to be done to make the COIN literature richer? The current literature has two pitfalls: lack of attention to the process of COIN and underdevelopment of the role of middle powers for COIN. First, the conventional literature overemphasizes one aspect of the above interconnected variables and underemphasizes the effects of other variables because it treats COIN as outcome-seeking, not process-seeking. Little attention has been paid to the impact of the interplay among the four actors from the viewpoint of process.

Second, the current literature marginalizes the positive effects and the substantial role of middle powers. It has been argued that great powers should always be responsible for COIN because they have the most resources, such as military technology and economic capability. IR scholars tend to take non-great powers as simply symbolic players rather than substantial players. Unlike conventional warfare, the four actors' interactions, rooted in the process of COIN, shape the trajectory of COIN: failure or success. To put it differently, COIN is not simply a kinetic fight between two opposing regular forces. Since different actors are involved in the trajectory of COIN success, non-great powers can be more effective under certain conditions. Non-great powers can benefit most only if they possess a well-disciplined military. Along with an organized military, middle powers can also become substantial players when they display high morale. In addition, their role can be effective when they understand culture on the battleground. In this respect, middle powers are frequently better than great powers in conducting COIN.

## II. Theoretical Framework

### A. COIN Process and Adaptation Costs

Understanding COIN process is important because an effective process reduces adaptation costs for COIN forces. As has been noted, there are two COIN approaches in general: an enemy-oriented approach and a population-oriented approach. The *enemy-oriented* remedies – more violent/brutal, compressed, and material-oriented strategies – require more tangible approaches, such as the use of an appropriate military doctrine to overwhelm insurgents by force. In contrast, the *population-oriented* remedies – less violent, more friendly and idealistic-oriented strategies – suggest more intangible approaches, such as confidence building, a high degree of the ‘hearts and mind’ strategy instead of the humiliation of an occupation, consensus formulation, multilevel dialogues involving a variety of groups, and cultural education for COIN forces.

Despite a clear distinction between the two remedies, successful COIN requires the integration of both approaches. Integration should be understood as a process, particularly as a time sequence. There are three processes in managing COIN. The first process is an enemy-based approach with a subsequent population-based approach. In this process, COIN forces initially focus on an enemy-centered approach and then later adopt a population-oriented approach, step-by-step depending on battleground situations. Determining a sequence is a battleground situation vis-à-vis the level of dominance of insurgent groups. South Korean COIN forces made the initial use of enemy-based remedies and the later use of population-based remedies in Vietnam.

The second process is a population-based approach with the support of military forces which is intended to deter the potential activities of the enemy early enough. The sequence of this process is the initial use of a population-based approach and the later use of an enemy-based approach. The South Korean military in Iraq adopted population-oriented remedies with the subsequent use of enemy-based tactics. The ROK successfully used a population-centered approach with supportive hard power.

The final process is an optimal balance between an enemy-led and a population-led approach. This process is an ideal type because battleground situations in COIN rarely offer a perfect balance between insurgent groups and local populations. Thus, I drop this scenario from my study.

Study of the first two processes is important because both processes are closely related to adaptation costs. A military mostly trained for conventional warfare will rarely adapt during conventional warfare because one SOP is applicable to most conventional warfare. However, conventional forces may have to pay a higher adaptation cost because conventional tactics are not effective in some battlegrounds. Thus, the minimization of adaptation costs is crucial for COIN success. If this is the case, under what conditions will COIN forces be able to minimize adaptation costs? Put simply, what leads to minimizing adaptation costs and contributing to COIN success?

#### B. The Logic of Success for the ROK COIN

COIN needs to be clearly defined in order to measure its success, a dependent variable. I conceptualize COIN as a process of gaining or regaining security in the



area where the interplay among four actors affects the trajectory of success. With this definition in mind, tactical success needs to be distinguished from strategic success. While tactical success refers to the degree of security control in one or a few areas within overall battlegrounds, strategic success is securing all battlegrounds. Thus, strategic success can be achieved through the expansion of tactical success to the overall battleground that requires coordinated efforts among COIN coalition forces. The leading country of the COIN coalition forces is in charge of the overall battleground and assigns other COIN forces to specific areas. Assigned COIN forces aim to secure their Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR). The COIN success as the dependent variable in this project refers to the tactical level of success.

The ROK military's success of COINs in Vietnam and Iraq was driven by the combination of the special nature of missions and the positional advantages of South Korea. The nature of missions was the first driver to reduce adaptation costs. Soldiers fight harder and better when they recognize a mission as highly important. The importance of missions for building national prestige generates higher military desire and capability.

A high degree of willingness not only stimulates soldiers to fight harder but also enhances capability, which results in minimizing adaptation costs. In contrast to the capability of conventional warfare – kinetic power – COIN capability is operationalized by types of tactics, the degree of organizational flexibility, asset types, and the COIN proficiency of fighters. High morale and desire of the military make COIN forces capable enough for unconventional war and

minimizes time/process required for building COIN capability: no desire, no capability. Unusual missions assigned to the military tend to generate more morale and performance because the forces consider the success of these missions crucial to increase national prestige.

What was a routine or unusual mission to the ROK military? Conventional military operations against the North Korean army were recognized as routine for more than 60 years. Conventional capabilities deterred the North Korean army from invading South Korea once again. Border patrols around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) or on the Northern Limit Line (NLL) have also been conventional missions. Conventional warfare has been recognized as a mandatory mission but at the same time it has become a routine way of operations. This mission was not related to national prestige but maintenance of external security on the Korean peninsula or status quo.

By contrast, both missions in Vietnam and Iraq were extremely rare and important so that the ROK military was armed with a higher degree of enthusiasm. The ROK military's mission in Vietnam had been its first ever overseas military operation. This task was crucial for increasing national prestige. South Korean soldiers knew that mission success would contribute to Korean economic development and military modernization because their participation encouraged the U.S. to give South Korea more financial and military aid. In addition, South Korean political leaders and military elites recognized that mission success would contribute to maximizing other national interests through diplomatic negotiations favorable to South Korea. In a situation where the U.S. struggled with fighting

against the Viet Cong guerillas, they needed South Korean fighters who were recognized as professional and capable. Thus, this mission was recognized as the most important task on a national level.

The ROK military's mission in Iraq was the most important overseas operations in the 30 years after its participation in the Vietnam conflict. More importantly, it was the first major activity for South Korea as a growing middle power in the post-911 era. South Korea, as a growing middle power, saw the mission in Iraq as an opportunity to extend its role in contributing to international security. In a nutshell, both missions in Vietnam and Iraq were important, and so the ROK military approached the challenge with a high degree of enthusiasm.

The ROK military's mission in Vietnam served as an important opportunity to increase national prestige and maximize utilities, both of which were significant benefits for all of South Korea. The success of the mission in Vietnam was crucial for the development of a national economy and the military modernization. Similarly, the ROK military's mission in Iraq was an important chance for South Korea, as a growing middle power, to show its increased capacity and responsibility for the world beyond simply international security. Thus, this mission was recognized as highly important to maximize national prestige, and by doing so, South Korean soldiers in Iraq were highly motivated.

A high degree of motivation in Vietnam and Iraq led the ROK COIN forces to a fast adaptation tempo. South Korea dispatched volunteers and its best units to Vietnam and Iraq. A willingness to adapt made mission organization flexible, and by doing so, the ROK COIN forces were able to create COIN capability rather

than the capability required for conventional warfare in both Vietnam and Iraq. Military officers first sent preliminary mission teams to battlegrounds as the first step for the adoption of an effective COIN approach. This process minimized adaptation costs.

The second driver for the ROK military's successes in Vietnam and Iraq sprang from the different nature of COIN. Unlike conventional warfare, COIN forces' physical enemy is not regular troops but guerillas who operate in terrains where they easily hide. In addition, other actors, such as the local population, affect the trajectory of COIN's success. COIN forces must gain the hearts and minds of the local population and understand social situations that surround the battleground.

South Korea had positional advantages in two dimensions: material and non-material. First, in terms of the material dimension, the ROK had experienced communist insurgencies at home in the early 1950s and harsh poverty after the Korean War.<sup>46</sup> Second, unlike the U.S., the ROK military was less seen as an occupier and outsider in both Vietnam and Iraq due to a relative lack of power asymmetry. Third, the ROK military was more familiar with the terrain and geography of the battleground. For example, its military was good at activities in mountainous areas which made the ROK military well-suited for jungle operations in Vietnam. Furthermore, politically divided geography in Vietnam was similar to the one in South Korea. Both countries were divided between two governments as a result of political-ideological friction between democracy and

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<sup>46</sup> I conceptualize these types of experience as non-great power experiences.

communism. Fourth, South Korea, as a growing middle power, also deployed an organized military similar to great powers. Although there is a big gap between a middle power and a great power in terms of military capacity for conventional warfare, there is no huge gap between the two for unconventional warfare missions.

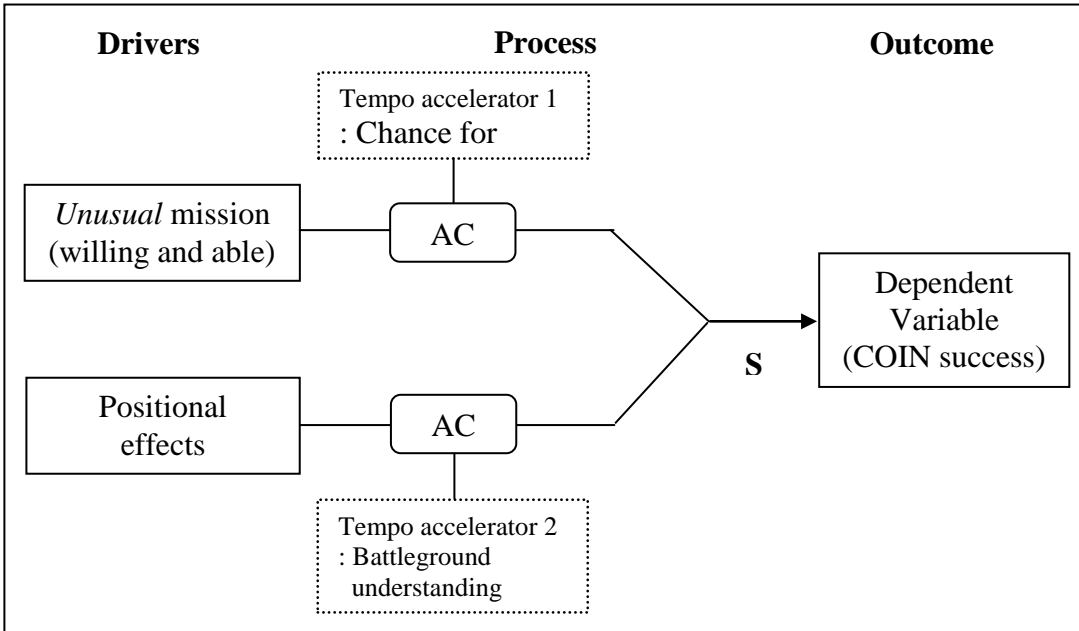
When it comes to the non-material environment, South Korea's socio-cultural characteristics were closer to Vietnam and Iraq. Similar to Vietnam, Confucius culture was embedded in South Korea. Thus, the ROK military was able to minimize adaptation time required to understand Confucius culture which emphasized the village. South Korea also had a community ethic similar to Iraqis and unlike Western countries' emphasis on individualism. Consequently, the ROK COIN forces understood the importance of community in Iraqi villages. To put it another way, it was better positioned to gain hearts and minds of the Iraqi residents with a relatively low adaptation costs. Second, the ROK enjoyed some connections on a societal level. There was a friendly connection between South Koreans and Iraqis. Iraqis held a positive image of South Koreans. They liked to buy Korean products, such as Samsung electronics and Hyundai cars.

Encouraged by the above two advantages, the initial image of Korean troops was more positive than American troops by the local population. The ROK's position was more advantageous from the viewpoint of Korea's domestic population as well as Iraq's local population. The importance of these missions encouraged the South Korean population to support their military's activity more

than the American population. Both the aforementioned material and non-material advantage contributed to reducing adaptation costs of the ROK COIN forces.

Figure 1

A Theoretical Framework: The Logic of the ROK COIN Success



AC: Adaptation costs, S: Sufficient condition

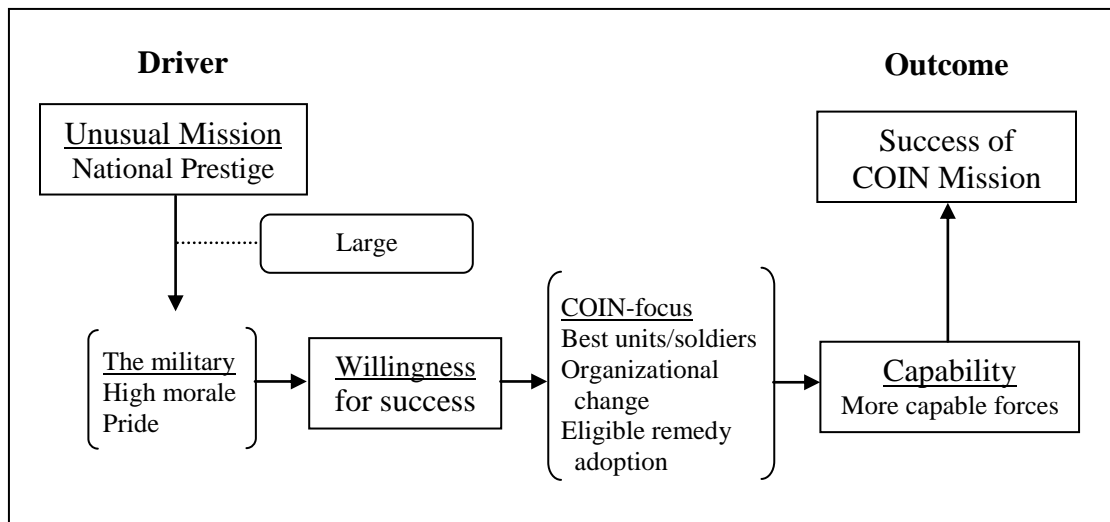
All in all, the success of COIN requires the minimization of adaptation costs which is an intervening variable. The ROK COIN forces were able to minimize adaptation costs under two logics – the special nature of missions and the political/socio-cultural advantages. Together, they were sufficient conditions for COIN success. Armed with both the logic of special missions and political/socio-cultural advantages, the ROK military was able to achieve remarkable success in Vietnam and later in Iraq.

The aforementioned two levels lead to a successful outcome in a synergistic way. The nature of special missions serves as the first driver of increasing

motivation for success (see Figure 2). When a country as a whole recognizes a mission as rare and crucial for national prestige, soldiers are more equipped with morale and pride for their mission. In this vein, large audience support motivates them to be more eager to accomplish their mission. Since they are more motivated, they are more willing to adjust mission organization, develop appropriate tactics, and select the best soldiers/units. Thus, a high degree of enthusiasm is transferred to a high degree of capability for COIN.

Figure 2

The Process of Minimizing Adaptation Costs: Unusual Mission



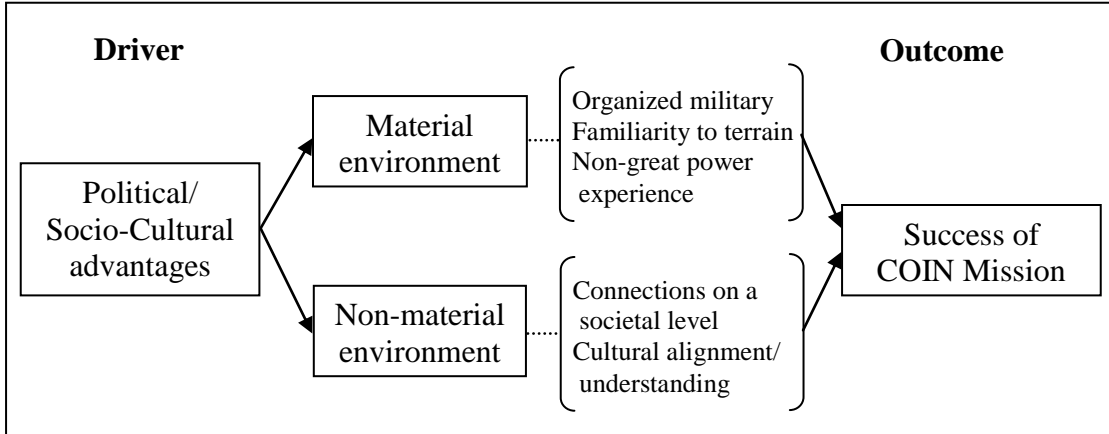
Positional advantages are also crucial for COIN because SOPs which are effective in one COIN often do not work for the other (see Figure 3). COIN forces need to adapt to battleground environments as soon as possible. Two positional environments are important. South Korea had advantageous material environments, such as organized military, more familiarity with military terrain, and non-great power experiences. It also enjoyed non-material environments,

such as more connections on a societal level and cultural alignment and/or better understanding of the battleground society.

Figure 3

The Process of Minimizing Adaptation Costs: Political/Socio-Cultural

Advantages



C. Assumptions and Hypotheses

With the aforementioned insights in mind, I lay out two assumptions and three big hypotheses.

Assumptions

1. *Mission types affect the military's willingness and, therefore, its military capability.*
2. *The ROK's political and socio-cultural advantages affect the trajectory of the military's performance.*

Hypotheses



1. *As the COIN forces are equipped with high morale driven by the nature of a rare mission, they will fight harder and better in their attempt to increase their national prestige, resulting in COIN success.*
  - 1A. When the COIN soldiers have high morale and pride, a successful outcome is more expected.
  - 1B. When the mission's expected gains for the ROK are high, the COIN troops will fight harder and better through learning lessons from the past as well as current events and by increasing their willingness to make the military organization adaptable for COIN missions.
2. *Mission variations of COIN forces, rather than overall military capacity, is related to mission success.*
  - 2A. When insurgents are heavily dominant, the initial use of an enemy-based approach is most likely to be effective. When insurgents are relatively weak, the initial use of a population-based approach is most likely to be effective.
  - 2B. When the COIN forces are tactically flexible, a successful outcome is more likely.
  - 2C. When the military sends its best units/soldiers and the COIN forces are equipped with light weapons/equipment, success is more achievable.
3. *States' political and socio-cultural characteristics make their military's success more probable in COIN warfare.*

### **III. Methodological Framework**

#### **A. Selecting Methodology**

Qualitative methodology will be employed particularly based on case study. There has been methodological competition among rational choice, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis. Each methodology has both merits and limits. Rational choice methodology is theoretically sound and rigorous and thus it started to gain a hegemonic position in the field of Political Science.<sup>47</sup> However, it struggles with serious weaknesses on two dimensions: minimal empirical work and limited applicability to security studies. Its unrealistic assumptions often make empirical testing extremely difficult. In addition, rational choice is limited regarding security studies because it focuses more on the logic of bargaining and cooperation.<sup>48</sup> As Walt (1999) reminds us, rational choice emphasizes method for theory construction (trivial arguments with precision), not the contents of theory.<sup>49</sup>

This research requires rich empirical work and examines military effectiveness, as one axis of security studies. Thus, rational choice is not a useful research methodology. Although I do not employ rational choice, I still take into account the concept of rationality. Since I define the middle states as strategic rational actors, I regard their goal seeking *vis-à-vis* mission achievement as vital. Seen in this light, the framework concerns rational outcomes but is not based on

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<sup>47</sup> Ian. S. Lustick “Rational choice as a hegemonic project, and the capture of comparative politics,” *APSA-CP. Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics* 5, no. 2 (1994): 31.

<sup>48</sup> Walt (1999) is critical of the applicability of rational choice to security studies, particularly in terms of scientific progress with three criteria: logical consistency and precision, originality, and empirical validity. Stephen M. Walt, “Rigor or Rigor Mortis?: Rational Choice and Security Studies,” *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 12-13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

rational choice itself in the sense that I do not employ hard formalization – rational choice method – heavily based on mathematics.<sup>50</sup>

Since rational choice methodology is not optimal for this research, the other two methodologies need to be examined. Despite the energetic emergence of rational choice theorists, many scholars are still heavily reliant on quantitative and qualitative analysis, rather than game theoretic methodology.<sup>51</sup> There has been a rivalry between quantitative and qualitative methodology in the social sciences. In *Designing Social Inquiry (DSI)*, King et al (1994), as quantitative scholars, argue that the same logic of inference that applies to large-N statistical analysis should apply to small-N or single-country analysis.<sup>52</sup> *DSI* suggests that qualitative research should be treated as derivative of the logic drawn from quantitative research. Some scholars, however, have responded by challenging and modifying *DSI*: Brady and Collier's (2004) *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, George and Bennet's (2005) *Case Studies and Theory development in the Social Sciences*, and Gerring's (2004/2007) *Case Study Research*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Duncan Snidal, "Rational Choice and International Relations," in Walter Carlsnaes, ed., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002), 73-94.

<sup>51</sup> Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, "Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics: An Analysis of Leading Journals," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 5 (2007): 5-31.

<sup>52</sup> Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Brady and David Collier, ed., *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MA: The MIT Press, 2005). John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Quantitative methodology is different from qualitative methodology along several dimensions. Quantitative ontology lies in regular-pattern or correlation seeking, whereas qualitative ontology has its roots in causality-seeking. The former is a probabilistic analysis based on a large-N study, whereas the latter seeks deterministic outcomes based on a small-N analysis. In addition, the former seeks to know less about more, whereas the latter attempts to know more about less.<sup>54</sup>

The recognition of the difference between quantitative and qualitative analyses shows that qualitative methodology is preferable for this study. This study will trace the causal mechanisms of the ROK military's COIN effectiveness, particularly focusing on the four actors' interactions. It utilizes qualitative methodology.<sup>55</sup>

### B. Process Tracing and Case Selection

Qualitative methodology has various methods to trace rich accounts of events or actors: counterfactual reasoning, congruence testing, path dependence, and process tracing. Counterfactual analysis attempts to test the condition that X was necessary for Y by asking what would happen if X were not present.

Congruence analysis aims to identify and predict correlational patterns in the

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<sup>54</sup> John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004), 348.

<sup>55</sup> In terms of methodology, the research ontology lies in a strategic process. Thus, as part of aligning this ontology with methodology, I apply process tracing to a research methodology. For more details on alignment between ontology and methodology, see Peter. H. Hall, "Aligning ontology and methodology in comparative research," in James Majoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, ed., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 373-406.

presence and strength of independent and dependent variables, in a similar way to quantitative analysis.<sup>56</sup> Path dependence, initiated by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), stresses history while arguing that events in the past affect the possible sequence of events in the future.<sup>57</sup>

Lastly, process tracing focuses on chains of events by identifying intervening variables. The process tracing method will be employed to trace different paths of the same outcome (successful COIN) despite different COIN remedies in Vietnam and in Iraq. It suggests the possibility of different paths from the independent to the dependent variable. As Van Evera (1997) reminds us, the method of process tracing allows researchers to explore “the chain of events or the decision-making process by which initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes.”<sup>58</sup>

Qualitative analysis lends itself to case study.<sup>59</sup> Gerring (2007) defines a case study as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is [...] to shed light on a larger class of cases.”<sup>60</sup> He classifies a case study as the examination of one or a few cases as opposed to a cross-case study. However, as *DSI* notes, qualitative methodology may be criticized due to selection bias.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 58-61.

<sup>57</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Party Systems and Voter Alignments,” in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan. ed., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (NY: Free Press, 1967), 1-64.

<sup>58</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods*, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Gerring, *Case Study Research*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> King et al, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 124-138.

In my attempt to minimize selection bias, two cases will be selected with case-selection criteria proposed by Van Evera (1997).<sup>62</sup> The unit of analysis for the research is conflict, particularly COIN, and the actor is the ROK military. Two COIN cases in Vietnam and Iraq conducted by the ROK military will be selected and explored for three reasons: “data richness,” “extreme value” on both the independent and dependent variables, and outlier / crucial characteristic.<sup>63</sup> Rich data are available for the Vietnam War from various sources, such as the Vietnam Virtual Archives. Since the Iraq War is still happening, a variety of data are accumulating. Since rich data are accessible, it is possible to answer more questions.

Second, these two cases are examples of the successful outcome of COIN (dependent variable), at least on a tactical level. They also tap the independent variable in the sense that South Korea is the middle power engaged in these missions with quite different methods – hard methods in Vietnam and soft methods in Iraq. Finally, the ROK military’s experiences in Iraq and in Vietnam offer cases that are rarely explained by the current literature or theory. This outlying or crucial characteristic allows us to trace unexplained conditions or events.

### C. Data Sources

I conducted archival research in the U.S. For military postures, I examine the ROK military’s official documents, such as *Defense Reform 2020*. I also use

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<sup>62</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods*, 77-88.

<sup>63</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods*, 77.

several primary sources, including the autobiography of General Chae, Commander, ROKFV (Republic of Korea Force in Vietnam); *Foreign Relations of the United States*; and several online archival documents, such as Texas Tech Vietnam Archive and ProQuest Historical Newspapers; in my attempt to trace the COIN effectiveness of the ROK military forces in Vietnam and Iraq. In addition to English materials, I use a variety of Korean data, such as the ROK Ministry of National Defense documents. Furthermore, in my attempt to gain Korean archival data, I conducted field research in South Korea. In particular, I used archival sources in several agencies, such as the ROK National Assembly Library and the ROK Institute for Military History Compilation. The archival research in both the U.S. and South Korea contribute to the qualitative analysis.

#### D. Measurement

It is imperative to clearly measure both independent variables and a dependent variable because these serve as a logical flow chart for the whole research project. First, the dependent variable for the research is COIN outcome – success or failure. Since missions in Vietnam and Iraq were successful cases for the ROK military, COIN success needs to be measured by several indicators (see Table 3).

Table 3

Measurement of COIN Success

Indicators	Measurement
TAOR control	A. Battle outcome: Kill ratio, POWs B. Separation between local population and insurgents C. Population growth in TAOR D. The degree of insurgent activities
The function of local	A. Local population's responses to infrastructure

population's basic / normal lives	building of COIN forces B. The degree of local autonomy C. The function of local market
Evaluation from others (Comparison with other COIN forces)	A. The adoption of the ROK COIN model B. The COIN leading country's request for more forces C. The COIN leading country's remarks on the ROK military D. Reporters' remarks on the ROK military

As had been defined earlier, COIN success refers to security control of assigned areas. Security control can be achieved through two paths: physical control and the safety of the local population. Physical control means success in the Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) measured by battle outcome, separation between local population and insurgents, population growth in TAOR, and the degree of insurgent activities. The function of local population's normal lives can be measured by the degree of infrastructure building, growth of local markets, and the degree of local autonomy.

Furthermore, the ROK COIN success can be evaluated by others, including other participating forces and/or civilians. In particular, the COIN leading country's remarks on the ROK military's performance will be explored and civilian reporters' experience on the battleground will be examined. If the ROK military did well, other forces would adopt tactics or models similar to the ROK military. Similarly, if the ROK military did well, the COIN leading country would ask South Korea to extend its military presence or further dispatch more soldiers.



The independent variables are examined over two dimensions: willingness and capability drawn from rare mission and positional advantages. To begin with, willingness is gauged with five indicators (see Table 4).

Table 4

Measurement of Willingness Driven By Logic of Unusual Mission

<b>Types</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Measurement</b>
Willingness	Expected/achieved utility of mission success	A. The scope of national prestige B. The scope of interest C. Governmental dialogue
	National pride/High morale	Veterans' accounts through archival research
	Willingness to change conventional organization	Examination of the process of organization changes by leaders
	Mission study of the ROK military	A. Preparatory team B. The use of lessons from past events C. The use of lessons from current events

First, the ROK military's willingness is measured by the degree of expected utility that South Korea could acquire through mission success. Second, willingness is measured by the level of soldiers' morale and pride through examining archival materials. Willingness is also measured by the ROK military's eagerness to change conventional organization eligible for COIN mission. In addition, it is gauged by the level of mission study conducted by the ROK military before dispatch as well as during operations on the battlefield.

What is more important in this examination is to trace the transition from willingness to capability because COIN capability is a more direct indicator of its

success. Strong enthusiasm for mission success makes COIN forces more capable for unconventional missions by encouraging them to develop appropriate tactics and a flexible organization. In more detail, capability is measured according to three indicators (see Table 5).

Table 5

Measurement of Capability Driven By Logic of Special Missions

Types	Indicators		Measurement
Capacity	Initial Tactical Adoption	Professionalized military tactics for COIN (Enemy-based tactics)	Adopted tactics - Small unit tactics - Night operations
		Qualified societal tactics for COIN (Population-based tactics)	Adopted tactics - “Hearts and minds” - Civil affairs management
		Organizational flexibility	A. Examination of Mission-oriented military organizational innovation B. Infrastructure building capacity - Types of infrastructure managed by the COIN forces Indigenous force building - Training program
		Soldiers/assets eligible for COIN	A. Cultivating elite soldiers - Standard of selecting units/soldiers - Mission training program - Mission rules observed by soldiers B. Qualified military assets - Types of weapons and equipment (e.g., light armament)

First, initially adopted tactics are measured by examining a variety of required COIN remedies, such as small unit tactics and civil affairs management. Second, organizational flexibility required for COIN success is measured by examining various COIN characteristics, such as mission-oriented military organizational reform, infrastructure building capacity, and indigenous force building. Third, the scope of soldiers and assets eligible for COIN is measured by analyzing how to cultivate elite soldiers and how to acquire appropriate military assets.

While the logic of special missions functions as one axis of the ROK COIN mission abroad, political/socio-cultural advantages of South Korea function as the other axis. South Korea was better positioned than other countries, particularly great powers, in two dimensions: material and non-material. Material environmental advantages are measured according to four indicators (see Table 6).

Table 6

Measurement of Politico-Environmental Advantages (Material Environments)

<b>States' Advantages</b>		<b>Measurement</b>
Material environments	Non-great power experiences	A. Historic examination of South Korea B. COIN experiences of its own home C. Its own experience in economic development
	Lack of power asymmetry	Economic and military power gap
	Familiarity of terrain and geography	Comparative examination between two countries
	Strong military organizations unlike weak powers	The strength of military organization - Overall military organization - Size of forces and weapons

First, the historical experiences of non-great powers are examined as one indicator, particularly focusing on the historic examination of South Korea, its COIN experiences at its own home, and its experience in economic infrastructure building. Second, the structural position of non-great powers is examined by measuring the economic and military power gap between a COIN country and insurgent country. Third, the scope of familiarity of terrain and geography is investigated. Finally, a middle power position that is different from a weak power is explored by measuring the strength of a military organization.

Non-material environmental advantages are also considered by various indicators (see Table 7). Connections between an insurgent country and a home country at the societal level are important for reducing adaptation costs. Thus, Vietnamese and Iraqi friendliness toward South Koreans is traced.

Table 7

Measurement of Socio-Cultural Advantages (Non-material Environments)

<b>States' Advantages</b>		<b>Measurement</b>
Non-material environments	Cultural understanding	Commonality among countries - Societal level - Troops' degree of understanding to society
	Connections on a population level	Vietnamese and Iraqi degree of friendliness - Interview data from newspapers
	Local population's favorable response to COIN forces	A. Vietnamese and Iraqi accounts from historical newspapers B. The scope of the first impression tactic C. Its negative response to insurgent groups
	Support from domestic population	Its activities to support the COIN forces

Second, cultural understanding is essential for gaining the “hearts and minds” of the local population. Accordingly, the level of cultural understanding is explored. While the first indicator is oriented to ties between South Korea and the insurgent country before dispatching troops, how local populations responded to the ROK military in the first phase of COIN is examined. Thus, the scope of the local population’s favorable response to COIN forces is traced by examining archival materials that include their accounts or evaluation. Finally, support from the ROK domestic population is crucial for continuing COIN because the people can ask their military either to withdraw or alternatively may support its activities. Consequently, the scope of domestic population’s support is investigated.

#### **IV. Within-Case Variation**

As has been noted, unusual missions served as the first driver for increasing the military’s enthusiasm for their missions. Since this serves as the first step in the process, one should examine within-case variation. If unusual missions are more likely to lead to success, are routine missions less likely to lead to success? What is a routine mission that the ROK military has performed?

Border security has become one of the major routine missions for the ROK military ever since the Korean War. South Korean territory is clearly separated from North Korean territory over the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). There is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the MDL in the south and north. The length of the DMZ is around 250 kilometers and its width is about 4 kilometers. The ROK military has patrolled this area as part of border security. While the ROK Army has three Field Army Commands, massive numbers of soldiers from

two Field Commands have been stationed and performed military exercises around border areas to deter the North Korean military's provocative actions. Routine work may decrease soldiers' willingness to perform effectively. Although South Korean conventional military forces have heavily patrolled the border areas, North Korean soldiers successfully infiltrated the border many times.

Soldiers' missions around the military border are to prevent infiltration from the north. However, military troops who were in charge of these routines often did not succeed. Quite a large number of North Korean infiltrators successfully crossed the border and then carried out their operations in South Korea. The most typical three cases are the 1968 attempted raid on the Blue House, the 1968 communist guerillas' infiltration in *Uljin* and *Samcheok*, and the 1975 axe murder incident (see Table 8).

Table 8

The Cases of Routine Missions

<b>Time</b>	<b>Incidents</b>	<b>Infiltration's type</b>	<b>Result</b>
1968. 1.17 -2. 3	An attempted raid on the Blue House	31 North Korean commandos' infiltration	<u>South Korea</u> 7 civilians dead, 23 soldiers dead, 52 soldiers injured <u>North Korean commandos</u> 28 dead, 2 fled, 1 captured
1968. 10.30-11. 2	Guerillas on <i>Uljin</i> and <i>Samcheok</i> in South Korea	124 communist guerillas' infiltration	<u>South Korea</u> 30 civilians dead, 52 soldiers dead, 67 injured, 1 captured <u>North Korean guerillas</u> (2 month operation) 107 dead, 6 fled, 7 captured
1976. 8.18	The axe murder incident	Border security forces' infiltration (Tree / Hatchet incident)	2 American officers dead 8 South Korean, American soldiers injured

### A. The 1968 Attempted Raid on the Blue House

The first event to examine within-case variation happened on January 17, 1968 when 31 North Korean commandos successfully crossed the border. North Korean commandos intended to assassinate the South Korean president and key governmental officials. They successfully crossed the South Korean border in the MDL during nighttime. More surprisingly, they successfully infiltrated Seoul, the capital city of South Korea over four days without getting caught.<sup>64</sup> Ironically, the year of 1968 was the time when the ROK COIN forces were successfully preventing the infiltration of Viet Cong guerillas in Vietnamese villages. In this vein, the ROK military's failure to prevent North Korean infiltration was in contrast with its success to thwart Viet Cong infiltration.

How did North Korean commandos successfully infiltrate South Korea? The vigilance of border security soldiers was relatively weak due to its routine nature. Their mission was not recognized as national prestige but as their customary duties. By contrast, North Korean commandos were equipped with a high degree of enthusiasm because they saw their mission success as highly important for their country. Second Lieutenant Kim Sin-jo who was the only captured North Korean commando said that "I never thought that this mission would fail because I believed that it was the greatest honor to die for Communist Party and Kim Il Sung."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, they were equipped with a high degree of

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<sup>64</sup> 1.21 Incident of Kim Sin-jo's commando forces Part II (Korean), [http://hackersnews.org/hn/read.cgi?board=hn\\_entertains&nnew=2&y\\_number=8116](http://hackersnews.org/hn/read.cgi?board=hn_entertains&nnew=2&y_number=8116) (Accessed September 29, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> 1.21 Incident of Kim Sin-jo's commando forces Part I (Korean),

pride and self-sufficiency. Second Lieutenant Kim recollects that “we were trained under the highest pride that we are the best soldiers in the world.”<sup>66</sup>

Their high morale was translated to a high degree of capability for infiltration operations. Before the dispatch, North Korean infiltrators, who were armed with pride, were professionally trained under mission-focused tactics.<sup>67</sup> In particular, they were trained to move silently and stand still for an hour. This strict training was intended to prevent South Korean forces from indentifying their infiltration. In addition, North Korean commandos possessed a very detailed scheme about what to do. For example, they put on South Korean military uniforms in order to effectively carry out their operations in South Korea. Their training and the carefully developed plans allowed them to successfully infiltrate up to the Blue House (the president’s office).

In contrast to the high degree of willingness and capability of North Korean commandos, the nature of the ROK military’s routine work *vis-à-vis* border security was recognized as less crucial. A barbed-wire fence in the MDL was rusty and had not been replaced due to budget issues. The area with an old-fashioned fence offered North Korean commandos an opportunity to effectively infiltrate South Korea.

North Korean commandos failed to assassinate South Korean President Park Chung Hee. The ROK military which indentified North Korean commandos’

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[http://hackersnews.org/hn/read.cgi?board=hn\\_entertains&nnew=2&y\\_number=8115](http://hackersnews.org/hn/read.cgi?board=hn_entertains&nnew=2&y_number=8115) (Accessed September 29, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



presence in Seoul carried out anti-guerilla operations and killed 28 commandos.<sup>68</sup> Their infiltration, however, was quite successful. Moreover, they created chaos by killing 32 South Koreans in the center of the South Korean capital. In this vein, a small failure of the routine mission of border guards led to serious damage to the military and society of South Korea.

#### B. The 1968 Communist Guerillas' Infiltration

The second case of North Korean infiltration's success is the 1968 communist guerillas' infiltration. On October 30, 1968, 120 North Korean communist guerrillas successfully infiltrated in east coast villages – *Uljin* and *Samcheok* – of South Korea. It was the largest size of infiltration after the Korean War.<sup>69</sup> Their infiltration was intended to determine whether guerilla activities were possible in South Korea.

North Korean guerillas infiltrated those areas via a coastal route at nighttime. They recognized that this coastal line was optimal for infiltration because of lack of difference in tides between morning and evening.<sup>70</sup> They entered into local villages in infiltrated areas and tried to educate South Korean

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<sup>68</sup> For the report of damage assessment, see the ROK Ministry of National Defense, *Anti-guerilla operations' history II: 1961-1980* (Seoul: the ROKMND Military History Institute, 1998), 47.

<sup>69</sup> *The Dong-A Ilbo*, "Communist guerillas' infiltration in Uljin and Samcheok," September 10, 1968, <http://dna.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1968121000209201018&edtNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1968-12-10&officeId=00020&pageNo=1&printNo=14513&publishType=00020> (Accessed September 28, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> *Anti-guerilla operations' history II*, 48-9.

village residents with communist ideology. They also forced them to join the guerilla groups and encouraged social uprising in South Korea.<sup>71</sup>

The ROK Army was responsible for border security in those areas which was its routine work. The 38th Division was in charge of *Samcheok* and 36th Division was in charge of *Uljin*. In a situation where specific areas of responsibility were designated like the above, the 36th Division did not dispatch patrol troops on that day. The absence of patrol forces served as a chance for infiltration. The first team, which was composed of 30 guerillas, successfully infiltrated in *Uljin* on October 30, 1968, following the other two successful infiltrations.<sup>72</sup> Captured guerillas said that there were no barriers to infiltrate those areas.<sup>73</sup>

Only a small number of South Korean soldiers patrolled there. What happened was that even they lacked the desire and capability to carry out their border security missions. One patrol soldier saw four rubber boats approaching the shore on November 2, 1968, but he left the station out of fear without reporting this incident.<sup>74</sup> This soldier's performance was totally opposite to South Korean soldiers in Vietnam. In 1968, South Korean soldiers were recognized as the most brave and loyal soldiers on the Vietnamese battleground. Only after one of *Uljin* residents reported the infiltration of communist guerillas on November 3, 1968, did the ROK military identify their appearance in South Korea.

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<sup>71</sup> For more details of communist guerrilla's mission, see *Anti-guerilla operations' history II*, 49.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

The ROK military, which recognized guerillas' activities after the civilian's report, then massively carried out irregular operations. However, anti-guerilla operations were not easy because those areas were surrounded by mountains. Thus, this operation lasted for about two months. The ROK military killed 107 guerillas and captured 7 guerillas. However, the action also caused serious damage. 52 South Korean soldiers were killed and 30 civilians were killed. This operation was considered a failure, considering that the operational areas were in South Korea where guerillas' military activities were extremely difficult. Moreover, the fact that communist guerillas were easily able to infiltrate was more problematic because it meant the failure of the mission given to border guards. As a result, two South Korean officers and soldiers were sent to court martial due to their negligence in border security and troop preparedness.<sup>75</sup> It was the same year that the ROK COIN forces achieved a remarkable success in Vietnam, and by doing so, many soldiers were awarded medals.

### C. The 1976 Axe Murder Incident

The last case that I examine in terms of within-case variation is the 1976 Ax Murder Incident. The Joint Security Area (JSA), *Panmunjeon*, is the only area in the DMZ where South and North Korean soldiers carry out security missions together. Two opposite sides of soldiers stand face-to-face in close proximity. South Korean soldiers and American soldiers had been responsible for the JSA of the South Korean side under the U.S. command ever since the Korean War (The ROK military, however, has been in command of the JSA since 2004).

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<sup>75</sup> *Anti-guerilla operations' history II*, 59.

On August 8, 1976, North Korean security guards attacked a South Korean-American security party that was trimming a big tree in the JSA with axes and pickaxes. South Korean-American soldiers were perplexed by a sudden provocative attack. Two American officers – JSF company commander Capt. Bonifas and Lt. Barret – were killed and 8 other soldiers were injured.<sup>76</sup> South Korean President Park harshly criticized North Korea while saying that “a stick is effective to deal with crazy dogs.”<sup>77</sup> This incident also made the U.S. consider the option of bombing North Korea. However, U.S. President Ford finally decided a soft option which was to chop down the tree. The action to remove the tree was carried out under Operation Paul Bunyan.<sup>78</sup>

The JSA is a most critical area because the opposite sides’ soldiers confront each other every day. It can serve as a powder keg at any time. However, security guard missions were South Korean and American’s routine work. They were less conscious of the potential for North Korean guards’ provocative attacks. Thus, South Korean security guards allowed North Korean guards to easily conduct inhumane attacks at them. North Korea should be blamed the most for this tragedy. At the same time, the routine nature of the security mission at the JSA made South Korean and American soldiers less alert in a dangerous military area.

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<sup>76</sup> Global Security, Operation Paul Bunyan: “Tree /Hatchet Incident” 18 August 1976, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/paul\\_bunyan.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/paul_bunyan.htm) (Accessed September 28, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> *The JoongAng Ilbo*, “North Korea’s ax murder in Panmunjeom,” August 24, 2010, <http://nk.joins.com/news/view.asp?aid=3452296> (Accessed September 28, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

The above three cases show that routine missions often end in failure because soldiers in charge tend to be less alert and able to accomplish their missions. Similarly, soldiers who are responsible for routine work, such as border security, also face repetition fatigue. Thus, infiltration or provocative attack was not that difficult from the perspective of North Korean infiltrators. These examples are cases of mission failure – a dependent variable – caused by a lack of enthusiasm and capability. More importantly, their low degree of morale and capability sprang from the nature of the missions – routine work – not the kinds of missions that lead to national prestige.

Accordingly, these cases show how significantly the type of mission affects the outcome. Highly important and crucially unusual missions create enthusiasm and generate capability. Additionally, when COIN forces are at an advantage due to their political and socio-cultural positions, their mission success becomes synergistic. This was what the ROK COIN forces did well in Vietnam and Iraq.

## **CHAPTER 3 THE ROK MILITARY'S COIN IN VIETNAM**

### **I. Overview**

The Vietnam War, like most wars, started as a conventional campaign in the sense that two big opposite groups supporting different states fought against each other. One group – the United States and SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) – sided with the government of South Vietnam, whereas the opposition – communist allies – backed communist North Vietnam. However, the nature of the Vietnam conflict became anti-guerilla warfare or COIN over time.

One of the reasons American forces entered the Vietnamese battleground in 1961 was to deter the Communist Domino Effect in Vietnam. The battleground situation, however, entered upon a new phase, so-called COIN, due to the strong emergence of the Viet Cong, which focused on guerrilla warfare. The United States fought against the Viet Cong with a conventional-power approach from the beginning: less so for the U.S. which used conventional tactics and massive technological firepower. By and large, the U.S. forces' remedy ended in failure. COIN led by the United States was unsuccessful in the sense that the United States withdrew its troops from the battleground in 1973, and the North Vietnamese army seized Saigon in 1975.

In addition to the U.S., seven countries, including the Republic of Korea, Australia, and Spain, participated in the Vietnam War under the slogan of “More

Flags to Vietnam” (see Table 9).<sup>79</sup> They responded to President Johnson’s request for the participation of “the nations of the Free World.”<sup>80</sup>

Table 9

Countries of COIN Coalition Forces in Vietnam

Year	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
US	17,200	161,100	388,568	497,498	548,383	475,678	344,674	156,975	29,655
ROK	140	20,541	45,605	48,839	49,869	49,755	48,512	45,694	37,438
Australia	200	1,557	4,525	6,818	7,661	7,672	6,763	1,816	128
Thailand	0	16	244	2,205	6,005	11,568	11,568	6,265	38
Philippine	17	72	2,061	2,020	1,576	189	74	57	49
New Zealand	30	119	155	534	516	552	441	60	53
Taiwan	20	20	23	31	29	29	31	31	31
Spain	0	0	13	13	12	10	7	0	0

Source: Yong-ho Choi, *T'onggyero bon Pet'ũnam chõnjaeng kwa Han'gukkun / Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces* (Seoul, The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2007)

Seoul dispatched the second-largest number of troops – around 320,000 soldiers for all participating years – to the South Vietnam battlefields, which was recognized as an unusual mission. The main units were Army Capital Infantry Division (Yellow Tiger/*Maeng Ho*), 9th Division (White Horse/*Baek Ma*), and the ROK Marine Corps’ 2nd Brigade (Blue Dragon/*Cheongryeong*). Table 10 shows the South Korean military’s area of responsibility in this COIN mission.

Table 10

South Korean COIN Forces Posts in Vietnam

Area	Forces
Da Nang	1 <sup>st</sup> Support Group 11 <sup>th</sup> Support Battalion (Sep 19, 1966 – Jan 29,

<sup>79</sup> Frank Baldwin, “America’s Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam.” *Critical Asian Studies* 7 (October-December 1975), 33.

<sup>80</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, Commander in Chief Report Section I (Washington, DC, 1968), 5.

	1972)
Hoi An	The <i>Cheongryeong</i> Brigade (Jan 7, 1968 – Jan 29, 1972)
Chu Lai	The <i>Cheongryeong</i> Brigade (Sep 9, 1966 – Jan 6, 1968)
Binh Khe	The <i>Maeng Ho</i> Armored Regiment (Nov 1, 1965 – Mar, 1973)
Phu Cat	The <i>Maeng Ho</i> 1 <sup>st</sup> Regiment (Nov 1, 1965 – Mar, 1973)
Qui Nhon	The <i>Maeng Ho</i> Division Command Headquarter
Song Kau	The <i>Maeng Ho</i> 26 <sup>st</sup> Regiment (Apr 15, 1966 – Mar, 1973)
Tui Hoa	The <i>Cheongryeong</i> brigade (Dec 26, 1965 – Sep 18, 1966) The <i>Baek Ma</i> 28 <sup>th</sup> Regiment 1 <sup>st</sup> Support Group 12 <sup>th</sup> Support Battalion
Ninh Hoa	The <i>Baek Ma</i> Division Command Headquarter (Sep 1966 – Mar 1973) The <i>Baek Ma</i> 28 <sup>th</sup> Regiment
Nha Trang	Field Command Headquarter, 100 <sup>th</sup> Logistical Support Command, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Support Group
Kam Lan	The <i>Cheongryeong</i> Amphibious Group (Oct 9, 1965 – Dec 25, 1965) The <i>Baek Ma</i> 30 <sup>th</sup> Regiment
Di Ahn	The Dove (Bidulgi) Unit (Mar 16, 1965 – Mar, 1973)
Vung Tau	1 <sup>st</sup> Hospital (Sep 22, 1964 – Mar, 1973) Taekwon-do (Korean Martial Art) team
Ho Chi Minh (Saigon)	ROK FV (Republic of Korea Force in Vietnam) Command Headquarters (Oct 20, 1965 – Mar, 1973) Navy group/the <i>Baek Gu</i> Squadron (Jul 7, 1965 – Mar, 1973) Air Force Support Group/ <i>Eun Ma</i> (Jul 1, 1967 – Mar, 1973)

Source: General Chae, Myong-sin. *Pet 'unam chŏnjaeng kwa na (The Vietnam War and Me)*. Seoul: Palbokwon, 2006.<sup>81</sup>

The overall strategic failure in Vietnam does mean that all COIN forces were unsuccessful at a tactical level. The ROK military fought well against Vietnamese insurgents in a situation where South Korea was not a great power like the U.S. Thus, the ROK military's participation was not only meaningful for more flags but also substantive for its role. The first question will focus on how the ROK military's success in Vietnam can be traced to identify the underlying logic of substantive roles.

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<sup>81</sup> I use McCune-Reischauer as Korean language Romanization in order to translate Korean to English.



## II. The ROK COIN Success in Vietnam

### A. Gaining Security: Strong Control of Assigned Areas

Since Viet Cong guerillas were dominant in the region, the ROK military suppressed their activities with the initial adoption of an enemy-based approach. This first phase of control was effective enough to regain security in the assigned areas by winning major battles against the NVA and more importantly against the Viet Cong (see Table 11). Their forces were in full control of their Area of Operation (AOA).<sup>82</sup> They also were capable in mountainous terrains; they controlled an area occupied by two North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalions within a few days on Phu Cat Mountain.<sup>83</sup> In addition, just three Korean soldiers were taken as prisoners of war (POW), even though around 320,000 conducted operations against the Viet Cong.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, during the first phase of operations, especially in 1966, the ROK forces' capture rate of POWs was highest with 7.0 per 1000 strength; the U.S. forces ranked second with 4.5 per 1000 strength (Thayer, 1977, p. 51).<sup>85</sup> Due to their remarkable achievements, 266 medals were awarded to South Koreans by the U.S., which was the COIN-leading country.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The COIN forces under the *Baek Ma* Division killed 204 enemies without losing one single soldier on October 25, 1968 as part of the Operation *Baek Ma* 9.

<sup>83</sup> See U.S. Department of the Army. *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 140.

<sup>84</sup> According to the ROK military, only three soldiers were taken as POWs, but all of them escaped or were freed. Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 43.

<sup>85</sup> Particularly in the first phase of the Vietnam War (in 1966 and 1967), the ROK forces captured more POWs per 1000 friendly strength than any of the other allied forces. Thayer, Thomas. C. *A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War 1965-1972* (Washington D.C.: The U.S. Department of Defense, 1977), 50-1.

<sup>86</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 44.

The ROK COIN forces' enemy-based approach was highly effective in the first phase, and by being so, their effective security control made them favorable to the step-by-step introduction of a population-based method in the second phase.

Table 11

The Successful Major Battles led by the ROK forces' Enemy-based Approach

<b>Operation code</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Contents</b>
Maeng Ho 5 ( <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	Mar 23 – 26, 1966	Massive nighttime infiltration * NVA: 331 dead, 287 POWs, weapons captured The ROK forces: 13 dead / The kill ratio: 25:1
Duc Co battle ( <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	August 8, 1966	Decentralized operation The typical example of effectiveness of company- led tactical base tactics * NVA: 187 dead, 6 POWs, weapons captured <sup>87</sup> The ROK forces: 7 dead / The kill ratio: 27:1
Maeng Ho 6 ( <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	Sep 23 – Nov. 9, 1966	Cave operations (The suppression of Vietcong hidden headquarter) in Phuket mountatin * Vietcong: 1,161 dead, 518 POWs, weapons captured The ROK forces: 30 dead / The kill ratio: 39:1
Baek Ma 1 ( <i>Baek Ma</i> )	Jan 21 – March 5, 1967	Cave operations The importance of information by POWs * Vietcong: 393 dead, 31 POWs, weapons captured The ROK forces: 19 dead / The kill ratio: 21:1
Tra Binh Dong Battle ( <i>Cheongryeong</i> )	Feb 14 – 15, 1967	Decentralized operation The fight between the ROK one company Marines (11 <sup>th</sup> company, 294 soldiers) and two brigades of NVA (around 2,400 soldiers) - The effective company-led tactical base tactics * The ROK forces: 15 dead, NVA: 246 dead / The kill ratio: 16:1 * All company soldiers promoted to the upper rank.
Oh Jac Kyo ( <i>Baek Ma</i> and <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	Mar 8 – Apr 18, 1967	Centralized operations The successful collaboration between two divisions Keeping the line of supply (Highway one)

<sup>87</sup> For more on the outcome of Vietnam War, visit  
<http://cafe3.ktdom.com/vietvet/us/us.htm>

		* Vietcong: 266 dead, 145 POWs / Baek Ma: 19 dead/The kill ratio: 14: 1 * Vietcong: 608 dead, 272 POWs / Maeng Ho: 16 dead/The kill ratio: 38: 1
Hong Kil Dong ( <i>Baek Ma</i> and <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	Jul 9 – Aug 26, 1967	Centralized operations The destruction of Vietcong’s command nerve The collaborative operations between two divisions * Vietcong: 394 dead, 57 POWs, weapons captured Maeng Ho: 21 dead / The kill ratio: 19: 1 * Vietcong: 271 dead, 61 POWs, weapons captured Baek Ma: 9 dead / The kill ratio: 30: 1
Bo Mul Sun ( <i>Cheongryeong</i> )	Jul 14, 1967	The collaborative operations between ROK and US The seizure of massive war supplies * K44 rifle: 975, K56 rifle: 189, etc
Mae Hwa ( <i>Maeng Ho</i> )	Aug 20 – Sep 6, 1967	The guarantee of Presidential Election (Sep 3, 1967) The turnout of area under Maeng Ho’s control: 90 % of local population

**Source:** General Chae, Myong-sin. 2006. *Pet ‘ŭnam chŏnjaeng kwa na / The Vietnam War and Me.* Seoul: Palbokwon.

The ROK troops under General Chae Myung-Shin, Commander of ROKFV (Republic of Korea Force in Vietnam), made remarkable achievements as soon as its first major troops arrived on the Vietnamese battleground in 1965. There existed four military regions in South Vietnam, and the ROK troops mostly took charge of Region II.<sup>88</sup> The ROK troops shared some operation areas with U.S. troops, particularly the U.S. Marines within Region II, but they conducted operations independently from U.S. Command. The ROK military stationed its command headquarters in Saigon. The marine brigade secured the areas of Hoi

<sup>88</sup> Thomas J. Barnes, “Memorandum: Provincial and Regional Pacification in Vietnam,” 12, January 2002, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed March 29, 2010), 22-4.

An, Chu Lai, Tui Hoa, and Kam Lan, and the one Army division – the *Maeng Ho* – controlled the areas of Binh Khe, Phu Cat, Qui Nhon, and Song Kau.<sup>89</sup> The marine brigade and army division rapidly started to secure those areas through criss-cross searches as soon as they arrived.<sup>90</sup>

#### B. Tracing Evaluation of the ROK COIN Success in Vietnam

Positive evaluations of the ROK military's performance in Vietnam can be traced through multiple sources: self-evaluation of the ROK forces, American military commanders' judgment, assessment from the U.S. military, the U.S. overall evaluation, South Vietnam's evaluation, and civilians' accounts by reporters.

General Chae's autobiography provides a detailed account of what South Korean troops did in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> South Korean troops fully separated the local Vietnamese from Viet Cong guerillas by tightly controlling their AOA through successful battles. South Korean troops captured the highest number of POWs in 1966 in terms of the number of POWs per 1,000 strength, and few Korean soldiers were taken as POWs.<sup>92</sup> The ROK military's pacification project was initiated when the ROK COIN forces started to gain physical security in the regions.

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<sup>89</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*.

<sup>90</sup> Barnes, "Memorandum: Provincial and Regional Pacification in Vietnam," 22.

<sup>91</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*.

<sup>92</sup> Particularly in the first phase of the Vietnam War (in 1966 and 1967), the ROK forces captured more POWs per 1000 friendly strength than any of the other allied forces. Thayer, *A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, 51.

Is self-evaluation of the ROK forces supported by external evaluations? To begin with, the U.S. commanders admired South Korean troops' achievements in Vietnam. The commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General William Westmoreland, praised the ROK forces' achievements in Vietnam several times. In a meeting in the summer of 1966, the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told the ROK Minister of Defense, Kim Sung-Un, that "General Westmoreland praised highly the performance of the Korean troops in South Vietnam" and that the ROK troops are dedicated and well-trained.<sup>93</sup> In a House Conference in 1967, General Westmoreland also evaluated Korean soldiers first class warriors.<sup>94</sup> In a meeting in October 1967, Westmoreland expressed to the ROK Prime Minister "his great admiration for the performance of Korean soldiers in Vietnam and for their leaders."<sup>95</sup> He "specifically praised General Chae and presented the Prime Minister with a highly favorable report on the Korean forces which had been prepared by his staff."<sup>96</sup>

In addition to the U.S. military generals, the U.S. military, the leading country of the COIN coalition forces in Vietnam, positively evaluated the ROK COIN forces as a whole. According to the report on the role of allies in the

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<sup>93</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 181-82.

<sup>94</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 507. Similarly, Thomas Barnes, who was the principal senior advisor in Binh Long (1967-68) and Deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) military region II in Vietnam, said that "The Koreans were formidable combatants." Thomas J. Barnes, "Memorandum: Provincial and Regional Pacification in Vietnam, 12," 22.

<sup>95</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 288.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Vietnam War issued by the U.S. Department of the Army in 1975, the U.S. military highly valued Korean troops' effectiveness and management in Vietnam, which shows that American troops had high opinions of South Korean troops' performance. The report says that "the Koreans showed remarkable ingenuity in handling many of their requirements with a minimum of equipment."<sup>97</sup> It also sees South Korean soldiers as highly professional.<sup>98</sup> Other U.S. military records state that South Korean forces were highly effective, particularly in terms of kill ratio.<sup>99</sup> In Vietnam, non-combat troops often had to engage in combat against guerillas; even their performance was outstanding. Thus, the American military tried to learn from the remarkable performance of even non-combat troops. The Dove unit – a non-combat unit – killed 18 guerillas and captured their weapons in a single fight with guerillas in 1966.<sup>100</sup> Impressed by this performance, the 1st division commander of the U.S. military praised the South Korean's ambush tactics and asked the Dove unit to teach his soldiers about South Korean tactics.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 143-44.

<sup>98</sup> The report says that "Korean operations in Vietnam were highly professional, well planned, and thoroughly executed; limited in size and scope, especially in view of assets made available; generally unilateral and within the Korean tactical area of responsibility; subject to domestic political considerations; and highly successful in terms of kill ratio." *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>99</sup> According to the September 1971 record, Korean Forces killed NVA (North Vietnamese Army)/VC (Viet Cong) troops with a kill ratio of 1 to 60. Barnes, "Memorandum: Provincial and Regional Pacification in Vietnam," 27.

<sup>100</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *Chŭngŏn ūl tonghae bon Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kwa Han'guk kun 1 / The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 894.

<sup>101</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 894.

Since the ROK soldiers were famous for their remarkable performance in Vietnam, the U.S. forces often asked them to come to American areas of operations and fight with them. While the ROK forces successfully suppressed the Viet Cong in Quy Nhon in 1966 based on their own tactics (company-led tactical base), the U.S. forces struggled with fighting against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in Duc Co around Cambodia. Thus, the U.S. forces asked the ROK forces to send South Korean units to Duc Co so that they could fight against the NVA with South Korean soldiers. The American forces' request was intended to figure out whether the ROK forces' tactics were effective to fight against a large-unit enemy as well as a small-scale guerilla fight.<sup>102</sup> The 9th company of the 1st armor regiment of the *Maeng Ho* division was outstanding in winning the battle of Duc Co.<sup>103</sup> American General Walker, who was suspicious of South Korean tactics, held the hands of South Korean battalion commander Byoung-soo Choi after the battle while saying that "you did a great job."<sup>104</sup> As a consequence, this battle led American soldiers to evaluate South Korean soldiers more positively, and the U.S. forces started to learn the ROK military's tactics.

The U.S. Congress also recognized the remarkable performance of their Korean ally in Vietnam. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report unusually praises the ROK military's performance in Vietnam. When senators

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<sup>102</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 375.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 379.

asked about the ROK military's performance at Binh Dinh in 1972, the U.S. military told them that "they had done a good job."<sup>105</sup>

The South Vietnamese government also recognized the remarkable performance of the ROK forces. Thus, it asked Seoul to send more troops to Vietnam. In a letter sent by the South Vietnam Prime Minister to the South Korean Prime Minister on February 14, 1966, he praised the ROK military as brave and useful forces.<sup>106</sup> Surrounded by external assessment, the South Korean government also cited the remarkable performance of their forces in Vietnam as a reason for additional dispatch in the letter which the South Korean government sent to the National Assembly.<sup>107</sup>

More important, non-governmental sources also verify South Korean troops' performance. *The New York Times*, on February 12, 1967, reported the ROK military's impressive performance, such as the kill ratio of 15 to 1 and successful pacification projects.<sup>108</sup> A more balanced and livelier evaluation on the ROK military's performance came from Katsuichi Honda, Japanese newspaper correspondent of the *Ashai Shimbun*. He worked as a combat reporter on the Vietnamese battleground from 1966 to 1968. By arguing that his eyes are the real

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<sup>105</sup> Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 – Assessment and Strategy, "Excerpts: Foreign Relations Committee Report," June 29, 1972, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed February 21, 2010). Internal quotation mark omitted.

<sup>106</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *Chŭngŏn ũl tonghae bon Pet 'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kwa Han 'guk kun 1/ The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 958.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 960.

<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Randal, "Korean Fighters True to Nickname: Act Role of 'Fierce Tigers' in South Vietnam Duties," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1967, 8.



data, he said that “on the battleground the ROK Army is undoubtedly the best among those foreign armies in Vietnam.”<sup>109</sup>

In a nutshell, the ROK military’s performance in Vietnam was outstanding. The ROK military’s remarkable performance often even made other foreign allies jealous of it.<sup>110</sup> If the ROK military conducted COIN operations effectively, the remaining question should be “how?” Exceptional performance by the ROK military would not have been feasible if it had not been equipped with an enthusiasm and capability for COIN drawn from the nature of a mission crucial for national prestige, particularly because it had focused on conventional warfare against North Korea’s regular forces before the deployment.

### **III. The Nature of Unusual COIN Mission in Vietnam**

What was the key driver that led to the success of the ROK forces in Vietnam? The nature of unusual missions functioned as the key driver. Why was the ROK military’s COIN mission in Vietnam recognized as an unusual task? Since the ROK military had focused on national security on the Korean peninsula, which was based on fighting against the North Korean army, the overseas mission in Vietnam was an extremely rare mission. To be more precise, this was the first dispatch of South Korean troops on international ground in modern Korean history. A U.S. Army document, *Vietnam Studies*, recognizes the function of the ROK’s rare mission. It reports that “this [the Vietnam conflict] was one of the few

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<sup>109</sup> Katsuichi Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes* (Tokyo: Mirai-Sha, 1972), 241.

<sup>110</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 244-45.

times in Asian history that a Far Eastern nation had gone to the assistance of another nation with so many forces.”<sup>111</sup>

The special mission of Vietnam COIN was the fundamental driver for the ROK forces’ success, particularly because their missions contributed to national prestige. What types of national prestige did its mission success increase? The ROK military’s mission in Vietnam was regarded as highly important to boost two axes of national utility: security and economy.<sup>112</sup>

When it came to security, the North Korean army was looking for an opportunity to invade South Korea in the early 1960s. Thus, alliance with the U.S. was crucial for South Korea’s survival. Moreover, military modernization was essential to guarantee its security. Seoul recognized that South Korea’s participation would contribute to not only strengthening its alliance with the U.S. but also accelerating military modernization. In terms of the economic utility, Seoul needed more money and resources to keep developing the South Korean economy in the early 1960s. South Korea’s involvement in Vietnam served as the most important chance to obtain financial support from the U.S.

By the time the South Korean government recognized the importance of the dispatch of its forces to Vietnam, it had already begun preparing detailed plans for the role of the ROK forces in the Vietnam conflict before President Johnson’s request.<sup>113</sup> Encouraged by Seoul’s recognition of the importance of its unusual

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<sup>111</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 134.

<sup>112</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, preface.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

mission in Vietnam, the ROK military that would represent South Korea saw its COIN mission in Vietnam as the most important opportunity to maximize national utility, and by doing so, it retained a high degree of enthusiasm for mission success. The ROK military's high degree of enthusiasm made it possible to develop a high capability for COIN by minimizing adaptation costs.

The nature of an unusual mission drove the ROK soldiers in Vietnam to be armed with a high degree of willingness and capability. The enhanced willingness and capability functioned as one of the axes of the ROK military's success in Vietnam.

#### **IV. The Function of Unusual Mission I: Willingness**

The ROK military's mission in Vietnam was crucially important to maximize two utilities (security and economy), leading to national prestige. Thus, a larger audience paid attention to the mission success of its military in Vietnam. In a similar vein, since South Korean soldiers recognized themselves as representatives of the country, they were highly motivated to achieve their mission, and by doing so, their motivation enhanced their capability. Their recognition of the Vietnam conflict as a crucial mission armed South Korean soldiers with national pride and morale. It also made ROK military elites more than willing to adapt mission organizations to fight against insurgents. In a similar vein, it encouraged the ROK COIN forces to intensively study their Vietnam mission trajectory in an effort to guarantee mission success. The ROK COIN forces' enthusiasm, driven by the importance of the mission, contributed to reducing adaptation costs, which are required for COIN, by converting its

eagerness to capability more quickly. Above all, key utilities that made South Korea regard its mission in Vietnam as important need to be examined.

#### A. Expected and Achieved Utilities of Mission Success

##### 1. Two Key Utilities

The expected utility of mission success can be explained by looking at the ROK-U.S. alliance. South Korea's participation in its ally's war created two expected utilities: security utility (the presence of American troops in South Korea and South Korean military modernization) and economic utility (economic modernization).

First, the ROK military's mission in Vietnam played a key role in maximizing security utility. South Korea's security was fundamentally based on a long-allied relationship between Seoul and Washington. The U.S. government has assisted in the development of the ROK military organization since the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Agreement in 1953. The U.S. government financially supported nearly sixty percent of the ROK total military expenditure.<sup>114</sup> This strong support encouraged the ROK military to modernize within ten years after the Korean War, before the deployment to Vietnam. More important, under this alliance, both militaries shared information and weapons to prepare for the North Korean threat.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Young-Sun Ha, "American-Korean Military Relations: Continuity and Change" in *Korea and the United States: A Century of Cooperation*, eds. Youngnok Koo and Dae-Sook Suh (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 119.

<sup>115</sup> The Mutual Treaty in 1953 had a great impact on the ROK military organizational building and its development of military strategy. For more on this,

However, because the U.S. was struggling with an insufficient numbers of soldiers in Vietnam, there was a high potential for the U.S. to send its troops stationed in South Korea, particularly two divisions, to Vietnam.<sup>116</sup> A memorandum of a conversation between ROK and U.S. officials clearly shows that the level of U.S. forces in Korea was a critical issue to determining the ROK's participation in Vietnam. The memorandum states that "With regard to the level of U.S. forces in Korea, [...] the U.S. cannot undertake to make a precise, open-ended commitment. [And] we cannot say that we will keep any specific number of troops for any specific period of time."<sup>117</sup>

What made matters worse was that in 1964, when the first South Korean troops were sent to Vietnam, North Korea was stepping up its effort to invade South Korea. Thus, the ROK military's participation in the Vietnam conflict allowed the U.S. to guarantee the presence of American troops in South Korea.

The ROK military's participation in the Vietnam conflict also accelerated its military modernization. Several documents clearly show how much Seoul paid attention to military modernization during the Vietnam War. Seoul believed that military modernization was very effective to cope with Viet Cong insurgency as

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see Byoung Tae Rhee, *The evolution of military strategy of the Republic of Korea since 1950: The roles of the North Korean military threat and the strategic influence of the United States*, Ph. D diss, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2004.

<sup>116</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 144.

<sup>117</sup> Participants in this conversation were South Korean Minister of National Defense, Kim Song-un, the U.S. ambassador Winthrop Brown, and several generals/officials. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 81.

well as to deter North Korea's provocative attacks in the future. In this vein, the Vietnam War offered an opportunity to promote the learning process and achieve military modernization. In an official talk between U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara and ROK Minister of National Defense Kim on May 18, 1965, the two military representatives discussed military assistance and the military transfer program.<sup>118</sup>

A memorandum from Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton also shows that Ambassador Brown supported the ROK's military modernization request, including the provision for additional packages (e.g., six 155 mm howitzers and one assault transport ship).<sup>119</sup> The memorandum from the President's Special Assistant McGeorge Bundy implies that the U.S. loan offer for military modernization allowed another Korean brigade go to Vietnam.<sup>120</sup> In 1966, the *Washington Post* also reported that the U.S. plans to invest millions for the ROK's military modernization.<sup>121</sup> The Brown Memorandum of March 4, 1966 detailed the U.S. military and economic assistance.<sup>122</sup> The Memorandum states

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<sup>118</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 110-12.

<sup>119</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (McNaughton) to Secretary of Defense McNamara," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 155.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 164.

<sup>121</sup> Arthur J. Dommen, U.S Promises Millions to Build S. Korea Defense, *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1966.

<sup>122</sup> For the Brown Memorandum, see The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 963-5.

ten items for military assistance and six items for economic assistance.<sup>123</sup> One item shows that military assistance aims to “provide over the next few years substantial items of equipment for the modernization of Republic of Korea forces.”<sup>124</sup>

The ROK military’s modernization was accelerated by the ROK forces’ participation in the Vietnam conflict, and by doing so, it served as a stepping stone for military industrial infrastructure building. South Korea started making M-16 rifles in 1972 and a variety of guns in 1977.<sup>125</sup> Although the ROK soldiers used the M-1 rifle before the Vietnam conflict, all soldiers were armed with M-16s in 1975.<sup>126</sup> In a similar vein, military spending was increased so that the ROK military was more capable of maintaining national security against the North Korean army. The ROK’s military budget was 23 billion won in 1965, whereas it was 127 billion won in 1971.<sup>127</sup> A paper prepared by the Policy Planning Council of the Department of State dated June 15, 1968 states that “The return of the ROK forces from Viet-Nam will open the way to a strengthening and restructuring of the ROK military.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Frank Baldwin, “America’s Rented Troops: South Koreans In Vietnam,” *Critical Asian Studies* 7 (October-December 1975), 36-7; The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces, [http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/hall2-04\(blw\).htm](http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/hall2-04(blw).htm) (Accessed March 4, 2010).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 145.

<sup>126</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 772.

<sup>127</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 148.

<sup>128</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, 434.

Moreover, when the ROK COIN fighters returned to their homeland, they played a key role in modernizing and reforming their military organization. The U.S. also noticed the positive impact of the South Korean military's experience in Vietnam on its own military development against the North Korean Army.

Second, the ROK military's mission in Vietnam also played a crucial role in maximizing economic utility. The Vietnam War provided South Korea with an opportunity for economic growth as well as military modernization.<sup>129</sup> In 1966, the *Los Angeles Times* stated that "the direct and indirect economic benefits South Korea is receiving as a result of the Vietnam conflict will grow."<sup>130</sup>

South Korean society was struggling with economic poverty nationwide in the 1960s. The term of *Poritkogae* was used to reflect the yearly food shortage during the spring austerity (May-June).<sup>131</sup> Economic development was not a matter of prosperity but of survival for South Koreans. South Korean soldiers recognized how important their mission was for revitalizing the national economy. In an attempt to maximize economic utility, South Korean political leaders tried to increase their negotiation power with this opportunity created by the dispatch of South Korean soldiers to Vietnam.

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<sup>129</sup> By contrast, Vietnamese guerilla groups denounced the ROK forces as "mercenaries," which seek the blood of Korean people cheaply, on the radio. Douglas Pike Collection, "Phul Yen Guerillas Deal Heavy Blow to Korean "Mercenaries," Unit 02 – Military Operation, The Vietnam Center and Archive, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed February 27, 2010). For an article of the ROK Forces in Vietnam as mercenaries, see Hyun Sook Kim, "Korea's 'Vietnam Questions': War Atrocities, National Identity, and Reconciliation in Asia," *positions* 9 (Winter 2001): 621-35.

<sup>130</sup> *The Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1966.

<sup>131</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 25.



ROK President Park requested U.S. President Johnson's commitment to massive economic assistance in exchange for deploying South Korean troops to Vietnam and increasing their numbers. President Park visited Washington on May 17, 1965 to secure President Johnson's promise. A memorandum from James C. Thomson of the National Security Council Staff stated that "The Koreans have wanted a very specific commitment from us to maintain our forces in Korea at their present level."<sup>132</sup> It also mentioned that "Park will want all the reassurance we can give him on our continued economic support. We propose to include in the communiqué a general aid pledge: to finance Korea's essential imports, to make available \$150 million in development loan [ ]."<sup>133</sup> In the summit meeting on May 17, 1965, President Johnson said to President Park that "the U.S. planned to extend all possible aid to Korea. It planned to keep its troops there [and] the U.S. would finance essential imports and development loans, technical assistance, and food for peace."<sup>134</sup>

Interestingly enough, because of the ROK forces' remarkable performance in Vietnam, Seoul's efforts to seek more economic utility from the U.S. became easier. The ROK COIN forces, which began their mission as symbolic players in 1964, became substantive players through successfully securing areas assigned to them as time went by. The ROK COIN forces became substantive players in

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<sup>132</sup> The U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum from James C. Thompson of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, *Korea*. (Washington, DC, 2000), 96.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>134</sup> The U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, *Korea*. (Washington, DC, 2000), 97-98.

Vietnam particularly due to a fast adaptation tempo – lower adaptation costs – driven by the ROK military’s enthusiasm and related capability. Consequently, the U.S. requested another larger dispatch of South Korean troops, who fought well. Impressed by the remarkable success of the ROK troops, Washington and the South Vietnamese government officially requested the dispatch of one more division from Seoul on February 22, 1966.<sup>135</sup> The U.S. commitment to financial support was strengthened through subsequent dispatches. What is implied here is that the ROK soldiers, as substantive players, contributed to maximizing economic utility. U.S. economic aid contributed to the ROK’s fast economic growth during and after the Vietnam War. ROK GNP per capita increased from 79 dollars in 1960 to 1,011 dollars in 1977.<sup>136</sup> Five billion dollars were imported to South Korea through South Korean companies, which went to the Vietnamese market, military aid, and other byproducts.<sup>137</sup> This foreign dollar currency was used to intensively develop the domestic economy. Per capita income of North Korea at this time was 153 dollars, higher than in South Korea, which was 103 dollars.<sup>138</sup> However, starting in 1969, the per capita income of South Korea overtook that of North Korea.<sup>139</sup>

Moreover, the economic development achieved under this rare opportunity contributed to Seoul’s emergence as a middle power, and by doing so, South Korea started to draw attention to international security beyond national security

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<sup>135</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 31.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-6.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

on the Korean peninsula. Ultimately, the ROK military's mission in Iraq was the result of this trajectory.

The ROK's participation in the Vietnam conflict offered an opportunity for the growth of its national strength by achieving security and economic utilities. Thus, the South Korean government was proud of its soldiers' achievements. When President Park announced the withdrawal of its military on January 24, 1973, he stated that "the original mission of the Korean troops has been accomplished."<sup>140</sup> Since these two national utilities were expected to be achieved from the beginning, South Korean soldiers were enthusiastic about their mission in Vietnam. In a similar vein, they recognized themselves as key players in increasing ROK national prestige. General Chae stated in a memoir in 1969 that the ROK forces' role in Vietnam made the nation stronger and increased national prestige in the international arena.<sup>141</sup>

## 2. International Political Utility

Also important is that these two utilities contributed to South Korea's increased role in international politics. Before the Vietnam conflict, South Korea seldom enjoyed the international arena and instead clung to the Korean peninsula, particularly in terms of security and political issues. These two utilities, which were achieved through South Koreans' remarkable Vietnam role, gave South

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<sup>140</sup> Pak Chong-hui Statement, *ROK to "Immediately Withdraw" Forces from Vietnam*, January 24, 1973. The Vietnam Center and Archive, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed February 27, 2010).

<sup>141</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 78.

Korea an opportunity to gradually rise as a middle power in the international environment. South Korea hosted the 1st Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) in Seoul on June 14, 1966. The 1st ASPAC, in which foreign ministers from ten countries participated, was intended to promote peace, liberty, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>142</sup> It permitted South Korea to see beyond the Korean peninsula in the sense that South Korea played a leading role in establishing and managing this council. Thus, the ASPAC can be an example of how national prestige was enhanced from the ROK military's mission.

How South Korea had been recognized by participating in the Vietnam conflict can also be traced by the increase in communication between South Korea and the United States. The U.S. Department of State *Foreign Relations of the United States* series is a collection of governmental documents. The increase of communication on a governmental level can be traced by comparing three publications that deal with Korea based on the periods: 1958-1960 (title: Japan; Korea), 1961-1963 (title: Northeast Asia), and 1964-1968 (title: Korea). In the 1958-1960 period, South Korea played a small role in international affairs and instead heavily focused on domestic affairs.<sup>143</sup> *The Foreign Relations of the United States* in this period dealt with the sections on South Korea and Japan together. Similarly, in the 1961-63 period, the U.S. Department of State published *The Foreign Relations of the United States* and included Korea in the volume of

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<sup>142</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 624.

<sup>143</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*. vol. XVIII, Korea (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994).

Northeast Asia.<sup>144</sup> However, in the 1964-68 period, *The Foreign Relations of the United States* published an entire volume dedicated to Korea.<sup>145</sup> Since South Korea dispatched its troops to Vietnam, its voice could not be marginalized any longer, not only in the bilateral relations arena but also in the international arena. Thus, governmental officials discussed several issues more intensively and produced many governmental documents.

In this vein, South Korea achieved international political utility as well through its troops' mission in Vietnam. The U.S. failed to achieve international political gain because it withdrew its troops without success, whereas the ROK maximized international political gain by participating in the Vietnam conflict and winning a variety of battles.

## B. National Pride and Morale

### 1. Mission and Pride

Since South Korean soldiers were aware of the importance of their mission in Vietnam related to the aforementioned utilities, their morale and pride were extremely high. The U.S. military recognized the function of national pride in mission success. A U.S. Army document, *Vietnam Studies*, reports that "Many observers felt [...] that, as a nation, the Koreans must succeed for the sake of their home country."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. vol. XXII, Korea (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

<sup>145</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. XXIX, Korea (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000).

<sup>146</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 135.

In addition, South Korea had relied on the U.S. for its security since the Korean War. The ROK military had been assisted by the U.S. military in terms of organizational development and military leadership. Thus, South Korean soldiers also saw their mission success as an opportunity to show the world that South Korea had an organized military that was both independent and strong. *Vietnam Studies* states that “the Vietnam War was an opportunity to show that Koreans could operate on their own without American forces or advisers looking over their shoulders.”<sup>147</sup>

South Korean veterans who went to Vietnam recollect their strong pride. Military veteran Dae-myung Choi, who served in the headquarters of the ROKFV in 1967, states that since the ROK military’s mission was its first overseas deployment, soldiers recognized their mission in Vietnam with a great honor.<sup>148</sup> Another veteran, Duk-gon Lee, who served as a search company commander, mentions that all of their company soldiers thought of themselves as diplomats as well as combatants who enhanced national prestige.<sup>149</sup>

That South Korean soldiers maintained strong pride can be noted by a high volunteer rate. The 9th commander of the 1st regiment, Youn-il Yong, noted in 1966 that 98 percent of his company soldiers volunteered to participate in the mission in Vietnam, and that high rate was based on their patriotism and the

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<sup>147</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 135.

<sup>148</sup> Dae-myung Choi, Vietnam memoirs, *Pet ‘ũnam chŏnjaeng yŏn ‘gu ch ‘ongsŏ / The Vietnam War Study 3* (The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2004), 257.

<sup>149</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 359.

importance of the mission to the nation.<sup>150</sup> Marine veteran Eung-se Kim, who served in the personnel department in the *Cheongryeong* brigade, states that the volunteer rate of the artillery battalion was 100 percent.<sup>151</sup>

Soldiers' morale is critically important because it is directly related to their will to fight. Thus, high morale leads to success. South Korean veteran Kyung-jin Jung, who won the Tra Binh Dong battle, states that he was convinced that his company could win battles because his company soldiers' morale was higher than his enemies'.<sup>152</sup> In particular, morale is more crucial for COIN success because COIN mostly relies on small unit operations, and it requires patience. ROK soldiers' morale was high because of their pride about their mission. For example, the ROK Marines wanted to fight with the enemy as soon as possible when there were no combat missions.<sup>153</sup> Put simply, South Korean soldiers' morale was already high before their dispatch, and their morale remained high until the U.S. discussed its troops' withdrawal.

In many ways, soldiers' high morale led to the COIN success in Vietnam. Military veteran Sung-sik Choi recalls that morale was the secret of mission success.<sup>154</sup> One explanation is that soldiers' high morale was converted to their patience in guerilla warfare. South Korean soldiers' pride and high morale made them patient enough when fighting with Viet Cong guerillas. General Chae states

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<sup>150</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 198-9.

<sup>151</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 16.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

that while American soldiers stopped fighting against Viet Cong guerillas when it became dark, South Korean soldiers patiently stayed in one area even for a week to catch Viet Cong guerillas.<sup>155</sup>

In addition, high morale made all soldiers enthusiastic fighters regardless of their duties (combat fighters or non-combat fighters). Since soldiers' morale was very high across units, even non-combat soldiers sometimes wanted to participate in combat missions. Sa-yeon Park, who was a medic soldier in the *Maeng Ho* division, voluntarily participated in combat in Chanh Ly in 1966.<sup>156</sup> Surprisingly, he killed seven guerillas and captured 11 attackers in the combat operations.<sup>157</sup>

The other function of morale had something to do with bravery of fighters. COIN fighters have to fight against ideologically and spiritually strong guerillas who sometimes use brinkmanship-led tactics, and thus COIN fighters have to be brave enough to deal with guerillas: without bravery, there is no triumph in guerilla warfare. The ROK fighters, encouraged by national pride and high morale, were brave enough to fight against Viet Cong guerillas. The junior officers' role model of bravery helped soldiers to be brave. The ROK officers were very brave because they were selected officers. For example, when Captain In-ho Lee, who was the Marine intelligence officer, saw the Viet Cong throw a hand grenade during a cave search operation, he caught it with his body and was

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<sup>155</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 102-3.

<sup>156</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 252.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



killed while saying “it is hand grenade! Stay away!”<sup>158</sup> Junior officers’ bravery played a role in inspiring non-commissioned officers to be brave. The Marine division commander, Young-jong Lee, who captured seven guerillas with his soldiers and was awarded a war medal, recalls that his division was able to successfully carry out its mission because his soldiers were brave enough to get close to the guerillas.<sup>159</sup>

## 2. Efforts to Maintain Morale

Although South Korean soldiers’ morale remained high, the South Korean government and the ROK military paid tremendous attention to maintaining soldiers’ pride and morale because of the different nature of conflict in Vietnam, which was unconventional fighting. Two methods were employed: material, and non-material.

First, the South Korean government focused on material elements to maintain soldiers’ morale. The South Korean government maintained soldiers’ morale by increasing their compensation and allowance. On May 18, 1965, the ROK Minister of National Defense Kim asked the U.S. government to give Seoul enough money for “adequate pensions and death benefits for Korean casualties in SVN.”<sup>160</sup> Seoul also asked Washington to increase overseas allowance for the ROK military in 1966.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 134-5.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-1.

<sup>160</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 112.

<sup>161</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of*

Washington positively responded to the ROK military's continued request to increase its soldiers' morale. In a meeting in the summer of 1966, the ROK Minister of Defense expressed appreciation for the efforts of the U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara to enhance the morale of the ROK forces in Vietnam.<sup>162</sup> National and military leaders' concern for soldiers' morale helped sustain already-well-disciplined troops. Seen in this light, there was a huge gap between South Korean and American troops *vis-à-vis* their will to fight, morale, and organizational strength. An old woman in the town of Song-Cau said to a reporter that "The ROK soldiers are strong and well-disciplined, but the Americans are not so strong and they are often beaten by the NLF; they are loose and dangerous for us, though they are generous with their money and pay me well."<sup>163</sup>

Second, the ROK COIN leaders focused on non-material elements to keep up soldiers' pride. The ROK military started to recognize that it would take harder work and longer engagement to conduct guerilla warfare than it had calculated. Thus, Korean military leaders continued to make encouraging statements. They urged Korean soldiers to take pride in themselves about their missions and recognize themselves as "freedom crusaders," not "mercenaries."<sup>164</sup> The ROK military leaders also treated dead bodies with honor in their attempt to maintain soldiers' high morale. In the Operation: *Maeng Ho* Five in March 1966, the ROK

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*Defense for International Security Affairs (McNaughton) to Secretary of Defense McNamara*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 155.

<sup>162</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Conversation*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. vol. 29, Korea (Washington, DC, 2000), 181-82.

<sup>163</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 242.

<sup>164</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 469-71.

forces sent the 3rd and 11th companies to the center of an enemy field to retrieve dead bodies of South Korean soldiers.<sup>165</sup>

South Korean commanders also tried to give their soldiers time to relax and reenergize after battles. They recognized that since COIN would require harder and longer engagements, soldiers' tension and fatigue needed to be carefully managed in order to maintain their high morale. Accordingly, the COIN forces established facilities to overcome warfare fatigue on a regiment unit basis. A total of 9 facilities were established in areas assigned to South Korean COIN forces.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, the ROK COIN forces gave distinguished officers opportunities to have their vacations outside of battlegrounds, such as in Thailand and Taiwan. A total of 3,323 soldiers benefitted from these opportunities.<sup>167</sup> This program continued to encourage soldiers to fight harder through positive competition. A military veteran, the 26th regiment commander Jong-lim Lee, notes that vacation facilities helped soldiers recharge their morale and energy.<sup>168</sup> He further states that the resting facilities offered a place for a post-combat discussion where soldiers could share lessons learned on the battleground in a relaxing environment, which led to continuous success in Vietnam.<sup>169</sup>

In a nutshell, the crucial nature of the mission in Vietnam allowed South Korean soldiers to maintain high morale. At the same time, military leaders and

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<sup>165</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 352.

<sup>166</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 50.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>168</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 646.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

the South Korean government made a tremendous effort to sustain that high morale. Consequently, South Korean soldiers, armed with high morale, fought harder to increase their national prestige.

Indicative of this high morale is that some wounded soldiers voluntarily went back to their units. For example, a platoon commander, Chang-soo Lee, was shot and injured during the Operation: *Maeng Ho Six* in 1966 and then was sent to a field hospital.<sup>170</sup> Despite the doctor's persuasion to stay in the hospital, he voluntarily went back to his unit after staying in the hospital only for 15 days. This high level of pride and morale enhanced the ROK forces' COIN capabilities as time went by, confirming hypothesis 1A.

#### C. Enthusiasm for Its Own OPCON and Flexible Organization

The ROK military's mission success can also be traced by its tremendous attention to authority of operational control (OPCON) and its eagerness to adapt mission organization.

Independent OPCON was important to ROK forces because ROK military elites did not want to merely participate; they wanted to win their mission. However, the U.S. military took its authority of OPCON for granted for two reasons.<sup>171</sup> First, the U.S. military had OPCON for all military operations in South Korea. Second, the U.S. military saw unity of OPCON as natural for military effectiveness.

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<sup>170</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 472.

<sup>171</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 60-1.

However, the ROK COIN leaders, who saw the failure of the U.S. forces in Vietnam, wanted their own OPCON. South Korean troops tried to avoid U.S. command tactics based on conventional warfare. General Chae sought to have an individual OPCON, independent from the American forces, because he had a skeptical view about the American forces' conventional tactics, "Search and Destroy."<sup>172</sup> Nevertheless, the American forces insisted on keeping the ROK forces under their control based on Unity of Command.<sup>173</sup> The U.S. military commander pushed the ROK military division to "Search and Destroy" operations outside its sector.<sup>174</sup> When the *New York Times* interviewed one Korean soldier, he said that "You Americans move too fast and have to come back to the same place again and again to fight the enemy" by implementing Search and Destroy

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<sup>172</sup> For differences between the ROK and the US *vis-à-vis* operational concept, see Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 61-62. There is a debate in terms of the effectiveness of the search and destroy strategy. Andrade (2008) opposes the conventional wisdom that General Westmoreland's search and destroy strategy should be blamed for the U.S. failure in Vietnam. He argues that when American forces arrived on the battleground in 1965, they and their allies already faced a big conventional Communist army in the South by supporting General Westmoreland. He also argues that "While Westmoreland concentrated on the main forces and failed to prevent a guerrilla offensive in 1968, Abrams placed great emphasis on pacification and failed to prevent a conventional buildup in 1972." Dale Andrade, "Westmoreland was right: learning the wrong lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19 (June 2008): 174. Robert R. Tomes argues that nuclear strategy prevented the development of innovative conventional strategy in the 1960s. Robert R. Tomes, *US Defense Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 32-95.

<sup>173</sup> When it came to the matter of operational control, U.S. Army report stated that "There was a certain amount of confusion, nonetheless, as to whether the Korean force in South Vietnam would actually come directly under U.S. operational control or whether it would be a distinct fighting force working in close coordination with the other allies but under separate control." U.S. Department of the Army. *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 133.

<sup>174</sup> South Korean Units Use Big Stick in Vietnam Pacification Drive, *The New York Times*, February 13, 1967, 7.

operations.<sup>175</sup> Skeptical of these operations, General Chae kept asking for South Korean troops' own OPCON independent from the U.S. command, and in doing so, for his own authority for Korean troops' area of responsibility.<sup>176</sup>

General Chae saw independent OPCON as necessary for COIN mission success in Vietnam. However, his insistence gave rise to some friction between the ROK military and the U.S. military. *Vietnam Studies* states that "There was a certain amount of confusion [...] as to whether the Korean force in South Vietnam would actually come directly under US operational control or whether it would be a distinct fighting force working in close co-ordination with the other allies but under separate control."<sup>177</sup>

Despite this friction, the ROK military insisted on authority of OPCON by making logical arguments. One reason the ROK military pointed out was that South Korea should show the world that South Korean soldiers were not mercenaries under the command of the U.S. military, but voluntary assistants who were willing to help their neighbor.<sup>178</sup> General Chae told American generals that if the ROK military was under the authority of the U.S. military, it would be

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<sup>175</sup> South Korean Units Use Big Stick in Vietnam Pacification Drive, *The New York Times*, February 13, 1967, 7.

<sup>176</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 154-63; U.S. Department of the Army. *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 133-34.

<sup>177</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 133.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5. For an article to analyzing South Korean soldiers in Vietnam as mercenaries, see Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's 'More Flags': The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 1994), 31-66.

caught in a trap set by communist groups.<sup>179</sup> He argued that communist countries would criticize the ROK forces as mercenaries who went to Vietnam to make money, and if that happens, the justification for South Korea's participation in Vietnam could be weakened, leading to the failure of psychological warfare.<sup>180</sup> His logical explanation finally persuaded American generals, and by doing so, the ROK COIN forces got their own OPCON.

The underlying intention of the ROK forces to maintain independent OPCON was that if they have their own OPCON, they would be able to conduct operations aimed at increasing national prestige, leading to COIN success. General Son Hui-sun who served as a planner for dispatching South Korean troops in 1965, states that the ROK military's own operational control was crucial for operations based on national interest.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the ROK military was able to minimize its casualties under its own independent OPCON because the ROK adapted tactics for COIN. Five thousands South Korean soldier were killed over 8 years, which was a relatively small number of deaths considering the harsh battleground. General Se-ho Lee, who went to Vietnam as the head of the liaison group, states that if the ROK forces had not maintained their own OPCON, ten times as many soldiers might have been killed in the same period.<sup>182</sup>

The ROK COIN forces' insistence in OPCON clearly shows that the ROK soldiers did not simply participate in the Vietnam conflict, but played a

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<sup>179</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 159.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 2001, 34.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 53.

substantial role in helping their neighbor and making progress in the Vietnam COIN. Similarly, their persistence implies their willingness to successfully accomplish their mission abroad. In a nutshell, both two national utilities and an international political utility were expected by the South Korean government, the people, and the military. Thus, South Korean soldiers fought harder. Furthermore, they fought better through an independent OPCON and by making the organization flexible for the Vietnam mission's success, confirming hypothesis 1B.

#### D. Mission Study toward Mission Success

The ROK military success in Vietnam can also be traced by its level of mission study. Firstly, the ROK military spent a lot of time studying COIN-based historical lessons. The ROK military concentrated on other militaries' historical cases in COIN before the deployment. The British Army implemented effective COIN in Malaya through fast learning tempo thanks to its flexible organizational culture, whereas the American Army decreased learning tempo due to its very conventional-oriented organizational culture.<sup>183</sup> The British success in Malaya serves as the most common example of military organization culture determining the learning tempo. The ROK military deeply examined the secret of British troops' success in Malaya to learn from other forces'

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<sup>183</sup> Nagl (2002) examines the importance of learning by comparing the British Army's success and the American Army's failure. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.



experiences. Similarly, military analysts argued that American troops fought in Vietnam in the same way that they had fought in World War II.<sup>184</sup>

Secondly, in addition to historical studies, the ROK military also intensively studied the upcoming mission in Vietnam.<sup>185</sup> In particular, its upcoming mission study can be noted by examining several steps toward mission adaptation: a battleground study by a military advisory group, the dispatch of a non-combat unit as the first force in Vietnam, and the dispatch of major combat forces (see Table 12). The step-by-step dispatch was intended to minimize adaptation costs by familiarizing the ROK military with battleground situations.

First of all, the ROK military sent a military advisory group to Vietnam in its attempt to examine political, military, and societal situations in South Vietnam on May 11, 1962. The military advisory group was led by two-star general Sim Heung-sun and was composed of 15 members.<sup>186</sup> This preliminary examination contributed to reducing adaptation costs when substantive troops arrived on the Vietnamese battleground.

Table 12

The Step-by-step Dispatch to Minimize Adaptation costs in Vietnam

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<sup>184</sup> Max Boot, "The Lessons of a Quagmire," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2003.

<sup>185</sup> Similarly, Choi argues that ROK President Park Chung Hee paid tremendous attention to mission study in Vietnam, and by doing so, the ROK mission forces' capacity was strengthened. Yong-ho Choi, *Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng esŏ Han'guk kunui Jakchŏn mit Minsasimnichŏn Suhaengpangbŏp kwa kyŏl / The ROK forces' military/civil affairs-psychological operations and its outcome*, Ph.D diss, Kyunggi University, 2005, 174.

<sup>186</sup> The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces, <http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/hall1-2-03.htm> (Accessed October 8, 2010).

<b>Mission Steps</b>	<b>Adaptation Pace</b>	<b>Dispatched Units</b>
The first step	Initial mission study	Military advisory groups (May 1962) : 15 officers
The second step	Non-combat troops	A. The first dispatch (September 1964) Mobile Army Surgical Hospital: 130 soldiers Taekwondo team: 10 instructors B. The second dispatch: The Dove Unit (March 1965) An Army engineer battalion/transport company A Marine engineer company A security battalion One Navy LST with crew * Troop size: 2,000
The third step	Combat troops	A. The third dispatch: October 1965 An Army division ( <i>Maeng Ho</i> ) A Marine brigade ( <i>Cheongryeong</i> ) B. The fourth dispatch An Army 26th regiment: April 1966 An Army division ( <i>Baek Ma</i> ): October 1966 * Troop size of A and B: 50,000 C. The fifth dispatch: July 1967 * Troop size: 2,963

Sources: The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces (<http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr>), Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, and U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*.

The second step was intended to make the Vietnamese see the ROK forces as friendly soldiers, not occupiers, by dispatching non-combat troops. The dispatch of a non-combat unit was intended to begin preliminary planning for large scale combat forces' participation.<sup>187</sup> For example, although a Marine engineer company was dispatched to Vietnam in the second step, the ROK Marine headquarters expected the dispatch of combat troops, and thus, it was already preparing for combat missions by devising the plan for combat troops'

<sup>187</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 121.

dispatch in May 1965.<sup>188</sup> These intentions contributed to reducing adaptation costs by giving South Korean troops time required for comprehensive preparation before a large-scale engagement. The second step was initiated by dispatching a Korean Mobile Army Hospital and Taekwondo (Korean martial art) instructors to Vietnam. The Vietnamese preferred South Korean hospitals because of a similarity of South Korean hospital personnel's appearance, which was one of the advantages for South Korean troops to carry out COIN operations in Vietnam.<sup>189</sup> There were American and Australian hospitals in addition to the South Korean hospital in Vung Tau, but more residents wanted to go to the South Korean hospital. Lieutenant Moon, who served in the South Korean hospital, states that more than 60 percent of local residents liked South Koreans when his troops arrived at Vung Tau.<sup>190</sup> Experiences from a Korean Mobile Army Hospital offered a very important opportunity for later success of COIN.<sup>191</sup>

The second step was completed by dispatching the Dove Unit, which was mostly composed of engineering groups. The title of this unit was chosen because the dove symbolizes peace.<sup>192</sup> Similar to the first dispatch, the title of the Dove Unit was intended to encourage the Vietnamese to see Korean troops as helpers, not occupiers. This unit constructed roads and buildings around Saigon. The Dove

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<sup>188</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> I intensively examine the political and socio-cultural advantages of South Korea in Vietnam COIN later.

<sup>190</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 876.

<sup>191</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 26.

<sup>192</sup> Similarly, the ROK military named its COIN unit in Iraq the *Zaytun* (meaning peace) division. I will deal with this case in chapter four.

unit was quite successful at making the local population see South Koreans as their friends. When the Dove unit soldiers visited villages, residents often sang Korean songs, such as *Arirang*, for them.<sup>193</sup> The Dove unit's activities facilitated the subsequent combat troops' acceptance.

The ROK military, after completing the second adaptation, started sending its combat troops to Vietnam. The third step was initiated by dispatching the best army division and Marine brigade to Vietnam. The ROK COIN forces, which fully adapted to battleground situations, allowed the ROK combat forces to secure areas assigned to them within a relatively short time. Moreover, the success of major combat groups led to another larger dispatch of a combat division, the *Baek Ma*. The ROK COIN forces had become a corps-size unified but flexible organization in 1966 through the gradual process of adaptation to the Vietnamese battleground.

The ROK military's careful study allowed its forces to engage in COIN missions in Vietnam step-by-step, confirming hypothesis 1B. Hun-sub Lee, who served as a forward party leader in 1964, states that the ROK forces were able to achieve a successful outcome because non-combat troops laid a foundation for the upcoming combat troops.<sup>194</sup> In this vein, the secret of the ROK military's success in Vietnam was driven by step-by-step adaptation for the mission. The ROK COIN forces, which were constructed under thoughtful readiness, became the most optimal troops for COIN in Vietnam. In 1966, the ROK COIN forces had

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<sup>193</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 902.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

the best organization, which was able to conduct both enemy-based and population-based operations.

I have examined four features connected to the ROK military's willingness for COIN mission success in Vietnam. COIN mission in Vietnam was a crucial mission for the whole nation to achieve expected utilities, leading to maximization of national prestige. Thus, South Korean soldiers in Vietnam were armed with high morale and fought harder and better with a high degree of organizational flexibility and mission study, which confirms hypothesis 1.

## **V. The Function of Unusual Mission II: Capability**

The aforementioned commitment to success was converted into capability by allowing the ROK COIN forces to choose the appropriate COIN approach against enemies in Vietnam. It also made it possible for mission organization to be flexible so that the ROK military was able to increase its capacity to deal with irregular operations. The ROK military's commitment to mission success also contributed to the cultivation of best units/soldiers for the mission.

### **A. A COIN Approach Adoption**

#### **1. The Initial Adoption of an Enemy-based Approach**

The military advisory group responsible for the first step of adaptation contributed to the initial adoption of an enemy-centered approach for the ROK military's COIN mission in Vietnam. This group recognized the Viet Cong insurgents' dominance on the Vietnamese battlefield, and by doing so, it encouraged the ROK COIN forces to adopt an enemy-focused approach in the first phase. The reason why the ROK COIN forces adopted an enemy-based

remedy in the initial phase was because it was extremely difficult and ineffective to apply a population-based approach in an insurgent-dominant region. South Korean veteran, Nak-yong Moon, states that only after COIN forces suppressed the Viet Cong's activities were they able to carry out civil-military operations.<sup>195</sup> Thus, in the initial stage, 70 percent of the ROK forces' operations were based on military combat operations, whereas 30 percent of them were driven by civil-military operations.<sup>196</sup> However, a balance between combat operations and civil-military operations had been maintained since mid-1967.<sup>197</sup>

Mission studies, like the military advisory group, were important to make the COIN forces understand the mission environment as fully as possible before their dispatch. Through mission studies, the ROK military knew that the South Vietnamese as well as the North Vietnamese admired Ho Chi Minh, which made the mobilization logic favorable to the Viet Cong. Likewise, the ROK COIN forces recognized that Ho Chi Minh supporters were easily recruited by the Viet Cong guerrillas.<sup>198</sup> Thus, the Viet Cong guerrillas were dominant, and they were conducting violent attacks. For example, in 1965 when the ROK forces started sending their combat troops to Vietnam, there were 10,601 terror attacks in South Vietnam.<sup>199</sup> Coastal regions in the II Corps area, where the ROK COIN forces were mostly responsible, were dominated by insurgent groups. *Vietnam Studies*

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<sup>195</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 152.

<sup>196</sup> Choi, *The ROK forces' military/civil affairs-psychological operations and its outcome*, 114.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 60.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 133.

states that “The most populated coastal province in the II Corps area, with roughly 800,000 people, Binh Dinh had been dominated by the Viet Cong for many years.”<sup>200</sup> General Chae stated in 1969 that most areas assigned to the ROK forces were dominated by Viet Cong guerillas.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, the Vietnamese in general maintained a strong spirit of resistance through historical experiences, such as fights against colonial powers, including China and France. By the same token, they had developed a variety of guerilla tactics over a long period.

The mission study rendered the ROK COIN forces capable of unusual missions abroad by leading them to adopt an enemy-centered approach in the first phase. The enemy-centered approach was aimed at gaining security in areas assigned to the ROK COIN forces. Thus, they set up standards to evaluate the degree of security in the areas ranging from A level to V level (see Table 13). With the use of standards, the ROK COIN forces brought 367 areas among 506 areas (about 73%) under their control, which implies that the ROK COIN forces possessed a strong security control.<sup>202</sup>

Table 13 Evaluation Standards for Security Control in Vietnam

Control level		Viet Cong’s residential area	Viet Cong’s sub-organization	Paying tax to Viet Cong
ROK force’s control	A	None	None	None
	B	None	Sometime	Sometimes
	C	None	Frequent	Sometime

<sup>200</sup> The U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 120.

<sup>201</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 84.

<sup>202</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 135.

Middle	D	Few places	Dominant	Regularly
	E	Few places		Organized
Viet Cong's control	V			
Etc	N	Unable to evaluate due to lack of data		

Source: Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 134.

There were two types of an enemy-based approach: large-scale operations and small-scale operations. Since the ROK COIN forces made mission organizations flexible, the ROK forces were able to conduct both large-scale operations and large-scale guerrilla operations. In the beginning, the ROK military had to conduct massive-scale operations to suppress a huge number of enemies in the assigned areas, but as time went by, small-scale operations were more effective because the Viet Cong carried out guerilla warfare.<sup>203</sup> What matters the most was that the transition from large-scale operations to small-scale operations was fast enough to achieve remarkable success. Thus, the ROK COIN forces were able to pay tremendous attention to anti-guerilla warfare. While the ROK forces conducted only 1,175 large-scale operations, which were operations that included more than a single battalion unit, they carried out 576,302 small-scale operations, which were operations that included a company unit or smaller.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Similarly, Choi argues that a large scale operation of the ROK forces was effective in the first phase but later a small scale operation was more effective. Yong-ho Choi, *Pet 'ŭnam chŏnjaeng esŏ Han 'guk kunui Jakchŏn mit Minsasimmichŏn Suhaengpangbŏp kwa kyŏl / The ROK forces' military/civil affairs-psychological operations and its outcome*, Ph.D diss, Kyunggi Unviversity, 2005, IX.

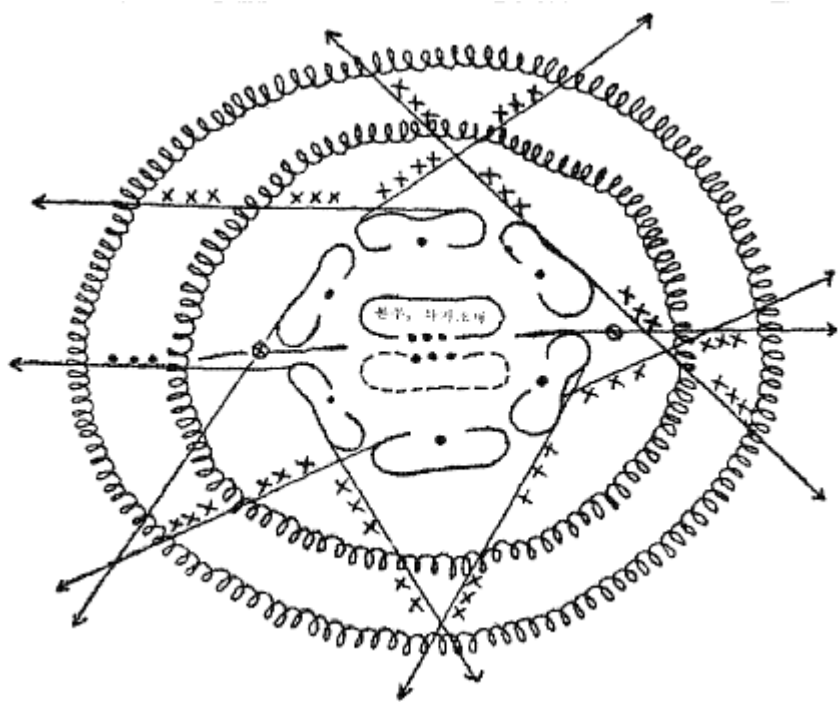
<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68.



Under battleground situations where an enemy-centered approach was required in the first phase of COIN in Vietnam, the ROK COIN forces developed their own enemy-based tactics – small unit-led tactics – which were different from the U.S. COIN forces’ tactics. What matters the most is that the independent OPCON allowed the ROK military to develop its own tactics appropriate for the Vietnamese battlegrounds. Put differently, the ROK military’s high morale was converted into COIN capability. General Chae devised the creative and adaptable tactics of company-led tactical base (*chungdae chönsul kiji*), typically company-size operations.<sup>205</sup>

Figure 4

The Floor Plan of Company-led Tactical Base



Source: The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the*

<sup>205</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 177-85.

*ROK forces through memoir 1*, 162.

A company-led tactical base was intended to achieve both defense and offense at the same time using a single company.<sup>206</sup> Offense was aimed at seizing the center of the guerillas' activities.<sup>207</sup> Defense was aimed at deterring guerillas' activities and holding the area for more than 48 hours even under attacks from larger units, such as a regiment (see Figure 4).<sup>208</sup>

Under this tactical concept, a big division spread out to the company level according to the newly devised SOP, and by doing so, effective small unit operations were attainable. The Department of the Army report of 1975 on the Vietnam War confirms that when the ROK COIN battalion arrived on the battleground, it conducted operations according to three separate companies and thus carried out small unit-based operations.<sup>209</sup> This small unit operation in a concentrated area proved quite successful not only for military operations, but also for civic operations.<sup>210</sup> The concept of a company-led tactical base encouraged more soldiers to contact the local population and thus allowed them to gather information *vis-à-vis* the Viet Cong.<sup>211</sup> The ROK forces' tactics proved

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<sup>206</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 159.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> The U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 140-41.

<sup>210</sup> Lee and Yim (1980) contend that the ROK military's small unit operation was one of the secrets for its success in Vietnam. Eun Ho Lee and Yong Soon Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1980), 90.

<sup>211</sup> The ROK COIN forces also saw aspects of psychological warfare in guerilla warfare with the Viet Cong. Thus, it taught its soldiers the Korean Martial Art,

very successful particularly in the battles of Duc Co in 1966 and Tra Binh Dong in 1967.<sup>212</sup>

By contrast, the U.S. military put a high premium on conventional fighting. The *Vietnamese Studies* shows that although the U.S. military started viewing military struggle on the Vietnamese battleground as guerrilla warfare, it saw large-unit fighting as a fundamental strategy in 1966.<sup>213</sup> Thanks to the South Korean troops' remarkable success, however, the U.S. forces started to adopt this tactic, which they called Fire Base, particularly after the battle of Duc Co.<sup>214</sup>

Some units of the U.S. military focused on small-unit operations. Particularly, the U.S. Marines engaged in small fights in the northernmost part of South Vietnam under the plan of the U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon (CAP), which focused on unconventional methods similar to the ROK troops. This small unit operation was possible due to the historical experiences of the U.S. Marines. The U.S. Marines had already focused on the different nature of small wars from conventional wars before the Vietnam conflict, because it used to conduct small wars in many countries (e.g., Haiti) during the 1920s. The Small

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*Taekwondo*, and further spread it to the Vietnamese population. General Chae said in his autobiography that the first Prisoner of War (POW) seized by the ROK forces was afraid of them partly due to their martial arts capacity. He reflects that this was part of the reasons for success in a psychological operation. General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 237.

<sup>212</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 62.

<sup>213</sup> According to *Vietnamese studies*, the US military recognized the importance of the balance between large-unit fighting and guerilla warfare. However, it still believed that "large-unit fighting necessarily plays a very important strategic part." Nguyen Khac Vien ed., "American Failure," *Vietnamese Studies* 20 (December 1968), 59.

<sup>214</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 86.

War Manual of 1940 pointed out that “The motive in small wars is not material destruction. It is usually a project dealing with the social, economic, and political development of the people.”<sup>215</sup>

The U.S. Marines used this Manual and developed more adaptable small war tactics in Vietnam. The U.S. Marines had recognized in 1965 that the protection of the local population and guerilla fights were vital to win the war in Vietnam.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, they focused on gaining the hearts and minds of the local Vietnamese. The U.S. Marines in Region I gave around 200,000 local civilians medical treatment and distributed about 140,000 pounds of food.<sup>217</sup> The U.S. Marines’ civil affairs project was successful. Some local civilians willingly started to give the U.S. Marines information about Viet Cong guerillas. Thus, the success of this plan allowed the U.S. Marines to become the most adaptable force to small wars and unconventional missions in the entire U.S. military.

The overall U.S. military organization, however, neglected to widen this plan to include the entire army.<sup>218</sup> The U.S. military depended on conventionally-oriented organization in general. The organization of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was more effective at resisting an invasion from the

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<sup>215</sup> U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Civil Affairs in I Corps Republic of South Vietnam April 1966-April 1967*. Historical Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington DC, 1970, 1.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>218</sup> Nagl confirms this mistake while arguing that “Westmoreland did not widen the concept [CAP] to include army units.” Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 157.

conventional NVA but was less effective at averting guerilla attacks.<sup>219</sup> By the same token, the U.S. inflexible organization failed to take advice both from the U.S. Marines and the British advisory team.<sup>220</sup>

Tactics of company-led tactical base, which the ROK COIN forces developed, were the most effective enemy-based method in Vietnam. The ROK COIN forces that had a remarkable success with these tactics expanded their TAOR over time. The ROK COIN forces, which were in charge of an area of 1,535 km<sup>2</sup> in 1965, were responsible for the area of 6,800 km<sup>2</sup> in 1969, and population grew in the areas where the ROK forces were responsible (see Table 14). Thus, the ROK COIN forces adopted close fight tactics on a small-unit basis over time, rather than kinetic fight tactics on a large-unit basis. In a similar vein, they used air bombings much less often than the U.S. forces because they thought that air bombings were not effective for COIN. General Chae states that the ROK forces used air bombings one-tenth as often as the U.S. forces.<sup>221</sup>

Table 14

The Expansion of the ROK COIN's TAOR

<b>Year</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>1966</b>	<b>1967</b>	<b>1968</b>	<b>1969</b>
Area (km)	1,535	4,470	6,800	6,800	6,800
Population	310	970	1,200	1,240	1,241

<sup>219</sup> Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 116.

<sup>220</sup> On October 23, 1961, the United Kingdom sent the British advisory team to Vietnam to pass lessons from success in Malaya, but the U.S. inflexible organizational culture hindered the U.S. from taking these lessons. *Ibid.*, 10. For the American-British cooperation in Vietnam, see Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

<sup>221</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 87.

(thousands)					
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Source: Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 63.

At the same time, the company-led tactical base made it easier for the ROK forces to apply a population-led method. A company strongly secured each village assigned to it but remained just outside of the village. Therefore, guerillas were separated from the local population.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, this base offered soldiers more chances to contact the local population. In this vein, the tactic served as a guide for the effectiveness of a population-led method in the second phase of the COIN operations in Vietnam.

The other creative tactic that the ROK COIN forces adopted was night-based operations. General Chae feared that the ROK military would repeat the American forces failure if it could not identify the Viet Cong's tactics: "Viet Cong is everywhere on the ground but they disappear whenever COIN forces seek to look for them."<sup>223</sup> Thus, General Chae identified the Viet Cong's orientation where guerillas in Vietnam did not make a direct attack during the day. He found that they used to strike COIN forces by intentionally exposing themselves and then tempting COIN forces to chase them. As a consequence, the ROK COIN forces employed night-led operations, just like the Viet Cong. They slept during the day and then sought to strengthen control at night. Accordingly, they minimized the scope of the Viet Cong's nighttime activities.<sup>224</sup> For example,

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<sup>222</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 568.

<sup>223</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 70-1.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 279-86.

company commander Seo-nam Bang said in 1967 that as his units started conducting night operations, the Viet Cong's activities were less dominant.<sup>225</sup>

In addition, one of the most important enemy-focused tactics was to disrupt the center base of the enemy, which offered mobilization, training, and supplies. The NVA 18th regiment and Viet Cong established the 226th base with the support of Laos in October 1969. The ROK forces worried that if this base were to function as a permanent base, it would weaken the effectiveness of an enemy-based approach where the ROK forces had been successful. Thus, the ROK forces conducted the Army Foundation Commemoration operation. In this operation, they were successful in stabilizing villages around the plains of Quy Nhon and Go Boi by blockading the intermediate supply base.<sup>226</sup> The enemy failed to increase its capacity.

Encouraged by the success of an enemy-based approach, the ROK soldiers were perceived as the best fighters against the Viet Cong and the NVA. Thus, enemies were reluctant to engage with South Korean soldiers if possible. The 1st regiment commander, Sung-kak Jun, relates one of the events that he experienced in Vietnam. He says that there was a consensus among enemies that when they fight against South Korean soldiers, they have to have at least three times as many soldiers as the South Koreans did. In the Operation: *Maeng Ho Six* from September to November 1966, when the South Vietnamese Army (SVA) came to

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<sup>225</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 203.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

the battlefield, the Viet Cong and the NVA avoided fighting with the SVA because they mistook the SVA for the South Korean Army.<sup>227</sup>

The remarkable success of the ROK COIN forces' creative tactics spread out beyond the Vietnamese battleground. Taiwanese President Chiang Kai-shek invited ROK military instructors to Taiwan in July 1968 in order to learn the ROK forces' tactics. He said that "the reason why the ROK forces were able to fight better in Vietnam than the U.S. forces was because they developed their own tactics."<sup>228</sup>

All of the above enemy-centered approaches were successful in the area where insurgents were dominant in Vietnam. Moreover, these remedies were tactically flexible enough so that the ROK COIN forces were able to develop their COIN capacity depending on battleground situations, which confirms hypotheses 2A and 2B.

## 2. The Image of Brutal Fighters

The ROK soldiers' strong security control made some Vietnamese recognize them as brutal fighters over time. Particularly, the image of South Korean soldiers as brutal fighters was part of the Viet Cong's psychological warfare. Terry Rambo, a private American project researcher, sparked the discourse of Korean troops' brutality. The *New York Times* reported on January 10, 1970 Terry Rambo's argument that "South Korean forces had murdered South Vietnamese villagers in

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<sup>227</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 428.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.



Phuyen Province” based on interviews conducted in 1966.<sup>229</sup> Influenced by the Vietnamese growing concern on this issue, in the same year, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) Foreign Ministry denounced the massacre by South Korean troops.<sup>230</sup> The *New York Times* also reported on January 16, 1970 that the ROK MND denied this rumor as ‘ungrounded’ and ‘deplorable’ charges.”<sup>231</sup> Some local villagers, however, kept alleging that the ROK troops killed 135 unarmed Vietnamese in the Ha My hamlet in 1968.<sup>232</sup>

South Korean veterans criticized the matter of representation of local villagers. Thus, there existed sharp disagreements between local villages and Korean veterans. General Chae has strongly denied most charges related to Koreans troops’ brutality. While he has joined conferences about war atrocities, he noted the huge gaps between alleged charges and the facts on the ground. He asserts with the honor of his name and his country that unintentional killings of a few ordinary civilians might occur because South Korean troops had to fight against hidden guerillas, but he further stated that South Korean troops never committed mass killings.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Robert Smith, “Vietnam Killings Laid to Koreans,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1970. *The New York Times*, January 16, 1970.

<sup>230</sup> Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 03 – Allied War Participants, “DRV denounces massacre by S. Korean troops,” January 08, 1972, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed April 23, 2010).

<sup>231</sup> *The New York Times*, January 16, 1970.

<sup>232</sup> Kim, “Korea’s ‘Vietnam Questions’: War Atrocities, National Identity, and Reconciliation in Asia,” 623-24.

<sup>233</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 489.

General Chae also argues that most of the alleged mass killing areas were not South Korean operation areas while stating that the Viet Cong and extremists overemphasized South Koreans' killings.<sup>234</sup> His statement is in line with Honda's evaluation through his experiences on the battlefield and in interviews with local civilians. Honda, the *Asahi Shimbun* reporter, stated that "the more frequent and closer the contact between the ROK Army and the people in a district, the more popular the ROK became."<sup>235</sup> South Korean troops might not be angels on the battlegrounds, but they maintained relatively favorable images with the local population, at least in specific areas, despite the bad conditions of bloody fights. If that is the case, what caused South Korean soldiers to be recognized as popular fighters rather than brutal fighters? Why did the Viet Cong's tactic fail? The introduction of a population-based approach in the second phase helped the ROK soldiers become more popular rather than being recognized as brutal.

### 3. Introduction of a Population-based Method in the Second Phase

When the ROK COIN forces started effectively suppressing the Viet Cong, a population-based method was introduced in the second phase of COIN. In an attempt to separate the local Vietnamese population from the Viet Cong, the ROK COIN forces developed operational tactics based on three steps: separation-interception-destroy. To that end, the ROK COIN forces set up tactical bases just outside of local villages.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 486-88.

<sup>235</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 242.

<sup>236</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 59.

It was imperative for the ROK COIN forces to closely cooperate with the local population for the success of the above operational tactics, which required civil-military operations.<sup>237</sup> To put it differently, gaining the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese was necessary. Although the ROK military considered hearts and minds on a tactical level (not a strategic level), its flexible adaptation was quite successful because this new method sprang from its other concern for unconventional military management.

One of the key operation's philosophies of General Chae was to "protect one local civilian even though you lose hundreds of Viet Cong."<sup>238</sup> He thought that such efforts promoted the separation between the local population and Viet Cong guerillas. Encouraged by General Chae's philosophy, South Korean soldiers' behavior was entirely different from American soldiers' behavior. Honda, the *Ashai Shimbun* reporter, revered the ROK behavior that he saw in Vietnam.<sup>239</sup> According to him, South Korean troops did not fire until Viet Cong did and never set fire to houses in farmland, unlike American troops.

General Chae's philosophy for gaining the hearts and minds of the local population materialized under three programs: the sanitized village program, the sister-relation program, and the good will program.<sup>240</sup> The sanitized village program aimed to protect local residents by separating them from Viet Cong guerillas. As part of actively implementing this sanitized village program, South

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<sup>237</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 59.

<sup>238</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 186.

<sup>239</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 239-41.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

Korean forces devised a sister-relation program which aimed to address the immediate difficulties of local Vietnamese. Under this program, they provided local populations with security and economic infrastructure. South Korean troops built safe villages, such as *Jae Koo* hamlet for local residents.<sup>241</sup> They built schools and helped drill wells in this sister village.<sup>242</sup>

One of the best examples of the ROK forces gaining the hearts and minds of the local Vietnamese within a relatively short amount of time was the activities of the *Jae Koo* battalion. This battalion was named after a brave South Korean officer who sacrificed himself to save his soldiers during the training period for the dispatch to Vietnam. As soon as the *Jae Koo* battalion arrived at its TAOR, it helped the Vietnamese and took care of patients. Thus, the local Vietnamese started to recognize the *Jae Koo* battalion as a friendly force. The initial success of the *Jae Koo* battalion in gaining the hearts and minds contributed to more defections of the Viet Cong. On October 30, 1965, less than a week since the *Jae Koo* battalion arrived, one Vietnamese woman came to the inspection office of the *Jae Koo* battalion. She told South Korean soldiers that since she was impressed by South Korean soldiers' efforts to help the local residents, she was willing to persuade her son, who had joined in the Viet Cong, to come back to her village by

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<sup>241</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 244-46. For the origins of *Jae Koo Hamlet*, see The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 289-293.

<sup>242</sup> *The New York Times*, February 13, 1967, p. 7.

defecting.<sup>243</sup> She went to a mountain where her son was operating, and several days later, she came back to the village with her son.<sup>244</sup>

The *Jae Koo* hamlet was the most successful case of creating a safe village. Most of the facilities in Phu Cat areas were destroyed due to the South Vietnamese army's operation against the Viet Cong. Thus, the ROK COIN forces built 150 homes and then offered them to refugees in February 1966. This hamlet became popular among the Vietnamese because the ROK soldiers strongly secured this village. Thus, a market appeared in the village, and the population grew to more than 3,000.<sup>245</sup> More people wanted to move in to the *Jae Koo* hamlet, and thus the *Jae Koo* battalion had to control too much influx of outside villagers.<sup>246</sup> Since South Korean soldiers were very popular, Phu Cat leader Captain Loc asked South Korean officer Jun-tak Kwon to make a brotherhood relationship with him.<sup>247</sup> The village name was also chosen to be the *Jae Koo* hamlet according to Loc's suggestion.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Kyung-suk Park, "*Pet 'ūnam chōnjaeng si Han 'guk kun ui chōnsul wa simnijōn Taemin chiwōn hwaltong* (The ROK forces' psychological warfare and civil affairs operations)," *Pet 'ūnam chōnjaeng yōn 'gu ch 'ongsō 1* (The Vietnam War Study 1), The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2002. 275.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-7.

<sup>245</sup> For more on the origins of the *Jae Koo* hamlet, see The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 289-293.

<sup>246</sup> Kyung-suk Park, "The ROK forces' psychological warfare and civil affairs Operations," 292.

<sup>247</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 292.

<sup>248</sup> Kyung-suk Park, "The ROK forces' psychological warfare and civil affairs Operations," 289.

In a similar vein, the ROK military carried out a good will program in their attempt to implant a favorable image of its soldiers among local residents.<sup>249</sup> South Korean soldiers showed their respect to elders and often demonstrated Taekwondo, the Korean martial art, for local residents.<sup>250</sup> In addition, under this program, 1,572 mobile hospitals as well as 51 general hospitals offered medical treatment to the local Vietnamese.<sup>251</sup> A total of 217,713 South Koreans and medical personnel participated in medical treatment activities from 1965 to 1972.<sup>252</sup> The military hospitals gave a total of 3,523,364 Vietnamese medical treatment from 1965 to 1972.<sup>253</sup>

One of the most productive operations carried out under the combined tactics of an enemy-based and a population-based approach was the Harvest Protection operation. This operation protected the local population with the use of enemy-based tactics. In 1965, the 5th company of armor regiment, the *Maeng Ho* division, was responsible for the Hoa Lac village, which was located 6km from the eastern side of Binh Khe. Hoa Lac residents were harvesting on the Hoa Hiep plain, and the Viet Cong had been attacking this area. Accordingly, villagers asked the 5th company to protect their harvesting areas from the attacks of

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<sup>249</sup> Lee and Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War*, 87-8.

<sup>250</sup> *The New York Times*, February 13, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>251</sup> Talking Proud, "ROK Army and Marines prove to rock-solid fighters and allies in Vietnam War," Talking Proud Archives, <http://www.talkingproud.us/International061406.html> (Accessed February 28, 2010). Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 137.

<sup>252</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 136.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

guerillas in November 1965.<sup>254</sup> The 5th company successfully expelled Viet Cong guerillas through three days of fighting, and as a result, farmers were able to harvest 70-80 percent of crops.<sup>255</sup> The success of this operation persuaded the Vietnamese to trust the ROK soldiers.

Similarly, South Korean soldiers were professional fighters from the viewpoint of an enemy-based approach, but at the same time, they stressed the importance of a population-based method. As a result, many local Vietnamese wanted the ROK soldiers to stay with them. The 9th company of the *Jae Koo* battalion was withdrawing from the *Jae Koo* hamlet after completing its mission in 1966. In the meantime, Phu Cat residents asked the 9th company to stay with them, and thus, the 9th company had to stay one more day.<sup>256</sup> Since the ROK soldiers were regarded as the best soldiers against Viet Cong guerillas, when South Korean soldiers stayed, Viet Cong guerillas were reluctant to engage. This was what happened in the *Jae Koo* hamlet as well. After the withdrawal of the 9th company, Viet Cong guerillas attacked a school that South Korean soldiers had built.<sup>257</sup> As a consequence, the *Jae Koo* hamlet residents strongly pleaded for the return of the ROK soldiers, and the *Jae Koo* battalion came back to this hamlet to be responsible for the security of this area.

The combined remedies were possible because they were initiated by an enemy-centered approach and were supported by a population-based tactic. South

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<sup>254</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 256.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

Korean veteran Young-il Moon states that the ROK had conducted two types of operations at the same time: one to physically fight against enemy combatants and the other to fight with hearts in their attempt to help civilians live under stable conditions.<sup>258</sup>

In general, the ROK flexible methods were positively evaluated. Nicholas Ruggieru, IPS correspondent, reported, “the Koreans not only fought well; they built bridges, roads, classrooms, houses, and more than 100 other facilities. They also engaged in a series of relief projects for bereaved families, refugees, civilian wound, and the poor.”<sup>259</sup>

The introduction of a population-based method in the second step was effective. First, it helped reduce the ROK military’s brutal image by adapting them to the battleground in Vietnam.<sup>260</sup> Second, it helped the local population see South Korean soldiers as crusaders, not as occupiers.

Company commander, Min-Sik Park recollects his experiences on the ground about the pacification project. In accordance with General Chae’s doctrine, he focused on the protection of every single local civilian in 1968, and villagers started to be grateful to his company’s soldiers’ efforts over time.<sup>261</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>258</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 520.

<sup>259</sup> Nicholas Ruggieru, *South Korean Forces Ending Task in Vietnam*, March 12, 1973, The Vietnam Center and Archive, <http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed February 27, 2010).

<sup>260</sup> Lee and Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War*, 83-90.

<sup>261</sup> The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces, <http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/technote6/board.php?board=gesipan6>



another junior officer who was on the ground took pride in the ROK military's effective population-based remedy. Vietnam War veteran Man-Won Ji, has written memoirs under the name of the truth in Vietnam. He went to Vietnam in 1967 just one year after he became an officer. He recollected in his memoirs that "local Vietnamese villagers wanted to receive food from Koreans, not Americans."<sup>262</sup> And he further said that "they were grateful for Korean soldiers' kindness and generosity by calling us *Dai Han*."

Under the second phase of tactics – an introduction of a population-based method – South Korean soldiers' behavior was entirely different from American soldiers' behavior. Honda shows a typical example to differentiate between Korean and American soldiers. He reported that Korean soldiers "got out of their jeeps [...] and handed it [gum and toffee] directly to each child," whereas American soldiers "amused themselves by throwing candy over the children's heads and watching them run and scramble for it like animals."<sup>263</sup> Similarly, South Korean veteran Nak-yong Moon also states that American soldiers threw rations (military packaged food) to the Vietnamese from their cars.<sup>264</sup> However, South Korean troops handed them directly to the Vietnamese after opening them.<sup>265</sup> In addition, American troops did not have trained interpreters on the front,

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&page=1&command=body&no=156 (Accessed April 24, 2010).

<sup>262</sup> The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces, <http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/technote6/board.php?board=gesipan6&page=3&command=body&no=27> (Accessed April 30, 2010).

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>264</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 150.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

but Korean military units had a conversation with local residents thanks to well-trained interpreters. The ROK military commanders always stressed that Korean soldiers had to be courteous to local residents.

The U.S. military attempted to evaluate the ROK's pacification project more carefully. The U.S. Army's report stated that the ROK pacification projects were more effective in an early stage (before 1968) than in a later stage (after 1968). The U.S. Army, however, recognized the overall success of South Korea's military pacification projects. The U.S. Army report mentioned that "Korean combat forces had their greatest success with small unit civic action projects and security operations within their Korean tactical area of responsibility."<sup>266</sup>

All in all, security control initiated by an enemy-centered approach was consolidated by introducing a population-based method later. This examination clearly shows how important a combination of the two methods is even in insurgent-dominated areas. The ROK forces secured the areas assigned to them. For example, the only area where trains ran in all of Vietnam was the South Korean military's tactical area.<sup>267</sup> Thus, more people came to the areas where South Korean troops were responsible. The number of defectors in South Korean areas was 5-6 times larger than in other areas.<sup>268</sup> Vietnamese who left their villages came back to their homes when South Korean soldiers secured their villages. Bam Re O, who was a leader of Phe Diem village, stated in 1967 that

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<sup>266</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 159.

<sup>267</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 107.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

when the *Maeng Ho* division soldiers secured the village, people who deserted their homes came back.<sup>269</sup> These combined tactics designed to win guerilla warfare were achievable particularly under the flexible COIN organization.

### B. Organizational Flexibility

The ROK military's eagerness for mission success tends to render military leaders willing to make organization flexible. Conventional military forces seek to centralize this organization under one unified command. The ROK military used to organize COIN forces based on a Joint General Staff in order to retain benefits from centralization. However, centralized and inflexible organizations are not effective for guerilla warfare in Vietnam. Thus, one of the biggest concerns of Korean commanders was to make the ROK COIN organization in Vietnam flexible enough to cope with the Viet Cong by keeping a balance between centralization and decentralization.<sup>270</sup>

On the one hand, in order to maximize benefits from centralization, the ROK military placed all South Korean troops in Vietnam under General Chae's unified command. On the other hand, the ROK military included one Marine Brigade in addition to two Army Divisions in an attempt to gain from

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<sup>269</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 152.

<sup>270</sup> Similarly, General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander in chief of the People's Army of Vietnam, conducted both regular operations and guerilla operations at the same time as part of regarding the Vietnam war as a long-term revolutionary war. For more on his tactics, see Jong-soo Kim, "*Ho Chi Minh kwa Vo Nguyen Giap ui chölyak kwa chönsul* (Strategies and tactics of the revolutionary war of Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap)" *Pet'ünam chönjaeng yön'gu ch'ongsö 2* (*The Vietnam War Study 2*), The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2003. 265-6.

decentralization. This combination allowed all Korean units to favorably compete with each other to achieve a successful outcome. Furthermore, the Marine brigade was under the authority of the ROK unified command, but it independently operated. Less intervention at the highest level made independent operations more effective because counter-guerilla warfare was not large-scale combined operations but was small- scale independent operations.

The ROK COIN forces had features of both centralization and decentralization because its organization was flexible. First, centralization under one unified command and decentralization based on small-unit operations served as the flexible organization. This organizational flexibility allowed the ROK COIN forces to be capable of both large-scale battles and small-unit operations. This flexible organization was effective because the ROK forces had to conduct both centralized and decentralized operations depending on situations, due to dual enemies – the NVA regular forces and the Viet Cong irregular forces. Likewise, this workable organization was a perfect match for the tactics of a company-led tactical base.

Centralized operation required a unified command, which the ROK forces already had. One of the best centralized operations based on a large scale was the *Oh Jac Kyo* operation. Two army divisions were dispatched to Vietnam in 1967. One division – the *Maeng Ho* division – was responsible for the northern part of South Vietnam, whereas the other division – the *Baek Ma* division – was in charge of the southern part of South Vietnam. This operation aimed at filling the middle ground area of South Vietnam by connecting the two divisions' secured

areas. This middle area – Song Cau and Tuy An – was dominated by the Viet Cong.

The *Baek Ma* division commander opposed this operation.<sup>271</sup> The problem was that this division's opposition could make it difficult to conduct a large-scale operation in a uniformed way. The presence of a unified command, however, functioned as an entity to address this demerit from decentralized divisions by integrating ideas and plans of both divisions. Put simply, this corps scale operation was possible because there was a unified command – the ROKFV. The ROKFV, under the command of General Chae, devised a plan to conduct this operation.<sup>272</sup> By successfully conducting the *Oh Jac Kyo* operation, 73,000 Vietnamese were liberated from the enemy's grip.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the success of this operation opened Highway One under the control of the ROK forces, and by doing so, one of the enemies' supply lines was blockaded. In addition, the success of this operation paved the way for more effective anti-guerilla operations against irregular guerrillas.

Second, under organizational flexibility, the ROK COIN forces stressed the importance of small-unit operations with light weapons. They flexibly changed organization depending on battleground situations. The 26th regiment commander Jong-lim Lee relates that soldiers' reliance on heavy fire does not guarantee

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<sup>271</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 2*, 145.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

success in combat in Vietnam because guerilla warfare is brain warfare.<sup>274</sup> Some regiments eliminated their single heavy machine company, which was equipped with heavy weapons, and then replaced it with a light-weapon based company. For instance, the 26th regiment used the 4th heavy machine gun company as a light gun company.<sup>275</sup> Put differently, the ROK forces remade their organization sufficiently flexible to win missions according to the battleground circumstances.

In addition, unlike the conventional organization that the ROK military employed for its homeland security, the ROKFV established the department of civil-military affairs under its command.<sup>276</sup> The department head was a colonel. Furthermore, each unit under the ROKFV also operated staff who were in charge of civil-military affairs.<sup>277</sup> Under this organization, each unit cooperated with its partners according to its position. For example, the partner of the ROKFV for conducting civil affairs was the South Vietnam government, and the partner of a division or brigade was a province (Tinh) size settlement.<sup>278</sup> Similarly, a regiment unit's counterpart was a town (Sa), and a company unit's counterpart was a village (Thon).<sup>279</sup>

Another important feature *vis-à-vis* the ROK COIN organization was that COIN forces were responsible for both military operations and civil affairs at the same time. South Korea believed that one voice under a unified command made

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<sup>274</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 645.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>276</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 130.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

organization more flexible to effectively deal with COIN. Thus, the South Korean ambassador in Vietnam, Sang-cheol Shin, did not intervene in the ROK military's affairs in Vietnam. Instead, he played a role only as the representative of the South Korean government. However, he recollects that unlike South Korea's unified and cooperative authority, there was friction between General Westmoreland and the American ambassador over their respective degrees of authority in the U.S.<sup>280</sup>

In short, the ROK COIN forces were able to deal with guerilla warfare effectively by making the organization flexible. Furthermore, these flexible organizations were managed by the best units, not less-professional units.

### C. Effective Resources

#### 1. The Best Units: Cultivating Elite Units

The ROK military chose the best units to dispatch. The ROK military commanders, guerilla war veterans, spent a lot of time selecting units eligible for the unconventional missions. In particular, the guerilla warfare experience of the ROK COIN leaders helped them to select South Korean units with high standards to successfully complete unconventional operations. Military leaders decided to dispatch the most professional units for the first combat missions: the *Maeng Ho* division and the *Cheongryeong* brigade.

South Korean military leaders put a high premium on combat experience when they chose the effective divisions to deal with the Viet Cong. Thus, they

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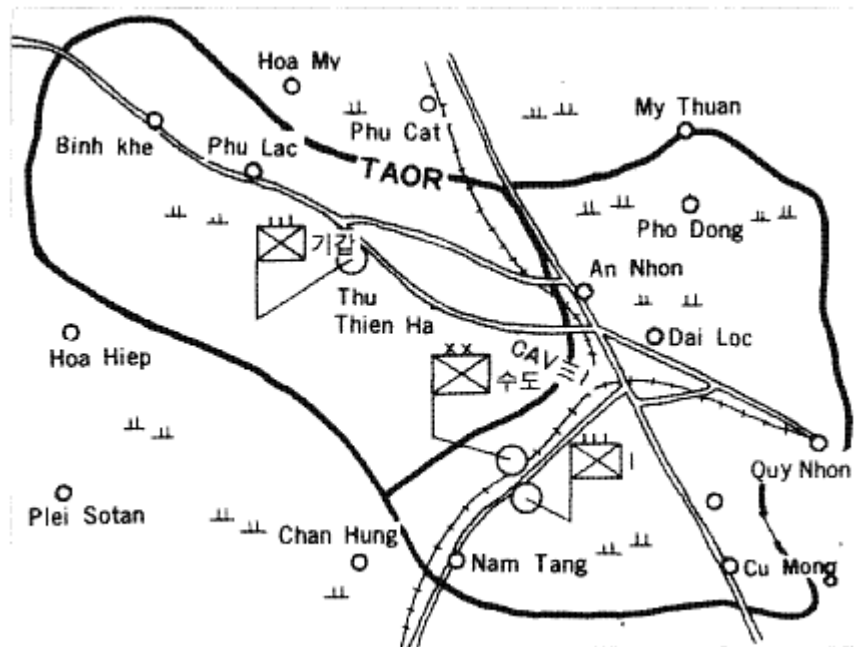
<sup>280</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 715.

decided to dispatch the Army Capital division (*Maeng Ho*) and the Marine brigade (*Cheongryeong*), which made great achievements during the Korean War as its first combat troops.<sup>281</sup>

Figure 5

The TAOR of the *Maeng Ho* Division

As of November 1965



Source: The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 160.

The *Maeng Ho* division had the crucial mission to protect the ROK capital, Seoul, before its deployment to Vietnam. Accordingly, this division possessed the smartest and best-trained officers. The *Maeng Ho* division arrived at Quy Nhon on October 22, 1965 and took over the South Korean TAOR, which ranged over 1,200 km, from the U.S. military (see Figure 5). Since it was the best division in

<sup>281</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 129-131.



the South Korean military, it was able to reduce its adaptation costs. It successfully secured its TAOR by suppressing the Viet Cong through 175,107 engagements.<sup>282</sup>

The *Cheongryeong* brigade was also selected because the ROK Marines were evaluated as the best branch in the ROK military. Since guerilla warfare requires a brave spirit, the Marines were the optimal forces in COIN in Vietnam, particularly when the ROK forces adopted an enemy-centered approach in the initial phase. For example, when the ROK Marines carried out the operation to return the city of Hoi An in December 1967, all the Marines of the 3rd battalion were highly motivated. Thus, they were able to win the urban warfare in the city of Hoi An.

The mother unit of the dispatching *Cheongryeong* brigade had achieved remarkable success in many battles during the Korean War.<sup>283</sup> Thus, the Marines were evaluated as best of the best. Military veteran Tae-suk Jung, who served as the *Cheongryeong* brigade's chief of staff, recalls that the Marines were armed with pride, and they agreed that defeat is not acceptable.<sup>284</sup>

Since the Marines were the best branch, it was successful in securing assigned areas within a relatively short amount of time. Put simply, the best unit helped reduce adaptation costs on the battleground. The *Cheongryeong* brigade arrived at Dong Ba Thin in October 1965 and successfully secured Tuy Hoa

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<sup>282</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 155.

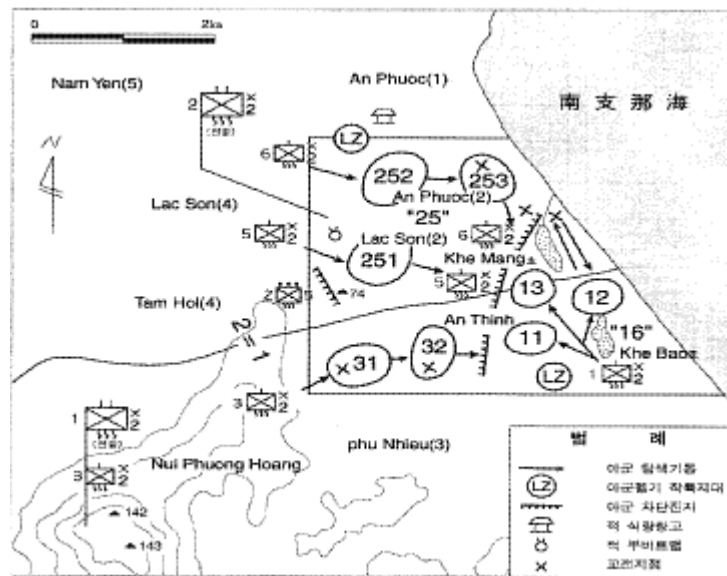
<sup>283</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 100.

<sup>284</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 14.

within two months in December 1965.<sup>285</sup> In particular, Highway One was secured under the *Cheongryeong* brigade's control. By securing this area, it also cut off the Viet Cong's supply line and helped address the food shortage of the local population.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, the *Cheongryeong* brigade won the Tra Binh Dong battle, which was one of the most renowned military battles in world history. One Marine Company (around 300 soldiers) – the 11th company – defeated two NVA regiments (around 2,500 soldiers) at Tra Binh Dong on February 14, 1967.<sup>287</sup>

Figure 6

The Attack Plan of the NVA in the Tra Binh Dong Battle



Source: The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the*

<sup>285</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 1.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>287</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 367-71. There is a debate whether enemies in Tra Binh Dong were the NVA or the Viet Cong. The *Cheongryeong* brigade intelligence staff officer, Chil-ho Cheo, argues that these enemies were evaluated as Viet Cong because the dead bodies did not wear unified uniforms. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 249.

*ROK forces through memoir 3*, 171.

A remarkable success in this battle promoted all Company soldiers to upper ranks. In addition, the U.S. 3rd amphibious force commander said that “this was the best performance in Vietnam since I served [in the Vietnam conflict], and the ROK Marines are a role model for all COIN coalition forces.”<sup>288</sup>

In a similar vein, South Korean troops, inspired by the selection of the best units, mastered operations in mountainous terrain in Vietnam with relatively low adaptation costs. Thus, South Korean troops gained control of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalions in Phu Cat Mountain with a short amount of time in 1966.<sup>289</sup>

Since the ROK military chose the best units as COIN forces, it was able to reduce its adaptation costs. Another factor that contributed to minimizing adaptation costs sprang from the individual level: best soldiers.

## 2. The Best Soldiers: Cultivating Elite Fighters

The scope of the ROK military’s capability for COIN can also be investigated by tracing the qualification of the soldiers that the ROK military dispatched. Seoul determined the types of soldiers to be sent to Vietnam in early 1964. In the meantime, Seoul was worried that the South Korean troops’ dispatch might lead to the opposition of countries that had supported South Korea’s position in the United Nations (U.N). Thus, in the first phase, there was some

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<sup>288</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 170.

<sup>289</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 140.

suggestion that Seoul needed to dispatch mercenaries, based on reserve forces or civilians, to Vietnam.<sup>290</sup>

This suggestion was positively received because it had two merits. First, South Korea thought that if regular forces were to be dispatched, it would be more vulnerable to the North Korean military's attack. The dispatch of mercenary forces was expected to solve this problem. Second, South Korea thought that the dispatch of mercenary forces would help solve an unemployment problem.

However, Seoul knew that regular forces would fight better than mercenaries. Fighting well was an important issue to maximize national prestige. Thus, the discourse regarding the dispatch of mercenaries was truncated, and instead the ROK military paid more attention to the dispatch of the best soldiers among the regular forces to Vietnam.

The ROK military chose soldiers to win COIN, rather than simply participating in it. The ROK military understood the different nature of COIN, particularly small-unit fights under decentralized military organization. Thus, it knew that the role of each individual commander and each soldier's individual proficiency is important to win guerilla warfare in Vietnam. All soldiers to be deployed were carefully screened. Elite soldiers were placed in three categories: senior commanders, junior commanders/officers, and non-commissioned officers.

First, senior commanders were chosen with high standards among officers who were the best qualified and had experience with guerrilla warfare. General

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<sup>290</sup> The Vietnam War and the ROK Forces, <http://www.vietnamwar.co.kr/hall1-2-03.htm> (Accessed October 8, 2010).

Chae Myung-Shin was selected as Commander of ROKFV (Republic of Korea Force in Vietnam). General Chae experienced COIN against communist guerrilla groups. He fought against the Red Guerilla Group in the *Taebaek* mountains (*T'aebaeksan*) in 1949 just before the Korean War broke out, and commanded the White Bone Group (*Paekkol pyŏngdan*) to cope with guerilla warfare during the Korean War.<sup>291</sup> Based on this experience, General Chae had already identified the different dynamic in the Vietnam War.<sup>292</sup> He said in his autobiography that “although conventional combat forces were dispatched to Vietnam, it is difficult for them to locate targets, because the Vietnam War is guerilla warfare.”<sup>293</sup>

In addition to General Chae, the ROK military chose other senior commanders – a regimental commander and a battalion commander – using very high standards.<sup>294</sup> Key high-ranking officers in Vietnam had experience in guerilla warfare. The selected commanders, including Colonel Kim Jong-Un, Colonel Sin Hyun-Soo, and Lieutenant Colonel Bae Jung-Do, had experienced real battles and guerilla operations and were decorated with medals for their remarkable achievements during the Korean War.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 32- 40.

<sup>292</sup> For one of the ROK's successful outcomes in Vietnam, Lee and Yim (1980) argue that General Chae was a soldier “who has a full knowledge of how communism operates guerilla warfare.” Lee and Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War*, 89.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>294</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 100-5.

<sup>295</sup> Lee and Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War*, 100-5.

Second, junior officers were also selected according to high standards because they mostly were in charge of guerilla warfare directly on the spot. The ROK military knew that since guerilla warfare is a small-unit operation, the role of junior officers is important for mission success. A military veteran, who served as company commander, Se-kwon Jang, notes that the role of junior officers, such as platoon commanders, was important for mission success.<sup>296</sup>

Junior army officers were mostly graduates from the Korean Military Academy, which requires four years of professional training.<sup>297</sup> Military veteran Chul-ho Lee, who served as company commander of the army division, stated in 1969 that all platoon leaders and company commanders were selected from graduates of the Korean Military Academy.<sup>298</sup>

Unlike the ROK Army officers, the ROK Marines did not consider which school officers graduated from – the Naval Academy or other military institutions – because all Marine officers were commissioned with the highest standard of training in the ROK military.<sup>299</sup> All Marine officers were already the best officers in the military. Despite the Marine officers' professionalism, the ROK Marines chose the best of the best Marine officers. For instance, success of the Tra Binh Dong battle, where one company defeated an enemy force the size of two

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<sup>296</sup> Lee and Yim, *Politics of Military Civic Action: The Case of South Korean and South Vietnamese Forces in the Vietnamese War*, 735.

<sup>297</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 142.

<sup>298</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 195.

<sup>299</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 16.

battalions, was attainable under the leadership of the best junior officers and the bravest soldiers.<sup>300</sup>

Third, non-commissioned officers' will to fight and their quality were carefully considered. Non-commissioned officers were sent on a voluntary basis in order to increase their eagerness to win. ROK President Park Chung Hee, the former Army general, knew that volunteer soldiers usually fight better and harder. Thus, even though South Korea's military service was based on a three years mandatory system, COIN forces in Vietnam were selected mostly on a voluntary basis among serving soldiers. Although the tour of duty in Vietnam was one year, incapable soldiers were sent back to Korea immediately. Staff officer Kuk-jong Bae, in charge of selecting soldiers in the *Maeng Ho* division whose commander was General Chae, stated in 1967 that he selected experienced and volunteer soldiers under the direction of General Chae.<sup>301</sup> He further said that 9,000 soldiers among the 13,000 soldiers of the *Maeng Ho* division were replaced according to this standard.<sup>302</sup>

All volunteer soldiers could not always go to Vietnam because the ROK military selected only the best soldiers from the pool of volunteers. The ROK military knew that the decentralized close fight – jungle operation – required each soldier to be a first-rank marksman. Since the ROK commanders recognized the

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<sup>300</sup> The 11th company commander, Kyung-jin Jung, alone led this battle. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 251-9.

<sup>301</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 214.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

importance of decentralized organization in COIN, they viewed the individual capability of each fighter. Thus, qualified and volunteer non-commissioned officers were sent to Vietnam. In this vein, although they mainly used old-fashioned M-1 rifles in 1966, as opposed to the state-of-the-art AK-47 that the Viet Cong used, South Korean soldiers had already become professional shooters before their deployment thanks to the high standard of dispatching soldiers and related training. For example, Company commander Tae-il Lee stated in 1966 that his unit's hit rate was already 88-92 percent before their dispatch.<sup>303</sup> Thus, ordinary soldiers were already professional before being deployed.

Similar to ordinary soldiers' quality, the quality of non-commissioned officers was important because COIN forces often had to fight against guerillas on a division-unit basis. Division commanders were highly qualified and brave. One Marine company carried out an ambush on July 19, 1967 in The Loi, and one division was separated from the main unit. This division's commander, Hak-young Kim, faced one Viet Cong company. Under his professional and heroic command, this division killed 32 and captured 4 guerillas without any South Korean casualties.<sup>304</sup> Small units commanded by distinguished and experienced officers allowed the ROK military to successfully achieve its decentralized mission. Moreover, since South Korean fighters were professional, each fighter was able to serve as an agent for psychological warfare as well. These best

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<sup>303</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 190.

<sup>304</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 176.



soldiers were also armed with military assets suitable for COIN, rather than conventional warfare, leading to a synergistic outcome.

### 3. Assets Used By COIN Troops

The ROK COIN capability can also be examined by looking at assets that the ROK COIN forces used on the Vietnamese battlegrounds. The ROK forces knew that small-unit operations are more viable than big-unit operations in COIN. Thus, they focused on weapons and equipment suitable for COIN operations. A small unit required light-weight equipment, unlike conventional organization, which is composed of heavy weapons. When large numbers of Korean troops arrived in 1965, they had to use the heavy M-1 rifle due to their lack of proper military assets. What was worse was that unlike the AK-47 used by the Viet Cong, the M-1 rifle was not an automatic gun.<sup>305</sup> It was the worst weapon for a close fight.

The South Korean commanders recognized that this heavy and manual weapon would be ineffective for unconventional guerilla fighting.<sup>306</sup> Thus, the South Korean military continued to request other weapons from the U.S. military, and by doing so, upgraded its key weapons from the ineffective M-1 rifle to the light M-16 in 1967. The process of the ROK forces acquiring the M-16 was one of the fastest transfers from willingness to capability. What is more interesting is that the ROK soldiers' enthusiasm made it possible for them to acquire the M-16.

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<sup>305</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 143.

<sup>306</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 61-2.

Impressed by the ROK soldiers' high morale, the U.S. military provided all South Korean soldiers with M-16s in 1967.<sup>307</sup>

In addition, the ROK COIN troops acquired appropriate communication equipment for COIN. The ROK forces used old-fashioned communication equipment, such as the P-6 and the P-10, which had short communication ranges.<sup>308</sup> However, the ROK COIN forces, which had already identified the nature of COIN, tried their best to acquire better communication equipment. As a result of General Chae's pressure on the U.S. military, the ROK military even supplied squad leaders with new communication equipment, such as the PRC-6, PRC-2S, and PRC-25, because they often had to be separated from platoon leaders in jungle operations.<sup>309</sup> A South Korean veteran who went to Vietnam in 1966, Sung-hwan Kim, states in his memoir that longer range communication equipment was important in mountainous operations.<sup>310</sup> In a meeting between the U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey and the ROK Prime Minister Jung Il-Kwon in Saigon, the ROK Prime Minister confirmed that "Korea had received the communications equipment and radar requested earlier."<sup>311</sup> Similarly, South

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<sup>307</sup> Choi, *The ROK forces' military/civil affairs-psychological operations and its outcome*, 160.

<sup>308</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 143.

<sup>309</sup> In particular, even the American forces lacked the PRC-25, but as the South Korean troops participated in the battle of Duc Co, the U.S. military supplied PRC-25s to South Korean forces. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 377.

<sup>310</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *Chŭngŏn ŭl tonghae bon Pet'unam chŏnjaeng kwa Han'guk kun 2 / The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 2*, 2002, 105.

<sup>311</sup> The U.S. Department of State, "Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the

Korean veteran Ki-jung Do, who was in charge of communications, stated in 1967 that the ROK soldiers used the PRC-2S, with which soldiers could communicate with each other during the rainy season over a 5-15 mile distance.<sup>312</sup>

By the same token, the ROK COIN forces differentiated between conventional weapons and unconventional equipment. South Korean troops asked for COIN equipment suitable for their light divisions. The official document *vis-à-vis* the 1966 conversations between President Johnson and President Park stated that “\$32 million of DoD [Department of Defense] funds for counterinsurgency equipment had been utilized for this purpose, and the counterinsurgency equipment plus \$30 million other equipment is waiting in Okinawa for the use of the new ROK light division.”<sup>313</sup> In a nutshell, military modernization through active participation in the Vietnam War made it possible for the ROK military to become a learning entity effective enough to deal with guerrilla fighters as well as to become a conventional force modernized enough to cope with conventional fighters, North Korean armies. This historical lesson sheds light on how the ROK military can develop and adopt a balanced strategy in the coming years of the post-September 11 attacks.

All of the above best units, best soldiers, and suitable weapons/equipment contributed to mission-oriented capacity in Vietnam, which led to COIN mission

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Department of State,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, *Korea*. (Washington, DC, 2000), 284.

<sup>312</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 208.

<sup>313</sup> The U.S. Department of State, “Summary of Conversations Between President Johnson and President Pak,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*. vol. 29, *Korea* (Washington, DC, 2000), 419.

success in Vietnam. This finding shows that mission-oriented capability is more important for COIN success than overall military capacity, which confirms the capability hypothesis (hypothesis 2).

The ROK military's willingness to successfully complete the Vietnam COIN, initiated by the importance of this unusual mission, helped cultivate its COIN capacity, which was required to fight against Viet Cong guerillas. In this vein, the nature of the "unusual mission" served as the key driver for the mission's success. At the same time, South Korea was better positioned to successfully complete the mission in Vietnam due to its advantages in both material and non-material environments.

## **VI. The Political and Socio-Cultural Function in the ROK COIN in Vietnam**

### **A. Material Environments: The ROK's Political Assets**

South Korea had four types of advantages from the viewpoint of material environments: non-great power experience, lack of power asymmetry, familiarity with terrain and geography, and organized military. This material standing buttressed the political advantages of South Korea.

#### **1. Non-great Power Experiences**

The non-great power experiences of South Korea made its COIN forces favorable to mission success. These advantages can be traced using three trajectories: historical position of nation-building, domestic COIN experiences, and its own experience with economic development.

First, South Korea, as a non-great power, historically had been overwhelmed by great powers due to a power gap. China had attempted to expand its sphere of

influence to the Korean peninsula. Japan ruled over the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Moreover, South Koreans experienced a tragic war, the Korean War, which was a proxy war of great powers. Thus, they knew how the Vietnamese would feel when foreign troops arrived there with a massive amount of kinetic power. In particular, South Korean soldiers, who saw North Korean communists and soldiers kill civilians and destroy their assets, tried their best to treat the Vietnamese well based on their own experience. South Korean veteran Dong-han Park recalls that the Korean War's experience contributed to a better understanding of the Vietnamese people's hardship.<sup>314</sup>

Experiences like the above allowed South Korea's COIN forces to recognize the importance of communication with the local people so that they would see the ROK COIN forces less as occupiers who used their military power for their own interest maximization. Thus, the ROK forces intensively taught soldiers the local language. They operated a Vietnamese language school in Saigon, and its principal was South Vietnamese. A total of 1,344 soldiers completed this program from 1966 to 1972.<sup>315</sup> Some soldiers who went to this school stayed with Vietnamese people in their homes, and by doing so, they became friends with the local Vietnamese. In addition, each unit operated its own language program. The *Maeng Ho* division taught Vietnamese to a total of 1,103

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<sup>314</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 471.

<sup>315</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 119.

soldiers from 1966 to 1971 and the *Cheongryeong* brigade taught 235 soldiers Vietnamese in the same period.<sup>316</sup>

This language training and the ROK military's emphasis on communication made COIN missions on the battleground more effective as well. The ROK COIN forces executed operations – both combat and civil-military operations – with well-trained interpreters.<sup>317</sup> The ROK COIN forces were able to communicate with local Vietnamese, and by doing so, they were able to recognize situations on the battleground, such as the locations of insurgents.

Second, Koreans' guerilla warfare experiences against the Communist partisans made the ROK military identify the importance of technological, light-weight, and small weapons. The military officers' individual experience significantly affected the tactical success of COIN in Vietnam. South Korean forces fought against Communist partisan groups, mostly in mountainous terrain, before and during the Korean War.<sup>318</sup> General Chae was a military expert on COIN, since he experienced guerilla warfare in the 1950s. He knew that the local population (water) should be separated from insurgents (fish) for COIN success.<sup>319</sup> He fully studied Mao Zedong's guerilla tactics, making it possible for

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<sup>316</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 120.

<sup>317</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 239-41.

<sup>318</sup> The Communist partisan guerilla group established its headquarters in the mountains and attacked the ROK governmental buildings. It played a key role in the *Taegu Uprising* in 1946 and the *Cheju Uprising* in 1948.

<sup>319</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 84.

his groups to defeat Chiang Kai-shek's army, which was ten times bigger than Mao's troops.<sup>320</sup>

In particular, General Chae's experience played a crucial role in reducing adaptation costs in Vietnam by making the ROK COIN forces develop anti-guerilla tactics before their dispatch. South Korean veteran Gi-taek Kim recollects that General Chae had already developed the concept of a company-led tactical base before the ROK COIN forces were dispatched.<sup>321</sup>

This experience of unconventional warfare also provided the ROK military with an opportunity to reduce adaptation costs in terms of organizational change. The ROK military was under conventional-led organizational culture before the Vietnam War, but the ROK military commanders' experiences with guerilla warfare allowed its organization to be flexible step-by-step, which in turn allowed it to be effective for guerilla warfare in Vietnam. South Korea's COIN experience made it possible for the ROK forces in Vietnam to devise the tactics of a company-led tactical base.<sup>322</sup>

The U.S. also believed that the ROK military's experience of guerilla warfare – its positional advantage – would play a crucial role in dealing with the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). In 1964, the *New York Times* reported that the U.S. military needed to invite South Korea because it has “had

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<sup>320</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 85.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

experience in guerilla warfare.”<sup>323</sup> What is implied is that the U.S. expected the ROK military’s potential for COIN effectiveness.

Third, the South Koreans’ own experience with economic management allowed COIN soldiers to fully understand what the Vietnamese really wanted. The local Vietnamese population was eager for food and facilities. South Koreans had experienced the hardship of food shortage, and as a result, they recognized how severe starvation was for the village people. Thus, the ROK forces understood the function of a manageable food supply in COIN success. They provided the Vietnamese people with relief food, such as rice, wheat, corn, and milk. Since rice was a staple of the Vietnamese diet, just like the Korean diet, the ROK COIN troops knew that rice would be the most important supply item. The item of which the ROK COIN forces offered the largest amount was rice. They provided the Vietnamese with about 16,000 tons of rice from 1965 to 1972, whereas they offered the Vietnamese approximately 1,170 tons of wheat in the same period.<sup>324</sup> South Korean troops also knew that working conditions in rural areas require many clothes in the process of village development. Thus, under the sub-project of relief activities, the ROK military provided local populations with about 430,000 clothing items from 1965 to 1972.<sup>325</sup> Put simply, the ROK forces were able to prioritize what they really needed based on their home experience. Thus, South Korea’s own experience of economic struggle allowed the ROK forces to reduce adaptation costs.

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<sup>323</sup> Geraldine Fitch, Letters to The Times, *The New York Times*, July 25, 1964.

<sup>324</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 135.

<sup>325</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 135.



In a similar vein, the new village movement (*Saemaül undong*) that South Koreans experienced at home helped accelerate the project for village prosperity. Through the new village movement, South Koreans were good at renovating old houses and buildings. Thus, the ROK forces were able to effectively renovate old buildings or construct new ones. As of April 30, 1970, the ROK troops had already built 139 bridges, 290 school rooms, and 1,519 houses.<sup>326</sup> The ROK forces constructed 1,740 buildings and about 400 km of roads from 1965 to 1972.<sup>327</sup>

South Koreans also focused on more effective farming under the new village movement. Based on their experience at home, the ROK soldiers helped the Vietnamese farm their land. Likewise, they provided the Vietnamese with a variety of equipment for farming.<sup>328</sup> Moreover, the ROK COIN forces taught them how to effectively farm their land.<sup>329</sup> According to a survey report, 60 percent of Vietnamese people stated that the ROK soldiers' lessons were helpful for their farming.<sup>330</sup>

The ROK COIN forces also gave the Vietnamese vocational training in their attempt to establish a stable societal infrastructure. They offered four types of training courses, such as mechanical skills, and 1,553 Vietnamese completed

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<sup>326</sup> The Republic of Korea, The Korean Armed Forces Command in Vietnam, "Civil Action Records of the Korean Army in Vietnam," (Saigon, 1970).

<sup>327</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 139.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

these courses from 1968 to 1972.<sup>331</sup> This vocational training was popular, and thus, more than 70 percent of Vietnamese people wanted more training courses.<sup>332</sup>

The U.S. Marines also implemented pacification projects under the insightful CAP plan, but the U.S. military did not expand this project to the entire force. In contrast, the ROK pacification projects maintained the overall balance among all the units under General Chae's command because the ROK COIN forces already understood what would work in Vietnam before they came there due to their own experiences. The U.S. military started to study pacification projects under the name of the Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN) in 1965, but it did not gain attention from the conventional war supporters.<sup>333</sup> When General Abrams took charge of the U.S. military command in Vietnam in 1968, the PROVN gained attention on a strategic level, but it was too late and ineffective to implement, considering the situation on the battleground.<sup>334</sup>

## 2. A Structural Position of South Korea: Power Symmetry

The local population tends to see foreign military forces more as occupiers when there is a huge power gap between its insurgent country and a country of foreign forces. Vietnamese people saw American forces as occupiers similar to

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<sup>331</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 139.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> For example, Nagl states that Army Chief of Staff General Johnson did not want discuss PROVN "outside of the Army Staff in the Pentagon." Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 160.

<sup>334</sup> For more on the origins of PROVN, see Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal," *The Journal of Military History* 72 (October 2008): 1216-7.

the way French forces were seen as occupiers in the 1950s particularly because the U.S. was one polar state under the bipolar system. In contrast, there was relative symmetry between South Korea and Vietnam in many ways: population size, economic power, and military power.

First, the total population of South and North Vietnam was approximately 40 million in 1972, similar to the total population of South and North Korea, which was about 50 million.<sup>335</sup> In addition, the population of South Vietnam in 1970 was about 19 million and the population of South Korea was around 32 million, which was closer than the U.S. population.<sup>336</sup> What is implied is that there was not a huge gap between the two countries *vis-à-vis* population size.

Second, there was a relative lack of economic power gap between South Korea and South Vietnam. The size of the Gross National Product (GNP) for South Korea was about 8.1 billion dollars in 1970.<sup>337</sup> The size of the GNP for South Vietnam was around 1.8 billion dollars in the same year.<sup>338</sup> South Korea's economic power was just four times bigger than South Vietnam's. More interestingly, consumer goods of South Vietnam were greater than in South Korea. Approximately 150 thousand cars were running and about 5.45 million TVs and radios were used in South Vietnam in 1971.<sup>339</sup> South Koreans had similar numbers of cars and TVs/radios. Considering the difference in population size,

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<sup>335</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 8.

<sup>336</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 9.

<sup>337</sup> *Korean Statistical Information Service*, <http://kosis.kr> (Accessed October 6, 2010).

<sup>338</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 8.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

the standard of living in South Vietnam was a little better than in South Korea in 1971. However, the size of the GNP of the U.S. was 1.025 trillion dollars in 1970.<sup>340</sup> U.S. economic power was approximately 600 times larger than South Vietnam's in 1970. As a consequence, there was radical asymmetry *vis-à-vis* economic power between South Vietnam and the U.S.

Third, the military power of South Korea was similar to that of South Vietnam, which possessed around 500 thousand regular troops.<sup>341</sup> South Korea's military was equipped with old-fashioned weapons, similar to South Vietnam's military. Thus, there was power symmetry between the two countries in terms of military strength. In contrast, the U.S. military, as a great power force, was one of the two biggest military powers in the world. In this vein, there was a huge power gap between South Vietnam and the U.S.

Faced with this power asymmetry, the South Vietnamese saw American soldiers more as occupiers, particularly in a situation where they historically experienced colonization under great powers, such as China, Britain, Japan, and France. In addition, when conventional forces based on kinetic power conduct unconventional warfare, they tend to have greater adaptation costs. The U.S. forces paid 54 billion dollars for the Korean War but spent 140 billion dollars for warfare in Vietnam.<sup>342</sup> Likewise, American forces used 630 thousand tons of air bombs for the Korean War, whereas they dropped 7,550 thousand tons of air

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<sup>340</sup> NationMaster, [http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco\\_gdp\\_in\\_197-economy-gdp-in-1970](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_gdp_in_197-economy-gdp-in-1970) (Accessed October 6, 2010).

<sup>341</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 11.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

bombs for the Vietnam conflict.<sup>343</sup> Ironically, despite lower costs, the U.S. won the Korean War in the sense that the U.S. forces with other U.N forces successfully defeated the invasion of North Korean troops in South Korea. However, it lost the Vietnam conflict despite massive warfare costs. Why was this massive amount of warfare cost ineffective? The U.S. failure springs from the nature of COIN. Destruction led by heavy weapons rarely guarantees COIN success, but rather selective suppression based on small-unit operations is more effective for COIN success by using a population-based method at the same time. What is implied here is that COIN forces need to reduce warfare costs by minimizing adaptation costs in the first phase of COIN. When American COIN forces failed to reduce adaptation costs in the first step, they lost the opportunity to make battleground situations favorable to COIN forces. And failing situations made American COIN forces rely more on heavy weapons as time went by in their attempt to achieve short-term military effectiveness, leading to a vicious cycle.

### 3. Familiarity with Terrain and Geography

Similar to Vietnam, the Korean peninsula was divided into two countries. Divided geography was familiar to South Korean soldiers. This familiarity contributed to the ROK military's efforts to gain the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese population. In 1967 when the Tiger Division conducted their eight operations around Cu-Mong Pass, an old man shouted something to soldiers; "My wife and daughter were helped by the ROK soldiers at a market at Cu-Mong Pass

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<sup>343</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 22.

[ ] They kept giving them food and medicine for more than one year. I think that now is the time for me to repay their kindness.”<sup>344</sup> The Tiger Division took over part of its area of responsibility from American troops near the border between South Vietnam and North Vietnam. The Tiger Division named a market “Panmunjom” around this area and offered food to local residents.<sup>345</sup> South and North Vietnamese people got together at 9:00 am every day, and as time went by, this market became popular even to North Vietnamese under communist rule.<sup>346</sup> Thus, this market served as an opportunity for more North Vietnamese to defect from North Vietnam. Defectors offered the ROK forces much information about enemies, which made their operations easier.

In addition to the market, when the Second Company, the Tiger Division 26th Regiment One Battalion, took charge of this area, “Panmunjom” became a security-guaranteed area where North and South Vietnamese could both meet, similar to Korean Panmunjom between North and South.<sup>347</sup> The Korean forces’ experience in Korean Panmunjom allowed Korean soldiers to manage remarkably well in this area. To put it another way, the ROK experience from the Korean peninsula helped successful management of this area. The Korean troops’ success in 1966 allowed local Vietnamese in that area, like the above old man, to welcome the ROK troops’ operation in 1967, not oppose it.

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<sup>344</sup> Honda, *Vietnam War: A Report through Asian Eyes*, 243.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 507.

<sup>347</sup> War Story of ROK Forces in Vietnam 1965-1973, [http://cafe3.kttdom.com/vietvet/technote/read.cgi?board=tolk&x\\_number=109533](http://cafe3.kttdom.com/vietvet/technote/read.cgi?board=tolk&x_number=109533) 570 (Accessed March 5, 2010).

The features of the terrain in Vietnam were also similar to those of South Korea in the sense that South Korea is mountainous. The ROK forces had always been trained in mountainous areas. Thus, they were able to reduce the time required to adapt to mountainous or jungle areas. Moreover, military terrain with which South Korean forces were familiar in the DMZ at home were not so different from the battlegrounds in Vietnam in the sense that they had to vigilantly secure their areas. Their familiarity with securing the DMZ reduced adaptation costs by effectively deterring Viet Cong within a relatively short amount of time. Regiment commander Hyun-soo Shin stated in 1966 that he gave his soldiers directions for how to deal with guerillas based on South Korean soldiers' experiences in the DMZ.<sup>348</sup>

#### 4. The Organized Military of a Functioning State

Since South Korea experienced the severe Korean War, the ROK military rapidly expanded its strength to deter another North Korean attack in the 1950-60s. Thus, in this period, the ROK military already had 630,000 personnel.<sup>349</sup> In particular, it possessed 566,960 army soldiers and 24,000 Marines, who were the main forces conducting COIN in Vietnam. In the period, the ROK military sought to field 18 active and 10 reserve army divisions.<sup>350</sup> In addition, it already had a plan to organize “a fleet marine force comprised of one marine division with

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<sup>348</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 179.

<sup>349</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, 452.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, 453.

necessary and appropriate combat.”<sup>351</sup> The ROK military also sought to increase the strength of the navy and air force in this period. The ROK Air Force had about 200 fighter aircraft, and the ROK Navy had about 60 ships in this period.<sup>352</sup> South Korea had a well organized military. Thus, the ROK military thus, unlike the weak states, played a substantive role in the Vietnam conflict, rather than a symbolic one. If the ROK military had not had organized military strength, the ROK COIN forces might have been just a symbolic player.

#### B. Non-material Environments: The ROK’s Socio-Cultural Assets

South Korea also had four non-material advantages: connections on a societal level, better cultural understanding, an initially favorable response from the local population, and consensus with the ROK’s domestic population. These non-material environments refer to socio-cultural advantages of South Korea.

##### 1. Socio-historical Position: Connections on a Societal Level

The societal setting of South Korea was connected and similar to that of Vietnam. First, economic communication led to societal connection. In 1963, when the ROK forces were dispatched to Vietnam, South Korea had already exported 12.14 million dollars’ worth of items to Vietnam.<sup>353</sup> Thus, societal

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<sup>351</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, 454.

<sup>352</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, 432.

<sup>353</sup> Sang-cheon Jung, “*Hankookui Pet’ŭnam jŏn ch’amjŏni Han-Pet’ŭnam kyoyŏk kwan’gye e mich’in yŏngnyang* (The impact of the ROK forces’ participation in the Vietnam War on the trade relations between South Korea and Vietnam)” *Pet’ŭnam chŏnjaeng yŏn’gu ch’ongsŏ 2* (The Vietnam War Study 2), The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2003, 94.



connections between two countries became closer than before, and the two peoples communicated more often.

Second, both South Korea and Vietnam had similar societally- and politically-divided situations. In particular, both countries were divided between two governments by foreign powers' influence. Vietnam was divided into two states after World War II. South Vietnam was under the control of France, and North Vietnam was under the influence of China.<sup>354</sup> Thus, two opposing societal groups were created in Vietnam: communist in the north and anti-communist in the south. Similar to Vietnam, South Korea was divided into two governments as a result of external powers' influence. When World War II was over, a communist block based on the Soviet Union and China was in charge of North Korea, whereas a democratic block, led by the U.S., controlled South Korea where its domestic political system remained authoritarian but was anti-communist. Thus, similar to Vietnam, there were two fighting societal groups – communism and anti-communism – on the Korean peninsula. This socio-historical similarity encouraged the Vietnamese to feel friendlier towards South Koreans. For example, South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem already felt friendlier towards South Koreans and their President, Park Chung Hee, before the South Korean troops' dispatch.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> For the history of Vietnam, see Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 1-7.

<sup>355</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 711.

Third, there was a similarity of appearance between South Koreans and the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese felt friendlier towards South Korean troops than towards American troops because South Korean soldiers looked similar to the Vietnamese. General Chae stated in 1969 that since “we [South Koreans] look similar to them [Vietnamese], they believed what we said.”<sup>356</sup> Similarly, South Korean veteran Jung-hui Song states that South Korean forces were better positioned for conducting civil-military operations than American forces because the Vietnamese felt friendlier towards South Korean forces due to similarities between Koreans and Vietnamese in terms of appearance and traditions.<sup>357</sup> By the same token, a local newspaper also mentioned the positive effects of similarity in the ethnic groups’ physical appearances. The editorial of *The Saigon Post* stated during the Vietnam conflict that South Korean soldiers looked similar to Vietnamese although they are taller and they seemed to be just neighbors rather than remote foreigners.<sup>358</sup>

Fourth, South Korean society understood Vietnamese society’s aspiration for independence. South Koreans were under the rule of Japan from 1910 to 1945, and thus, they understood how precious national independence is. The Vietnamese had been ruled by foreign powers for a long time, and thus, the status

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<sup>356</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 73.

<sup>357</sup> The asset that the ROK military was lacking was communication because the languages were different. However, he argues that South Korean soldiers were able to communicate with the Vietnamese with the use of Chinese characters, although it was limited. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 410.

<sup>358</sup> Kyung-suk Park, “The ROK forces’ psychological warfare and civil affairs Operations,” 309.

of an independent nation was regarded as crucial for them. Boosted by their experiences at home, the ROK COIN forces tried to show their similarities with the Vietnamese as part of gaining the hearts and minds of the local population. For example, when they constructed a new high school in 1966, they built a main gate with the same design as the Independence Gate of South Korea. This plan was intended to show the Vietnamese that South Koreans hoped Vietnam would become a unified independent nation as soon as possible.<sup>359</sup>

Finally, South Korean society experienced hardship in war through the Korean War. American soldiers had been stationed in South Korean society during and after the Korean War. Thus, South Koreans and the Vietnamese were sympathetic to each other in terms of their reliance on foreign troops. General Chae argues that this similarity helped the ROK forces achieve mission success in Vietnam.<sup>360</sup> In a nutshell, based on all of the above societal similarities, South Korean forces were able to recognize problems on a societal level quickly.

## 2. The Initial Response of Local Population to the ROK Forces

The Vietnamese population did not welcome South Korean forces warmly in the beginning. At the same time, they did not have animosity to the ROK forces either. Rather, the aforementioned element – connections on a societal level – made the ROK COIN forces increasingly favorable to mission success as time went by. The engineer battalion commander of the Dove unit, Ki-bong Oh, who

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<sup>359</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 239-40.

<sup>360</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 73.

was dispatched before combat troops, states that although the Vietnamese did not cooperate with American troops, they voluntarily cooperated with South Korean soldiers.<sup>361</sup>

The Vietnamese maintained a relatively favorable image of South Koreans in the initial phase of COIN because the Vietnamese recognized similarities between their country and South Korea. The direct similarity that the Vietnamese identified was that South Koreans were Oriental (Asian) people just like them. Thus, the Vietnamese rarely saw the ROK military as a foreign occupier, unlike the U.S. military. Veteran Chang-kyu Jang recalls that the Vietnamese treated South Korean soldiers like friends because of their societal and cultural similarities.<sup>362</sup> The societal advantage of being the same oriental people was often used as a way to persuade Viet Cong guerillas to defect. A flyer was circulated bearing some statement that “since there would be a military attack here, we [South Korean soldiers], as an Oriental people just like you, came here to save you.”<sup>363</sup> The second facet of their similarity is that South Koreans faced divided nations just like the Vietnamese.<sup>364</sup> Korea had been divided into two countries since the Korean War. The sympathetic response from the local Vietnamese, boosted by these two similarities, made the ROK COIN forces favorable to civil-military operations, particularly the first impression tactics.

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<sup>361</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 905.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>363</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 233-4.

<sup>364</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 63.

Thus, the function of commonality as Oriental people was embedded in the minds of the Vietnamese people to constitute a relatively favorable image to the ROK forces from the beginning. A South Korean veteran who arrived at Vietnam in 1966, Young-ho Tak, recalls in a memoir that the local population maintained a favorable image of South Korean forces. He noted that despite their favorable image, the local Vietnamese were often reluctant to cooperate with the ROK forces because they were afraid of revenge from the Viet Cong.<sup>365</sup> What this implies is that when the local population was physically secure, it was more willing to cooperate with the ROK military than with Western militaries.

### 3. Cultural Position: Better Understanding of Battleground Culture

The ROK COIN forces' better understanding of battleground culture played a key role in minimizing the adaptation costs required by COIN forces. One document issued by the ROK military states that "the ROK military in Vietnam successfully completed operations to control assigned areas along with civil-psychological operations based on better understanding Vietnamese who had history, culture, and custom similar to South Korean."<sup>366</sup> The ROK forces better understood Vietnamese culture in three aspects: Confucian norms, the influence of religious leaders on the function of community, and traditions (e.g., marriage ceremony).

First, South Koreans shared Confucian cultural norms, stressing a hierarchical relationship between seniors and juniors based on age. Thus, the

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<sup>365</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 2*, 35.

<sup>366</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, preface.

ROK COIN commanders stressed the importance of observing Confucian-based local culture. General Chae kept requesting that his soldiers respect old people and village leaders.<sup>367</sup> More importantly, South Korean soldiers easily understood what their commanders meant when they were told to respect Vietnamese culture because they lived in a society where Confucian culture worked. Thus, in order to show village leaders respect, South Korean soldiers often handed relief supplies to village leaders, rather than directly to village residents.<sup>368</sup> South Korean soldiers also showed senior residents their respect both materially and mentally. To that end, the ROK COIN forces built a resting place where seniors easily got together and had conversations.<sup>369</sup> The ROK military's better understanding of the local cultural rule took effect quickly. For example, good relations with village leaders and seniors encouraged guerillas to defect from the Viet Cong.<sup>370</sup>

In addition, Confucian culture emphasized non-material assets. General Chae encouraged his soldiers to “give local populations your hearts, not materials.”<sup>371</sup> Thus, the ROK COIN forces did not simply give the Vietnamese materials, such as food. Rather, they tried to investigate the opinions of the local population who received food. To that end, they conducted a survey of the local Vietnamese. One of the questions in the survey was whether they felt thankful to the ROK forces who provided relief activities. After 3,245 Vietnamese were

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<sup>367</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 193-200.

<sup>368</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 156.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>371</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 194.

interviewed by the ROK military, about 86 percent of interviewees answered that they were thankful to South Korean troops.<sup>372</sup> In a similar vein, General Chae often put on Vietnamese traditional costume when he visited local villages to gain hearts and minds of the local population.<sup>373</sup>

Furthermore, a key principle of Taekwondo was similar to the Confucian tradition that the Vietnamese had maintained because Taekwondo stresses etiquette and respect based on hierarchical relations. In order to maximize this advantage from Taekwondo, the ROK COIN forces taught the local Vietnamese Taekwondo. Taekwondo class was very popular and more Vietnamese participated in Taekwondo classes over time (see Table 15).

Table 15

The Increase of Vietnamese Trainees for Taekwondo

Year	1962-3	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Instructors	4	10	20	100	146	198	205	208	199	22
Vietnamese	139	440	1,602	5,405	81,648	104,410	137,295	174,083	196,971	210,206

Source: Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 140.

Taekwondo classes made the local Vietnamese feel closer to South Korean soldiers. In addition to the function of Taekwondo in making South Koreans feel close to Vietnamese, this martial art functioned as a psychological tactic. Viet Cong guerillas were afraid of close man-to-man fights because they thought that

<sup>372</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 136. Critics might argue that the outcome of this survey might be bias because it was conducted by the ROK forces, not by others. Despite the fact, it is true that 86 percent is a very high number.

<sup>373</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 196.

all South Korean soldiers had professional Taekwondo training. South Korean veteran Jang-rae Son states that there were beliefs that South Korean soldiers were brave and were able to break bricks with just their hands, which made guerillas fearful.<sup>374</sup>

Confucian cultural norms also highlight the importance of etiquette and well-mannered behavior. The ROK soldiers knew how to treat people who live under Confucian culture well. Thus, the ROK military commanders always stressed that Korean soldiers had to be courteous to local residents. Honda shows a typical example to distinguish between Korean and American soldiers, as has been noted earlier.<sup>375</sup>

The second advantage served by better cultural understanding was that the ROK soldiers understood societal culture where religious leaders affected the local population more than governmental officials did. The ROK troops maintained close relations with various religious leaders, such as the Buddhist leader, Chau.<sup>376</sup> Moreover, when the ROK forces visited villages, the first place that they went was the local religious leader's residence.<sup>377</sup> When there were religious ceremonies, they also sent Buddhist South Korean soldiers to local

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<sup>374</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 120.

<sup>375</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 240.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>377</sup> In particular, since 90 percent of the Vietnamese were Buddhist, South Korean soldiers tried to maintain good relations with Buddhist religious leaders. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 151.



Buddhist temples and Christian South Korean soldiers to local churches.<sup>378</sup> Good relations with religious leaders contributed to gaining the hearts and minds of the local population in Vietnam. For example, the Marine brigade carried out Operation: *Cheongryeong* One in Tuy Hoa from December 1965-January 1966. The ROK Marines protected Tuy Hoa residents during the harvest, and sometimes they directly helped the Vietnamese collect crops. Furthermore, they maintained good relations with religious leaders. Thus, when Marines were preparing for the withdrawal from Tuy Hoa after accomplishing their mission in January 1966, a Buddhist leader and his followers demonstrated to oppose the ROK Marines' withdrawal.<sup>379</sup>

Finally, the ROK soldiers were able to understand the traditions of the local Vietnamese because their traditions were similar. For example, a Vietnamese marriage ceremony was similar to a South Korean one. South Korean tradition *vis-à-vis* marriage was that when there is marriage ceremony, all neighboring people get together to celebrate the new couple because South Korean society is community-based rather than individual-based. Thus, when there was marriage, South Korean soldiers participated in the marriage ceremony. In particular, the Marine brigade sent a company commander to the marriage ceremony with some gifts, such as rice and candles.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 151.

<sup>379</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 150.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

Since the ROK soldiers better understood battleground culture based on their own culture, they were better positioned to conduct hearts and minds operations. For example, when South Korean soldiers visited villages, local villagers offered them corn. The problem was that the corn was infested with flies. Since South Korean soldiers understood that it is regarded as good manners to eat food that is offered, they ate the corn anyway. More than that, South Korean soldiers intentionally asked villagers “whether we can get more for later.”<sup>381</sup> In addition, while American soldiers never bowed to local villagers, South Korean soldiers readily did because bowing was their tradition as well.<sup>382</sup>

Better understanding of battleground culture based on similar traditions made the local Vietnamese recognize South Korean troops as friendly soldiers. Put simply, better understanding of battlefield culture reduced adaptation costs for a population-based method, and by doing so, the ROK troops were better able to gain the hearts and minds of the local population. Bam Re O, who was a leader in Phe Diem village, stated in 1967 that his village residents hoped that they would develop their village with the help of South Korean soldiers who came from a country with similar traditions.<sup>383</sup> South Korean veteran Chang-won Kim also recalls that when local residents would take to the streets for demonstrations,

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<sup>381</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 127.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 154.

they would set American cars on fire, but they would allow South Korean cars to safely pass on the streets.<sup>384</sup>

#### 4. Intangible Resources: Non-material Role of Domestic Population

COIN requires a long engagement for success: historically it took at least ten years to accomplish COIN. At the same time, it requires a lot of money and supplies. Thus, without the steadfast support from one's home population, it is difficult for a country to send its troops on a COIN mission and for COIN forces to continue their mission. In a similar vein, when a larger audience carefully recognizes the importance of this mission, mission teams are likely to be more eager for mission success based on increased material and non-material resources.

A larger audience, including the ROK domestic population, gave the ROK military's mission more attention than routine missions. The South Korean population supported the engagement of the ROK troops in Vietnam because it identified two utilities of their mission: security and economy. First, the security utility motivated the South Korean population to support troop dispatch. To begin with, South Koreans thought that it was a good opportunity for South Korea to repay countries that helped it against communist countries during the Korean War. In addition, they also thought that the mission in Vietnam was necessary for South Korean security itself in a situation where anti-communist South Vietnam was being challenged by communist North Vietnam. North Korea rapidly sought military modernization and thus wanted to seize the chance to force South Korea

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<sup>384</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 160.

to be communist when President Park Chung Hee and military leaders discussed the matter of dispatching forces to Vietnam.<sup>385</sup> Surrounded by serious threats from a communist country, South Koreans were armed with extreme anti-Communism sentiment. Accordingly, they viewed the Vietnam War as a necessary war to secure the South within the Korean peninsula as well as internationally. As a result, South Koreans supported their troops dispatch.<sup>386</sup>

Second, economic utility played a role in making South Koreans support their troop dispatch. This was a very crucial period to develop the South Korean economy further, and the entire nation paid tremendous attention to getting out of poverty under the new village (*Saemaül*) movement. The ROK military's activities in Vietnam directly contributed to expanding the export markets of South Korea. Most military supplies that the ROK COIN forces used were imported directly from South Korea.<sup>387</sup> In particular, *Kimchi*, which South Korean forces ate, was imported directly from South Korea.<sup>388</sup>

Consensus from South Koreans helped the South Korean Congress unanimously pass the agreement for the first dispatch to Vietnam on July 31, 1964.<sup>389</sup> Under the support of domestic politics, the first combat troops were sent

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<sup>385</sup> For South Korean President Park's speech of the necessity of the ROK forces' participation in the Vietnam conflict, see Jung-kwan Jae, Kyun-yul Park, and Trieu Minh Phuong, "*Pet 'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kiŏk sŭnghwa rŭl wihan yŏn'gu / The study to cultivate memory for the Vietnam war,*" *Pet 'ŭnam chŏnjaeng yŏn'gu ch'ongsŏ / The Vietnam War Study 3* (The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, 2004), 14.

<sup>386</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 26.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>388</sup> General Chae, *The Vietnam War and Me*, 224-230.

<sup>389</sup> Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 26.

to Vietnam without much challenge, considering the importance of this mission. The South Korean congress passed the bill to send additional troops on March 20, 1966. Ninety-five congressmen voted for this bill, and only twenty-seven voted against it.<sup>390</sup>

When the ROK National Assembly passed the bill to dispatch South Korean troops to Vietnam, the South Korean population reelected the incumbent as their president. The 6th presidential election took place in May 1967, while the ROK forces were carrying out overseas operations in Vietnam. Since there was consensus about the importance of these missions among the South Korean population, the incumbent President Park Chung Hee, who sent his troops to Vietnam, won the election by about 1.2 million votes.<sup>391</sup>

The ROK population positively evaluated South Korean forces' role in Vietnam in the post-Vietnam era as well. According to a survey conducted in 1999, 69.1 percent of interviewees positively evaluated the dispatch of South Korean troops to Vietnam, whereas only 6.8 percent of those interviewed negatively evaluated it.<sup>392</sup> Moreover, in the same survey, when it came to the mission's contribution to national development, 85.8 percent of interviewees answered that it had significantly contributed to development, whereas 4.8 percent of South Koreans answered "no."<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 2*, 5.

<sup>391</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 3*, 622-3.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 778.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

Domestic support contributed to an increase in the morale of deployed soldiers. South Korean veteran Gi-taek Kim recalls that the vigorous support of South Koreans at home contributed to the ROK forces' success by helping South Korean soldiers adapt to the Vietnamese battleground more quickly.<sup>394</sup> The 9th commander of the *Maeng Ho* division, Chun-kun Lee, who won the battle of Duc Co in 1966, also states that the national level of support made it possible for the ROK forces to win battles in Vietnam, and national support was directly connected to the soldiers' performance.<sup>395</sup> In addition, the ROK COIN forces were able to develop their capability due to increasing the number of volunteer soldiers encouraged by support from the domestic population. To put it another way, continued mobilization of qualified soldiers was not that difficult.

I examined how South Korea's material and non-material advantages contributed to its COIN success in Vietnam. Cultural and political characteristics and advantages made South Korea's mission success in Vietnam more probable, which confirms the political and socio-cultural advantages hypothesis (hypothesis 3).

## **VII. Conclusion: Sufficient Condition of the ROK COIN Success in Vietnam**

### **A. The Change of Willingness and Capability over Time**

South Korea's eagerness for mission success in Vietnam was converted to workable capability, as I pointed out earlier. The ROK COIN forces had the

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<sup>394</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 376.

<sup>395</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 395.

capacity for COIN missions by adopting an appropriate COIN approach, organizational flexibility, the best soldiers, and optimal assets. At the same time, the ROK COIN forces made the best use of their political and socio-cultural advantages. Thus, they effectively suppressed Viet Cong insurgents and captured weapons that guerillas used (see Table 16). Furthermore, they successfully carried out civil-psychological operations.

Table 16

The Effective Suppression of Insurgents in Vietnam

Scope	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	Total
Killed	517	5,117	7,387	9,035	8,014	3,456	4,633	3,261	42	41,462
POWs	121	1,404	1,638	655	329	281	166	39		4,633
Defect	4	512	884	720	188	63	52	60		2,483
Captured weapons	30	1,545	4,747	3,565	5,308	2,251	2,253	1,252	21	20,972

Choi, *Statistics of the Vietnam War & ROK Armed Forces*, 80.

However, the ROK COIN forces fought better in the first period (1965-66) than in the period of preparing for withdrawal (1971-73).<sup>396</sup> The South Korean military's performance in battles tended to be exaggerated during the period of 1971-73, although it was true that they still fought better than other coalition forces.<sup>397</sup> The variation of South Korean soldiers' performance can be explained by a difference in enthusiasm for the mission in Vietnam. The Paris Peace Talks

<sup>396</sup> The ROK military document which is based on veterans' memoir deals with the failure of operations in the period of 1971-73 more than in the first period. The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 689-862.

<sup>397</sup> Chul-soo Cho, who served as a platoon commander in 1972, states that his platoon just hung around the jungle without any record for 20 days, but it was falsely reported that this platoon killed 7 guerillas and captured their weapons on September 19, 1971. *Ibid.*, 775.

to discuss the end of the Vietnam conflict started on May 10, 1968. Subsequent talks and the worsening political situation in South Vietnam forced the U.S. to seriously think about withdrawing its troops from Vietnam.<sup>398</sup>

Thus, South Korean soldiers started to see their mission as less important during the period of 1971-73 than during the first period. Soldiers' willingness for mission success was reduced, and accordingly, their capability was also weakened.<sup>399</sup> South Korean veteran Kyung-suk Park argues that South Korean soldiers' pride diminished during this period.<sup>400</sup> He further argues that when officers tried to give soldiers high-level training in order to increase their pride and willingness, soldiers were disgruntled.<sup>401</sup> One example of this lack of enthusiasm that ended in failure was the Anke Pass battle. The ROK COIN forces failed to recognize the infiltration of enemies in March 1972, and thus, they were severely damaged during the Anke Pass operations.<sup>402</sup> General Deuk-man who served as the *Maeng Ho* division's general during 1971-73, notes some problems of the Anke Pass operations in 1972. He states that soldiers neglected to identify

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<sup>398</sup> Similarly, Choi argues that the U.S.'s movement to withdraw its troops affected the ROK military's performance. Choi, *The ROK forces' military/civil affairs-psychological operations and its outcome*, 108-111.

<sup>399</sup> Variation about the ROK soldiers' performance depending on period clearly shows that they were not mercenaries but national fighters who represented their country. If they had been mercenaries, there would not have been a gap in their performance over time. The same amount of money was paid to the ROK soldiers regardless of the period, but they fought better in the first period. The reason is that in the first period they were better armed with pride based on their conviction that they came to Vietnam as representatives of their nation.

<sup>400</sup> Kyung-suk Park, "The ROK forces' psychological warfare and civil affairs Operations," 340.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>402</sup> Yong-ho Choi, "*Pet 'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kwa Kerillajŏn* (The Vietnam War and Guerilla Warfare)" *Kunsa* no. 6 (2004), 256-257.



enemies' activities and that they passively engaged in battles.<sup>403</sup> In this battle, 75 South Korean soldiers were killed in action and 222 soldiers were injured.<sup>404</sup>

Another veteran, Jong-sik Kim, who served as a company commander during the 1971-1973 period, states that South Korean soldiers lacked the willingness to win the battle, and they paid more attention to their own survival during the Anke Pass operations.<sup>405</sup> Furthermore, Jong-tae Jeong, who served as a platoon commander during these operations, recalls that although he ordered his soldiers to move forward, not even one soldier moved; they just hid their heads in the drainage canal.<sup>406</sup> He also states that many soldiers started to ask why they had to fight here in Vietnam, doubtful of the importance of their mission.<sup>407</sup> These issues were rarely raised in the first period.

By the same token, in contrast with the soldiers' desire for combat in the first phase of the Vietnam mission, soldiers rarely wanted to see combat in the later period. This difference clearly shows that soldiers' morale was very low. South Korean veteran Sung-baek Wi, who served in the 30th regiment of the *Baek Ma* division, recalls that although his regiment was composed of the maximum number of soldiers, they lacked military discipline and preparedness for combat

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<sup>403</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 784.

<sup>404</sup> Kyung-suk Park, "The ROK forces' psychological warfare and civil affairs Operations," 348.

<sup>405</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir 1*, 786.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 790.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

during Operation: *Dong Bo* 18 in 1972.<sup>408</sup> He further argues that symbolic operations cannot be successful, and combat success requires a mission with purpose.<sup>409</sup> Movement toward withdrawal of all COIN coalition forces prevented the logic of unusual mission from working, and by doing so, South Korean soldiers were less enthusiastic and capable in this period.

In a nutshell, while one axis (political/socio-cultural advantages) of mission success was not changed on the battleground, the other axis (the nature of important mission) rapidly changed in the 1971-73 period. The ROK military, which was struggling with a lack of morale and capability in this period, was not able to succeed with only political and socio-cultural advantages.

#### B. Sufficient Condition of COIN Success in Vietnam

The nature of the important mission – the first overseas mission in modern Korean history – served as the primary driver of COIN success because it increased the willingness and capability of the ROK COIN forces. Political and socio-cultural advantages of South Korea served as the second driver, which accelerated the ROK's COIN capacity. Accordingly, the nature of the unusual mission and political/socio-cultural advantages, taken together, were a sufficient condition for COIN success because they reduced the required adaptation costs. The two drivers allowed the ROK military to become a reliable and substantial fighter in Vietnam, particularly in the first six years of ROK involvement. When it appeared that the United States would leave Vietnam in the early 1970s, ROK

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<sup>408</sup> The ROK Institute for Military History Compilation, *The Vietnam War and the ROK forces through memoir* 2, 805.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 808.

forces morale significantly declined, and their mission success atrophied in 1971-73.

## CHAPTER 4 THE ROK MILITARY'S COIN IN IRAQ

### I. Overview

The Iraq War, just like the Vietnam War, was conducted as a conventional conflict between state actors (states' coalition forces led by the United States and the other state, Iraq), namely Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in the first phase of the war in 2003. As I pointed out earlier, the crucial assets in conventional warfare are firepower and technology. The American-led forces, armed with massive kinetic power and state-of-the art technology, seized Baghdad only 20 days after the first attack on March 20, 2003, and President Bush declared completion of the mission on the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003: "my fellow Americans: Major combat operations in Iraq have ended."<sup>410</sup> The success of this conventional major campaign, however, did not lead to strategic success because it gave rise to social disorder followed by a power vacuum and violence throughout the country. This disorder permitted a strong insurgency to rise, which made Iraq become an unconventional warfare battlefield composed of various insurgencies, such as indigenous Sunni insurgencies and foreign al-Qaeda insurgencies led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Unlike the Afghanistan War, from the beginning the U.S. war in Iraq was not supported by the U.N. and international society. Faced with lack of legitimacy for the Iraq War, the U.S. asked countries to form a "Coalition of the Willing (COTW)".<sup>411</sup> This coalition of mission in Iraq intended to achieve international

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<sup>410</sup> *The Washington Post*, May 1, 2003.

<sup>411</sup> Newnham, "Coalition of the Bribed and Bullied?," 184.

legitimacy for the Iraq War rather. Strong U.S. influence persuaded 63 countries to become members for an international COTW. A number of weak powers, such as Ethiopia, Mongolia, and Macedonia, were among its members. Thus, the U.S., did not expect the COTW countries to play a substantial role in COIN in Iraq but rather as a cover to help them justify American-led military actions in Iraq.

By contrast, South Korean COIN forces played a significant role in the Iraq COIN mission. Seoul sent one division unit to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq – Arbil – to conduct COIN operations; the ROK forces were assigned to the most stable part of Iraq but there were still insurgent activities, such as bombing (see Table 17). It was the third largest number of troops after the U.S and Britain. The ROK COIN forces successfully controlled the security of assigned areas based on a population-centered approach. They helped local Iraqis establish political, economic, and societal infrastructures. South Korean soldiers had high motivation to successfully achieve their mission in Iraq. At the same time they had sufficient COIN capability as a consolidated middle power with an organized military. Furthermore, South Korea’s COIN experience in both its homeland and Vietnam and connections on a societal level with Iraqis contributed to its success in Iraq. Thus, the South Korean military became as a substantial player in Iraq rather than a symbolic player.

Table 17

Deployed Soldiers

<b>Year</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Unit	<i>Seoheel/Jema</i>	<i>Zaytun</i>	<i>Zaytun</i>	<i>Zaytun</i>	<i>Zaytun</i>	<i>Zaytun</i>
Number	300 per year	3,000	3,600	2,300	1,200	650

Total	1,141	19,032 (Man-days)
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Source: The ROK Ministry of Defense, “*Kukche p’yŏnghwa yuji hwaltong* (International peace-keeping activities),” <http://www.mnd.go.kr> (Accessed October 8, 2010).

## II. The ROK Military’s Success in Iraq

The Iraq mission between 2003 and 2008 conducted by the Korean *Zaytun* Division was successful in the sense that the COIN forces won the “hearts and minds” of the local Iraqi population without a single casualty of South Korean soldiers. In a situation where insurgent activities were less dominant in Arbil than other regions in Iraq, a population-centered method was the best choice in the Kurdistan region of the North, which turned out to be successful in securing the assigned region in a non-militaristic way. For example, the stabilization of Arbil by the ROK forces allowed more international companies to invest in the region. In the Dohuk area, including Arbil, of the northern region of Iraq, the number of international companies increased from 100 in 2004 to 404 in 2007.<sup>412</sup> The local population in Arbil also increased from 700,000 in 2004 to 1,300,000 in 2008 due to the increased security and infrastructure building.<sup>413</sup>

The *Zaytun* Division became the role model of a population-centered approach to other COIN forces. The U.S. Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, John Hillen, visited the *Zaytun* division with a “thank you” letter from U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice on January 17, 2006. He said to the *Zaytun* division Commander, Seoung-Jo Jung, that “in a situation where American forces are strong for military combat but weak for civil affair

<sup>412</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 3, 2008, 9.

<sup>413</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 12, 2007, 3.

operations, South Korean forces' civil affair operations integrating politics, economy, and culture are the textbook model for American forces."<sup>414</sup>

The U.S. military gave South Korean forces much credit. The American Task Force which visited the area of responsibility assigned to the South Korean military on January 4, 2007 also praised the remarkable role of South Korean troops in stabilizing the region. The team said that they "had just witnessed a textbook demonstration of an effective way to go about 'winning hearts and minds' of the local population through the Korean military detachment at *Zaytun*."<sup>415</sup>

In addition, on October 20, 2006 Maj. Gen Caldwell, spokesman for the Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) said to the *Zaytun* Division Commanding General Hwang that "You are an example of what is possible for all of Iraq," emphasizing "hearts and minds."<sup>416</sup> Thus, there was a growing consensus about "Zaytun-Like Operations."<sup>417</sup> American Lieutenant General Chiarelli who hosted a meeting with other countries' commanders on January 19, 2006 stressed four

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<sup>414</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Segyesok ui Han'gukkun* (South Korean forces in the world)," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 386 (February, 2006), 17.

<sup>415</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (Jan 4-5, 2007). *Mission Report: Industrial Revitalization Initiative for Iraq*. Institute for Defense and Business, 16. Visit <http://www.idb.org/IDB/default.aspx>

<sup>416</sup> Multi-National Force-Iraq Homepage. "Zaytun Division creates results" (2006), [http://www.mnfiraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6616&Itemid=18](http://www.mnfiraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6616&Itemid=18) (Accessed on September 13, 2009). *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>417</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 28, 2006, 2; *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 12, 2006, 3.

times that “we have to conduct operations just like the ROK forces.”<sup>418</sup> In this meeting, he stressed the importance of the non-kinetic fight in Iraq. Similarly, Chief of U.S. Central Command, Admiral William Fallon, who visited the *Zaytun* division on March 26, 2007 said that “the *Zaytun* division is a role model for allies of MNF-I.”<sup>419</sup> In a similar vein, General Petraeus sent his high ranking officers to the *Zaytun* division to learn the know-how of the ROK military’s success in Arbil on March 31, 2008.<sup>420</sup>

Asked by MNF-I Command, the *Zaytun* division finally published *ZAYTUN CMO (Civil Military Operation) Handbook* in order to share its secrets of successful COIN with other allies. This handbook stressed the concept of Operation Iraqi Future (OIF) which was different from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).<sup>421</sup> Just as the ROK COIN forces taught U.S. forces the concept of company-led tactical base in Vietnam, they taught the U.S. forces the concept of civil-military operations this time in Iraq.

The remarkable success of the ROK COIN forces in Iraq was known to other countries as well. *The Toronto Sun*, a Canadian newspaper, praised South Korean forces’ success in Iraq under the title of “Koreans Build Iraq Success” on October 18, 2006.<sup>422</sup> This newspaper introduced the *Zaytun* division Commander

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<sup>418</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Gülloböl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 389 (May, 2006), 75-6.

<sup>419</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 28, 2007, 2.

<sup>420</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 2, 2008, 4.

<sup>421</sup> *The SeoulKyungjae*, December 31, 2006, <http://economy.hankooki.com/lpage/news/200612/e2006123118200770300.htm> (Accessed October 28, 2010).

<sup>422</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 13, 2006, 6; visit



Joong-sun Hwang as a great commanding officer who knows “how to win battles without fighting.”<sup>423</sup> The newspaper also stated that “Over the past three years, his 19 doctors, 32 paramedics and 460 medical personnel, supported by 1,400 combat Marines and special-forces commandos, and 1,600 army engineers have virtually made themselves crucial to the people.”<sup>424</sup>

The Iraqi government also noticed the remarkable achievement that the ROK COIN forces made in Arbil. The Iraqi Defense Minister who visited South Korea in January 2009 praised South Korean forces’ performance in Arbil while saying that “there were no beautiful forces like the *Zaytun* division of the ROK military.”<sup>425</sup> He further noted that since the *Zaytun* was stationed, armed insurgents were fearful of coming closer to the area [... and] since South Korean soldiers treated the local population with manners, Kurdish residents liked the *Zaytun* division.”<sup>426</sup>

Best of all, the local Kurdish population showed South Korean soldiers their trust. The Iraqi local population in this region often called the *Zaytun* Division “a gift of God.”<sup>427</sup> According to *Kurdish Globe*, the Kurdish local newspaper, 84 percent of the Kurdish residents supported the South Korean troops

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<http://www.sonshi.com/news2006.html> (Accessed November 1, 2010).

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Inmul* (Person),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 398 (February, 2009), 92.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

<sup>427</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun pudae p’abyõngsa tasi ssõussda* (The *Zaytun* Division to write a new history for dispatching Korean forces abroad),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 391 (July, 2006), 62; *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 12, 2006, 3.

in Arbil.<sup>428</sup> Friendly relations between South Koreans and Iraqis, encouraged by this success, contributed to more productive communication and trade between the South Korean and Iraqi governments. In a summit talk between Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in September 2009 when South Korean troops successfully completed their mission in Iraq, the Iraqi President expressed gratitude for the Koreans' efforts to build infrastructure in Iraq.<sup>429</sup> In this summit, the two leaders signed a memorandum to further develop infrastructure: construction of a power plant and development of an oil field, for example.<sup>430</sup>

Similarly, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) president Massoud Barzani said that “there is a Kurdish proverb that there are no friends to Kurds besides mountains, but now we [Kurds] made another true friend [the *Zaytun* division soldiers].”<sup>431</sup> Moreover, the Iraqi population saw the ROK COIN forces as friendly troops so that the Iraq military even purchased South Korean military uniforms for its own soldiers. *The Chosun Ilbo* (November 1, 2007) reported in 2007 that a Korean company would export military uniforms to Iraqi forces.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Gülloböl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 406 (October, 2007), 81.

<sup>429</sup> *The Chosun Ilbo*, “Korea, Iraq Agree Oil Deal,” September 4, 2009, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2009/02/25/2009022561019.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/02/25/2009022561019.html) (Accessed on September 3, 2009).

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>431</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010.

<sup>432</sup> Hyun-ok Ha, “Iraqi forces who wear Korean uniforms,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 1, 2007, [http://bemil.chosun.com/nbrd/bbs/view.html?b\\_bbs\\_id=10040&num=39709](http://bemil.chosun.com/nbrd/bbs/view.html?b_bbs_id=10040&num=39709). (September 3, 2009).

By the same token, since the ROK COIN forces were successful in gaining the hearts and minds of the Kurdish population, they wanted South Korean troops to stay longer than initially planned. The ROK military was originally scheduled to withdraw its troops no later than the end of 2007. Local leaders in Arbil asked for the ROK forces to stay in a meeting with the performance evaluation team that was dispatched in October 2007 to examine the achievements that the *Zaytun* division.<sup>433</sup> In addition to local leaders' request, according to a survey, 84 percent of Iraqis in Arbil wanted South Korean forces to continue to be stationed in this region.<sup>434</sup>

### **III. The Nature of the Unusual COIN Mission in Iraq**

Similar to the Vietnam COIN, the Iraq COIN was an unusual mission. The Iraq COIN constituted the second largest overseas dispatch of South Korean soldiers after the Vietnam mission. In 1993, South Korean forces started to engage in international security, particularly by joining in U.N-led peacekeeping operations (PKO). In their first role, they joined in the U.N-led PKO in Somalia from July 1993 to March 1994.<sup>435</sup> ROK forces have participated in these efforts in various countries, such as Angola and Western Sahara, since the first effort in Somalia. However, the numbers of deployed soldiers had been very limited. Most deployed soldiers were liaison officers or observers, and at best, an engineer unit of battalion size was dispatched to overseas missions.<sup>436</sup> Similarly, their activities

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<sup>433</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 3, 2008, 13.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> *The ROK Army, Zaytun* (Seoul, 2005), 183.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

were confined to supporting roles rather than independent roles. As a consequence, the division size of the overseas mission in Iraq was an unusual mission for the ROK military; the ROK forces' mission in Iraq comprised the largest number of troops ever dispatched overseas since the Vietnam mission. This was particularly special because they were responsible for the entire Arbil area. This guerilla warfare-led mission overseas was also unusual in a situation where the ROK forces had been trained primarily for conventional warfare against North Korean forces.

#### **IV. The Function of Unusual Mission I: Willingness**

##### **A. Expected and Achieved Utilities of Mission Success**

The ROK military's COIN mission in Iraq was expected to increase national stature interest and prestige both nationally and internationally.<sup>437</sup> This expectation was achieved when the ROK COIN forces were successful in their mission in Arbil.

##### **1. A Key Utility and Byproduct**

Unlike the mission in Vietnam Iraq's economic utility was not important because South Korea already had become the 10th largest economy in the world. Similarly, during the Iraq War, South Korea, as a member of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), had already

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<sup>437</sup> One report of Korea Institute Defense Analysis (KIDA) lays out four types of gains through this mission: the increase of national prestige in the international arena, contribution to the ROK-US alliance, national interest, and internationalization of the ROK military. KIDA, "*Iraq p'abyŏngui sŏngkwa wa hyanghu kwaje* (Achievement of the Dispatch of the ROK military in Iraq and Tasks Ahead)," December, 2007, 93.

achieved economic development, unlike the ROK's situation during the Vietnam conflict.

However, similar to Vietnam, the ROK military's mission in Iraq was important for South Korea's national security. The ROK regional security environment had not changed since the Vietnam War. North Korean armed forces still threatened. The Cold War was not over yet on the Korean peninsula. North Korean forces still carried out provocative attacks. For example, North Korean navy ships conducted gunnery attacks against the South Korean ships around the Northern Limit Line (NLL) on June 29, 2002. In this engagement named *Icha Yŏnp 'yŏng haejŏn*, one South Korean ship was sunk and six crew members were killed in action.<sup>438</sup>

Similar to the Vietnam period, the alliance between South Korea and the United States was key to South Korea's security. The alliance was still regarded as crucial for national security although the ROK military had become the 10th strongest armed force, and ROK forces were stronger than the DPRK forces. This was particularly true because China still strongly supported North Korea's political position.

In the above regional security environment, American forces remained the most important deterrent logic to guarantee for ROK security. The alliance between the two countries was considered even more important because North Korea was believed to already have nuclear weapons. In the meantime, the Bush

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<sup>438</sup> Faced with North Korean ships' attacks, South Korean ships conducted counter-attacks, leading to sinking the two North Korean navy boats and critically injuring 30 of their crew members.

administration developed the concept of “strategic flexibility” based on Global Posture (GPR). Strategic flexibility was aimed at quickly dispatching American soldiers to any place in the world. This could affect American forces in South Korea as well. Thus, the defense ministers of South Korea and the U.S. discussed this issue in the 2003 ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM).<sup>439</sup>

While the U.S. military was struggling with its COIN mission in Iraq, U.S. forces in Korea were subjected to relocation. Faced with a need for more soldiers in Iraq, Washington sent one brigade (around 4000 soldiers) of American forces in Korea to Iraq.<sup>440</sup> The dispatch of some American forces in South Korea to the Iraq mission was regarded as a sign of weakening security on the Korean peninsula. As a consequence, the ROK military’s mission in Iraq became crucial for ROK national security to prevent the further transfer of American troops from South Korea to Iraq. In this vein, the dispatch of the *Zaytun* division in August 2004 contributed to easing the pressure on U.S. forces in Korea. The U.S. plan to reduce American troops by 15,000 diminished.<sup>441</sup> The ROK military mission in Iraq precluded additional American troops in South Korea from moving to Iraq and contributed to strengthening the alliance between South Korea and the U.S.

In addition to national security maximization, the South Korean troops’ mission in Iraq contributed to another byproduct: energy security. South Korea is

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<sup>439</sup> For more on strategic flexibility of U.S. Forces in Korea, visit <http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/policy-forums-online/security/0619Lee.html> (Accessed October 24, 2010).

<sup>440</sup> *The Dong-A Ilbo*, May 17, 2004, <http://www.donga.com/fbin/output?n=200405170021> (Accessed October 24, 2010).

<sup>441</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 13, 2004, 2.

one of the largest exporters in the world. South Korea heavily relies on overseas energy to make this economy work. The ROK spends about 40 percent of its national budget to import energy.<sup>442</sup> South Korea is the world's largest crude oil importer.<sup>443</sup> In a situation where oil is a fundamental resource for the national economy, South Korea needs good relations with Iraq, one of the biggest oil export countries.

Particularly, the Kurdistan region, for which the ROK COIN forces were responsible, contained oil. Thus, the successful mission of the ROK COIN forces was valuable for energy security for the nation. Since the ROK military was successful in winning the hearts and minds of local Kurds in Iraq, the South Korean government maintained good relations with the Kurdistan government as well. As a consequence, the KRG gave South Korean companies permission to develop and produce oil in northern Iraq. For example, on June 25, 2008 when ROK COIN forces were conducting stabilization operations in northern Iraq, the KRG signed an oil contract with state-owned Korea National Oil Corp.<sup>444</sup> This contract made it possible for South Korea to acquire about 2 billion barrels of crude oil which would meet South Koreans' oil needs for more than 2.5 years.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> *The Hankook Kyungjae*, October 24, 2010, <http://market.hankyung.com/news/app/newsview.php?aid=2004090187881&ltype=1&nid=102&sid=01190524&page=9> (Accessed October 23, 2010).

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> Miyoung Kim, "Asian Company and Markets: Iraq's Kurds sign oil deals with S.Korea firms," *Reuters*, June 25, 2008, <http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/asiaCompanyAndMarkets/idINSEO28961220080625> (Accessed October 23, 2010).

<sup>445</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Haeoe p'abyöng söngkwa* (Achievements through Overseas Mission of the ROK forces)," *The National Defense Journal*,

The other byproduct that South Korea gained through the successful mission of the *Zaytun* division was South Korean companies' participation in a variety of reconstruction projects in Arbil. The *Zaytun* division's success in winning the hearts and minds of the Kurdish population enticed the KRG to consider South Korean companies for infrastructure projects. The KRG invited 13 South Korean companies to Arbil in July 2007, and both parties negotiated contracts worth 23 billion dollars for various projects, such as hydro dam and housing facilities. One KRG official told representatives from South Korean companies that "as long as the *Zaytun* division is here, [the KRG] will give South Korean companies more benefits."<sup>446</sup>

## 2. International Political Utility

South Korea, as a consolidated democracy and a growing economy, has sought more engagement in international affairs both militarily and economically since the 1990s. Its first military involvement occurred in 1991, when it sent 314 military medics and transportation corps members to the first Gulf War in Iraq. In subsequent years South Korean troops have been sent to many places in the world. Seoul was also seeking more economic engagement in world affairs as well. However, the scale of ROK military and economic engagement in world affairs remained small.

Thus, the dispatch of one division to one of the most important international security missions, COIN in Iraq, was considered to be a golden opportunity to

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No. 421 (January, 2009), 77.

<sup>446</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, August 10, 2007, 1.



increase its national prestige in the international arena. The ROK Army document clearly states that South Korea, at the time the 12th biggest economy in the world and a member of OECD, sent its troops to Iraq to play a substantial role in world affairs to increase its national prestige.<sup>447</sup>

While the ROK military's mission in Vietnam introduced South Korea to international politics, its mission in Iraq served as an accelerator to extend its role in the international arena. To put it another way, it offered South Korea an opportunity to show the world that South Korea has become a middle power both willing and able to contribute to international security. South Korea achieved these utilities both in international security affairs and international economic affairs. The success of the *Zaytun* division showed the world that South Korea is an active and substantial player for international security beyond simply security on the Korean peninsula. At the same time, the *Zaytun* division showed the global economic community that South Korea is capable of building economic infrastructure for another country.

#### B. National Pride and Morale

South Korean soldiers agreed that ROK military and economic achievements since the Vietnam War and its close alliance with the United States led to Seoul's discussion to help Washington and the Iraqis.<sup>448</sup> South Korean soldiers' performance in Iraq increased ROK national prestige. As a consequence, South Korean soldiers were equipped with a high degree of pride *vis-à-vis* their

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<sup>447</sup> The ROK Army, *Zaytun*, 13.

<sup>448</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 3, 2008.

mission. Reporters of *The National Defense Journal* who visited the *Zaytun* division noted that they could read soldiers' pride in their mission.<sup>449</sup>

Female non-commissioned officer Kung-mi Hwang who was being trained for Iraq in 2004 said that she, representing South Korea, would try her best to give Iraqis pride.<sup>450</sup> Soldiers' pride in this mission sometimes guided some soldiers to delay their retirement from mandatory military service. When the *Zaytun* division was preparing for Iraq, 500 soldiers of the *Zaytun* division were supposed to retire during their deployment because their mandatory service term was supposed to be over. Nevertheless, they voluntarily extended their military service in order to participate in the mission in Iraq.<sup>451</sup> Similarly, according to the survey, 90 percent of the *Zaytun* soldiers answered that their thoughts about life and death significantly affected their mission success.<sup>452</sup> In this vein, their role in increasing their country's prestige was necessary for their role in COIN in Arbil.

By the same token, South Korean soldier, Sak Lee, who returned to South Korea after completing his duty in 2005, said that "my heart was full of national patriotism and pride due to the fact that I used to be one member of the *Zaytun* division."<sup>453</sup> In a similar vein, two brothers, each of whom had abandoned permanent residency in the U.S. and Switzerland in order to volunteer to the

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<sup>449</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Gülloböl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces)," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 394 (October, 2006), 53.

<sup>450</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 15, 2004, 3.

<sup>451</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, July 6, 2004, 1.

<sup>452</sup> Jae-eun Lee, *Zaytunui yǒng-chōk hyanggi* (*The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*) (Seoul: Jinhan M&B, 2006), 116-7.

*The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 234.

<sup>453</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, July 26, 2005, 9.

*Zaytun* division, strongly showed their pride as members of the *Zaytun* division when they returned to South Korea in September 2006 after accomplishing their duties.<sup>454</sup>

The ROK president also recognized the role of the ROK soldiers in increasing national prestige. President Roh Moo-hyun who visited the *Zaytun* division on December 8, 2004 stressed the importance of its mission in Arbil while saying that “your [the *Zaytun* division soldiers] perspiration and efforts [here in Arbil] are another power of South Korea as well as a diplomatic power of South Korea.”<sup>455</sup>

*Zaytun* division high-ranking officers also encouraged their soldiers to have a pride as representatives of South Korea. The first *Zaytun* division Commander Ui-don Hwang stated that “I will let the world know that the South Korean military is excellent and South Korea is a peace-loving people” in September 2004 before the *Zaytun* division started to conduct operations.<sup>456</sup> Another *Zaytun* division Commander Joong-sun Hwang stressed that all of his soldiers have to approach local residents as if they were South Korea’s diplomats.<sup>457</sup> In a similar vein, the *Zaytun* division in Iraq posted stickers which say that “you are the very

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<sup>454</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 19, 2006, 3.

<sup>455</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “*Haeoe p’abyōng hwaltong* (Overseas operations of South Korean military)” February 13, 2007, 13.

<sup>456</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 23, 2004, 3.

<sup>457</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 12, 2006, 3.

South Korea” in its working places.<sup>458</sup> Another sticker says that “our sweat and efforts are a driver for South Korean power.”<sup>459</sup>

National pride and related morale motivated South Korean soldiers to help the Iraqi population in Arbil with their hearts, and by doing so, they were successfully able to complete COIN in Iraq based on a population-centered approach. In an interview with a *The Korea Defense Daily* reporter two months before all South Korean forces withdrew from Arbil, the *Zaytun* division commander Sun-woo Park noted that “South Korean forces were successful in winning the hearts and minds of the local population in Arbil through a variety of civil-military operations and reconstruction projects.”<sup>460</sup> He further said that “[due to the *Zaytun* division’s mission success] Arbil has been evaluated as the most secured area in all of Iraq.”<sup>461</sup>

Similarly, the 11th Civil-Military brigade soldiers who came back to South Korea in 2006 were proud of themselves in terms of their mission. The brigade commander Kuk-sun Im noted in 2006 that he appreciated his country which gave him this mission.<sup>462</sup> Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Won-cheol Kim said that he was proud of the achievements in Arbil.<sup>463</sup> Captain Jong-kook Im also noted that

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<sup>458</sup> <http://dodgernation.co.kr/90091663758>

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun pudae p’abyöngsa tasi ssöussda* (The *Zaytun* Division to write a new history for dispatching Korean forces abroad),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 391 (July, 2006), 62.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 63.

his experience was the highest source of pride that he had ever had.<sup>464</sup> In a nutshell, *Zaytun* soldiers were proud of themselves as members of their special division, and thus, they maintained high morale. Their pride and morale contributed to making themselves become effective COIN players in Arbil, confirming hypothesis 1A (the hypothesis of morale and pride).

### C. Enthusiasm for Its Own OPCON and Organization

The *Zaytun* Division was composed of two civil-military brigades and other supporting groups. Even though its mission was based on a population-centered approach, it required well-disciplined soldiers. Thus, around half of them came from special forces. When it came to the scope of operational control, the *Zaytun* Division was one member of the chain of command of MNC-I, but conducted operations independently under the ROK Joint Chiefs of Command in the assigned area, Arbil.<sup>465</sup>

One of the most important four principles for the South Korean government to decide mission area in Iraq was whether it would be possible for the South Korean military to conduct independent operations under South Korea's own command.<sup>466</sup> Similar to situations in Vietnam, the ROK military thought that

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<sup>464</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "The *Zaytun* Division to write a new history for dispatching Korean forces abroad," 64.

<sup>465</sup> Congress's consent paper notes that the authority to command the *Zaytun* division is under the ROK military and the *Zaytun* division commander has the operational control. Jae-kun Yoo, "*Iraq Zaytun pudae bangmun gyöl-kwapogosö* (The Report about the Visit of the *Zaytun* Division), December 2005, 58. The ROK religious officer, Jae-eun Lee, also mentions the ROK military's OPCON in Arbil. Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 168.

<sup>466</sup> The other three principles were its responsibility of a specific area, peace/reconstruction mission, and the eligible troop size (no larger than 3,000).

independent operations would make COIN success in Iraq better. Thus, the ROK military did its utmost to lobby for independent operational authority, and by doing so, succeeded. On October 1, 2004, the *Zaytun* division assumed operational command over some areas of the northern Iraq, including Arbil from a Striker unit under MNC-I.<sup>467</sup> This independent authority allowed the ROK forces in Iraq to develop their own creative tactics.

#### D. Mission Study toward Mission Success

Similar to the ROK military's efforts to reduce adaptation costs in Vietnam, it studied the COIN mission in Iraq in two ways: a historical study and current mission-based study. In the historical study, the ROK military focused on two factors: a key factor of the ROK COIN success in general and lessons learned from a population-focused remedy in the second phase of its mission in Vietnam. On the one hand, the key general concept for the ROK COIN was to separate the local population from insurgents. This concept had been applied to South Korea's own fight against Communist guerillas and its overseas fight against the Viet Cong. Thus, the *Zaytun* division adopted this general COIN rule by intensively reexamining the South Korean military's successful experiences.

Second, the ROK military strategically reexamined how it had achieved a successful outcome in Vietnam because it believed that the Iraq mission would be similar to the Vietnam mission in the sense that the mission in Iraq is also unconventional warfare, more clearly COIN. In particular, since the ROK military

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*The Korea Defense Daily*, March 20, 2004, 2.

<sup>467</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2004, 1.

considered the adoption of a population-centered approach to its COIN mission in Iraq, it reexamined civil-military operations that the ROK military had carried out in the second phase of its COIN mission in Vietnam. By doing so, the ROK COIN forces fully identified what to do and how to do it in Iraq before deployment.

The mission-based study on the battleground was made by dispatching soldiers step-by-step in an attempt to reduce adaptation costs. The gradual engagement to the Iraq mission proceeded with the following steps: examination by a surveillance team, the dispatch of preliminary COIN forces, the mission study by an advisory team on the battleground, and finally substantial involvement through a fully organized COIN unit.

As the first step, the ROK military sent three liaison personnel to Kuwait on April 7, 2003, and then on April 17, 2003 before the dispatch of preliminary COIN forces; they launched a surveillance team which was composed of 20 soldiers.<sup>468</sup> This team was intended to investigate battleground situations so that preliminary COIN forces were able to play a meaningful role under favorable conditions.

The second step to reduce adaptation costs was made by sending preliminary COIN forces before the dispatch of the major mission unit. South Korea sent softer troops, the *Seohee* and *Jema* units, in its attempt to make the Iraqi population maintain a favorable image of South Korean soldiers in Iraq in

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<sup>468</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “*Haeoe p’abyŏng hwaltong* (Overseas operations of South Korean military)” February 13, 2007, <http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndInfo/workData> (Accessed October 25, 2010).

general.<sup>469</sup> These units served as an initiator for applying a population-centered approach. In contrast with the ROK military's enemy-oriented approach in the Vietnam conflict, South Korean forces adopted a population-centered approach, which stressed the protection of the local population and the construction of infrastructure in Iraq. Thus, the *Seohee* and *Jema* units (600 soldiers), arrived in Southern Iraq (a Shia dominant region) in 2003 to provide the Iraqi population with reconstruction-related help and medical services. *Seohee* and *Jema* unit soldiers were professionally trained particularly focusing on population assistance.

The third step was initiated by sending the advisory team to the Iraqi battleground to figure out the role of the upcoming division level unit in the region. The first advisory team was dispatched on September 24, 2003. This team was composed of 12 personnel from the Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense (ROKMN), the Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (ROKMFAT), and civilian organizations. The second advisory team, led by two star Army General Ki-seok Song, arrived at the battleground on April 11, 2004, and discussed the upcoming division unit's mission with the COIN leading country's military, the U.S. military.<sup>470</sup> In addition to these governmental teams, the ROK National Assembly also dispatched its mission study team to Iraq.<sup>471</sup> In particular, the advisory team from the National Assembly suggested the dispatch

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<sup>469</sup> Softer troops refer to non-fighting forces whose missions are aimed to provide the local population with medical treatment and housing construction.

<sup>470</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 12, 2004, 1.

<sup>471</sup> The ROK Army, *Zaytun* (Seoul, 2005), 12.



of an independent unit in December 2003.<sup>472</sup> Thus, the multi-layered investigation allowed the ROK COIN forces to fully understand their mission and the battleground situation.

After promoting a favorable climate to minimize adaptation costs, as the last phase of engaging the COIN mission, the ROK military sent a division – the *Zaytun* (meaning olive in Arabic, symbolizing peace) division – to Arbil in northern Iraq, which was assigned by the COIN leading country.<sup>473</sup> The most important assignment in this step was for the main unit to safely move to Arbil. The safe movement of troops from Kuwait to Arbil was crucial because if South Korean forces had been attacked or damaged, their mission would have ended in failure before it began. Adapted to battleground situations through gradual mission studies, the ROK military successfully moved from Kuwait to Arbil without casualties or damage in September 2004.<sup>474</sup>

The examination of the ROK willingness variable clearly shows how importantly the nature of the mission affects their high degree of enthusiasm for mission success. The aforementioned expected gains for South Korea through the mission in Iraq increased the ROK troops' eagerness for mission success, and by confirms hypothesis 1B. The eagerness of the ROK COIN forces was converted into a high degree of capability required for COIN success in Arbil by allowing

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<sup>472</sup> The ROK Army, *Zaytun* (Seoul, 2005), 180.

<sup>473</sup> The *Zaytun* division is called as *Irak'ü P'yöngghwajaegön Sadan* in Korean. The ROK Army, *Zaytun* (Seoul, 2005), 56.

<sup>474</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “*Haeoe p'abyöng hwaltong* (Overseas operations of South Korean military)” February 13, 2007, 10-1.

them to choose their own COIN methods, making mission organizations workable, and dispatching the best trained soldiers to Iraq.

## V. The Function of Unusual Mission II: Capability

### A. A COIN Approach Adoption

#### 1. Evaluation: The Degree of Insurgent Activities

One of the most crucial capabilities for the ROK COIN forces was their capacity to choose an appropriate approach. They chose a population-centered approach as the optimal strategy because Arbil, which was assigned to them, was less dominated by insurgents than other areas in Iraq.

There was no domestic central authority in Iraq after OIF was completed on May 1, 2004. Thus, political chaos existed particularly at the time of the general election on January 29, 2005. There was a political struggle between Shia and Sunni ethnic groups in the process of regaining domestic order. Thus, a variety of insurgent groups – Sunni, Shia, and later al-Qaeda – started to rise in the different regions of Iraq.

In the meantime, insurgent groups were relatively less dominant in the Kurdistan autonomous area than other areas. In this region, there was a central political authority, which was the KRG, and 53,000 KRG security forces were playing their role in securing the region.<sup>475</sup> In addition, two major political parties in the region – KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of

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<sup>475</sup> Hak-seung Ahn, Hak-seung Ahn, “*Minsajakchŏn chaegŏnchiwŏn Arbil Vision / Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision*,” *Haeoe p’abyŏngsa yŏn’gu ch’ongsŏ* (A series of overseas dispatch history of ROK armed forces). Vol. 1 (Seoul: The ROK Ministry of Defense, 2006), 258.

Kurdistan) – were sharing power in the region. One province of this Kurdistan autonomous region, Arbil, was assigned to the ROK COIN forces. Taking advantage of the low degree of insurgent activities in this area, the ROK COIN forces adopted a population-centered approach as the key COIN method.

What made the adoption of a population-centered approach favorable to South Korean forces' success? The strongest point was the optimal use of resources. COIN requires a lot of money and other resources. In this vein, the appropriate COIN method's adoption allowed the ROK COIN forces to use their resources with maximum effectiveness. They spent most of their resources on civil affairs operations rather than military operations by adopting a population-centered approach after carefully evaluating the Arbil battleground.

## 2. Adopted "Hearts and Minds" Tactics

While the ROK COIN forces in Vietnam adopted the company-led tactical base as their key tactic for an enemy-oriented approach, the ROK forces in Iraq developed their own creative tactic by adopting the Green Angel program as a population-centered approach. On a tactical level, this program was intended to help marginalized rural village residents through support from the ROK civil-military operation team, including medical treatment, electronics repairs, and road pavement.<sup>476</sup> What was important was that the *Zaytun* soldiers visited the local residents in marginalized villages, rather than making the local residents come to the *Zaytun* division. In other words, they helped the local residents before those residents asked for a help.

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<sup>476</sup> The ROK Army, *Zaytun*, 108.

On a strategic level, the Green Angel program was aimed at building a friendly and cooperative network system with the local population through three steps: stabilization, settlement, and development.<sup>477</sup> Under this operation, Korean soldiers and local Iraqis played sports together and shared cultural activities, such as traditional dance. For example, the *Zaytun* division hosted a friendship day between South Koreans and Kurds under the slogan of “We are Friends, Peace of Kurdish.”<sup>478</sup> It also provided the local people with more opportunity to experience benefits from the COIN force. This program helped the local population to recognize the COIN forces as an aid program rather than an occupying force.<sup>479</sup>

### 3. Actions: Infrastructure Building

A population-centered approach was realized through a variety of infrastructure building projects. The *Zaytun* division built infrastructure as a way to separate the local population from insurgents. For example, the *Zaytun* division constructed 280 new facilities.<sup>480</sup> Therefore, the population-centered approach yielded: political, security, economic, and social gains (see Table 18).

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<sup>477</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 365.

The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Kukkunae baranda* (Asking for the ROK military),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 382 (October, 2005), 31.

<sup>478</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Gülloböl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 401 (May, 2007), 76.

<sup>479</sup> The enhanced friendly relationship between South Korea and Iraq, which was the outcome of the ROK’s soft remedy of COIN, can be easily detected due to. In an interview with *the Korea Times*, Mustafa Musa Taufik, *charge d’affaire* of the Iraqi Embassy in Seoul, said that “The troops acquired admiration and respect from the Iraqi people.” Se-jeong Kim, “Korean Troops in Iraq Praised,” *The Korea Times*, January 13, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/07/176\\_17227.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/07/176_17227.html) (Accessed September 3, 2009).

<sup>480</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 16, 2010, 2.

Table 18

The ROK COIN Forces' Infrastructure Building in Iraq

<b>Types</b>	<b>Key Contents</b>
Political infrastructure	Cooperation with KRG, KDP, and KNA The support for general election
Security infrastructure	The construction of security facilities The removal of land mines Indigenous security forces training: IA brigade, ING Joint inspection sites
Economic infrastructure	RRT The new village movement Sewerage facility renovation / road's repair A step-by-step support by KOICA
Societal infrastructure	Civil health Education Job market Civil welfare

First, political infrastructure building was made under various organizations, such as the Civil Military Center (CIMIC). The CIMIC offered a venue to evaluate the soft COIN methods and listen to the requests of the KRG and the local people. The ROK COIN forces also cooperated with local political leaders, such as Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and KNA (Kurdistan parliament). The establishment of legitimate local leadership or government is crucial to weaken an insurgency. Thus, the COIN forces supported operations for stabilizing the general election process.

Second, the ROK COIN forces also paid attention to building the security infrastructure in Arbil. The ROK forces were in a supporting role for security forces rather than direct engagements so that the KRG used its own security troops. This indirect role was more effective because indigenous security forces in

Arbil were stronger than in other areas in Iraq. Furthermore, the supporting role was important for winning the hearts and minds of the local residents because Kurds had wanted their own authority. As part of its indirect role, ROK forces provided local security forces key items, such as communications systems.<sup>481</sup> As of 2007, the ROK COIN team provided 15,000 items.<sup>482</sup> They also constructed and repaired security facilities, such as key military facilities and inspection posts, so that local security forces were able to effectively play their role in protecting the local population. For example, the *Zaytun* division provided the Iraqi Army (IA) brigade in Arbil with a new intelligence department building in April 2006.<sup>483</sup> Furthermore, the *Zaytun* division soldiers removed land mines to protect local people in coordination with the IKMAC (Iraqi Kurdistan mine action center), who were the primary actor.

More important, the *Zaytun* Division trained indigenous security forces – police forces and military forces, such as the IA brigade and ING (Iraqi National Guard).<sup>484</sup> The unit of MiTT in the *Zaytun* was in charge of education for military forces, whereas the unit of PAT supported education for police forces.<sup>485</sup> In particular, the *Zaytun* division trained police forces in Arbil through the P3 (Police-Partnership-Program) plan. It published a Kurdish language textbook for

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<sup>481</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 420-3.

<sup>482</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “*Haeoe p’abyōng hwaltong* (Overseas operations of South Korean military)” February 13, 2007, 12.

<sup>483</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 10, 2006, 6.

<sup>484</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 408.

<sup>485</sup> This unit educated police forces five days a week on 4-5 hours basis per day. The Republic of Korea Army, *Zaytun Budae* (*Zaytun* division) (Daejeon: The ROK Army, 2009), 92.

police training, and then it intensively trained police forces in small classes (20-30 persons per class).<sup>486</sup> In addition, one of the most original methods by South Korean soldiers to train security forces was the Taekwondo school for security forces to increase their individual capability in martial arts.<sup>487</sup>

Third, the ROK COIN forces built economic infrastructure. Cooperating with the COIN leading country (the U.S.), the ROK COIN forces developed economic structure under the RRT (Regional Reconstruction Team) project. They cooperated with KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency). They repaired roads and renovated sewage facilities under this economic infrastructure building project.<sup>488</sup> Furthermore, they redesigned 20 villages. As of 2007, South Korean soldiers paved roads and constructed facilities for electronic generators in 46 places.<sup>489</sup>

Lastly, the *Zaytun* division launched societal infrastructure building projects. Society cohesion can collapse in a war-stricken country, which inhibits COIN forces from winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The ROK COIN forces saw the rebuilding of societal infrastructure in Arbil as imperative. Thus, they focused on increasing key societal assets that made society work in Arbil: civil health, education, job markets, and civil welfare.

Above all, as soon as the ROK COIN forces arrived at their assigned area, Arbil, they provided the local Iraqi population with the best medical treatment in

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<sup>486</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 22, 2006, 6.

<sup>487</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 373.

<sup>488</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 416-26.

<sup>489</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, "Overseas operations of South Korean military" February 13, 2007, 12.

an effort to promote civil health. The *Zaytun* hospital, which opened on November 27, 2004, provided medical treatment to more than 88,000 Iraqis as of 2008.<sup>490</sup> In particular, the *Zaytun* hospital was regarded as one of the best hospitals that gave them emotional treatment as well as physical treatment, and thus, it became the most popular hospital in the area. In an effort to show local residents South Korean soldiers' concern, they operated shuttle buses for local residents to the *Zaytun* hospital.<sup>491</sup> This hospital became very popular. Due to increasing demand from the local population, it was difficult to give all patients treatment. Thus, the ROK soldiers had to ask them to bring a document from other hospitals which showed that they needed treatment. Encouraged by the *Zaytun* hospital's popularity, South Korean forces gave medical treatment tickets particularly to Iraqis who provided assistance for ROK forces' infrastructure building.<sup>492</sup> These tickets were regarded as one of the best gifts to the local residents.

In addition to offering medical care, the ROK COIN forces encouraged local Iraqis to actively engage in societal improvement by training new Iraqi medics through an 8-week internship program.<sup>493</sup> This program was successful and popular. For example, on November 8, 2007, one Iraqi medical student, who

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<sup>490</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 16, 2010, 2.

<sup>491</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>492</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>493</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Gillobol kukkun* (Global South Korean forces)," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 398 (February, 2007), 72.



completed an internship program, said that “South Koreans’ inherent kindness and *Jung* culture encouraged me to join this program.”<sup>494</sup>

The second sector for societal infrastructure was education. The role of education was important because it provides children with the opportunities to know their own history and culture. To begin with, the ROK COIN forces focused on constructing or repairing schools which had to be closed frequently when it rained or was cold because the school buildings were in a state of general disrepair. They established or repaired around 395 classrooms in schools.<sup>495</sup> After repairing schools, they established a sisterhood relationship with them. The literacy rate was just 50 percent in Arbil before South Korean soldiers’ arrival, and thus the ROK COIN forces offered residents a Kurdish language class.<sup>496</sup> The class, which began under the concept of capacity building for residents, became popular, and thus, the number of classes was increased from 8 in 2004 to 85 in 2005.<sup>497</sup> A total of 7,256 residents took the Kurdish language class during the *Zaytun* division’s COIN operations.<sup>498</sup>

Third, ROK COIN forces activated job markets. This sector displayed by two trajectories: hiring local residents and offering vocational training. The ROK COIN forces hired local residents as interpreters for their civil-military operations.

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<sup>494</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, November 14, 2007, 4. I examine the impact of *Jung* culture on COIN effectiveness in Iraq in the section of political/socio-cultural advantage section in a more detail.

<sup>495</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 353.

<sup>496</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun p’yŏnghwa chaegŏn Immu nŭn gyesok doenda* (The *Zaytun* Division’s mission for peace and reconstruction continues),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 411 (March, 2008), 75.

<sup>497</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 392.

<sup>498</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 16, 2010, 9.

In addition to interpreters, they hired teachers, Taekwondo instructors, and facility personnel. Hiring local residents contributed to increasing constructive communication between COIN forces and the local population in a synergistic way.<sup>499</sup> To put it another way, local interpreters played a bridging role between the ROK forces and the local residents as well as increasing job opportunities in Arbil.

The ROK COIN forces also provided local residents with vocational training. A vocational training center provided uneducated local people with an opportunity to learn job-related skills.<sup>500</sup> About 2,300 local residents took vocational training, and graduates who completed this program were guaranteed employment.<sup>501</sup> This became very popular with the local population, as reflected in the fact that there were about 7 applicants for each available position.<sup>502</sup> Students, who completed this training and then got jobs sent their South Korean instructors “thank you” letters.<sup>503</sup> The American force, stimulated by the big success of the ROK forces’ vocational training center, started to establish its own

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<sup>499</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 430-3.

<sup>500</sup> It offered several job-related classes: such as car maintenance, baking, maneuver of heavy machinery, computer class, etc. *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>501</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “Overseas operations of South Korean military” February 13, 2007, 12. *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 16, 2010, 2.

<sup>502</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun, Chungdong ui p’yŏnghwa simko oda* (The *Zaytun* Division which returns after promoting peace in Middle East),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 420 (December, 2008): 77.

<sup>503</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Gŭllobŏl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 403 (July, 2007), 79.

vocational centers in October 2007.<sup>504</sup> U.S. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld told MNF-I General Chiarelli that the ROK vocational training center should be benchmarked by U.S. forces.<sup>505</sup>

The last sector that the ROK COIN troops focused on for societal infrastructure building was civil welfare. Arbil lacked space for residents to enjoy their spare time. Thus, South Korean soldiers constructed a civil park, which was equipped with a playground for children and displayed Korean traditional architectures. The other big project to enhance civil welfare was the construction of a library. This was intended to make local residents see South Korean soldiers as friends from a neighboring society rather than an opposing society. This library was named the *Zaytun* library.<sup>506</sup> The *Zaytun* library which was completed on October 22, 2008 was state-of-the-art in the Kurdistan region and became a symbol of civic welfare.

By the adoption of a population-centered approach the ROK COIN forces won the hearts and minds of the local population, confirming hypothesis 2A (the hypothesis of COIN method-adoption hypothesis). Just like the ROK soldiers in Vietnam were called “Dai Han” by the local Vietnamese, who showed their friendly attitude as a consequence of the adoption of a population-based method

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<sup>504</sup> Soon-tae Kim, “*Kunŭi p’yŏnghwajŏk yŏkhale kwanhan yŏn’gu* (The Study on the peaceful role of the military forces),” *Kunsanondan*. Vol. 53 (2008), 187.

<sup>505</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Gŭllobŏl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 388 (April, 2006), 73.

<sup>506</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

in the second phase, the ROK soldiers in Iraq were called “Kuri” by the local Kurds, illustrative of the overall success of the population-centered approach.<sup>507</sup>

### B. Organizational Flexibility and Training

The ROK military used to focus on hierarchical and inflexible organization because its organization had been developed against a conventional threat, North Korea’s traditional military force. The troops to be sent to Iraq, however, required more flexibility to deal with unconventional missions. Thus, the ROK military started to make the COIN organization in Iraq more flexible and adaptable to the situation.

What did the ROK COIN forces do for organizational flexibility as part of making it possible for a population-centered approach to succeed? First, the planning unit of the *Zaytun* division was established on January 12, 2004 to make the mission organization fully effective. This planning unit played a key role in preparing for the dispatch of the *Zaytun*.<sup>508</sup> The ROK military gave the *Zaytun* soldiers intensive physical training so that they were able to adjust to the desert climate.<sup>509</sup> More importantly, along with the physical training, the ROK military attempted to change soldiers’ conventional warfare-oriented minds. To that end, all deployed soldiers took mandatory courses in Islamic culture and the local language.

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<sup>507</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 368. The religious officer, Jae-eun Lee, who participated in Green Angel operations, recalls that Kurdish children greeted Korean soldiers by calling them “Korae (Kuri).” Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 116-7.

<sup>508</sup> The ROK Army, *Zaytun*, 44.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Since the ROK military knew the importance of cultural background for COIN soldiers, training of COIN soldiers took much longer than normal soldiers'. South Korean men, who are mandatorily conscripted, typically received five weeks of military training. In addition to that normal training, the ROK military gave the *Zaytun* soldiers, who had already completed the five weeks mandatory training, another six weeks training. Thus, the six-weeks training of South Korean soldiers for the Iraq mission was much longer than Americans' 16 day training.<sup>510</sup> Moreover, the first group of soldiers deployed in the *Zaytun* received a full six-months training for this special mission's success. This longer and intensive training made it possible for the *Zaytun* to function as COIN forces within a population-centered approach.

Equally important, the ROK military made a substantial organizational change. Based on the Vietnam War experience, ROK COIN forces knew that a population-centered method requires flexible organization because it covers non-military affairs as well as military affairs. Thus, they tried to make mission organizations flexible and workable for the stabilization operations by establishing necessary sub-organizations. Workable organizations had been made in three contexts: Cooperation Committee, POL-MIL, and CIMIC.

First, the Cooperation Committee was designed to offer a cooperating arena between the *Zaytun* division and the KRG. This Committee has been very active ever since it was first established in September 2004. As part of this committee,

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<sup>510</sup> Diana Lyn Sargent, *The Role of Culture in Civil-Military Operations: U.S. and ROK Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Northern Iraq*, MA thesis, Iwha University, 2008, 68.

*Zaytun* division personnel visited the Arbil government office building, and both sides together discussed how to prioritize construction projects.<sup>511</sup> This Committee made construction projects seen as the common work of South Korean troops and a regional government rather than as the *Zaytun*'s own work.

Second, the ROK military sought to deal with various dynamics in COIN by establishing a sub-organization combining the political sector and military sectors. The role of POL-MIL (Political-Military) – a caucus between non-military leaders and military leaders – guided the COIN organization in its unconventional mission. Seoul recognized that the mission in Iraq was more than just a simple military operation. Thus, it established POL-MIL on October 26, 2004 to share information across agencies and discuss better ways to deal with this mission.<sup>512</sup> The POL-MIL is composed of the *Zaytun* general, South Korean ambassador in Iraq, agents of the ROKMFAT, and other governmental representatives. If Korean civilians were to be attacked, the domestic population might ask the ROK troops to be withdrawn. In this regard, the caucus dealt with ways to protect and effectively control Korean civilians who worked on reconstruction projects. The Korea Center in the *Zaytun* Division also played an important role in protecting Korean civilians. It served as an organization to integrate and process various types of intelligence and information, which contributed to protecting Korean soldiers from insurgent attack.

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<sup>511</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 440-1.

<sup>512</sup> Hong-sik Kim, "*Zaytun pudae chǒngch 'I kunsā hyōbūich 'e ui ch 'ujin naeyong mit punsōk* (Contents and analysis of the *Zaytun* division's POL-MIL)," *ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 33 (October 2007), 72.

Finally, the ROK military established CIMIC (Civil Military Cooperation Center) under the command of the *Zaytun* Division. Participants in CIMIC were drawn from various representatives from military officers to NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) personnel to the representatives from the local Iraqi community.<sup>513</sup> The CIMIC served as the key organization for the entire civil affairs operations.

All of the above organizations contributed to a population-centered approach, which required various dimensions beyond simply a military one, confirming hypothesis 2B (the hypothesis of organizational flexibility). These organizations had become more effective by being operated by the best trainees and the most effective soldiers.

### C. Effective Resources

#### 1. The Best Unit: Appropriate Size and Cultivating Elite Unit

It is important to take into account the size of mission units depending on battleground situations. If too many soldiers with heavily armed weapons are sent to areas where insurgents are less dominant, the local population is more likely to see them as occupiers, leading to the failure of winning their hearts and minds. At the same time, if only military engineers are dispatched to the areas, the COIN forces would be vulnerable to insurgent attacks, and furthermore, they would be incapable of offering the local people physical security.

The selection of an appropriate size was one of the most important processes for the ROK's mission's success. The ROK military decided on the

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<sup>513</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 281-4.

division unit as the appropriate size so that the COIN forces were able to carry out their own independent operations in Arbil while preventing the unit size from being too large. Since Iraqi local forces were in charge of security, the ROK COIN forces were designed to focus more on reconstruction operations.

The *Zaytun* division was composed of two civil-military brigades (1,000 special operation soldiers), engineer/medical units (600 soldiers), security forces (500 special operation soldiers, 200 soldiers of an armored company, and 100 Marines), and other troops (1,200 soldiers).<sup>514</sup> In particular, the Marines, which were dispatched to Vietnam for the first time in the history of the ROK military's overseas operations, were responsible for force protection.<sup>515</sup> One company size of Marines was sent to carry out security patrol missions for the *Zaytun* division's protection. What mattered the most was that 1,000 soldiers from special operation units were in charge of civil-military operations. Thus, they were good at protecting themselves from insurgent attacks as well as conducting civil-military operations.

## 2. The Best Soldiers: Cultivating Elite Fighters

Stimulated by a tactical success in Vietnam based on the dispatch of elite soldiers, the ROK military chose elite officers and highly-disciplined soldiers as its COIN force. Similar to Vietnam, since it was considered an honor to be

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<sup>514</sup> Min-ho Choi, *Kukche jök kunsu hwaltong kwa Han 'guk kun haeoe p'abyöng yön'gu (International Military Activity and the Overseas Dispatch of ROK Forces)*, MA thesis, Sungkyunkwan University, 2004, 70-1.

<sup>515</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Jöngnye kanggun yonkwa mirae – haegun (The Sixty-years of Elite-based Strong Armed Forces and Its Future – Navy)*," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 411 (March, 2008), 41.



selected, the competition rate to become *Zaytun* soldiers was high, with as many as 14.8 applicants for each position.<sup>516</sup> Non-commissioned officer Sueng-ki Sung said in 2007 that since he was selected under a high competition, he felt honored.<sup>517</sup> Through careful examination, the ROK military finally selected 3,494 soldiers as mission warriors. Rotating soldiers were selected with high standards as well. The ROK military continued to select the best soldiers by putting an announcement about the selection of the *Zaytun* soldiers in *The Korea Defense Daily*. Candidates who experienced overseas operations and had the local language ability were more likely to be selected as mission soldiers.

The ROK military chose not only volunteers and qualified soldiers as the Iraqi COIN fighters but also paid a tremendous attention to making its troops the most optimal units with players who effectively dealt with a population-centered approach. Since the population-centered approach was adopted, the most important elite soldiers in this mission were engineers and medics. Thus, professional and voluntary engineers and medical personnel were dispatched for the mission. The ROK military also recognized the importance of interpreters, and by doing so, selected 46 soldiers who already were good at Arabic and then trained them for 12 weeks.<sup>518</sup> Furthermore, it hired 41 civilians as its interpreters.<sup>519</sup> At the same time, since they were sent to the most dangerous battleground, half of them were soldiers from special operation forces and the

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<sup>516</sup> The ROK Ministry of National Defense, “*Haeoe p’abyŏng hwaltong* (Overseas operations of South Korean military)” February 13, 2007, 9.

<sup>517</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 8, 2007, 1.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

Marine Corps. Thus, the *Zaytun* division had a capacity to not only deal with civil-military operations but also protect themselves in case insurgents attacked them.

The ROK military provided selected soldiers with mission training in two trajectories: mission proficiency and Iraqi cultural education. In particular, the first step of mission proficiency element focused on force-protection and its second step highlighted civil-military operations by increasing their ability to repair machines and electric items and speak the local language.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, the ROK military published its own field manual called “*P‘abyǒng ilji* (Dispatching Daily Log)” for dispatching soldiers in March 2004 so that they would be familiar with civil affairs operations as well as military operations.<sup>521</sup> Through this process, the *Zaytun* division was composed of the best soldiers for the application of a population-centered approach in Iraq.<sup>522</sup>

### 3. Assets Used by COIN Troops

Since the ROK military adopted a population-centered method for the COIN mission in Iraq, the most important assets that the *Zaytun* division required were equipment to construct buildings and repair electronics and soldiers’ abilities to do these works rather than physical fighting assets, such as weapons. Thus, the *Zaytun* division sought construction equipment, such as trucks to build economic and societal infrastructure in Arbil. In addition, the *Zatyun* division acquired non-

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<sup>520</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, June 21, 2004, 1.

<sup>521</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 17, 2004, 3.

<sup>522</sup> Similarly, one report of KIDA sees the dispatch of the best soldiers in Iraq as one of secrets for the ROK military’s mission in Iraq. KIDA, “Achievement of the Dispatch of the ROK military in Iraq and Tasks Ahead,” 102.

military assets, such as chalkboards and chalks. These non-military assets were very useful for the Arbil mission. For example, in January 2008 when the *Zaytun* division built the 53rd school in Arbil, the *Zaytun* division had already provided Arbil schools with 29,000 school-related items, which contributed to the enhancement of children's educational capacity.<sup>523</sup>

In a similar vein, as noted earlier, the ROK military trained soldiers to repair facilities and electronics in the training session before being deployed to Iraq. In addition, the ROK military also sent them to South Korean civilian companies, such as Samsung and LG, for more professional electronics' repair training.<sup>524</sup> Furthermore, when the *Zaytun* division needed more spares to repair electronics of the local population on the battlefield, it was supported by the civilian companies. For example, Local branches of the aforementioned South Korean civilian companies in UAE provided the *Zaytun* division with spares.

The ROK COIN division in Iraq was equipped with more professional and effective soldiers because South Korea sent the best soldiers to the special battlegrounds. Furthermore, these soldiers were equipped with COIN assets rather than kinetic assets so that its mission was more achievable. The above examination of soldiers' qualification and division's assets confirm hypothesis 2C (the hypothesis of the best units/assets).

## **VI. The Political/Socio-Cultural Function in the ROK Iraq COIN**

### **A. Material Environments: The ROK's Political Assets**

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<sup>523</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "*Gülloböl kukkun* (Global South Korean forces)," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 410 (February, 2008), 79.

<sup>524</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, May 24, 2004, 7.

## 1. Non-great Power Experiences

Similar to the mission in Vietnam, the non-great power experiences of South Korea made its COIN forces appropriate for mission success in Iraq. These advantages can be traced by four trajectories: historical experience of nation building, COIN experiences in Vietnam, its own experience of economic development, and its structural status as an outside player with an equal partnership.

First, the South Koreans' in historical trajectory contributed to better understand the Iraqi local population. South Korea, which was devastated in the 1950s after the Korean War, had to receive much aid from foreign powers, particularly the U.S. It took a lot of perspiration and time to build the war-torn country. In their nation building process, they understood what the local Iraqi population needed. Thus, their hardship experiences in the 1950-60s helped their COIN forces in Iraq reduce adaptation tempo. Sam-yeol Jang, coordination group commander of South Korean forces in MNF-I, noted in 2006 that Koreans' own painful experiences after the Korean War was the driver for ROK forces in Iraq to achieve success in Arbil.<sup>525</sup>

Second, South Koreans' COIN experiences in Vietnam also helped accelerate adaptation tempo. Although the ROK COIN in Vietnam was based on an enemy-oriented approach, a population-based method was also introduced in the second phase. As has been noted earlier, the ROKFV Commander Chae knew the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the local population in COIN.

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<sup>525</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 28, 2006, 2.

His experience was transferred to the *Zaytun* division during training before the deployment. General Chae gave the *Zaytun* soldiers who were being trained a special lecture about his experience in Vietnam on March 27, 2004; in this lecture he stressed that “you should never be arrogant and treat the local people with your hearts.”<sup>526</sup> The ROK military also published a book about lessons in Vietnam so that the *Zaytun* division soldiers were able to understand various features of irregular fighting before they went to the battlefields.<sup>527</sup>

The ROK COIN experience in Vietnam contributed to reducing adaptation tempo for the ROK COIN forces in Iraq. In particular, some population-based methods in Vietnam served as a spring board for a population-centered approach in Iraq through infrastructure building projects. For example, the vocational training that the ROK forces developed in Vietnam was transferred to vocational training in Iraq. Similarly, the Mobil Hospital in Vietnam was transferred to the *Zaytun* division in Iraq.

Third, similar to the ROK military’s COIN in Vietnam, South Koreans’ own experience in economic development contributed to economic infrastructure building in Iraq. South Korea’s experiences developing a poor state in the 1970’s helped the COIN forces build their tactics. Under President Park, all Koreans conducted the new village movement (*Saemaül undong*) together with the aim of living better. This movement was very successful, and thus, South Korea became the 10th largest economy in the world.

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<sup>526</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 29, 2004, 7.

<sup>527</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, May 25, 2004, 11.

South Koreans' experience in economic development was particularly advantageous for Iraq COIN operations because the economic situation in Arbil was similar to South Koreans' situations in the 1970s.<sup>528</sup> The ROK military taught deploying officers the new village movement so that they were able to apply this movement to the Kurdish area.<sup>529</sup> Accordingly, the COIN forces applied this movement to twenty Iraqi villages when they arrived in Arbil, which led to the minimization of adaptation costs.<sup>530</sup> The new village movement was aimed at teaching how to catch fish, rather than just giving fish.<sup>531</sup> Two villages – Bahirka and Sebiran – were selected as demonstration villages in the first phase.<sup>532</sup> Furthermore, similar to what South Korean did in the 1970s, the *Zaytun* division provided village leaders, who would lead this new village movement, with a leadership program.<sup>533</sup>

The *Zaytun* division also taught local residents farming techniques as part of the new village movement. One of the most successful examples was to teach local farmers green house techniques. These techniques contributed to the income growth of local residents. One of the local farmers who was successful in cucumber farming based on a green house technique said in 2008 that “our

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<sup>528</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*T’ũkp’awõn bangdam* (Correspondents’ Discussion),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 372 (December, 2004): 89-90.

<sup>529</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, May 17, 2004, 7.

<sup>530</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 424-5.

<sup>531</sup> Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 255.

<sup>532</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*T’ũkp’awõn bangdam* (Correspondents’ Discussion),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 372 (December, 2004), 91.

<sup>533</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 26, 2005, 6.

farmers are grateful to South Koreans who give us hope.”<sup>534</sup> Based on the concept of this new village movement, the *Zaytun* Division encouraged the local people to participate in the project rather than simply putting money toward it.

Lastly, South Koreans who experienced foreign rules fully understood the desire of the local Kurdish residents towards independence. Similarly, when South Koreans needed some help from great powers, they wanted outside powers to be equal players, not superior or controlling ones, with them. Thus, South Korean COIN forces helped the Kurdistan region in Arbil function as an autonomous area under the concept of equal partners.<sup>535</sup> All in all, the aforementioned four dimensions driven by South Korea’s position as a non-great power served as advantages for the Iraq COIN.

## 2. Structural Position of South Korea: Power Symmetry

A significant power gap between countries tends to see the great power as an occupier when their military forces conduct COIN on a foreign soil. Put simply, huge power asymmetry is less advantageous for winning the hearts and minds of the local population. This power gap can be investigated by two dimensions: economic and military capacity. There was a huge power gap between the U.S. and Iraq in 2002. The GDP of the U.S. was about 10.4 trillion dollars which was

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<sup>534</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytuni sŏnmulhan oie kamdong han jumin dŭl* (The local residents who are touched by cucumbers that the *Zaytun* offers),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 415 (July, 2008), 83.

<sup>535</sup> Likewise, while stressing the role of culture, Sargent argues that sharing similar suffering in history helped South Korean troops be smoothly accepted by the local Iraqis. Diana Lyn Sargent, *The Role of Culture in Civil-Military Operations: U.S. and ROK Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Northern Iraq*, MA thesis, Iwha University, 2008, 46-7.

more than one fourth of the world GDP in 2002.<sup>536</sup> By contrast, the GDP of Iraq was just 18 billion dollars in 2002 which was 500 times smaller than the U.S. There was also a huge military gap between the two countries.<sup>537</sup> In 2002, armed forces personnel of Iraq were about 432,000, whereas armed forces personnel of the U.S. were around 1,420,000 which were three times larger than Iraq's.<sup>538</sup> When it came to military expenditure, the U.S. spent 3.93 percent of its GDP in 2004, and Iraq spent 2.38 of its GDP in the same year.<sup>539</sup> In a situation where the U.S. had a 500 times bigger GDP than Iraq, there was a huge gap between the two countries in terms of military expenditure as well. Furthermore, the U.S. military was equipped with a number of nuclear weapons and kinetic weapons which the Iraqi military did not possess.

By contrast, power asymmetry between South Korea and Iraq was relatively small. In an economic sense, the GDP of South Korea was 575 billion dollars in 2002 which was 30 times bigger than Iraq.<sup>540</sup> In a military sense, the power gap between the two countries was much smaller. Armed forces personnel of South Korea were about 690,000 in 2002 which was a little larger than Iraq's.<sup>541</sup> Military expenditure was similar with each other in terms of a percent of GDP because South Korea spent 2.47 percent of its GDP for the military.<sup>542</sup> Furthermore, unlike the U.S., South Korea was not a great power equipped with

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<sup>536</sup> The World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/> (Accessed November 4, 2010).

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.



kinetic weapons against a great power. Nor was there a huge gap of military power between the two countries; rather, Iraq was two times larger than South Korea in terms of territory.

These relatively small differences between South Korea and Iraq made the ROK forces less likely to be seen as occupying forces. By contrast, citizens from non-great powers, Iraqis, are worried about the use of great powers' kinetic forces. In this vein, a structural position of South Korea as a non-great power made the ROK forces COIN operations in Iraq more acceptable than the U.S. forces.

### 3. Familiarity with Terrain and Geography

There was a difference between South Korea and Iraq in terms of physical terrain and geography. While South Korea is mountainous and has four distinct seasons, Iraq is surrounded by a wide range of deserts. However, there was a similarity between them in terms of security terrain. The DMZ on the Korean peninsula has been one of the most tense military terrains in the world ever since the Korean War. Many South Korean soldiers had been well-trained about how to secure this highest alert area and protect themselves for a long-time.

This familiarity with high alert security terrain allowed the ROK COIN forces to accelerate adaptation tempo. One of the most important preconditions for civil-military operations was to guarantee ROK base security because it served as headquarters of all operations. As soon as the *Zaytun* division arrived on the Iraqi battlefields, it established an effective base-protection system, the five-steps-based inspection system. Jin-sub Jo, the Korea Defense reporter, stated in 2005 that the *Zaytun* division tightly carried out surveillance operations on a similar

level of alert status to the DMZ.<sup>543</sup> In particular, Visitors Control Center (VCC) soldiers were in charge of the security check at the entrance of the *Zaytun* division. They checked visitors based on three steps: in-depth check by local security forces, name-list checking at check-point, and in-depth check by the *Zaytun* soldiers.<sup>544</sup> This high alert system, inculcated in Korean soldiers before their dispatch, prevented insurgent groups from attacking the *Zaytun* division.

#### 4. The Organized Military of a Functioning State

In 2004 when Seoul dispatched the *Zaytun* division, South Korea possessed the 10th largest military forces in the world. Encouraged by economic development, the ROK military forces were armed with the-state-of-the-art weapons and equipment. The ROK military already had 687,700 active soldiers in 2004.<sup>545</sup> The ROK Army was composed of 3 Field Army Commands, 1 Special Warfare Command, 1 Capital Command, and 1 Army Aviation Command.<sup>546</sup> The ROK Navy was equipped with 43 surface combatant ships, 75 coastal combatant ships, 15 mine warfare ships, 10 amphibious ships, and 20 submarines.<sup>547</sup> The ROK Marines were composed of 2 divisions and 1 brigade.<sup>548</sup> The ROK Air

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<sup>543</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun pudae p’abyöngsa tasi ssöussda* (The *Zaytun* Division to write a new history for dispatching Korean forces abroad),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 376 (May, 2005), 71.

<sup>544</sup> Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 156.

<sup>545</sup> The IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies), *The Military Balance 2006* (London: Routledge, 2006), 278.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> *The Military Balance 2006*, 278-9.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

Force was equipped with 540 combat aircraft, 28 helicopters, and more than 100 UAVs.<sup>549</sup>

The ROK military provided the ROK COIN forces in Iraq with military equipment appropriate for their mission. One of the most technological equipment for their COIN mission was a multi-functional robot called ROBHAZ whose missions were explosive ordinance disposal, surveillance, and rescue.<sup>550</sup> The ROK COIN forces were also equipped with a new armored-vehicle which was designed to protect soldiers from insurgents' attacks as well as a satellite-based equipment system that facilitated communications.<sup>551</sup> This equipment gave ROK forces a similar capability to the U.S., the COIN leading country, at least from the perspective of COIN operations. What matters most was that these capabilities were not the ones that weak powers had.

#### B. Non-material Environments: The ROK's Socio-Cultural Assets

The aforementioned material assets are related to political advantages because of South Korea's experience as a non-great power and its domestic military experience. South Korean troops were also advantaged in non-material terms. These non-material dimensions are closely related to socio-cultural advantages of South Korea.

##### 1. Socio-historical Position: Connections on a Societal Level

First, similar to Vietnam, South Koreans' experience in seeking independence from a great power transferred to Iraq. Socio-historical

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<sup>549</sup> *The Military Balance 2006*, 279-80.

<sup>550</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, June 21, 2004, 3.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

characteristics of South Korea had been centered on maintaining and regaining its sovereignty from neighboring powers. Through this historical struggle, South Korea has survived as an independent country for about 5,000 years.

Embedded in this socio-historical trajectory, South Korean soldiers understood the Kurdish aspiration towards their substantial autonomy. Thus, the ROK COIN leaders immediately set up guidelines for soldiers to observe: their socio-historical positions reduced adaptation costs. The ROK military distributed to all soldiers selected for this mission the guidelines to conduct COIN operations (see Table 19).<sup>552</sup>

Table 19

Major Rules of the ROK Soldiers in Conducting COIN Missions in Iraq<sup>553</sup>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. We, as members of the <i>Zaytun</i> Division, are proud of conducting stabilization operations.</li><li>3. Do not behave as an occupying force.</li><li>9. Listen to local people's grievances.</li><li>12. Do not be disappointed with the first phase of difficulty and do not hesitate.</li><li>22. Stay away from violence and the use of force to local Iraqi people.</li></ol>
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Source: Hak-seung Ahn, *Civil Military Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision in A series of overseas dispatch history of ROK armed forces*. Vol. 1 (Seoul: The ROK Ministry of Defense, 2006), 303-12.

In particular, the *Zaytun* division distributed to soldiers a pocket-sized book so that they could check the rules at any time.<sup>554</sup> The rules were designed to make

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<sup>552</sup> The 25 major rules, 8 rules in terms of civil activities, 5 rules *vis-à-vis* Iraqis' habits, 8 rules for visiting civilian houses, 5 rules when meeting local religious leaders, 10 rules when meeting children and women, 13 rules related to Islamic religion, and 25 other rules. Hak-seung Ahn, *Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision in A series of overseas dispatch history of ROK armed forces*. Vol. 1 (Seoul: The ROK Ministry of Defense, 2006), 303-12.

<sup>553</sup> This table is also used in my published article to analyze the ROK COIN operations. Ban, "The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency," 238.

the Kurdish population recognize the ROK troops as supporting Kurdish autonomy. More importantly, ordinary soldiers on the spot fully observed the rules because the notion of sovereignty and autonomy was also important to them due to their country's socio-historical position.

Second, Iraqi society preferred Korean electronic products, such as Samsung and LG before the Iraq War to other foreign products because they are cheap and durable. Similarly, many Iraqis drove Korean cars, such as Hyundai. South Korea already exported 86 million dollars of items to Iraq in 2002.<sup>555</sup> This economic relationship increased societal communication as well. Thus, on a societal level, the Iraqi population recognized a neighboring country rather than a stranger who came from an enemy country.

Third, soccer was popular in both South Korean and Iraqi societies. The ROK COIN forces recognized that when people played soccer together, they became friendlier. In order to maximize this advantage, the *Zaytun* division hosted soccer competitions from November 27 to December 12, 2004.<sup>556</sup> This competition was transmitted all over the Kurdish region on TV and radio, and it made the Kurdish local population recognize South Korean forces as their friend. This positive outcome was possible because the *Zaytun* division made the best of societal similarity and public diplomacy.

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<sup>554</sup> The Republic of Korea Army, *Zaytun Budae / Zaytun division* (Daejeon: The ROK Army, 2009), 40.

<sup>555</sup> The ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Irak'ũ Kaehwang (The Outlook of Iraq)*, July, 2004, 147.

<sup>556</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 374-5.

Finally, both societies had a long history which traces back thousands of years. Thus, they treated national heritage as very important. South Koreans' aspiration to a national heritage allowed the *Zaytun* division to repair one of broken Iraqis' national heritages; thus, Iraqis were able to understand that South Korean soldiers honored their traditions and culture.<sup>557</sup> By conducting Ello's Heaven operation, South Korean soldiers restored a fortress which was recognized as the most important traditional treasure in the region.<sup>558</sup>

## 2. The Initial Response and the "Quick-Impact" Tactic

Local people, mostly Kurds, wanted a high degree of autonomy from the central government as has been noted many times. They were suspicious about whether the ROK forces would weaken their autonomy. Moreover, the initial response of the local population was less friendly in Iraq than in Vietnam because South Koreans were Asians who were different from their ethnic groups. Yet at the same time, the Kurdish population was less hostile to foreign forces than other Iraqi ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Kurdish population did not see South Korean forces as occupying forces because South Korea was not seen as a great power or a colonial power. Best of all, the aforementioned socio-historical positions helped the Kurdish population quickly change their attitude toward the ROK forces from suspicion to friendship, which led to the success of ROK tactics. The governor of Arbil, Nawzad Hadi, maintained in 2007 that "when we saw you

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<sup>557</sup> The *Zaytun* division Commander Hwang noted in 2006 that the spirit of respect was a key to success of gaining the hearts and minds of the local population. *The Korea Defense Daily*, September 12, 2006, 3.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-400.

[the *Zaytun* division] for the first time, we were suspicious of you because you are military soldiers [...] However, you are not aliens any longer but one member of our society.”<sup>559</sup>

The ROK COIN forces emphasized the first impressions – how Iraqis evaluated the COIN forces at first – and thus the ROK forces tried to impress the local Iraqis as soon as possible based on the “quick-impact” concept.<sup>560</sup> The ROK COIN forces suggested ways for the local people in Arbil to improve the villages’ condition together, but the population was apathetic to their suggestions. The ROK soldiers, however, started to clean foul-smelling villages by themselves. As time went by, villagers started to gather near working spots to help them and some villagers greeted them with “Hi, friends.”<sup>561</sup> Encouraged by the *Zaytun* division’s sincere efforts to help the Kurdish population, one Kurdish elementary school invited the *Zaytun* soldiers to its event which was made under the slogan of “We are friends” on April 11, 2005.<sup>562</sup> Responding to their invitation, the *Zaytun* division also invited students of this school and gave them Korean traditional rice cakes and cookies which were made on the spot.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Taehanmin’guk kanggun rip’ot’ũ* (The Report of the Powerful ROK military),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 404 (August, 2007), 95.

<sup>560</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 243.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*P’yõnghwa hwaltong 7 kaewõl ’sõnggong jõk’* (Successful 7 months of peace activities),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 377 (May, 2005), 47.

<sup>563</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “Successful 7 months of peace activities,” 47.

The positive participation of the local people impressed the American Sergeant Major group, who inspected this area from Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) on May 11, 2006.<sup>564</sup> Furthermore, Lieutenant Colonel Kwang-sik Jung in the *Zaytun* division recalls that when Iraqi children saw South Korean soldiers, they shouted “Kuri, number one.”<sup>565</sup>

This “quick-impact” was a great success. When the ROK troops were preparing to withdraw, the local population wanted to stay with them longer. Iraqis in Arbil were wholeheartedly happy about the ROK National Assembly’s decision to extend its troops longer in late 2007. For example, one local resident who served as an interpreter told the *Zaytun* soldiers that a real friend is supposed to be with us when we need real help.<sup>566</sup> In addition, when it came to the complete withdrawal of South Korean troops, the *Zaytun* Commander Sun-woo Park said in November 29, 2008 that since the *Zaytun* soldiers respected the Kurdish people and were regarded as Kurdish citizens by them, they felt sad about the ROK forces’ withdrawal.<sup>567</sup> The KRG Prime Minister expressed his appreciation to the ROK military which was leaving Arbil by saying that our Kurds who have

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<sup>564</sup> Yang-sub Sim, “Iraq p ‘abyŏng pandaeundongkwa p ‘abyŏng kyŏlchŏngkwajŏng (Activities against sending troops in Iraq and the decision-making process to send troops),” *Haeoe p ‘abyŏngsa yŏn ‘gu ch ‘ongsŏ* (A series of overseas dispatch histories of ROK armed forces) Vol. 2 (Seoul: The ROK Ministry of Defense, 2007), 96.

<sup>565</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 3, 2008, 11.

<sup>566</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 7, 2008, 1.

<sup>567</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*Zaytun, Chungdong ui p ‘yŏnghwa simko oda* (The *Zaytun* Division which returns after promoting peace in Middle East),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 420 (December, 2008), 78.



struggled with suppression and death found some hope for our life due to the *Zaytun* division's help.<sup>568</sup>

### 3. Cultural Position: Better Understanding of Battleground Culture

Unlike Americans, South Koreans better understood battlefield culture based on their own community-oriented culture.<sup>569</sup> The Kurds also had community-based culture, not an individualism-led culture. Thus, the ROK forces better understood local culture and used cultural advantage in a synergistic way. Better understanding of the local culture for the *Zaytun* division contributed to achieving peace in Arbil over time.

More importantly, South Korea was equipped with its own approach to strong community culture, which was appropriate to gain the hearts and minds of the Kurdish population. The culture of *Jung* (affection or attachment) has been embedded in South Koreans. *Jung* stresses the importance of helping others and respecting neighborhoods based on non-materially-oriented closeness with others, not materially-driven calculation. It guides South Koreans to make friends with their hearts rather than with their interest.

This embedded culture allowed South Korean soldiers to better understand the culture of the Iraqi population which is based on community tradition, not

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<sup>568</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "The *Zaytun* Division which returns after promoting peace in Middle East," 79.

<sup>569</sup> For more details on cultural difference on a societal level between South Korean and the U.S., see Kil-Joo Ban. *Pukkŭkkom sahoe: Migukui sahoechabon kwa uriui mirae (The Polar Bear Society: The U.S.'s Social Capital and South Korea's Future)* (Seoul: Ppuri publishing company, 2011).

individualism-oriented tradition.<sup>570</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Kwang-sik Jung in the *Zaytun* division notes that South Korean soldiers' commitment to their own culture, *Jung*, allowed the local population to open their hearts.<sup>571</sup> In particular, the *Jung*-led approach was perfectly applicable to the Kurdish culture because that culture similar to *Jung* was embedded in Kurds.<sup>572</sup> By the same token, the ROK COIN forces paid attention to building respect towards the local culture under the slogan of "Korean Iraqi-Kurd Culture" to maximize advantages from their own community-based tradition.<sup>573</sup>

The ROK COIN forces understood the function of community in Arbil. Above all, the function of religion was recognized by the ROK COIN forces. Thus, they had tried to respect the local population's devotion to the Islamic tradition before they came to Iraq. The ROK military thought that it is crucial to fully understand the religion of the local population. Thus, the ROK military sent soldiers who do not have religion to the Islam school under a Islamic mosque in Seoul so that some of its soldiers were able to have religious understanding of the

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<sup>570</sup> The use of the ROK military's cultural asset significantly contributed to preventing Korean soldiers from being recognized as occupying forces. By contrast, the U.S. forces were less equipped to understand local culture. The *Josun Ilbo* reporter, Gap-sik Moon, who was dispatched to Iraq, recalls that American soldiers were seen as occupying forces due to their neglect of local culture and etiquette. Gap-sik Moon, *Zaytunui chŏnjaeng kwa p'yŏnghwa* (War and Peace of *Zaytun*) (Seoul: Nanam, 2004), 90-3.

<sup>571</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, January 3, 2008, 11.

<sup>572</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, "T'ŭkp'awŏn bangdam (Correspondents' Discussion)," *The National Defense Journal*, No. 372 (December, 2004), 90.

<sup>573</sup> One of the strategic approach *vis-à-vis* civil affairs operations was to create consensus with the local population under the slogan of "We are Friends." Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 323.

Iraqi local population.<sup>574</sup> In addition, when they arrived, they supplied various items – around 5,100 – for mosques so that the local population recognized South Koreans’ respect for their religion.<sup>575</sup> They also offered the Islamic services on the *Zaytun* base which offered to Islamic South Korean soldiers and Iraqi residents working in the *Zaytun* division.<sup>576</sup>

As South Korean forces did in Vietnam, they maintained good relations with religious leaders as well. They invited religious leaders to big events, such as the opening ceremony of the religious center.<sup>577</sup> They also gave soldiers a direction that they should respect religious leaders.<sup>578</sup> As a consequence, a friendly network with religious leaders was developed. For example, a religious leader from the biggest mosque in Arbil said that “the Kurdish region was able to be developed due to the *Zaytun* division which respected other culture [the Kurdish culture].”<sup>579</sup> The consensus building with local religious leaders allowed Korean forces not to be seen as an occupying force. Furthermore, local religious leaders asked the *Zaytun* division to play a bigger role in helping local people.<sup>580</sup>

Second, the community-based culture of South Korean society contributed to understanding the Kurdish community quickly, which led to the minimization of adaptation costs. There was a difference between the South Korean community

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<sup>574</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, May 29, 2004, 11.

<sup>575</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 382.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>577</sup> The religious center was open on November 27, 2004. For more detail on its opening ceremony, see Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 91-2.

<sup>578</sup> Ahn, “Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision,” 307.

<sup>579</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

<sup>580</sup> Lee, *The spiritual fragrance of Zaytun*, 159.

and Kurdish community in the sense that the former is driven by a wide range of communities, such as family, neighborhood, school, and company, whereas the latter is driven by tribes. However, both are similar in the sense that the function of community rather than the function of individualism-based ethics worked in each society. As a consequence, South Korean forces reduced the time required for understanding the community-based culture. In their attempt to make friendly relations with community leaders and show the local residents South Koreans' respect for their leaders, they did not criticize tribal leaders openly even when they behaved in a peculiar way.<sup>581</sup> Rather, they made their best effort to respect local leaders. For example, before the ROK soldiers gave residents gifts or supplies, they mostly checked on local community ethics through local leaders.

Third, the community culture of South Koreans accelerated the tempo of cultural communication and exchange between the ROK COIN soldiers and the local population. South Koreans' community tradition stresses a sincere greeting when they meet their neighbors. Along with this, South Korean soldiers gave the local population a sincere greeting particularly with the use of the local language.<sup>582</sup> Likewise, Korean culture stresses the importance of friends and neighbors. Thus, by hosting Korea Day, the COIN forces offered an arena where Koreans and Iraqis could communicate culturally; it offered an opportunity for South Koreans and Iraqis to treat each other as real friends, not fake friends.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Ahn, "Civil Affairs Operations/Rebuilding Support Arbil Vision," 308.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 370-2.

In addition, similar to Vietnam COIN, the ROK COIN forces in Iraq used their martial arts – Taekwondo – to come closer to the local people. The *Zaytun* division gave locals Taekwondo classes in five areas and showed them Taekwondo team’s colorful actions on a local stage.<sup>584</sup> As time went by, Kurds in Arbil started to be interested in South Koreans’ martial art, which contributed to making Kurds feel friendly to South Korean soldiers. Encouraged by a growing popularity of Taekwondo, the KRG established the Kurdistan Taekwondo Association within just two years of South Korean troops’ arrival on December 4, 2006.<sup>585</sup>

The aforementioned community-oriented approach allowed the local population to call the *Zaytun* forces part of their community or brotherhood rather than hostile military soldiers.<sup>586</sup> This clearly shows that only after COIN forces give their hearts to the local population, can they win the hearts and minds of the local population. In a nutshell, since the ROK soldiers better understood the local culture due to their own community-based culture, it was easier for South Korean soldiers to share and exchange culture and tradition with the local Kurds.<sup>587</sup> All in

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<sup>584</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 6, 2006, 1.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>586</sup> The ROK Defense Media Agency, “*P’yŏnghwa hwaltong 7 kaewŏl ‘sŏnggong jŏk’* (Successful 7 months of peace activities),” *The National Defense Journal*, No. 377(May, 2005), 46.

<sup>587</sup> Unlike the ROK soldiers, the U.S. soldiers failed to share and exchange culture with local Iraqis. Similarly, Sargent argues that while the U.S. forces paid less attention to cultural exchange, the ROK forces placed a high priority on cultural exchanges. Sargent, *The Role of Culture in Civil-Military Operations: U.S. and ROK Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Northern Iraq*, 62-3.

all, better understanding of the local culture led to winning the hearts and minds of the local residents.

#### 4. Intangible Resources: Non-material Role of Domestic Population

The success of COIN also requires continuous support from the COIN country's domestic population. Support from the South Korean population was weaker in the Iraq COIN mission than the Vietnam COIN mission for two reasons: absence of ideological battles and enhanced civil society. First, the Iraq war was not a conflict between democracy and communism, unlike the Vietnam War. Thus, the ROK military's mission in Iraq was perceived to be less vital for their survival. Second, since South Korean civil society became stronger than ever due to consolidated democracy under President Roh Moo-hyun, it was reluctant to send South Korean combat troops to less vital missions for ROK survival. Thus, civil society had a strong voice against the use of violence.<sup>588</sup> Because of a lack of perceived legitimate causes, the ROK domestic population was less willing to tolerate warfare on foreign soil by their forces.

Nevertheless, South Koreans viewed this mission as important for their national prestige. Furthermore, when South Koreans recognized that their military would apply a population-centered approach with non-combat troops, they positively evaluated their soldiers' mission which was intended to help politically and economically deprived Iraqis. According to survey data reported by *The*

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<sup>588</sup> Sim Yang-sub argues that the ROK government tried not to use the phrase "combat soldier" to persuade the strong civil society in the process of discussing the troops' dispatch to Iraq. Sim, "Activities against sending troops in Iraq and the decision-making process to send troops," 10.

*DongA Ilbo*, 46 percent of Koreans disagreed with the dispatch of combat troops.<sup>589</sup> Nevertheless, a survey conducted by KSOI (Korea Society Opinion Institute) reveals that 53 percent of surveyed Koreans supported the dispatch of troops whose mission was expected to help build infrastructure of a war-torn neighbor.<sup>590</sup>

South Koreans recognized the importance of this mission, and they were satisfied with the mission trajectory which was based on the role of non-combat troops in stabilizing Iraq. As a consequence, the function of unusual mission worked again from the perspective of South Korea's domestic population as well. When South Koreans saw their soldiers successfully carry out missions to help people in need, they increased their support for the soldiers' mission. In a survey about the performance of the *Zaytun* division, about 56 percent of interviewed South Koreans answered "very good," whereas only about 14 percent of them said "negatively."<sup>591</sup>

Best of all, the domestic population played its own role in winning the hearts and minds of Iraqi people. South Koreans tried to build a consensus with the Iraqi local population. Thus, Seoul and the domestic population sought to create a friendly relationship with the Iraqi people ahead of ROK deployments as

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<sup>589</sup> *The DongA Ilbo*, "Netizen kwabansu Iraq chǒnt'ubyǒng p'abyǒng pandae (Half of South Koreans disagree with the deployment of combat troops)," September 19, 2003, from <http://www.donga.com/fbin/output?n=200309160042> (Accessed on May 10, 2009).

<sup>590</sup> *The Chosun Ilbo*, "Iraq p'abyǒng haeya 53% (53% of Korean support the dispatch to Iraq)," July 4, 2004, <http://www.chosun.com/editorials/news/200407/200407040229.html> (Accessed on September 5, 2009)

<sup>591</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, December 31, 2007, 2.

part of public diplomacy. They recognized that soccer was one of the Iraqi people's favorite team sports. Accordingly, South Korean people invited the Iraqi National Soccer Team to a match with the Korean national team on April 6, 2004. Many Iraqi people watched this match. After this match, some of them came to South Korean soldiers who were already there in the *Seohee* and *Jema* units, and they said to them "Koreans are our permanent friends."<sup>592</sup> To put it another way, this event led by the ROK COIN forces' home country actors enticed the Iraqi local population to recognize South Korean forces as friendly players, which was an important requirement for COIN success.

The second societal action made by the South Korean domestic population was to provide specialized medical care to Iraqi patients in South Korea. For example, Kyung Hee University of South Korea operated on an Iraqi girl who suffered from chronic otitis media in April 2006.<sup>593</sup> By the same token, the Korea Heart Foundation suggested that the *Zaytun* hospital find local Iraqi patients who needed a heart transplant so that it could give them medical treatment in South Korea. Under this program, the first five Iraqi patients visited South Korea for medical treatment in March, 2007.<sup>594</sup> Similarly, South Korean COIN forces sent an Iraqi boy, who lost his legs in a bombing, to the ROK for medical treatment in December 2007. He was able to walk again with a new pair of artificial legs.

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<sup>592</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 8, 2004, 1.

<sup>593</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, April 28, 2006, 6.

<sup>594</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 12, 2007, 1.



Mustafa Musa Taufik, *charge d' affaire* of the Iraqi Embassy in Seoul, said that this event rendered the relationship between Koreans and Iraqis more friendly.<sup>595</sup>

Similar to the support of the ROK domestic population, Congressmen supported the South Korean soldiers' mission. When National Defense Committee Chairman, Jae-kun Yoo visited the *Zaytun* division in November 2005, he strongly supported the *Zaytun* division's efforts to help the Kurdish residents.<sup>596</sup> Similarly, congressman Young-dal Jang who visited the *Zaytun* division with other three congressmen on July 9, 2007 said to its soldiers that "I am proud of you who represent South Korea as one member of international society and are so devoted to your missions for peace and reconstruction in Iraq."<sup>597</sup>

All in all, both material and non-material advantages drawn from the political/socio-cultural position of South Korea served as the second key driver for the Iraqi COIN, confirming hypothesis 3 (the hypothesis of political/socio-cultural advantages).

## **VII. Conclusion: Sufficient Condition of the ROK COIN Success in Iraq**

### **A. No Change of Willingness and Capability**

What is interesting is that in contrast to the situation in Vietnam, the ROK soldiers' willingness and capability did not decrease over time, but rather their performance improved. One of the explanations could be their focus on civil

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<sup>595</sup> Se-jeong Kim, "Korean Troops in Iraq Praised," January 13, 2008, *The Korea Times*. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/07/176\\_17227.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/07/176_17227.html) (Accessed September 3, 2009).

<sup>596</sup> Jae-kun Yoo, "The Report about the Visit of the *Zaytun* Division," 34-5.

<sup>597</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, July 11, 2007, 4.

welfare through many projects, such as the *Zaytun* library which was constructed two months before the troops' withdrawal. Although the number of mission soldiers was reduced by 1000 – from 3000 in 2006 to 2000 in 2007 – the size of their construction projects – maintained similar levels from 63 projects in 2006 to 56 projects in 2007.<sup>598</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily* states on March 14, 2007 that despite the reduction of troops, the *Zaytun* soldiers' willingness to achieve their mission in Arbil was not weakened at all.<sup>599</sup> What made South Korean soldiers keep their willingness and capability? Unlike the situation in Vietnam, the logic of unusual mission had functioned from 2003 to the end (2008). The COIN leading country, the U.S., was still conducting operations in Iraq when South Korean troops left. Moreover, a population-centered approach which was intended to help the poor neighbor was still an important mission to South Korean soldiers for their national prestige. For example, in an interview which was conducted two months before the withdrawal of South Korean troops, the *Zaytun* division commander Sun-woo Park said that "I hoped that the *Zaytun* division could stay longer [in Arbil] to maximize national interest."<sup>600</sup>

#### B. Sufficient Condition of COIN Success in Iraq

Similar to the Vietnam COIN, the nature of special mission in Iraq generated ROK military enthusiasm for mission success. This enthusiasm was converted into effective COIN capability by guiding ROK forces to adopt a population-centered approach in Iraq. While the nature of mission served as one

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<sup>598</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, March 14, 2007, 3.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>600</sup> *The Korea Defense Daily*, October 2, 2010, 8.

axis for COIN success, South Korean political and socio-cultural advantages served as the other axis. Since South Korea historically had similar political situations to Iraq and has maintained socio-cultural harmony with Iraq, the ROK COIN forces were able to reduce adaptation costs. Accordingly, the nature of unusual mission and political/socio-cultural advantages of the COIN country, taken together, were sufficient conditions for the ROK COIN forces' success.

### **VIII. Commonalities for Both COINs and Implications for General COIN**

#### **A. Key Commonalities of the ROK COIN in Vietnam and Iraq**

It is important to analyze key commonalities for insights into general COIN (see Table 20). The first commonality is the nature of special missions. The ROK military's missions in both Vietnam and Iraq were special and unusual in the sense that the ROK military primarily focused on the threat from North Korean military forces before its dispatch for these missions. In addition, both missions were important for South Korea's domestic utility maximizations (economic development and/or security affairs) and its external utility maximization (national prestige in the world).

The second commonality is that the ROK forces adopted an effective COIN approach in both mission fields through in-depth studies of battleground situations. In Vietnam, they used the enemy-oriented approach supported by population-based methods. By contrast, they adopted the population-centered approach in Iraq. Third, the ROK COIN troops' eagerness for mission success was high, and so, they focused primarily on in-depth mission study and step-by-step engagement. More importantly, they placed a high priority on winning approval for an

independent OPCON. Fourth, their eagerness for mission success was smoothly converted into effective COIN capability by sending the best soldiers/units to Vietnam and Iraq and developing creative tactics.

Fifth, the ROK forces reduced adaptation costs through their home country's experience and made the best of cultural advantages in both Vietnam and Iraq. To put it another way, their home country's political/socio-cultural advantages helped them to become more effective COIN forces. In both COINs, the ROK forces also used their home country's traditional martial arts as a supporting asset of their COIN methods.

Sixth, the adaptation tempo of the ROK forces was fast enough to effectively perform both COIN operations. In Vietnam, they quickly secured their assigned areas through combat while minimizing trial and error, and then they introduced a population-based method before the local population turned their backs on South Korean troops. In Iraq, they won the hearts and minds of the local residents in the first phase of their operations. Their success helped South Korean soldiers create an image as professional fighters and friendly helpers. South Korean soldiers were called "Dai Han," in Vietnam, and they were called "Kuri" in Iraq.

Table 20

Commonalities of the ROK COIN in Vietnam and Iraq

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>Iraq</b>
Mission Nature	Unusual/ Important	The first overseas mission in the modern history	The largest overseas mission after the Vietnam conflict
Utilities	Expected/	Security/economic scope	Security scope

	Achieved	International scope	International scope
Adopted Remedy	Appropriate (for situations)	An enemy-based remedy (Supported by population-led tactics)	A population-centered remedy
<b>Willingness</b>	Very high	In-depth Mission Study Step-by-step Engagement 1. Advisory unit 2. Non-combat unit 3. Combat-unit Independent OPLAN	In-depth Mission Study Step-by-step Engagement 1. Advisory unit 2. Basic non-combat unit 3. Major non-combat unit Independent Ops
<b>Capability</b>	Well-Developed	The creative tactics : Company-led tactical base Best units/soldiers : Voluntary/disciplined	The creative tactics : Green Angel Program Best units/soldiers : Voluntary/disciplined
<b>Political/Socio-Cultural Advantage</b>	Embedded	Its Own Experience - Anti-communist guerilla ops - Economic development Taekwondo Asian Culture (Confucius culture)	Its Own Experience - COIN in Vietnam - Economic development Taekwondo Community-led culture ( <i>Jung</i> culture)
Adaptation Tempo	Very fast	Tight control of TAOR in the first phase	The success of the quick-impact scheme
Soldiers' Image	Professional /friendly	Called as "Dai Han"	Called as "Kuri"
The Role Model		Fire-Base	<i>ZAYTUN CMO Handbook</i>
Mission Outcome	Successful	Securing Assigned Areas : Effective suppression of the Viet Cong	Securing Assigned Areas : Gaining the hearts and minds of the local population

Finally, since the ROK forces were substantial players, their COIN methods/tactics served as the role model for other Coalition forces. The ROK military's concept of a company-led tactical base was adopted by the U.S. forces under the name of Fire Base in Vietnam. The ROK military's concept of Green Angel was published under the title of *ZAYTUN CMO Handbook*, which was intended for other countries to learn the secret of South Korea's achievements. The aforementioned commonalities clearly show that the ROK forces were reliable and substantial players in COINs rather than simply symbolic players.

## B. Insights into General COIN

The in-depth case studies of the ROK COIN in Vietnam and Iraq also shed light on key aspects for general COIN. First, the political and military position of the COIN leading country can affect the eagerness of other coalition COIN forces for mission success. Domestic movements in the COIN leading countries to withdraw their forces are a serious problem because such actions can undo the remarkable achievements of middle-power COIN forces rather than boosting their success in a synergistic way. For example, the U.S. forces' discussion of their withdrawal from Vietnam seriously weakened the ROK soldiers' willingness to sacrifice for COIN success.

Second, it is imperative for a COIN leading country to guarantee other coalition COIN forces' authority for independent OPCON. This is particularly true when the COIN leading country struggles with COIN mission. The ROK forces' independent OPCON allowed COIN forces to develop creative tactics applicable to battleground situations. Moreover, it prevented the ROK COIN forces from being trapped in the vicious quagmire of the U.S. forces. Best of all, when the ROK troops had an independent OPCON, they were more enthusiastic about COIN missions.

Third, gradual engagement in insurgent battlegrounds is more effective for COIN success than precipitous engagement. In this vein, the role of advisory teams is crucial to reduce adaptation costs. The ROK forces sent advisory teams to identify the battleground situations before COIN forces' engagement. By the same token, South Korea engaged in COIN missions in Vietnam and Iraq step-by-step by sending the smallest unit in first rather than a full size unit.

Finally, the COIN leading country needs to seriously take into account which country is better able to play substantial roles for its COIN efforts. The COIN leading country should make the best use of the military forces of a country which maintains a cultural similarity with the insurgent country. In addition, it also needs to be supported by the military forces of a country which has historical experiences similar to the insurgent society. The use of military forces from these countries can help make battleground situations favorable to COIN forces by significantly reducing the adaptation costs.

## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION**

### **I. Introduction**

The study's findings, drawn from in-depth examinations of the ROK military's COIN successes in Vietnam and Iraq, have produced IR scholarly and regional/national security-policy implications. First, the findings guide us toward the development of a middle power COIN theory because the ROK force, as a middle power military, was a more substantial player in both the Vietnam COIN and the Iraq COIN than great powers expected. Accordingly, middle power COIN theory contributes to identifying the enhanced role of middle powers in the international arena.

Second, the findings produce regional/national security-policy implications in two ways: Northeast Asian security and ROK military strategy. One of the most serious issues in Northeast Asian security is the potential collapse of the North Korean regime. If the Kim regime collapses, North Korea could experience an insurgency. The dissertation findings shed light on how to deal with this contingency through COIN doctrine. The other policy implication is that the findings guide South Korean military planners to doctrinal reform, particularly because international demands on the ROK military for international security keep growing.

### **II. A Scholarly Implication: Middle Power COIN Theory**

The dissertation findings, drawn from the ROK COIN forces' achievements, help explain the theory about middle powers' roles in international security. In particular, middle powers can play a more substantial role in COIN than IR



scholars or military planners from great powers expect. In this vein, this dissertation contributes to scholarship in the field of IR, particularly international security and politics.

#### A. The Middle Power and COIN

The dissertation findings show that when COIN forces combine morale and capability, partly attributable to their political/socio-cultural advantages, success in COIN is more probable. COIN missions are appropriate for middle powers, unlike great powers, because middle powers rarely engage in security operations with large scale military forces. Thus, middle power fighters are more likely to be prepared for success when they have an opportunity to engage in COIN missions; this is particularly true because these missions also provide an opportunity to increase their national prestige in the international arena.

In addition to this first driver, regional middle powers possess a political advantage in COIN operations because there is a smaller power gap between them and an insurgent country versus great powers and an insurgent country. This difference gives middle powers a better chance of winning the hearts and minds of the local population. Furthermore, these middle powers are also socio-culturally advantaged because they are more familiar with the role of culture on the battlefield.

#### B. Defining Middle Powers *vis-à-vis* COIN Mission

How can middle powers be conceptualized in terms of dealing with COIN? The middle powers can be assessed through the following four dimensions. First, middle powers do not engage in great power politics in the international system.

They are not major actors in the anarchic international system. Thus, external missions of middle powers are not routine affairs. Instead, they recognize overseas missions as unusual and important for their prestige.

Second, similar to the first characteristic of middle powers, they do not seek hard or soft balancing behaviors unlike the second tier countries, which challenge the status quo state or a hegemonic country in the international system. These balancing behaviors force great powers to engage in international affairs more often, and by doing so, their overseas missions become routine. By contrast, middle powers rarely engage in balancing behaviors, and thus, their overseas missions are seen as special, not routine.

Third, middle powers do not have the experience as providers of world order that great powers have; rather some of them have a history of being colonized or ruled over, similar to weak powers. This history of subjugation contributes to middle powers' COIN success because it provides empathy for inhabitants of the countries middle powers assess. In this vein, Britain and Japan are not middle powers because they had experience as great powers. By contrast, South Korea had experience as a weak power in the post-World War II era.

Finally, middle powers have enough resources to conduct overseas operations as well as to manage national security. Unlike weak powers, they have an organized military that can dispatch its troops for international security.

The first two traits of middle powers help them recognize overseas COIN missions as unusual. The last two attributes address the material environment that

middle powers face. According to these four dimensions, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and Turkey can be classified as middle powers.

Unusual missions and materially-driven advantages made the middle power Australian COIN forces more willing and capable to deal with insurgency in Vietnam. Earlier the Australian army successfully conducted COIN in Malaya in 1955, an action that increased its national prestige.

The Australian COIN was also particularly effective in the first phase of the Vietnam conflict from 1962 to 1965. Australia as a middle power participated in the Vietnam conflict as part of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (the AZNUS Treaty). Australia had already dispatched “a thirty man group of jungle warfare specialists” in the first phase of the Vietnam conflict.<sup>601</sup> As time went by, Australian forces increased their engagement by expanding their initial role as assistants to more active civic action. They dispatched medical teams to support the Vietnamese local population under the Columbo Plan in 1964 and 1965.<sup>602</sup> Their willingness and capability made their first activities in Vietnam smooth and favorable to mission success. Australia’s geographical location and organized military led to Australia’s success at least in the first phase of the mission.

Despite Australian forces’ initial COIN effectiveness, in general, Australian forces were less efficient and durable than the ROK forces. What made Australian

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<sup>601</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 88,

<http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/vva/servlet.starweb> (Accessed on February 15, 2010).

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

forces different from South Korean forces in Vietnam? Australian forces did not enjoy non-materially-driven advantages (socio-cultural advantages). Local populations recognized them as quasi-American soldiers who came from the Western world and viewed them as occupiers. In essence, they lacked cultural ties with the Vietnamese. They did not understand the Confucius tradition that worked as an organizing principle in villages. They also rarely shared societal customs with the local population.

In this vein, the distinction between general middle powers and regional middle powers should be made clear. The middle powers in general have greater willingness to engage in a COIN mission because they take into account its unusual nature as an important opportunity to raise their national profile. However, all middle powers are not uniformly effective for all types of COIN in the world. When middle powers have connections with an insurgency-host country, the effects can be synergistic. To put it another way, regional middle powers can enjoy a more favorable climate for COIN success than general middle powers.

A regional middle power can be conceptualized in two different ways. First, a regional middle power can be defined as a country that is geographically bordering an insurgencies infected country. Second, it can be conceptualized as a country that is a little farther away geographically but has societal ties or cultural commonalities with the host country. Therefore, regional middle powers enjoy both material and non-material advantages, unlike general middle powers. Thus, in terms of socio-cultural advantages, the former is more advantageous in terms of three dimensions: moderating the local population's hatred of outsiders,

minimizing adaptation costs, and increasing the effectiveness of a first (initial) impression. Unlike Australian COIN forces, South Korean COIN forces enjoyed both material and non-material advantages, and thus, the ROK's Vietnam mission was more successful.

### C. International Politics, State's Position, and COIN Performance

With the aforementioned insights in mind, the logic of the middle power COIN can be summarized in a clear way by comparing its advantages with other powers' caveats.<sup>603</sup> First of all, COINs are routine missions for great powers. In general, great powers engage in many conventional warfare situations against other great powers, as can be seen in WW I and WW II. At the same time, great powers have been involved in unconventional warfare in foreign countries as part of their effort to play a major role in maintaining world order. Thus, soldiers from great powers tend to struggle with multiple missions before they go into new battles.

More importantly, great powers know how hard it is to win unconventional warfare. The U.S. Army had already experienced overseas COIN missions in the Philippines during 1899-1902.<sup>604</sup> It also had unconventional military involvement in many countries, such as Haiti in the 1920s.<sup>605</sup> Thus, great power militaries tend

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<sup>603</sup> The advantages of a middle power in COIN are stated in my published article in a summarized way. Ban, "The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency," 231-2.

<sup>604</sup> Brian McAllister Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>605</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 436-483.

to prefer conventional fighting and are reluctant to engage in COIN. Great powers are apt to view COIN missions as another one of their unfavorable routine missions. Thus, they may be less willing to devote the necessary resources and planning for mission success.

In terms of capability or resources to deal with COIN, great powers tend to be armed for conventional warfare. Great powers try to maximize their military capability and rely on worst case scenarios because they see power maximization as necessary for their survival in international politics. Thus, they tend to heavily arm themselves for a kinetic fight under a conventional warfare organization and preserve conventional military doctrine designed to deter other great powers.<sup>606</sup> Thus, the military organizational structure is designed to survive in great power politics, which is rarely appropriate to deal with small wars. This conventional organization prevents them from becoming sufficiently flexible to deal with COIN.

By the same token, great powers have more resources than those necessary to win small wars. Thus, they tend to respond to COIN by using their conventional heavy weapons or technological weapons, such as state-of-the-art Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). Accordingly, great powers' conventional approach is less effective in dealing with unconventional missions. The U.S. has developed advanced fighters, such as F-14, 15, 16, 18, 22 and 35 JSF in its attempt to retain its status as a superpower in the world. These fighters, however,

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<sup>606</sup> For the logic of great power politics, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: the Maple-Vail Book), 2.

are less effective for unconventional warfare. Field commanders who engage in COIN require old-fashioned helicopters, or at most UAVs, rather than the aforementioned advanced fighters.<sup>607</sup> Likewise, although the U.S. has the largest aircraft carriers in the world, they are the least useful for COIN. Rather, multifunctional ships are more effective for COIN as they can support armies from nearby coastal areas.

However, great powers like the U.S cannot abandon these heavy weapons. They believe that disarmament, or even the reduction of their military capacity, can pose a serious threat to the maintenance of their position in the world. For example, the U.S. cannot reduce its heavy military armaments in a situation where China continues to expand its military as well as its economy. The spiraling logic of great powers who seek relative gain prevents them from seeking organizational flexibility required for COIN success. Thus, great powers tend to intervene in overseas COIN missions in order to gain an advantage in great power politics, rather than to achieve a key goal of COIN, which is based on gaining security on the battlefield. The U.S. sent its troops to Vietnam in an attempt to gain the upper hand in great power politics against the Soviet Union, the leader of the communist bloc. This led to strategic failure.

In addition to the kinetic nature of the military forces of great powers, their presence on unconventional battlefields creates tension with the local population. Many people on insurgent battlefields had harsh experiences under great powers' colonialism. Their painful experiences are the outcome of power asymmetry

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<sup>607</sup> *The Economist*, "Defense spending in a time of austerity," August 28, 2010, 20.

between great powers and insurgent countries. Thus, great power intervention in COIN tends to make the local population more likely to see them as occupiers than as liberators. When the U.S. forces arrived on the Vietnamese battlefield, they were easily recognized as occupiers by the local population due to power asymmetry and their painful experiences in the colonial era. To put it another way, great powers do not enjoy structural advantages that middle fighters have.

To make matters worse, great powers' over-armament in small warfare pushes the local population to avoid them. Since the U.S. forces intervened in Vietnamese affairs as part of great power politics, they rarely reformed their military organization needed to succeed in unconventional warfare at the first stage. By contrast, the ROK forces came to the Vietnamese battlefield to conduct a special mission of overseas COIN, rather than to engage in great power politics. In a nutshell, great power COIN forces' willingness and capacity, as well as their structural standing, make them less likely to succeed in COIN.

If great powers are ineffective in COIN missions, are weak powers effective in COIN missions? Weak powers are more willing to engage in overseas missions than great powers because they view these missions as more important. Moreover, fighters from weak powers are more likely to fight harder because they see this unusual mission as an opportunity to maximize their countries' stature in the world. In addition, weak powers are better in COINs because when they border insurgent battlegrounds, they frequently have political/socio-cultural similarities. Since there is little power asymmetry between neighboring weak powers and the local population's mother countries, the local population is less likely to see



fighters from weak powers as occupiers. Furthermore, they are more familiar with terrain, climate, and even culture on the battlegrounds.

While weak powers' assets are useful for COIN from the viewpoint of non-material dimensions, particularly socio-cultural assets, they may be disadvantaged by fewer material assets and a small military. Thus, COIN missions are rarely assigned to fighters from weak powers. When these missions are assigned to them, they are more likely to engage in them only symbolically due to a lack of military capacity. In a nutshell, weak powers in COIN missions suffer from a lack of resources and organized military.

By contrast, middle power fighters are the optimal forces to deal with COIN because they not only possess a high degree of willingness and capability to fulfill this unusual mission but also political/socio-cultural advantages (see Table 21).

Table 21

Types of State Strength and Expected COIN Outcomes

Types	COIN forces		Positional effects	Expected outcome
	Willingness	Capacity / resources		
Great power (Heavy fighters)	Low (Usual mission)	Overly armed (Conventional)	Few	Less favorable to success
Middle power (Middle fighters)	High (Rare mission)	Eligible (Flexible)	Many	Optimal
Weak power	High (Rare mission)	Under armed (Unable)	Many	Less favorable to success

Middle countries are not trapped in great power politics, and thus do not have to heavily arm themselves. They are most likely to focus on the

accomplishments of special missions with the use of appropriate weapons for COIN. In addition, their willingness is converted into COIN capability by making their military organization flexible enough to deal with small unit fighting, not kinetic fighting. At the same time, similar to great powers, they have organized militaries and disciplined/non-corrupt soldiers. Finally, similar to weak powers, middle powers are advantaged by a small power gap with a COIN-stricken country and better socio-cultural understanding. All in all, middle power fighters possess the merits of both great and weak powers. At the same time, they avoid the disadvantages of great and weak powers.

### **III. A Policy Implication I: Northeast Asian Security**

#### **A. The Collapse of the Kim Regime and Possible Response Scenarios**

Lessons the ROK forces learned in Vietnam and Iraq can shed light on a plan to deal with situations led by the collapse of the Kim regime.<sup>608</sup> Before this insight is discussed, two dimensions need to be addressed regarding the post-Kim regime situations: possible situations in North Korea followed by the Kim regime's collapse and scenarios of external actors' intervention.

To begin with, when the Kim regime collapses, what situations would follow in North Korea? The first possible scenario is that specific groups in North Korea could acquire chemical or nuclear weapons that the Kim regime managed. These groups have the potential to use these catastrophic weapons irrationally or

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<sup>608</sup> I analyze in a journal paper how the ROK military's lessons in Vietnam and Iraq shed light on its plausible COIN in North Korea dealing with situations for the collapse of the Kim regime. For more on this, Ban, "The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency," 225-47.

make money by exporting them to transnational terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda. Thus, this scenario needs to be seriously considered not only for regional security but also international security.

The second scenario is that a large number of North Koreans could flee to South Korea or China. A massive number of refugees could disrupt South Korea and China and lead to political and economic instability. Accordingly, a manageable plan to deal with North Korean refugees needs to be carefully developed.

The third scenario is that as soon as the Kim regime collapses, the North Korean military could attempt to take over North Korea. In this case, loyalists of the Kim regime could fight against the military coup group, heading to a civil war in North Korea. If this situation happens, the next question would be whether outside actors intervene, similar to situations in the Middle East, such as Libya in 2011.

The final scenario is that external actors, such as South Korea or the U.N., could be responsible for governance in North Korea. In this case, various insurgent groups could rise in North Korea to overthrow an interim government managed by these external actors. I discuss this final scenario in this dissertation because the aforementioned three scenarios are reported to be already dealt with by South Korea and the U.S. through OPLAN 5029, but this last insurgency scenario is rarely discussed.<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> For the article about OPLAN 5029, *The Dong-A Ilbo*, “Gov’t, US prepare draft for NK contingency plan,” February 09, 2010,

Scenarios about types of external actors which intervene after the collapse of the Kim regime also need to be mentioned. First of all, when the Kim regime collapses, the U.N. might attempt to intervene in North Korea. In this scenario, the U.N. would serve as an arena where neighboring countries and regional powers discuss how to deal with the situation. U.N.-led peacekeeping forces or international coalition forces could become responsible for restoring stability in North Korea.

However, if U.N.-led efforts fail, individual countries with security concerns might then intervene. China would be a probable intervener. This is particularly true because China sees the DPRK as buffer zone between China and Western powers-led political democracy. China is also concerned about the collapse of the North Korean regime because it might trigger a massive number of North Korean refugees. In this scenario, China's intervention could be followed by many other countries' engagement, which could destabilize Northeast Asia.

The third scenario is that the U.S. intervenes in a North Korean situation as a major player with the use of the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea before China intervenes. In this scenario, the U.S. intervention might be designed to expand its sphere of influence in the Korean peninsula. However, direct U.S. intervention would lead to military friction with China, similar to the second scenario.

The final scenario is that South Korea intervenes in a North Korean situation. This case is particularly plausible because South Korea would see a North Korean collapse as an opportunity to reunify the peninsula. I focus on this scenario because this dissertation deals with the effectiveness of regional military forces on COIN.

In the following section, I provide policy implications based on the aforementioned two scenarios: the rise of insurgent groups and South Korea's direct intervention to achieve stability on the Korean peninsula.

#### B. Future Insurgencies in North Korea

Insurgencies in North Korea seem plausible because three interconnected situations increase the degree of instability in the North: unexpected blowback to the DPRK caused by nuclear-seeking behaviors, a leaderless regime situation, and the increase of North Korean defections.<sup>610</sup> To start with, although the Kim regime has developed nuclear weapons designed for nuclear deterrence or regime survival under *Juche* ideology: *Juche* might lead to an internal regime struggle with unexpected blowback, such as worsening economic poverty, food crisis, and the rise of social unrest.

Moreover, North Korea is most likely to be in a situation of leaderlessness in the coming years due to the Kim Jong II's poor physical condition and unaddressed issues about a successor. Power transition may not be smooth. *The Korea Herald* reports that "North Korea may face anarchy after the death of its

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<sup>610</sup> Ban, "The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency," *Asian Politics and Policy* 3, 227.

leader, Kim Jong-il, due to a lack of a clearly powerful successor despite reports that Kim has appointed one of his sons as heir.”<sup>611</sup> Likewise, *The Economist* (December 4, 2010) states that “on the death of the Dear Leader [Kim Jong Il], North Korea descends into anarchy or lashes out, as it did in the island attack last month that killed South Korean servicemen and civilians.”<sup>612</sup> In a similar vein, *The Economist* (May 29, 2010) argues that “opposing factions loyal to different members of Mr Kim’s family” might lead to a crisis in North Korea.<sup>613</sup> Furthermore, North Korea recently started idolizing Kim Jung-Un, the third son of Kim Jong-Il, as a part of the efforts to transfer political power. Thus, South Korea and the U.S. included “unstable situations” referring to contingency in North Korea in the joint statement of the 42nd SCM on October 8, 2010.<sup>614</sup>

Most importantly, the number of people who defected from North Korea to the ROK’s democracy has significantly increased. *The Korea Times* reports that “about 16,500 North Koreans have fled to the South up to late June [2009] [...] the number of defectors has steadily increased by more than 10 percent every year, and this year’s total is expected to reach 3,000.”<sup>615</sup> More recently, *The Korea*

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<sup>611</sup> *The Korea Herald*, “N.K. may face anarchy after Kim Jong-il’s death,” July 29, 2009, [http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/archives/result\\_contents.asp](http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/archives/result_contents.asp) (Accessed September 1, 2009).

<sup>612</sup> *The Economist*, “Friends, or else: Living with China’s rise will test America’s diplomacy as never before,” in A Special report on China’s place in the world, 14, December 4, 2010.

<sup>613</sup> *The Economist*, “Briefing North Korea,” May 29, 2010, 24.

<sup>614</sup> *The JoongAng Sunday*, October 10, 2010, <http://sunday.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=19145> (Accessed October 10, 2010).

<sup>615</sup> *The Korea Herald*, “N.K. may face anarchy after Kim Jong-il’s death,” July 30, 2009, [http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/archives/result\\_contents.asp](http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/archives/result_contents.asp) (Accessed September 1, 2009).

*Herald* states that “Until September this year [2010], about 20,000 North Koreans have taken asylum here [to South Korea], fleeing from hunger and political suppression in the communist state.”<sup>616</sup> Increasing numbers might be just the starting point for the future influx of massive refugees.<sup>617</sup> The increase of defection reflects the North Korean regime’s failure. Regime change by foreign intervention might not be feasible.<sup>618</sup> Internal regime failure, however, seems to be only a matter of time; particularly societal and economic instability may lead to a weakening regime and finally regime failure (However, it should be noted that North Korea’s demise has been predicted for three decades, and has not yet occurred).

The aforementioned situations could lead to various insurgencies against an unstable local government that will serve as one local branch of the South Korea-led unified government on the Korean peninsula.<sup>619</sup> One insurgent group could

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<sup>616</sup> Lee Sun-young, “Audit offers glimpse into defectors’ lives,” *The Korea Herald*, October 5, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20101005000877> (Accessed October 5, 2010). *The Economist* reports that “the South’s unification ministry has announced that the 20,000th defector, a 41-year-old woman, arrived on November 11th.” *The Economist*, “North Korean defectors: No paradise, but better than hell,” November 20, 2010, 50.

<sup>617</sup> The South Korean government has run the *Hanawon* Center – a resettlement facility for North Korean defectors since 1999 in its effort to deal with problems caused by the increase of North Korean defectors.

<sup>618</sup> The cooperative and strategic relationship makes it difficult for regime change by foreign intervention to be made. For example, China has seen the Taiwan issue as its crucial affair (domestic affair rather than foreign affair) and thus has been worried about American intervention over this issue. North Korea, however, tends to force the United States to focus more on itself rather than Taiwan; it plays a “role in pinning down American forces in the region” *The Economist*, “Hell on Earth,” October 24, 2009, 12.

<sup>619</sup> These scenarios are discussed in my published article as well. Ban, “The ROK

spring from ex-political leaders, or Kim Jong Il's family members. This group will want to regain political power and reestablish a communist regime in the North. Insurgencies driven by this group will be physically intense. Second, ex-military leaders would promote insurgencies to regain their superior positions. It will be easier for them to gain access to military weapons that communist North Korea has built up for more than 60 years. Thus, their insurgencies will rely on military weapons intensively. These two groups are most likely to be supported by China because they have historically enjoyed a good relationship with Chinese political and military leaders.

The third scenario is an insurgency by anti-Kim Jong Il groups that had grievances under the Kim regime. This group will include political prisoners or military leaders who tried coups against the Kim regime. Even though they wanted to overthrow the Kim regime, they will want to address a power vacuum on their own, not by foreign actors. Fourth, economically deprived societal groups might become insurgents. The power vacuum will weaken the control of the border and thus South and North Koreans are most likely to confront each other. North Koreans, who did not enjoy democracy and capitalism, will feel frustrated due to economic gaps with South Koreans – gaps between “haves” and “have-nots.” They will not want to be second-class citizens. Accordingly, they are more likely to seek nation-rebuilding in their own way, which may not be democratic.

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as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency,” 227-8.



The final insurgency might spring from the clash of ideologies. The longest cold war in the world has been on the Korean peninsula; extended tension between democracy in the South and communism in the North has existed over 60 years. North Koreans have been ruled under one family, whereas South Koreans have enjoyed pluralism. The long-lasting gaps could make ideologically-armed North Koreans become insurgents against South Koreans. In this case, the COIN forces need to employ societal appeals to decrease the ideological gaps. The organizations will include democracy-seeking groups in the North as well as religious groups, human rights groups, and charity groups in the South.

In particular, the COIN forces will have to build and maintain a strong connection with democracy-seeking North Korean groups as well as share information with them. Some North Koreans have started to gain information regarding South Korea's enhanced political and economic development. They will want the North to become a democracy, stimulated by South Korea's success story. Thus, this group is most likely to be aligned with the ROK's COIN forces. The ROK's COIN forces will have to cooperate with this group to reestablish order in the region in a democratic way. However, what matters most regardless of types of groups is that the COIN force should have strong support from neutral or ordinary local North Koreans for strategic success in future COIN. All in all, the "demand" *vis-à-vis* COIN will necessarily emerge.

#### C. A Leading COIN Player in North Korea

When the North Korean insurgency becomes reality in the process of the Kim regime breakdown, who should be a major player in its attempt to secure the

Korean peninsula? There will be no place for weak powers in this mission because they do not have the resources to conduct this mission. Furthermore, there are no regional weak powers in Northeast Asian geopolitics.

By contrast, great powers will be interested in this mission as an attempt to extend and maintain their sphere of influence in the region. When the last battleground of the Cold War disappears in the Korean peninsula, they will utilize this mission as an opportunity to maintain or increase their influence as they have done since the end of WW II.<sup>620</sup> The U.S. could be an influential player with the use of American troops stationed in South Korea in an attempt to prevent China from increasing its influence. China might become an active player to minimize a security threat driven by the elimination of the buffer zone between the democracy bloc and the communist bloc and by a massive influx of refugees on China's border.

Thus, if both powers intervene, the Korean peninsula will become trapped in the quagmire of great power politics. In this situation, the nature of the mission will be unintentionally changed from gaining regional security (a key objective of COIN) to maximizing the influence of great powers. If that happens, the mission will be longer and success will be hardly achievable.

More importantly, as has been noted earlier, security management by great powers is less successful because they will see the mission of COIN in the Korean peninsula as one of the usual missions for great powers as they did in the past, not

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<sup>620</sup> In addition to the Korean peninsula, Taiwan can be described as the last Cold War front as well.

as an unusual mission. Thus, the perception of routine missions will make them both less willing and capable of achieving mission success. Kinetic fighters from the U.S. and China are less likely to fight with COIN in mind; rather they are more likely to rely on traditional fighting methods related to great power politics. Inflexibility of American or Chinese military organizations developed under the logic of great power politics in an anarchic world will be the least effective. Furthermore, they will be less interested in making their organizations flexible for this mission because each will pay more attention to conventional threats as great powers.

These great powers also lack political/socio-cultural advantages with respect to the local population's culture, the first impression, their status as outsiders, and adaptation costs. North Koreans have seen Americans as the most hostile or evil enemy in the world for more than sixty years. Thus, when the U.S. military takes over this COIN mission, it will struggle from the beginning, particularly due to the local population's strong hatred. By the same token, American intervention as a major player will stimulate North Korean bystanders to join insurgent groups, and by doing so, it will create a mobilization logic favorable to insurgent groups. Second, in a situation where the level of the local population's hatred of Americans is so high, the first impression strategy of U.S. COIN forces will be futile.

Third, since the U.S. neither shares culture/traditions with North Korea nor is a neighboring country, its status as an outsider will dominate. Finally, U.S. forces will have massive adaptation costs because it is less familiar with both

material environments and non-material environments. American COIN forces are less familiar with mountainous guerillas' activities. They are also less familiar with the non-material environment of North Korea, such as language, local traditions, or informal rules of villages.

Considering a traditional alliance between China and North Korea, China's forces will be better positioned than U.S. forces, but they also lack political and socio-cultural advantages. North Koreans may have less hatred towards Chinese than Americans, and by doing so, China's COIN forces may be better positioned for a more favorable first impression. However, China's status as an outsider is still high because Chinese culture and traditions are different from Korean. Moreover, historically, China has been a foe rather than a friend before the modern state came to be. Thus, when the Kim regime collapses, North Koreans' friendliness to the Chinese will significantly decrease. Similar to U.S. forces, China's forces that speak a different language and do not understand Korean informal traditions and culture will have massive adaptation costs.

While there is no place for weak powers in this mission and great powers are less effective for its achievement, the South Korean military will be the most efficient entity to cope with North Korean insurgencies and secure the Korean peninsula. South Korean forces will have even more potential to successfully deal with this once in a lifetime mission (the most special mission) – in more detail, a singular mission for unification – than their successes in Vietnam and Iraq.

First of all, the nature of this unusual mission will make the South Korean military much more enthusiastic and capable. Since this mission will serve as the

only opportunity for reunification between South and North Korea in a democratic way, South Korean fighters will display a high degree of morale and pride. Their mission will be recognized as the most important: to increase national prestige as a unified state. Accordingly, similar to South Korean COIN troops' fast organizational adaptation in Vietnam and Iraq, they will make COIN organizations flexible enough to increase their capacity for this mission. In addition to this military capacity, COIN forces require economic capacity in the sense that it is very important to help build an economic infrastructure for North Koreans. South Korea, a growing middle power and a chair of G-20 in 2010, has the economic resources for this infrastructure building.<sup>621</sup>

Second and of equal importance, South Korean forces have significant political and socio-cultural advantages. The level of North Koreans' hatred of South Korean troops will be the lowest among possible troops because they are the same and only ethnic group in the world.<sup>622</sup> Thus, the ROK forces will be positioned as the best troops to create a first impression. The ROK COIN forces will not be seen as outsiders. This is particularly true because they are the most

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<sup>621</sup> The cost of South Korea's efforts to build an economic infrastructure of the North could lead to the South's economic stagnation. Thus, in order to minimize this stagnation, the ROK President Lee Myung-Bak mentioned the necessity of a discourse about a unification tax. *The Korea Times*, "Lee proposes unification tax," August 15, 2010, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/10/116\\_71464.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/10/116_71464.html) (Accessed April 9, 2011).

<sup>622</sup> The Kim regime has used propaganda to promote anti-South Korean sentiment. In this vein, it could be true that the North Korean population exposed to this propaganda will not be fully satisfied with South Korean COIN forces. However, North Koreans still have many separated families in South Korea. This kin group characteristic could reduce the effects of this propaganda when the Kim regime, which served as a propaganda manager, collapses.

familiar with material and non-material environments in the Northern region of the Korean peninsula. When it comes to material environments, the terrain, climate, and geography of North Korea are similar to or almost the same as those in South Korea. In this vein, South Korean troops are already prepared for the mission on this terrain because they have been trained in terrain similar to North Korea. Furthermore, South Korean troops have already experienced guerilla warfare in mountainous terrains. In addition, the ROK forces are also best positioned because South Koreans share language, culture, and traditions with North Koreans. Thus, these advantages of the ROK forces will minimize adaptation costs. All in all, the nature of the COIN mission and political/socio-cultural advantages of South Korea, taken together, should serve to provide success of COIN in North Korea.

#### D. The Role of the U.S. Military

As has been noted, the use of American forces will evoke hatred from North Koreans because they have been taught that the U.S. is their evil enemy. Thus, the COIN operations will face a quagmire from the beginning if the U.S. military plays a leading role. American forces, however, need to play another important role in North Korea.

A specific mission needs to be given to U.S. forces. While the ROK military forces play a major role in dealing with this unusual mission, the U.S. needs to play a supporting role. It will have to play a supporting role while it stays in South Korea as a backup in case that foreign forces, such as China and Russia, support the insurgencies. In particular, China will attempt to exert its influence in

a power vacuum North Korea. *The Economist* reports that when the Kim regime collapses, China will not like “America or South Korea to assert control over the North [and] in the long run, China may expect to regain the sort of influence over a unified Korea.”<sup>623</sup> Thus, while American forces stay in South Korean areas, they should be able to deter China from intervening in the ROK military’s efforts to reestablish order in the North. The major role of Seoul and the minor role of Washington will prevent this mission from being trapped in great power politics between the U.S. and China.

Historically, China has intervened in the Korean peninsula. China’s effort to influence the Korean peninsula has not been exceptional in modern history. China has strongly opposed foreign forces’ interventions in the Korean peninsula because China has historically attempted to maintain its influence there. China intervened in the Korean War in 1950. Chinese leader Mao Zedong perceived American troops as the biggest threat to China in 1950 when the Korean War broke out.<sup>624</sup> More importantly, China strategically saw North Korea’s survival as crucially important for its own survival. Thus, China sent its troops to the Korean peninsula in order to support its Communist ally during the Korean War. This

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<sup>623</sup> *The Economist*, “Friends, or else: Living with China’s rise will test America’s diplomacy as never before,” December 4, 2010, 14.

<sup>624</sup> As opposed to one leader-oriented analysis, Scobell argues that Chinese civilian leaders were more hawkish, but Chinese military leaders were more dovish by examining civil-military relations in 1950. Andrew Scobell, “Soldiers, Statesmen, Strategic Culture, and China’s 1950 Intervention in Korea,” in Suisheng Zhao eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Pragmatism and Strategic Behavior* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 107-127.

notion and expectation from China have not been totally wiped out in the present era.

China still intervenes in current affairs related to the Korean peninsula. China has played a leading role in addressing North Korea's nuclear issue. At the same time, China serves as a blood ally to North Korea. When the ROK *Cheonan* sinking incident led by North Korea in March 2010 was referred to the United Nations Security Council in July, 2010, North Korea was not listed as an attacker on the UNSC statement due to China's strong opposition.<sup>625</sup> *The Economist* states that "In March, when the North sank a South Korean warship, killing 46 soldiers, China failed to issue any condemnation."<sup>626</sup> In a similar vein, even when the North Korean military shelled South Korean sovereign territory, *Yeonpyeong* Island, in November 2010, China did not condemn North Korea, unlike other countries, such as the U.S., Japan, and even Russia. *The Economist* reports that "when North Korea shelled a South Korean island last month, China was characteristically reluctant to condemn it [North Korea]."<sup>627</sup>

Considering China's extreme interest in the Korean peninsula, China's interference in a North Korean collapse is more than probable in its efforts to increase its sphere of influence and guarantee its national security. The North Korean refugee issue has also been one of the major concerns for China, and it

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<sup>625</sup> For the news article for the UNSC statement, see Na Jeong-ju, "UNSC statement on Cheonan is half success," *The Korea Times*, July 09, 2010, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/08/116\\_69142.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/08/116_69142.html) (Accessed September 26, 2010).

<sup>626</sup> *The Economist*, "The dangers of a rising China," December 4, 2010, 15.

<sup>627</sup> *The Economist*, "Brushwood and gall," in A Special report on China's place in the world, December 4, 2010, 5.



will become more serious if the Kim regime collapses. *The Economist* reports that a refugee crisis led by a collapse in North Korea is one of China's biggest concerns.<sup>628</sup>

When China intervenes in this situation, the U.S. has to be responsible for great power politics, focusing on deterring China from being militarily aggressive on the Korean peninsula. *The Economist* analyzes this possibility. It states that when North Korea collapses, "there is even a risk that China and America would find themselves supporting opposing sides in a conflict that could involve nuclear weapons."<sup>629</sup> Thus, the deterrent role of the U.S. military is crucial for the ROK military to effectively deal with COIN in North Korea. In a nutshell, while the South Korean military plays a major role in COIN operations in North Korea, American forces must convince China to refrain from a heavy military engagement.

#### E. How to Deal with Contingent Situations<sup>630</sup>

The past always provides important opportunities for teaching the present and future ROK military. What lessons can the ROK military, as a necessary major player in a North Korean collapse, learn from COIN missions in Vietnam and Iraq? How would the ROK military have to cope with a possible North Korean insurgency? We need to identify the dynamics based on the interplay between four actors in order to effectively deal with possible upcoming

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<sup>628</sup> *The Economist*, "The North Korean Succession: Thanks Dad," September 25, 2010. 18.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>630</sup> The analysis of this section is also used in my published article in a similar way. Ban, "The ROK as a Middle Power: Its Role in Counterinsurgency," 241-3.

insurgencies in North Korea.<sup>631</sup> The identification offers an answer in terms of how to do this. To start with, *South Korean domestic population* will be very unwilling to militarily fight against North Koreans because they are the same Korean ethnic group and share 5,000 years of history. Furthermore, the strong civic society, led by the high degree of democracy, will even more discourage the use of mass-violence.

Second, when it comes to the role of North Koreans, *the local population*, a non-political dynamic will dominate the first phase of insurgencies because North Koreans have been armed with an extreme religious level of *Juche* ideology. North Koreans are rarely exposed to the outside world. They have been conditioned to believe that they live in the happiest country in the world, rather than the worst. This extremist ideology of the local North Korean population will make them vigorously resist the presence of outside forces.

The above insights from the two actors show that a population-oriented approach should be prescribed ahead of an enemy-based approach.<sup>632</sup> Along with a population-based approach from the COIN force, the domestic population can boost their effectiveness by helping North Korean refugees leave their homeland for more stable and freer areas of South Korea. Just as the South Korean population helped Iraqis, they can also boost the effectiveness of COIN in North

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<sup>631</sup> The report on the Iraq mission also shows that the ROK military needs to prepare for contingencies in North Korea. See Lee, *The mission report on RRT*.

<sup>632</sup> I describe a population-oriented approach as a soft remedy in COIN through another article. Kil-Joo Ban, "Political or Religious Insurgencies and Different COIN Remedies: Insights from Identifying Distinction between Malaya Insurgency and Intifada," *Korea Journal of Military Art and Science* 65/1 (2009), 39-42.

Korea by helping North Korean refugees and casualties on South Korean home ground.

It will not be easier to separate the local population from insurgents than COIN forces anticipate. Many experiences in Iraq, however, offer an insight into how to deal with them. The COIN forces will have to conduct friendship programs, such as the Green Angel, at the first phase of a population-oriented COIN approach. When quick-impact is working under the friendship program, it needs to focus on infrastructure building in four ways: security, political, economic, and social.

Yet at the same time, when a population-based approach is beginning to work, an enemy-based method should be considered and introduced due to an underlying dynamic of another actor in COIN: a variety of North Korean *insurgent groups*. North Koreans had conducted guerilla warfare and have been trained to a high standard for sixty years. North Korea is surrounded by mountainous terrain, and this will offer insurgents a favorable condition for guerrilla warfare. Based on experiences in Vietnam, an enemy-based COIN method should be aimed at preventing guerrillas from controlling mountainous or rural areas. In order to achieve these aims, the company-led tactical base, which was effective in Vietnam, would work to deal with North Korean insurgents as well. To that end, the ROK military needs to analyze the terrain in North Korea's mountains prior to any involvement.

In addition, an enemy-based COIN also needs to be aimed at safely controlling the biological and nuclear weapons that the Kim regime possesses. An

enemy-based COIN has to focus primarily on preventing the transfer of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to insurgent groups. If insurgent groups possess WMDs, the ROK COIN forces will be trapped by insurgent groups' psychological tactics. Insurgent groups with WMDs will attempt to make domestic populations fearful under nuclear brinkmanship tactics. Thus, the WMD aspect should be considered important for enemy-based COIN operations.

Seoul also needs to make use of the remaining North Korean soldiers as local security forces instead of decommissioning them to prevent insurgent groups from easily mobilizing them. The former soldiers who were kicked out of the military are likely to be strong insurgents, as we can see in Iraq. The use of local soldiers for regional security would not only weaken the insurgents' power, but also make the local community more autonomous.

The last actor, *the COIN force*, needs to make its organization flexible and adaptable to the mission. To that end, as I noted earlier, the COIN force should be composed of Korean soldiers rather than external soldiers because South Korean soldiers would be regarded less as occupiers than Western soldiers. In addition, the ROK military has better cultural understanding of the North Korean situation. South Koreans speak the same language as North Koreans, and they both share traditional customs on a societal level. Thus, the ROK military will have the strongest cultural advantages on the battleground among possible military forces.

The ROK military also will have to choose officers and soldiers based on high standards. Special forces and/or soldiers experienced in unconventional missions are desirable. The COIN force should establish sub-organizations,

particularly focused on civil-military missions as part of a population-based approach. Under this remedy, Seoul needs to provide the local North Korean community with some degree of autonomy from the central government and establish legitimate local government. It also *should* keep the balance between centralization and decentralization to strengthen an enemy-based COIN capability. A tactical success in one area or village achieved by the COIN force should lead to success in other areas by increasing the number of secured areas; the positive domino effect will work under these mixed remedies between a population-led method and an enemy-led method. When the North Korean population enjoys more freedom under democracy, has more stable economic lives, and feels like a united Korea over time as a result of the above strategy, they will stay away from North Korean insurgent groups rather than help them.

As the ROK COIN troops achieve short-term outcomes, a Korean unified government needs to step up its efforts to attain a long-term outcome, a fully integrated democratic society. As the *Hanawon* Center did, it should teach newly integrated North Koreans how to make their living on their own, rather than relying on government. In this process, government needs to insure Northerners are not treated as second class citizens by offering them specific benefits, such as financial stipends needed to resettle in a democratic society.

In addition to this economic focus, a unified government should focus on a political dimension as well. In the political process, it needs to prevent Northerners from being marginalized by offering them advantages in the electoral process. One possibility for political integration would be to stipulate only

Northerners may be political candidates for local government positions in specific parts of the North. Education is crucial to help Northerners understand a democratic political process. Thus, a unified government needs to establish various institutes to educate Northerners about democratic politics and teach them their rights in a democratic society. Similarly, schools should be set up where children from both the South and North can study together to reduce societal gaps between the two groups. The aforementioned economic, political, and societal integration efforts will lead to a unified government and hopefully, a fully integrated stable peninsula.

#### **IV. Policy Implication II: The ROK Military Strategy**

##### **A. The ROK Military Strategy and Organization: Today**

The ROK military strategy has paid much attention to conventional warfare against the North Korean Army. Conventional wisdom presupposes that the ROK's military strategy should be developed and advanced according to North Korea's military threat, such as its military capabilities and strategy. By the same token, the conventional analyses focus mostly on the current capability of the North Korean regime/military, and therefore, they rarely explore possible future contingencies that the military will have to manage.

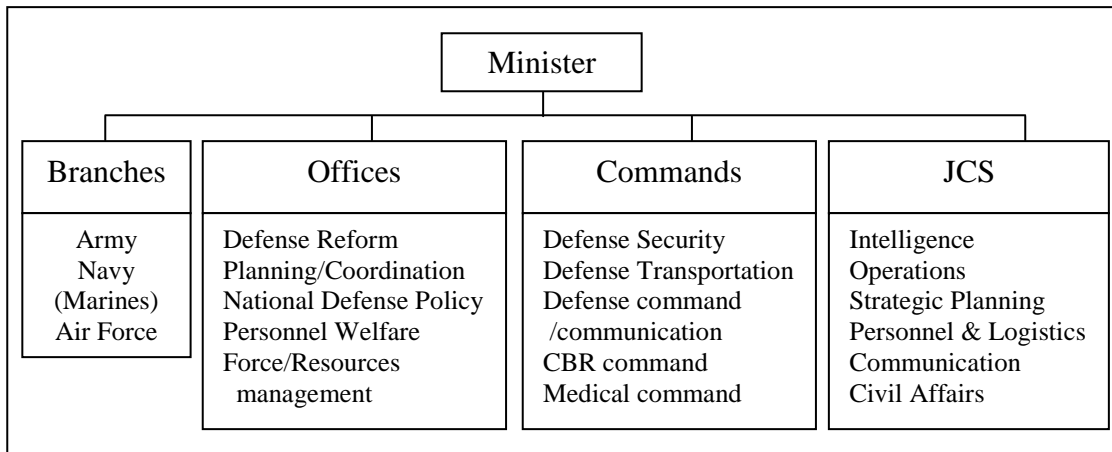
Thus, valuable lessons learned from Vietnam and Iraq *vis-à-vis* COIN have not been integrated into the military strategy. In the non-mission period, unconventional warfare tends to be marginalized in the military strategy. As such, the ROK military organization is rarely intended to deal with unconventional

warfare. This explains why its military organization tends towards a traditional structure to manage conventional threats.

Likewise, the ROK's military organization has been framed under the military's adoption of conventional military strategy, as opposed to balanced military strategy. The ROK Ministry of Defense pays less attention to the establishment of a special office or command that controls unconventional missions (see Figure 7). The Military PKO (Peacekeeping Operation) Center, a very small organization, has taken charge of developing a doctrine for overseas missions and the training of soldiers.

Figure 7

The ROK Major Military Organizations



The major training and exercises that the ROK military has conducted also show how much conventional military strategy is embedded in ROK military strategic culture. To effectively carry out traditional war campaigns, major exercises are based on kinetic operations (see Table 22). According to the *Defense White Paper 2008*, only two ROK exercises out of 13 focus on unconventional

missions. There are no exercises to deal with COIN or pre-war and post-war management.

It is important that crisis management is embedded in unconventional missions, such as COIN, before and/or after battles. Unconventional missions require interplay among various factors: political, economic, cultural, foreign affairs, and military. For example, the agencies' cooperation is crucial for effective COIN. COIN is not simply military operations but also various conflict management plans, such as civil operations. Section 6 of Chapter 5 in *the Defense White Paper* stresses the importance of the military overseas missions and identifies the importance of coordination with other agencies to effectively carry out unconventional missions<sup>633</sup>:

MND (the Ministry of National Defense) is making an effort to establish a legal and systemic basis in order to expand Korean participation in PKO and also enhance military capabilities [...] first, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT), there are now plans to enact the PKO participation ACT (provisional name) to simplify the domestic procedure to dispatch troops.

Table 22

The ROK Military Major Training and Exercises

Type	Name	Contents	Nature
ROK-US Forces	Ulchi-Freedom (UFG) Exercise	Theater-level operation	C
	Key Resolve/Foal Eagle Exercise	Proficiency for war campaign	C
Joint Exercises	Taegeuk Exercise	Theater-level CP exercise	C
	Hoguk Exercise	Large scale joint exercise	C
Other Exercises	Combined counter-terror exercise	ROK, US, and Russia	U
	Rim of Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC)	Large scale sea exercise (ROK, US, Australia, Japan, etc)	C
	Search and Rescue Exercise	Basic sea exercise (ROK and	U

<sup>633</sup> The ROKMND, *The Defense White Paper*, 142.



		Japan)	
	Pacific Reach	Submarine Rescue Exercise (ROK, US, Australia, etc)	C
	West Pacific Countermin Warfare Exercise (MCMEX)	Mine Search / Sweep (ROK, Japan, Australia, etc)	C
	Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercise	ROK and US	C
	Combined Landing Operation Exercise	Amphibious operations (ROK and US)	C
	Combined Large Force Employment (CLFE)	Mid-altitude infiltration training (ROK and US)	C
	Cooperative Cope Thunder	Air infiltration (ROK, Japan, UK, France, etc)	C

Source: The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *The Defense White Paper 2008*, 362-3.

\* C: Exercise against conventional threat, U: Exercise against unconventional threat

Cooperation among agencies, however, is limited to the procedure of sending troops overseas in a tactical and temporary sense. Particularly, two ministries – MND and MOFAT – need to be strongly coordinated before, during, and after conducting COIN for possible insurgencies in the North as well as for overseas missions. The process of strengthening agencies relations need to be accelerated in various areas by developing a better balanced military strategy. It is about time that the ROK military grasps the need to successfully achieve the unconventional missions for the future as well as for the present. A balanced strategy for the ROK military will make it feasible by bolstering military organizational adaptation and investing more time into unconventional warfare-led exercises. In a nutshell, the current military organization and the scope of exercises in South Korea show that the military strategy adheres to the conventional posture despite its effort to support the outward national strategy of Global Korea.

#### B. The ROK Military Strategy and Organization: Future

As has been noted earlier, COIN is different from conventional warfare. Thus, there is a debate over the future strategy of the military in the United States based on four different schools: traditionalist, non-traditionalist, hybridist, and division of labor.<sup>634</sup> The traditionalist school stresses the importance of conventional warfare. Although traditionalists do not entirely neglect the presence of unconventional warfare in the world, they see a massive scale of conventional warfare as the most important mission for the military forces. Thus, they are mostly opposed to the U.S. military's heavy involvement in COIN.

The non-traditionalist school highlights the importance of unconventional missions in the world. Non-traditionalists stress the emergence of small scale military disputes, asymmetric warfare, and COIN. They also pay attention to the growing potential for future unconventional warfare, particularly in a situation where failing states, ungoverned states, and non-state actors are growing in the international environment.<sup>635</sup> Thus, they recommend that policy makers design the future military to deal with unconventional missions.

The hybridist school maintains that the military force has to effectively deal with all types of warfare, involving conventional and unconventional warfare. Hybridists often maintain that the U.S. military needs to "win all wars."<sup>636</sup> They avoid dichotomous preference in regards to conventional or unconventional

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<sup>634</sup> In particular, when it comes to the debate between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, see Michael C. Horowitz and Dan A. Shalmon, "The Future of War and American Military Strategy," *Orbis* 53, no. 2(2009), 303-308.

<sup>635</sup> General Petraeus and General McChrystal represent this school.

<sup>636</sup> For this school's position, see Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars," *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2009), 27-33.

warfare. Instead, this school insists that military forces should be able to do every mission. The problem with this school is that a tremendous amount of budget is required for the military to have dual capabilities.

Lastly, the division of labor school argues that military forces should be professionalized according to two career tracks – conventional officers and unconventional officers. The problem is that the-division-of-labor military can encounter a lack of flexibility in terms of the transition from unconventional warfare track soldiers to conventional track soldiers when more conventional forces are required for contingent situations. Furthermore, a large number of soldiers are needed to keep two professional tracks.

What would be the best military strategy for the future of South Korea? In terms of the aforementioned four schools, the future ROK military strategy could have three options: status-quo (a conventional strategy), an unconventional strategy, and a balanced strategy between the two. These three are particularly true because the third and fourth schools' views look better but less realistic due to budget and troop size issues.

Seoul should choose the third option. The first option is meaningful itself in the sense that the Korean peninsula remains the last-remnant battleground of the Cold War between democratic South Korea and communist North Korea. However, the status-quo strategy will be insufficient to deal with future unconventional missions. The second option, an unconventional strategy, is more effective for futuristic missions, but its focus might undermine the capacity to cope with a conventional threat from the North Korean Army.

In contrast to the first two options, the third option, a balanced strategy, has the capacity to cope with current and future missions alike.<sup>637</sup> The balanced strategy serves as the middle ground between the hybridist school and the division of labor school. Hybridist-based strategy requires a massive military budget, and thus, it is unrealistic and ineffective. Nevertheless, it is valuable for the military force to enhance its capacity *vis-à-vis* a variety of missions. The division of labor school requires large military forces to make each military branch divisible over special careers.<sup>638</sup> Considering the current size of ROK military forces, the division of labor is unrealistic. However, it is valuable because it increases the military forces' proficiency in their areas. The balanced strategy needs to be developed to reflect advantages from both schools because conventional and unconventional missions are equally important to the ROK military and require proficiency from the military forces. According to the balanced strategy, the ROK military forces should be designed to establish flexible organizations so that they can deal with all of these different missions with adapted proficiency.

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<sup>637</sup> South Korean military needs to adopt the balanced strategy on a comprehensive level. For example, operations at sea also require the balanced strategy for the future. For more information on the balanced strategy for the navy, see Kil-Joo Ban, "The Clash of David and Goliath at Sea: The USS *Cole* Bombing as Sea Insurgency and Lessons for the ROK Navy," *Asian Politics & Policy* 2/3 (2010), 463-85.

<sup>638</sup> Jong-ha Kim and Jae-yup Kim support the division of labor school for the future ROK military strategy. Jong-ha Kim and Jae-yup Kim, "*Pok'ap jök kunsawihyöbe taeünghagi wihan kunsalyök könsölui panghyang* (The trajectory of the military construction to respond to complex military threats)" *Journal of National Defense Studies*, 53, no. 2 (2010), 47-50.

Why is a transition from the current conventional strategy to the balanced strategy required now and for the future? It springs from a growing demand for unconventional warfare: internal and external alike.

### 1. A Growing Demand for Unconventional Missions

As mentioned earlier, insurgency in North Korea is getting closer to a reality, due to regime leader succession, a devastated economy, and international isolation in North Korea. Thus, a potential for a COIN mission on the Korean peninsula is growing.

In addition to a national level of demand *vis-à-vis* an unconventional military mission, an international demand is also growing due to two factors: the changing international environment and the domestic power growth of South Korea. To start with, we need to identify the rapidly changing international security environment. Two dynamics center around international environments: the low frequency of wars between state actors and the rapid emergence of non-state threats in the post-Cold War era. There have been no physical wars between the great powers since WW II. The low frequency of conventional great wars has tended to moderate even wars between small states. War has become obsolescent among modernized states because cultural change has shifted the way to evaluate war.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> Mueller's key explanatory variable is a cultural change that makes wars "unthinkable." Mueller also differentiates between declining war and remaining war. The former refers to major war among developed countries or "conventional civil war," whereas the latter concerns "unconventional civil war" among non-developed countries, or "policing wars" by developed countries. John Mueller. *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Second, the transformation of the international environment from a bipolar to a unipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union forces encourages many more asymmetric threats to rapidly emerge. In this vein, the 9/11 attacks offer the most dramatic case. Non-state actors (e.g., al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and maritime pirates) have been dominant in a unipolar system. New actors operate and dominate across international boundaries in changed international security environments: Jema'ah Islamiyah, the Afghan Taliban, Hizballah, and al-Qaeda.<sup>640</sup> The United States is struggling with two critical unconventional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Small states as well as big states have started to place global insurgents, namely al-Qaeda, at their center *vis-à-vis* their security and interest. Under US hegemony, failing or failed states keep rising, which requires non-traditional missions by the military.<sup>641</sup> In a nutshell, the demise of the other superpower created “the new world disorder” by spreading violence.<sup>642</sup>

Growing unconventional warfare does not mean that all states in the world can afford to play a role in international security against non-state actors. A country needs to be equipped with a certain amount of capacity to deal with overseas missions. In this vein, the domestic power growth of South Korea allows

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<sup>640</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press), 5-7.

<sup>641</sup> As of 2010, there are a potential large number of countries for failed states. Somalia is ranked as the country with the highest index score of failed states, followed by Chad, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. *The Economist*, “Failed States: Where life is cheap and talk is loose,” March 19, 2011, 68.

<sup>642</sup> *The Economist*, “After the Soviet Union: A globe redrawn,” November 7, 2009, 26-7.

its military to respond to unconventional missions that keep growing under the changing international environment.

As neoclassical realists noted, a state's capacity to extract resources affects its outward behavior.<sup>643</sup> Seoul has increased its economic performance through the Vietnam War and the 1988 Olympic Games.<sup>644</sup> Due to its enhanced economy, Seoul has increased its military power.<sup>645</sup> In the 1990s, when Seoul started to build enough resources, it began to be concerned with affairs beyond the peninsula. Seoul has dispatched its military for a variety of overseas missions,

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<sup>643</sup> Neoclassical realists examine the effects of intervening variables, such as leaders' perception and the state's strength relative to society, as well as an independent variable (the distribution of capability). By adding less-structural variables, neoclassical realists attempt to incorporate both dimensions – external (international systemic) and internal (individual). The ROK's behavior can be explained by extending neoclassical realism into the middle-level range states, because security is important not only for Great Powers, but also for small states. The typical neoclassical realists are Zakaria (1998) and Christensen (1996). Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's world Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>644</sup> The ROK economic strength started to rapidly grow through two critical events. The ROK's involvement in the Vietnam War offered South Korea an opportunity to increase its economy; Seoul was able to have a massive amount of economic assistance from the U.S. through its commitment in the Vietnam War. Furthermore, after the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the ROK economy rapidly increased. According to *World Economic Outlook Database*, IMF (International Monetary Fund), the size of its GDP in 1990 was about four times the size of the GDP in 1980. International Monetary Fund, *World Economy Outlook Database*, <http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm> (Accessed March 10, 2010).

<sup>645</sup> The ROK military's modernization has been taken for granted by Korean society because it had to secure itself against the biggest threat since the Korean War, the North Korean Army. This condition has allowed Seoul to extract resources from society more easily than others. Political party rivals have not affected the ROK's behavior *vis-à-vis* an outward national strategy since the early 1990s regardless of administrations' ideological positions (liberal or conservative).

starting with sending 314 soldiers to the Gulf War in 1991.<sup>646</sup> The internal growth, on the other hand, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its changing strategy from inward to outward. As most realists argue, it is difficult for non-Great Powers to jump into the international arena where even Great Powers are struggling with each other.

The rapidly changing environment, which is difficult for one superpower to manage alone, offers the middle-level states, which have enough resources to go outward, a window of opportunity to engage in international affairs.<sup>647</sup> As a consequence, the “demand” *vis-à-vis* unconventional warfare has been increasing both internally and externally.

## 2. Tracing Outward Posture of South Korea

The South Korean government has consciously developed an outward national strategy. Nevertheless, it did not formalize this strategy until the Lee Myung-Bak administration’s adoption of the national strategy of Global Korea in 2008. South Korea has altered its behavior from inward posture to outward

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<sup>646</sup> The ROK military has engaged in multiple overseas missions ever since 1991: 1) Gulf War in 1991, 2) Peacekeeping Operations from 1993 to the present (e.g., Somalia, Western Sahara, Georgia, Angola, East Timor, and Lebanon etc), 3) counterinsurgency in Iraq from 2003 to 2008, and 4) maritime asymmetric operation (anti-piracy) off Somalia from 2009 to the present. The ROK Ministry of National Defense, *International Peacekeeping Operations*, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndEng\\_2009/DefensePolicy/Policy12/Policy12\\_2/index.j](http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndEng_2009/DefensePolicy/Policy12/Policy12_2/index.j) (Accessed March 1, 2010). When Seoul decided to send its troops to the Gulf War, it enjoyed rapidly growing economic power, followed by joining in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Enough national resources made national leaders perceive Korea as a “quasi-Great Power.”

<sup>647</sup> The changing environment forces states with sufficient resources, such as South Korea, to play a proper role in making “supply” meet “demand” for emerging unconventional missions.



posture depending on its internal resources and the international environment. It was crucial for Seoul to adopt an inward national strategy after the Korean War due to its devastated domestic infrastructure. Likewise, the presence of an enemy just across the border, the North Korean army, caused the ROK military to adopt an inward-seeking military strategy, which focused on how to prepare for conventional war against it. Thus, in the post-Korean War period, South Korea aligned its national strategy with its peninsula military strategy, which focused on domestic affairs.

In the 1960s, however, President Park Chung Hee adopted an ad-hoc outward seeking national strategy, such as an export-driven economy, in his attempt to enhance domestic economy. The ROK military also engaged in an ad-hoc outward mission in Vietnam. As a result, in the Vietnam War era, both national and military strategies were inherently inward-looking but temporarily outward-looking. This period can be defined as a critical juncture because an inward-looking middle state engaged in a tactical outward mission. The ROK outward mission against the Viet Cong guerrillas offered its military an opportunity to differentiate between conventional and unconventional fighting. That being said, from the Korean War to the Vietnam War period, the balance between national and military strategies in South Korea was well-maintained.

In the post-Vietnam War era, however, South Korea rapidly increased its domestic economic strength; leading to strategic imbalance between the nation-state and its military over time. South Korea became a middle-level state due to its enhanced economy particularly during the early 1990s, and in doing so, joined

the OECD in 1996. Thus, Seoul started to adopt an outward-seeking national posture in the early 1990s on a strategic level in economic and security areas. Seoul has sought more global economic engagements such as in the G-20 meeting. South Korea has also engaged in international security affairs, such as UN-led Peace Keeping Operations (PKO), War on Terrorism (e.g., Iraq War), and war on bandits (e.g., anti-piracy operations off Somalia), which extend beyond simple national security (see Table 23). Boosted by the ROK outward strategy, *MBC News* reported on October 22, 2009 that Seoul plans to establish foreign dispatch-ready troops in its attempt to systemically engage in international affairs.<sup>648</sup>

Table 23

The ROK Military's Conflict Involvement after the Korean War

<b>Period</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Forces / Size</b>	<b>Nature</b>
Mar 10, 1965 – Mar 23, 1973	Vietnam War	Two Army divisions and One Marines brigade About 310,000 soldiers	U
Jan 24 – Apr 10, 1991	Gulf War	Medics and Air Force transportation corps 314 soldiers	U
Jul 30, 1993 – Mar 18, 1994	Somalia	Engineer battalion, 516	U
Aug 9, 1994 – May 15, 2006	Western Sahara	Medics, 542	U
Oct 6, 1994 – Jul 9, 2009	Georgia	Observers, 135	U
Mar 3, 1997 – Mar 31, 1996	India and Pakistan	Observers, 135	U
Oct 5, 1995 – Dec 13, 1996	Angola	Engineer battalion, 600	U
Jun 15, 1999	The NLL of Korea	Navy ships (PKM/PCC class) / 1 <sup>st</sup> navy clash between South and North Korea	S
Oct 4, 1999 –	East Timor	Infantry battalion (3,328)	U

<sup>648</sup> *MBC News* reported that Seoul is trying to upgrade its military level of PKO center to the national level and to establish 1,000 ready troops for professional foreign missions under the Special Forces Command. *MBC News*, October 22, 2009, [http://imnews.imbc.com/news/2009/deplom/article/2474945\\_5625.html](http://imnews.imbc.com/news/2009/deplom/article/2474945_5625.html) (Accessed March 21, 2010).

Jun 4, 2004		Staff and Liaison officers (45)	
Dec 21, 2001 – Dec 14, 2007	Afghanistan	Navy ship (1 LST), Air Force transportation corps (2 C-130, 446) Medics (780), Engineers troops (1,330)	U
Jan 4, 2002 – Dec 23, 2003	Cyprus	Commander (1)	U
Jun 29, 2002	The NLL of Korea	Navy ships (PKM/PCC class) / 2 <sup>nd</sup> navy clash between South and North Korea	S
Apr 30, 2003 – Dec 17, 2008	Iraq	The reconstruction troops (around 20,000)	U
Mar 25, 2003 –	Djibouti	Staff officers (11)	U
Oct 18, 2003 –	Liberia	Observers (12)	U
Sep 15, 2004 – Dec 11, 2006	Burundi	Observers (4)	U
Nov 25, 2005 –	Sudan	Observers (33)	U
Mar 12, 2007 –	Nepal	Observers (9)	U
Jan 16, 2007 –	Lebanon	Infantry battalion (1,747), Staffs (22)	U
Jan 16, 2008 –	Somalia	Navy ships (3 DDH, about 900), Staffs (7)	U
Jul 29, 2009 –	Cote d'Ivoire	Peacekeeping groups (2)	U
Jul 29, 2009 –	Western Sahara	Observers (2)	U
Nov 10, 2009	The NLL of Korea	Navy ships (PKM/PCC class) / 3 <sup>rd</sup> navy clash between South and North Korea	S
Mar 26, 2010	The NLL	The ROKN <i>Cheonan</i> sinking incident	U

Source: The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense at [http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndPolicy/globalArmy/globalPeace/globalPeace\\_3/index.jsp?topMenuNo=2&leftNum=16](http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndPolicy/globalArmy/globalPeace/globalPeace_3/index.jsp?topMenuNo=2&leftNum=16)

\* S: Symmetric engagement, U: Unconventional mission / Asymmetric engagement

All ROK presidents, regardless of their ideological positions, have gradually sought the outgoing posture under two conditions (national growth and international changing environment) ever since 1991, when South Korea's economic performance began to consolidate. The Kim Young-Sam administration (Conservative) started to send ROK troops on overseas missions as part of peacekeeping operations in 1993. Kim Dae-Joong's administration (Liberal) dispatched the Ever Green Unit to East Timor in 1999. Roh Moo-hyun's administration (Liberal) sent the *Zaytun* Division to Iraq, which aimed at

stabilization operations and counterinsurgency (COIN).<sup>649</sup> Due to greater national resources<sup>650</sup> and more demand *vis-à-vis* unconventional missions, under the Lee Myung-Bak administration (Conservative), Seoul has sought an outward national strategy, represented by “Global Korea,” making use of the military.<sup>651</sup> In sum, these developments clearly show that the ROK’s economic growth promotes its outgoing strategy.<sup>652</sup> While South Korea’s national strategy is outward-oriented, its military strategy is inward-oriented, focusing on the North Korean conventional threat.

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<sup>649</sup> President Roh sought to play a mediating role in peace and stability for Northeast Asian security, boosted by a growing economy. Zhiqun Zhu, “Small Power, Big Ambition: South Korea’s Role in Northeast Asian Security under President Roh Moo-hyun,” *Asian Affairs* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer 2007), 67-86.

<sup>650</sup> The Global Competitiveness index shows that the ROK ranked 11th out of 131 during 2007-2008, 13th during 2008-2009, and 19th during 2009-2010; the ROK is currently a highly competitive state on the world stage. *The World Economic Forum*, The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010, <http://www.weforum.org/> (Accessed February 27, 2010), 190.

<sup>651</sup> For example, The *Defense White Paper 2008* states “Global Korea” as Korea’s national strategy. The ROKMND, *The Defense White Paper*, 44-5. By the same token, in the World Ocean Forum (WOF), on November 11, 2009, President Lee Myung-Bak stated that “South Korea, as the a chair state of G-20 meeting in 2010, will play a leading role in making the world actively respond to climate change along with both developed and developing countries.” The Office of the President (Cheong Wa Dae), *President Speeches*, November 11, 2009, [http://www.president.go.kr/kr/president/speech/speech\\_list.php?board\\_no=P04&search\\_key=&search\\_value=&search\\_cate\\_code=&order\\_key1=1&order\\_key2=1&view\\_type=&cur\\_year=2009&cur\\_month=11](http://www.president.go.kr/kr/president/speech/speech_list.php?board_no=P04&search_key=&search_value=&search_cate_code=&order_key1=1&order_key2=1&view_type=&cur_year=2009&cur_month=11) (Accessed March 29, 2010).

<sup>652</sup> The ROK currently is the 10th largest economy in the world. Similarly, the *World Factbook* shows that, in 2008, South Korea ranked 15th in economic power ingross domestic product (GDP). The enhanced economy allowed Seoul to seek more global engagement. As a part of more global engagement, Seoul hosted the G-20 meeting in 2010 as a chair state. The *World Factbook 2009*. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/rankorderguide.html> (Accessed February 13, 2010). The GFP (Global Fire Power) data shows that South Korea has the 12th largest military in the world. *The GFP*, “GlobalFirePower.com: Strength in Numbers,” <http://www.globalfirepower.com/> (Accessed February 26, 2010).

### 3. Required Alignment

Thus, aligning the military strategy with the national strategy is crucially important. How can the ROK military attain this? The answer is simple, the balanced strategy. This imbalance was accidental, not intentional; Seoul started to possess enough resources to go abroad within a very short amount of time, but three particular situations have prevented its recognition of the quickly changing warfare environment in the world. Three foundations have driven the ROK military's overemphasis on conventional war: a historical foundation (the experience of the Korean War), a structural foundation (the last frontier of the Cold War), and a military organizational culture (officers' overemphasis on conventional war).

First, the two Koreas experienced a harsh symmetric war during the Korean War. The Korean War led to about 2.5 million casualties. Korean society had to struggle to rebuild its post-war infrastructure. Thus, this historic event pushed its military to see conventional war as the most important mission. Second, despite the official end of the Cold War in 1991, the Korean peninsula is still a part of the structure established by the Cold War.<sup>653</sup> Third, more important, the historical and structural factors forced the ROK military to create a modern conventional organization, which can deter conventional war against North Korea and defeat it

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<sup>653</sup> Democratic South Korea and Communist North Korea are still fighting with each other in the last-remnant battlefield of the Cold War. In this vein, the longest cold war in the world has been on the Korean peninsula; long tension between democracy in the South and communism in the North has existed for over 60 years. This structure embedded the conventional way of fighting logic in Korean society.

if it occurs. Thus, the conventional way of fighting experienced in the Korean War is firmly embedded in the ROK military organizational culture.<sup>654</sup> In a similar vein, the military organizational culture has ignored the quickly changing environment. More important, it takes a long time to innovate in its organizational culture, particularly because the ROK military has been under the above three situations for sixty years.

There was a tactical balance between national and military postures in Vietnam. Now is the time that there should be a strategic balance between them. Moreover, the balanced strategy kills two birds with one stone. It will allow the ROK military to effectively deal with possible unconventional missions as well as a conventional threat, the former being North Korean insurgencies caused by the Kim Regime collapse in the coming years. Military officers who have experienced unconventional missions, as well as insightful planners, would be the major players who together might lead this innovation.

Both COINs in Vietnam and Iraq caused a new generation of military officers to raise their voice that unconventional warfare is becoming important, if not more important than traditional warfare. As shown in table 12, the ROK military officers can be broken down into four generations based on their experiences. In the first generation of the post-Korean War, the most important

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<sup>654</sup> Korean officers prefer the study of traditional war and see asymmetric warfare as secondary. Their Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is based on the traditional North Korean threat and they resist the current SOP's innovation. This conventional-war-oriented posture of the ROK military organization causes the inward military strategy to continue to dominate, and in doing so, it clashes with the ROK outward national strategy.

issue was to build the modern regular army to support an independent country. In this generation, the military developed the traditional strategy to prepare for conventional war between South and North Korea. In the process of military building, the ROK military often had to fight against local guerrillas in a divided Korea. Thus, some of them experienced guerilla warfare on the Korean peninsula to fight against communist partisan groups. Nevertheless, the Korean War showed how important it was for the military to possess modern regular armed forces. Accordingly, this group of officers has seen conventional warfare missions as the most important.

The second generation was inspired by the ROK military's participation in the Vietnam War. The experience with unconventional warfare by some of the first generation of officers provided the ROK military with an opportunity to better deal with non-state actors, such as Vietcong guerrillas. Driven by experiences from fights against North Korean communist guerrillas, the ROK military fought against Vietcong physically with hard weapons. The learning process was led by professional officers who had guerrilla warfare experience in the first generation, not by systemic doctrine. Although officers were insightful in winning COIN in Vietnam, the ROK's success did not lead to organizational change on a comprehensive level. Also, despite its big fights against non-state actors, the military retained the conventional strategy due to the threat from North Korea, a state actor.

Table 24

Four Generations of the ROK Military

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Nature</b>	<b>Major events</b>
The First Period (1945-1963)	The traditional military building Conventional missions	Fight against communist partisan groups
The Second Period (1964-1992)	The military development Overseas guerilla warfare experiences	Vietnam War
The Third Period (1993-2008)	The military modernization Overseas stabilization experiences	Iraq War
The Fourth Period (2009-)	The balanced strategy or not * Transitional period	

The third generation was stimulated by participation in overseas peacekeeping operations that started in 1993. The enhanced economic power encouraged the military to play an outgoing role in international security beyond national security on the Korean peninsula. The most crucial event was the ROK's military participation in the Iraq War. The second generation officers' experiences illuminated the third generation officers *vis-à-vis* how to better manage local unconventional warfare, or COIN. The second group of officers' success in Vietnam helped the *Zaytun* division (the third generation) achieve success in Iraq.

In the third generation, changes started to be made on an organizational level, represented by *Defense Reform 2020*. This organizational change, however, does not reflect the balanced strategy. Thus, the current strategic road map still overemphasizes traditional threats. Thus, this period guided the transitional period (the fourth generation) to emerge in the sense that the new form of military operations in Iraq offered insight into future operations. In this regard, the ROK military in the fourth generation stands at a critical juncture on whether the military goes back to the conventional strategy or goes forward to an innovative strategy or balanced strategy. An innovative military strategy should be able to



manage both possible contingencies in North Korea and overseas military missions simultaneously.

#### 4. How to Articulate the ROK Military Strategy

It is crucial that the military strategy should be developed to deal with future challenges, such as the possible instability of North Korea's regime as well as the contemporary global security needs. Thus, the ROK military *should* prepare for an unconventional threat (post North-Korean regime) as well as a conventional threat (present North-Korean regime). Accordingly, the flexible strategy, which is applicable not only to the former but also to the latter, is highly recommended.

The South Korean military will confront two conundrums in its effort to proceed to the flexible strategy: tension between traditional and non-traditional warfare, and organizational transformation. The former is related to military organizational culture, which places traditional kinetic warfare at its main mission. It is difficult to transform operational mindsets, particularly in a big organization.<sup>655</sup> Thus, the fixed mindset of the ROK military toward conventional war *should* be reoriented in a more flexible way.

The latter, productive organizational transformation, would encourage military generals and officers to change their inflexible mindsets. This would play an influential role in reducing the amount of time required for the changing

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<sup>655</sup> Legro (1994) claims that "it can be difficult and expensive to reorient operational philosophy, especially in a large and complex organization." Jeffrey W. Legro, "Military Culture and Inadvertent Escalation in World War II." *International Security*, 18, no. 4 (1994), 117.

process. It would be highly recommended to establish an Unconventional Warfare Department, under the Ministry of National Defense (MND), to deal with unconventional warfare professionally.

The Unconventional Warfare Department will play a role in bridging the gap between centralized and decentralized postures. This Department would be composed of two centers: a land force unconventional warfare center and a maritime unconventional warfare center. The first center will mostly be in charge of COIN – both within and beyond the peninsula. To put it another way, it will play a leading role in the necessary COIN operations in North Korea as well as global peacekeeping missions. The present Peacekeeping Center would be merged with the land force unconventional warfare center.

The maritime unconventional warfare center would be responsible for maritime-based missions, such as anti-Piracy operations, SLOC (Sea Lanes of Communication) protection, or possible PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative) operations. As Biddle (2006) reminds us, “proficiency” in the conventional mission does not automatically lead to “proficiency” in the unconventional mission without an appropriate flexible strategy.<sup>656</sup> Seoul *should* be a master of both missions for regional security.

The above organizational transformation will allow the ROK military to pave the way for achieving “proficiency” in unconventional missions as well as conventional missions. To that end, what does the land force unconventional

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<sup>656</sup> Stephen Biddle. *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

warfare center have to prepare for in order deal with insurgency in North Korea? First, it has to “Know the Enemy.” The insurgents, armed with *Juche* ideology, will be the remnants of the communist regime and may very well “miss” the old regime. Thus, they will use tactics similar to the communist partisan guerilla, conducted in the Korean War period. One of important lessons *vis-à-vis* the ROK forces in Vietnam is that they achieved tactical success because they had already identified the Vietcong’s tactics before they were dispatched to the battleground. The ROK forces were able to reduce casualties and losses caused by trial and error and more importantly learning. The center has to develop detailed tactics by analyzing the tactics from communist partisan guerrilla warfare in Korea and the Vietcong guerrilla warfare and teach COIN forces the effective tactics.

Second, the center should continue to examine the ROK military’s experience in dealing with guerillas or not-state actors (e.g., company-based tactical base in Vietnam) and integrate these lessons into field manuals or formalized tactics. Third, in addition to the above enemy-based methods, it also needs to keep improving options for population-based methods, which were very effective in Iraq. Fourth, the center has to establish a database with insightful and productive lessons from past unconventional operations that were conducted during the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq War. Fifth, as we can see in the Vietnam War, the roles and abilities of individual soldiers – martial arts capability, a high degree of marksmanship, and special operations’ capability – is crucial. Thus, COIN operations need to be led by the Marines or special forces of

each military branch, and they should be trained to prepare for unconventional warfare in peace time.

Finally, the land force unconventional center should command its own troops – a professional standing force for stabilization operations – which play a central role in non-traditional operations internally as well as abroad. Timing is crucial for stabilization operations, and thus, the military should reduce the time required to reorganize its force. In other words, COIN forces have to try their utmost to minimize adaptation costs.

The standing force, which will have accumulated experiences in terms of unconventional warfare, will already be prepared for this mission and thus minimize the time for preparation and organizational reorientation. While placing this force at its core for mission preparation, other soldiers selected with high standards will have to be dispatched to this organization for support and actual application of effective COIN. In this vein, the establishment of the *Onnuri* unit on July 1, 2010, whose mission will be exclusively overseas operations, will serve as the starting point to change the ROK military organization.<sup>657</sup>

What matters most is that professionally developed strategies and standing forces allow the ROK military to effectively achieve its mission even in a situation where their missions will become more specialized than routine tasks.

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<sup>657</sup> The *Onnuri* unit is composed of 1,000 standing soldiers who will be trained only for external missions. *The Korea Times*, “Korea launches standby PKO unit,” July 1, 2010, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/11/205\\_68669.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/11/205_68669.html) (Accessed November 5, 2010).

This is why lessons from Vietnam and Iraq need to be integrated into the strategic level for the future.

It is about time for the ROK military to take into account future strategy due to the growing potential for unconventional missions in North Korea and the increasing demand for unconventional missions abroad. These missions will become more frequent and will require greater military attention. Only after a country prepares for the worst, can it guarantee its security and achieve the best outcome.<sup>658</sup>

## **V. Future Research Directions**

Further research is required in four areas: the extended role of middle powers in international security, the process of COIN, the transition from tactical success to strategic success, and more intensive studies to link the ROK military's mission in Vietnam and Iraq with the potential of North Korean insurgency.

First of all, future questions need to be focused more on how a changing international environment in the post-9/11 era will affect the role of non-great powers in international security, particularly the middle powers. The U.S. struggle with COIN in Afghanistan and Iraq, initiated as part of the response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, has encouraged both scholars and policy makers to pay more attention to unconventional warfare.<sup>659</sup> What is problematic, however, is

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<sup>658</sup> In terms of the issue of the North Korean succession, *The Economist* states that "other countries, including South Korea, America, Russia, and Japan, must also prepare for the worst." *The Economist*, "The North Korean Succession: Thanks Dad," September 25, 2010, 18.

<sup>659</sup> The U.S. military's struggle in Iraq and Afghanistan reflects the difficult nature of COIN. However, some argue that the U.S. over-response based on military

that despite America's greatest efforts, the al-Qaeda threat has not been dismantled, rather it has become much more globalized, aligning with more of its sub-local branches.<sup>660</sup> What is implied here is that unconventional fights take longer and are more costly. In the twenty first century, unconventional warfare, defined by fighting against non-state actors, such as insurgents, terrorists, or maritime pirates, became the center of regional and international security. This trend has also served as an opportunity for even middle powers to recognize the

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campaigns is problematic. For example, Desker and Acharya (2006) argue that huge violence from Islamic extremism, such as the 9/11 attacks, is just a beginning for further violence, and the U.S. military-led remedies caused the increase of radical terrorists attacks. For example, the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars under the Bush administration have prompted the U.S. to lose the War on Terror; the U.S.'s harsh response to the 9/11 attacks was what Bin Laden really wanted to achieve through his attacks. The U.S. military-led response made the global Islamic community perceive America as a threat to the existence of Islam. They further argue that the U.S. did not identify al-Qaeda's global scale interconnectivity and recruiting dynamics. They claim that the U.S. has to utilize the moderate Islamic community in order to deal with the radical Islamic influence. Desker and Acharya, "Countering the Global Islamist Threat," 59-83.<sup>660</sup> Moghadam (2008/09) traces how al-Qaeda was able to be globalized, focusing on globalized suicide bombing. He argues that globalized suicide missions are the outcome of the interplay between two factors: al-Qaeda's growth into a globalized organization and the growing appeal of Salafi Jihad. Al-Qaeda was able to be strong globally because of three factors: 1) its position as an Islamic army, 2) the "Afghan Arabs" formation, following the end of the Afghanistan insurgencies against the Soviet Union, 3) internal strategic shift within al-Qaeda from the "near enemies" (e.g. Arab countries) to the "far enemies" (e.g. Western countries, particularly the U.S) during 1995-96. In addition, the spread of Salafi Jihad, a radical Islamic movement, helped suicide terrorism become globalized; Salafi Jihadists adopted violent means to create a Muslim world, unlike the general Salafis. Salafi Jihadists differentiate between suicide and martyrdom; the former is driven by personal reasons, such as depression, while the latter springs from a religious mission for God and for the benefit of the Islamic world. Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2008/09), 46-78.

importance of unconventional warfare in a changing international arena. Future research needs to examine the extended role of middle powers in this new trend.

This dissertation should be recognized as a small contribution for explaining and understanding how effectively non-great powers can contribute to international security. Further case studies will be required besides the South Korean case. Other middle powers, such as Australia, New Zealand, India, Israel or Turkey, would serve as good cases to further explore middle powers' military effectiveness.

Second, besides an enemy-centered approach followed by the population-based method or a population-centered approach supported by professional troops to deter enemy actions, there could be more questions about the process of COIN. Are there several layers of reversal processes, such as enemy-population-enemy approaches? Is the combination of enemy-based and population-based methods always necessary? These questions should be asked by tracing other cases.

Third, questions about a strategic success need to be addressed. If the ROK COIN forces were successful on a tactical level in Vietnam and Iraq, why did their success fail to be transferred to a strategic level of success? One possible answer could be a lack of coordination among all COIN forces. The strategic success requires combined operations between all participating COIN forces across countries. They should be coordinated and collaborative regardless of their TAOR. What matters is that the degree of prescription – enemy or population-oriented methods on a strategic level – should be coordinated and consistent across all COIN forces. The lack of coordination or consistency in terms of the

degree of a mission approach can be easily detected in current COIN efforts.<sup>661</sup> The biggest efforts to win “the hearts and minds” in one region can be easily spoiled by the outcomes of the other forces’ hard remedy-led overreaction, leading to civilian casualties. Under a consolidated coordination, all COIN forces should share the know-how of tactical success in one specific COIN force with each other. Thus, coordination among all COIN forces needs to be examined as a part of linking a tactical success with a strategic success.

Finally, future research needs to ask how many lessons from the ROK military’s success overseas have been integrated into the development of a military strategy. The unconventional battleground situations in Vietnam and Iraq need to be professionally compared with the future of the unconventional battleground in North Korea. This is just a small step toward the analysis of linking lessons learned from overseas COINs with possible North Korean COIN. This research should continue to be conducted since it is crucial for future regional and national security.

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<sup>661</sup> German forces killed Afghan civilians as well as Taliban insurgents under the aid of American air bombing on September 4, 2009, even though General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of the NATO-led force in Afghanistan, stresses the importance of protecting civilians. *The Economist* reports that “Germany now stands accused of overreacting when a threat appears.” *The Economist*, “War in Afghanistan: Collateral damage of every sort,” September 12, 2009, 47.



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