



universität
wien

MASTER THESIS | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

The Agency of Proxy Forces: Insights from the Korean- and Vietnam Wars

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears
on the student record sheet:

UA 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Internationale Studien | International Studies

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Priv.Do. Robert Schuett, Ph.D.



**diplomatische
akademie wien**

Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Abstract - Deutsch

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Handlungsfähigkeit von Stellvertreterkräften anhand der Fallstudien von Präsident Rhee Südkorea und Präsident Diem Südvietnam während und rund um ihre jeweiligen Kriege. Die Arbeit misst Handlungsmacht, indem sie die von den Stellvertretern gegen die Interessen und sogar den ausdrücklichen Willen ihres Auftraggebers unternommenen Handlungen betrachtet, und stellt fest, dass beide ein gewisses Maß an so messbarer Handlungsmacht hatten. Sie unterscheiden sich jedoch im Ausmaß und Bereich der ausgeübten Handlungsmacht, da Südvietnam Handlungsmacht über ein breites Spektrum ausübte, während die Handlungsmacht Südkoreas sich nicht ernsthaft auf Sicherheitsfragen erstreckte. Die Masterarbeit misst diese unterschiedlichen Ausdrucksformen von Handlungsfähigkeit an zwei Hauptfaktoren, nämlich an soziopolitischen Unterschieden in der Selbstwahrnehmung und ihrem unterschiedlichen Grad an materieller und finanzieller Abhängigkeit von den Vereinigten Staaten. Die Fallstudien zeigen, dass ein unabhängigeres Selbstverständnis, basierend auf eigene militärische Traditionen und eine politische Identität, die im Süden Vietnams vor der amerikanischen Beteiligung entstanden ist, erklärt, warum die Diem-Regierung ein höheres Maß an Handlungsfähigkeit ausübte als ihr südkoreanisches Gegenstück. Die Vorstellung, dass ein höheres Maß an materieller und finanzieller Abhängigkeit die unabhängige Handlungsmacht verringern würde, konnte nicht belegt werden. Stattdessen konnte festgestellt werden, dass der durch größere Fähigkeiten in Südvietnam erzeugte Kapazitätszuwachs die negativen Auswirkungen der entsprechend erhöhten Abhängigkeit abmilderte. Beide Stellvertreter waren unglaublich abhängig von den USA, dennoch hatte nur Südvietnam eine bedeutende militärische Handlungsfähigkeit. Südkorea fehlten einfach die Ressourcen und das Können, da es bis zum Beginn des Koreakriegs absichtlich schwach gehalten worden war. Diese Masterarbeit kam daher zu dem Schluss, dass die Selbstwahrnehmung und die tatsächlichen Fähigkeiten eines Stellvertreters eine überaus wichtige Rolle dabei spielen, wie viel strategische Handlungsfähigkeit Stellvertreter tatsächlich ausüben.

Abstract - English

This master's thesis investigates the agency of proxy forces using the case studies of President Rhee's South Korea and President Diem's South Vietnam during and around their respective wars. The thesis measures agency by looking at actions undertaken by the proxies against their principal's interest and even expressed wishes and finds that both had some degree of so measurable agency, they however differ in the degree and domain of agency exercises, as South Vietnam exercised agency across a broad spectrum whilst South Korea's agency did not seriously extend into security matters. The thesis measures these different expressions of agency against two primary factors, namely sociopolitical differences in self-conceptualization and their varying degrees of material and financial dependency on the United States. The case studies demonstrate that a more independent self-conceptualization, self-conceptualization, evidenced by military traditions and a political identity formed in South Vietnam preceding American involvement, explains why the Diem government exercised a higher degree of agency than their South Korean counterparts did not. The idea that a higher level of material and financial dependency would reduce independent agency could not be substantiated. Instead, the thesis found that the increase in capacity generated by greater capabilities in South Vietnam mitigated the negative impact of correspondingly increased dependency. Both proxies were incredibly dependent on the US, nevertheless only South Vietnam had significant military agency. South Korea simply lacked the capacities for action, having been kept deliberately weak until the beginning of the Korean War. The thesis thus found that the self-conceptualization and the actual capacities of a proxy play an outsized role in influencing how much strategic agency proxies actually exercise.

Key Words: Proxy forces, agency, dependency, Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War, United States, South Korea, South Vietnam.

“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorised assistance on it.”

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Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPKI	Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KDP	Korean Democratic Party
PF	Popular Forces
RF	Regional Forces
RoK	Republic of Korea
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNCTOK	United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VNQĐĐ	Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Ever since the end of the Second World War, the use of proxy forces has increased dramatically, enabling countries to intervene in conflicts while limiting the exposure of their own forces to harm and the associated political fallout that might follow (Levy, 2022). The Cold War, in particular, was characterized by the superpowers avoiding open confrontation and instead relying on proxies to achieve their political aims in various parts of the world. Proxy forces have continued to be employed even after the end of the Cold War, being used in the context of the War on Terror.

Despite their ubiquity, proxy forces are not a well-studied subject, leaving much to be desired, especially given their role in the context of great and regional power conflict. For this reason, this thesis will aim to explore this gap in the literature, exploring how proxies exercise agency against their principal, which can have major consequences and impact the development of world politics.

Research question and theory

The thesis will aim to answer why proxy forces act against their principal's interests and under what conditions. There are a multitude of factors that might impact an actor's behaviour. This thesis will posit that the self-conceptualisation of an actor and the degree to which they are materially dependent on another are vital factors that determine behaviour in the case of proxy forces.

This is inspired by role theory, which argues that actors will aim to fulfil the roles they see themselves as holding in the international community (Wehner, 2020). It stands to reason that this extends to proxy actors, meaning their self-conceptualisation in relation to their principal will have a key effect on their behaviour. The second element derives its relevance from a realist understanding of leverage and how it would constrain an actor's freedom of action (Harknett & Yalcin, 2012). The thesis ultimately found that although the self-conceptualisation of a proxy has a key impact on its behaviour the leverage of dependency has less effect, seeing as capabilities built through assistance lead to greater independence, meaning the actual dependence is less important.

Structure of Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, including the introduction, which explains the rationale for the research focus. The second chapter will provide an overview of the literature on the Korean and Vietnam Wars, with a dedicated section for each. The following chapter will explain the theoretical framework used in the thesis and how certain concepts will be used in that context, before the fourth chapter explores relevant concepts more closely to create a more holistic understanding and avoid confusion as you read the rest of the thesis. Chapters five and six concern themselves with South Vietnam and South Korea, respectively. Each chapter will first examine whether and where the relevant proxy engaged in agency. A more thorough

analysis follows in the discussion chapters, which will reconcile the findings of the preceding case studies with the aforementioned theoretical framework, in order to paint a fuller picture of how proxy force behaviour is altered by the two key factors. Ultimately, the thesis will conclude by summarising its findings and explaining how it arrived at that outcome.

Contemporary Relevance of Thesis

The study of proxy forces has seldom been as relevant as it is now. Iran's power in the Middle East has historically hinged upon what it calls the “Axis of Resistance”, a network of proxy forces scattered across the region. In Africa, Russia’s Africa Corps, the successor to Russia’s Wagner Group, builds networks and conducts patronage and influence operations, essentially creating Russian proxies (Pokalova, 2026). Previously, Russian proxies had been instrumental in waging the War in the Donbas, which preceded the full-scale War in Ukraine. In Transnistria, a Russian proxy continues to rule and undermine Moldova’s territorial integrity and independence (Kosienkowski & Dembińska, 2025). The West itself is also no stranger to the use of proxy forces to advance its interests and achieve its aims. The US (Tellidou, 2024), for instance, acted in large parts through proxy forces to first overthrow the Taliban government in 2001 and later to supplant them through the Karzai and Ghani administrations and associated tribal networks (Long, 2016). The EU relies on proxy forces, in the form of the Libyan Coast Guard (De Leo, 2025), to prevent the crossing of migrants from Libya to Europe.

Proxy forces have and continue to be used as important tools to achieve various political ends. Although frequently used, they are less frequently studied, meaning that many of the complexities of their behaviour is not commonly understood. This has led to ineffective efforts (Theros, 2023), such as the US failure to build a sustainably functioning Afghan State. Especially in the context of the War against Terror and the efforts deriving from its legacies, Proxy forces will likely continue to exist including forms such as the Danab Brigade in Somalia which was created as a US “partner force” which is frequently a euphemism for a proxy force in the US context (Krishnan, 2019). In that sense, it is important that proxy forces be well understood so that unintended and potentially unfortunate consequences can be avoided. Many other such American proxies can be found elsewhere in the world, especially in the Middle East, where they played a vital role in dismantling ISIS' and its reign.

Prospective principals turn to proxies for a wide variety of reasons, some of which can be seen as illegitimate, whereas others, such as using them to fight terrorists, are quite tolerable and can indeed be seen positively. Even if proxies rarely refer to themselves as such and principals essentially never admit to maintaining proxies, preferring instead to frame them as partners, allies or other euphemisms, they nevertheless share certain behavioural traits. This thesis aims to contribute to the body of academic literature on the geopolitical role of proxy forces and by extension, to formulate suggestions on how powers can more effectively partner with less powerful actors, avoiding the chaos that can result from misguided efforts. Although this thesis is situated in the disciplines of history and international relations, its insights can also be applicable outside these disciplines; it may aid in

understanding the behaviour of nominally subsidiary companies or the behaviours formally or informally dependent on a more established institution. This can help companies and other civil society actors avoid wasting scarce resources on matters that could be avoided through better mutual understanding.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This thesis covers two case studies of two very important and consequently well studied conflicts, even though they are often seen as offering different lessons. In the case of the Vietnam War, the lessons are mostly seen in the domain of counterinsurgency and foreign intervention, whilst the Korean War is frequently viewed in the context of the United Nations and the associated security system, as well as being one of the first wars of the Cold War in which the Western and Eastern Blocs collided without the superpowers, in the form of the US and USSR, engaging in open warfare against each other. In that sense it can be seen as the inaugural proxy war, making the reasons for its outbreak important for the wider question of how the Cold War was fought between the US and the Soviet Union.

The literature review is divided into two sections, each covering one of the case studies and focusing on some of the most extensively covered topics in each conflict. The first section, which examines the literature around the Vietnam War looks at why the US lost the war, particularly by considering the policies it employed and the effects and consequences they are seen to have had. The second section, covering the South Korean War, focuses on the causes of the war as well as what literature says about the role of the UN.

Section 1: Literature on South Vietnam

The Vietnam War is one of the most studied conflicts in human history, owing to its profound social impact and the failure of the US to achieve its objectives. It was also a testing ground for new technologies, both military and civilian, and was the first war that could be followed from the comfort of one's home, with combat footage shown on television and the horror of war witnessed directly by the public.. Beyond this broader impact, it is also one of the earlier examples of security force assistance, in which one country attempted to build up the fighting forces of another. The lessons of the Vietnam War in both counterinsurgency and the training of partner forces are still being considered, especially in the context of the War on Terror, where similar efforts to build up and advise local forces were made in an effort to avoid the deployment of one's own forces.

There is significant debate as to why the US lost the Vietnam War (Andrada, 2008). Broadly speaking there are two schools of thought. One asserts that the US did not apply sufficient pressure on North Vietnam, the other argues that the US failed at counterinsurgency level and that its defeat was driven by its inability to address the internal security challenges of South Vietnam. A third approach contends that the US primarily faced the problem that it never held initiative, meaning it could never adequately determine the course of the war and was consequently put on the backfoot.

Proponents of the theory that US did not apply enough pressure against North Vietnam, such as Dale Walton (Clemis, 2025), argue that the US fought the Vietnam in a relatively restrained

way, leaving much of North Vietnam's infrastructure vital to the war effort untouched in an effort to avoid escalation and the associated confrontation with the Soviet Union and Communist China. In this view defeating the North would also necessarily have caused the defeat of the Viet Cong, as it was arguably dependent on the North and could be seen as an extension of the North Vietnamese forces. A case, especially popular within military circles, is made that a US victory was prevented by the reticence of civilian leaders to apply the pressure required to break the North's ability to fight the War (Andrada, 2008). The argument hinges on the idea that in order to win a war, it is important to apply force decisively (Clemis, 2025). Violence alone is not enough; it must be directed in such a manner as to pressure those elements most influential to the political aims to be achieved. In essence, the argument states that a military solution to the conflict would have been possible had the US applied sufficient force in those areas where it would have had enough impact on the North's ability to fight the war on both a material and political level, which the US was unable to due for a variety of reasons. These include efforts to avoid escalation, meaning that the targets which would have had the most effect on North Vietnam were not struck by US forces.

The other school of thought argues that the US failed primarily on a counterinsurgency level (Andrada, 2008), meaning that it did not manage to prevent Viet Cong insurgents from causing trouble for the US, the Republic of Vietnam, and its forces. Jeffrey Record (Record, 1996), for instance, argued that one of the key factors undermining the US in the Vietnam War was that it did not have a sufficiently coherent and comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. Instead, US counterinsurgency efforts alienated the Vietnamese population through their often-brutal nature (Conn, 2001). The US failed at a political level to prevent the rise of insurgent activity and support, which is sometimes attributed to its failure to address the issue politically and deal with Vietnamese grievances (Clemis, 2025). The US was arguably plagued by short-termism, in the sense that it could not find long term solutions to the crisis, lacking the stamina to remain in Vietnam for as long as necessary to defeat North Vietnam and the Viet Cong (Andrade, 2008).

At the military level, the US was extraordinarily successful, winning virtually every firefight, which did not, however, prevent new insurgents from taking up arms; this is cited as a cause for the US' defeat (Gartner & Myers, 1995). Essentially, the argument of this school of thought revolves around the idea that the US simply failed to prevent insurgent activities in Vietnam, leading to a situation where, despite its military successes and high kill counts, it could not sustainably weaken the communist forces. Local support cannot be destroyed by force of arms; instead, it requires political and policy solutions to address the security challenge of counterinsurgency (Kocher, Pepinsky & Kalyvas, 2011). The US, however, did not mount an effective response to the root causes of Viet Cong support, being unable to adapt effective developmental counterinsurgency policies and to invest in the areas that required investment in order to deprive the Viet Cong of its base.

A third, less prominent theory argues that US failure to achieve its aims does not primarily stem from failures in its own policies but should rather be attributed to the successes of its

communist opponent's strategy (Jacobsen, 2015). The Vietnam War, and the way it was fought by communist forces, evolved over time, and in that context the US response also had to evolve; no single policy failure can reasonably be identified and laid at the feet of US leaders. Communist forces in Vietnam implemented a complex strategy to achieve their aims, simultaneously relying on conventional and irregular forces (Clarke, 1986), both of which the US would arguably have had to address. Although the conflict was initially a guerilla war in the early 1960s, the North Vietnamese increasingly relied on conventional forces to do the brunt of the fighting in order to maintain the initiative, seeing as they viewed insurrection alone as insufficient to topple the South Vietnamese regime. In this context, the US prioritized conventional warfare, relying on the South Vietnamese themselves to combat the insurgency, which however proved insufficiently effective. In essence, this school of thought argues that the US did not fail because of flawed policies alone, but primarily because it faced both conventional and irregular challenges, not all of which it could address sufficiently.

Section 2: Literature on South Korea

The Korean War is one of the most significant events of the Cold War, even if it is sometimes treated as the “forgotten war” (Kim, 2004). It had tremendous impact on the trajectory and policies of the superpowers. It was one the very first conflicts in which the US and USSR supported different sides, avoiding direct engagement while still trying to weaken the other's influence. Not only did it make future Cold War confrontations more violent, but it also changed the role and operations of the UN (Goodrich, 1953). Previously the USSR had boycotted the UN Security Council, assuming that it could not function without Soviet participation, However, when the Council agreed to take action against the North Korean invasion of South Korea in absence of the Soviet Union, it became clear how the Council functioned. This resulted in regular Soviet attendance and thus allowed the USSR to exercise greater influence.

The Korean peninsula was divided as a consequence of the Second World War, when one half was occupied by the Soviet Union and the other by the US. Both powers are usually seen as regarding this as a temporary solution. Nevertheless, they could not agree on how to achieve reunification. One strand of scholarship argues that the failure to reunite Korea was caused by the Soviet desire to ensure its own security (Chang-Il, 2010), meaning that the USSR would not allow US forces to sit directly on its border, thereby necessitating a buffer State. In this line of argument, the US is seen as supporting self-determination, but their efforts being frustrated by Soviet desires to secure their frontiers.

Others, however, place more emphasis on the US and its actions, arguing that US support for the South Korean regime and its persecution of leftists (Stueck, 2010) meant that the Soviet Union was justified in refusing to allow a UN monitored vote to settle the question of Korean unity and determine what regime should govern this unified State. In this line of thought, the division of Korea can be attributed to US actions that made a fair election, in which parties friendly to the USSR had a realistic chance, impossible, thereby pushing the Soviet Union to not

accept unification. Another factor sometimes argued to have contributed to the division of Korea is the South's relative leniency towards people who had collaborated with the Japanese (Han, 2008), which created internal pressures in the South that made reunification impossible.

It is widely asserted, that the Korean War was enabled by the North's belief that it could easily win the War (Chang-Il, 2010), giving its far superior military strength. The South received significantly less military support from the US than the North did from the USSR. Arguments have been advanced that the US was reticent to arm the South in a manner which would enable it to maintain a proficient military capable of defending itself against North Korean aggression, and this indicated a lack of commitment to South Korea (Stueck, 2010), making it easy prey. In that sense, a key cause of the war was the alleged North Korean and Soviet belief that it would be an easy conflict to win and thus relatively easy to achieve their aims.

The desire of both North and South Korea to unify the peninsula is sometimes attributed to ideological reasons, namely that both were Korean nationalists who did believe it was right for their people to be divided along an arbitrary line (Yang, 1983). This explanation prioritises ideological and sentimental reasonings as a factor behind the Korean War. A different approach cites fears that the very existence of South Korea posed an existential threat to North Korea (Kim, 1999), the two sides having engaged in periodic clashes prior to the War, meaning that North Korea, the Soviet Union and the PRC had reason to fear that, if South Korea continued to exist, that it would pose a persistent challenge.

Another aspect of the Korean War that has been explored is the role the UN played in the conflict. There are two competing approaches in this regard. One argues that UN involvement acted as a mere vehicle for American interests and a forum in which minor actors could legitimize US foreign policy in exchange for US support. Other literature, on the other hand, emphasizes the UN's own agency, seeing it as the structural driver behind a US-led international effort to defend South Korea against North Korea's invasion.

The argument that presents the UN as a hollow organisation used by the US to legitimize its actions centres on the fact that the US had been the driving force behind the UN decision to authorize collective action against the North Korean invasion (Stairs, 1970). Its further points to the fact that the US dominated the strategic level, exercising command over the forces fighting under the UN flag, and to US internal documents showing that the US had decided to go to war even before the UN had given its approval. This interpretation follows a realist understanding of world politics (Arabu & Yandaki, 2020), placing the nation state at the centre, and treating international organisations as mere tools used by states with virtually no agency of their own.

A different strand of thought argues that the UN decision to become involved in the Korean War should be interpreted as the UN fulfilling its intended function as a collective security organization (Barnes, 2025). The UN Charter clearly defines the duty of the UNSC to uphold international peace and security which, in the case of the Korean War, it did by authorizing UN troops under US command to repel the North Korean invading forces (Fisher, 1995). This places

the UN in a position where it, in its own right, helped initiate an international response to the North Korean invasion of the southern peninsula. This supports a more liberal institutionalist interpretation of the conflict (Cetin, 2016), by attributing the structural origins of the international response to the UN's decision to mobilize against North Korea's aggressive violations of its charter.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This thesis will employ a comparative approach to examine how and why proxy forces retain agency even when dependent on an external principal. It specifically seeks to address the question: under what circumstances do proxy actors act contrary to their sponsor's interests? To do so, the study will compare the cases of the South Vietnamese regime led by President Ngo Dinh Diem and the South Korean regime led by President Syngman Rhee, analysing the conditions that enabled each to diverge or abide with the aims of their principal.

The analysis will investigate instances in which these proxy actors were able to exercise agency despite their dependency on the US as their principal partner, thereby going against US interests or desires. The differences in how these actors were able to exercise. The differences in the form of agency will be explained by a series of factors related to their relationship with the US. The differences in these factors between the two case studies will be contrasted to determine which factors are most influential in shaping the proxy actors' agency.

This chapter first presents a theoretical framework that will present the theory of behaviour used as part of this thesis and explain how the analysis will be conducted. After this, the thesis will go on to operationalise the concepts present in the framework and expand on how they are applied in the analysis. Together, the framework and the part on the operationalisation of the concept should give a clear picture of how the research and analysis have been conducted. This will be followed by an explanation of some of the choices made in the material covered in this thesis, notably the selection of case studies and the timeframe covered in each case study, which should illustrate why the thesis has the scope it does. Finally, this chapter will go over some of the major limitations of this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

The thesis posits a proxy's propensity towards agency depends upon a combination of two factors: its self-conceptualisation and its material and financial dependency on its principal. A proxy's self-conceptualisation alters its relationship with its principal in the sense that a proxy whose imaginary places him in a position of fealty towards the principal is less willing to against the principal's interests, however a proxy which sees itself as a mere partner to the principal is more likely to act on their own accord on the grounds that they see themselves as entitled to agency. Whereas the material and financial dependency gives the principal greater leverage over the proxy.

Proxies may consider themselves beholden to/independent from their principal for a variety of reasons; these reasons may include a sense of ownership of the principal's mission, a sense of belonging towards the principal, a sense of debt towards the principal or any number of comparable feelings justifying loyalty towards the principal. These sentiments may derive from ideological affinity, meaning that the proxy shares the principal's worldview and supports them in their effort to realise it, or they may be socialised into the proxy, becoming ingrained at an

ideational level. Essentially, it can be expected that proxies will fulfil the role and mission they see themselves as having in relation to the principal. In the context of the Cold War, a US proxy is likely to share the US' animosity towards communism, whilst a Soviet proxy is likely to at least rhetorically support socialist ideas even if it is not an explicitly communist entity.

The second factor impacting the degree of agency exercised is the material and comparable dependency of the actors. It stands to reason that actors of greater financial/material means are more likely to be able and willing to exercise agency in contravention of the principals' will. Conversely, a greater material dependency increases the principal's standing in the eyes of the proxy so the proxy would not want to risk losing the principal's support and thus forego acting outside the principal's advice and instructions. In certain cases, material dependency might even restrict the actual ability of a proxy to exercise their agency, as the proxy may be materially incapable of taking independent strategic action, which would prevent any independent action. Material dependency thus correlates with lower proxy autonomy.

Operationalisation

The concept of agency is complex and will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter. This thesis will identify agency as actions by the proxy that go against the interests or wishes of their principal. In that way, unambiguous instances in which the proxy acts independently are clearly identified without examining actions that might not have been initiated by the principal, and without affecting the principal's interests or plans. Only the agency that actively goes against the principal's relevant for this thesis, as other forms of agency have no bearing on the principal and are thus not necessarily important to study in this context.

This thesis interprets self-conceptualization in light of the origin of the proxy, their ideational relationship with the principal, and the socialisation of their military leadership. Further considered is the origin of the proxy and to the degree to which principal was involved, the second will be gleaned from the prominence of their ideational affinity to the principle and last will be inferred from the degree to which the principal's doctrine and traditions are imparted on young and aspiring officers, as these are the most likely constituency to have sufficient influence and ability to adapt to new ideas as to be of relevance. In the context of ideational affinity, communism is one of the most relevant organizing principles of the Cold War period, which is further explored in the subsequent chapter. The less the principle is involved in the elements here characterized as making up the self-conceptualisation the more autonomous will the proxy be deemed to be, based on a more independent view of themselves. Material and financial dependency is a far simpler concept, essentially linked to the amount and importance of the equipment and financial support provided by the principal to the proxy. This is measured by assessing how important the aid is in enabling the proxy's activities.

The factors and elements here described will be taken as the conceptual basis to analyse the case studies in the manner that the framework describes above. In this way, the terminology

employed is self-explanatory and it allows a coherent analysis. Nevertheless, the examination of both case studies is separate, meaning they will not be conducted in the identical manner; with different emphasis within the two factors analysed being placed. Despite their comparability, they are very different, and although the elements mentioned here are all present, their individual relevance in each case study is weighted differently and thus receives varying levels of attention. This is done in the interest of conscience.

Case Selection

This thesis employs these two case studies for a variety of academic reasons, including: the fact that they are widely accepted as proxy conflicts, that they occur in a comparable time period, and that they are easily researchable. Both the Vietnam and Korean Wars are widely recognized as proxy wars between the US and the USSR, meaning that the thesis would have to spend any time convincing the reader that the conflicts are indeed within the scope of the thesis. The two conflicts also have the advantage of taking place or at least beginning in the early Cold War, and although they do not occur at the same time, they were nevertheless fought with comparable equipment and in comparable geopolitical contexts, allowing the thesis to dispense with comparing different geopolitical situations, which would adulterate the analysis.

The US is the principal in both cases, an actor that is relatively open about its past, making it easy to access resources for this thesis. At the same time, the fact that both proxies have the same principal means that resulting consistency greatly reduces the complexity and number of elements beyond the scope of this analysis, which could affect the behaviour of the two proxies. In short, the US being the principal in both cases ensures that a significant diversity of primary and secondary sources are available to draw on, and the consistency of having the same principal reduces the complexity of the analysis, making the findings clearer and more generalisable. The case studies are therefore chosen in service of the analysis and should give a clear and coherent picture of factors influencing the behaviour of proxy forces.

Time Frame

The analysis of the thesis will focus on the tenure of the proxies' respective first presidents, but analysing the outbreak and ideological contours of the conflict will involve investigating the periods immediately preceding their tenures. The reason for this is that both presidents were highly influential during the active phases of their respective wars; in South Korea's case, the Korean War fell entirely within President Syngman Rhee's administration. In the South Vietnamese case, the Vietnam War escalated considerably after the death of Diem; however, this escalation was led by direct US involvement, meaning that South Vietnamese agency can less clearly be investigated, the situation being more complex. A second reason is that both president's terms were followed by periods of political instability in their respective countries, meaning that turbulence and the rapid associated changes make it very hard to make any general deductions on the agency of the associated proxies.

When examining the factors that affect the agency of these proxies, there is no defined timeframe; some elements are relatively stable and thus existed both before and after the terms of the respective presidents of both countries. Nevertheless, the investigation in the South Korean case will begin primarily with the end of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, and will not generally look beyond the 1960s, as much would subsequently change, making the consideration in the analysis less useful. In the case of South Vietnam there is a natural end point presents itself with the state's defeat in 1975, similarly to South Korea the end of the Second World War marks the beginning of where the thesis will begin investigating, however certain historical factors, such as France's rule in Indochina prior to the Second World War, will also be considered as they are foundational for certain continuities relevant to the analysis.

The chosen time frames will constrain the scope of the thesis whilst providing a window large enough to provide a sufficient basis for analysis. A broader time frame could be chosen, but it would add little more to what can already be gleaned from what the thesis will examine.

Limitations

Like any academic endeavour, this thesis has a number of limitations that do not invalidate its findings but may limit its applicability. The limitations of this thesis fall into two primary categories: those relating to the methodology and those relating to the circumstances of the chosen case studies and their respective historical contexts, which could not be avoided by choosing other case studies but will always be present in investigations of this topic.

Limitations: Methodological

The methods employed in this thesis have their own qualitative limitations. Principally, it cannot investigate the agency of the proxies comprehensively, and there are key limitations in the sources available for analysis, many of which are unavailable. Another key methodological limitation is that only certain factors are examined, leaving other explanations unexplored.

The concept of agency itself is somewhat ambiguous, and every actor performs small exercises of agency in their regular organizational functions. It is obviously impossible to capture all of these moments, all of these exercises of agency, many of which were strategically insignificant enough to leave any records of note. Firstly, this creates the problem that there is no usable evidence for these countless minor moments, and a second challenge arises; such exercises in agency have no bearing on examinations of proxy-principal relationships. For the agency to be sufficiently relevant in the relationship to be considered in this thesis, it needs to affect and be noticed by the principal, which is not always a given, since the principal does not have perfect intelligence, and thus, relevant elements may escape its view. At the same time, the nature of conflict and matters related to it mean that assessments of the principal, where those do exist, are rarely publicly accessible and can thus not be used in the context of this thesis. As such, there are limitations on which instances of proxy agency can be captured, and the

principal's considerations regarding the proxy's agency can also not always be appropriately captured, being too ambiguous or minor to note.

The thesis limits itself to a very narrow set of factors that influence agency and does not consider all possibilities that might influence the behaviour of proxies. For instance, the thesis does not consider internal power struggles and how that would affect the behaviour of the proxies, which would be relevant in the sense that private interests would influence the proxy's action outside of normal behaviour. The thesis also does not consider what the proxies are aware of, meaning the intelligence available to decision-makers, as well as the internal politics of the proxies examined. This entails that those factors cannot be properly taken into account. In the case of available intelligence, this matters because decision-makers can only work based on the information they are aware of; differing information before political and other leaders will drastically impact the behaviour of any given entity. Similarly, internal political dynamics and the factional interests advanced by certain elements can significantly impact the priorities and actions of specific actors. These two elements are essentially impossible to model adequately, the necessary information being simply unavailable or non-existent.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not invalidate the findings of this thesis. Although the limitations pose challenges, this thesis operates on a qualitative basis, not every minute dynamic needs to be explored to arrive at satisfactorily justified insight. The instances of agency this thesis has identified and examined are sufficiently clear, demonstrating the most important elements needed to establish a clear and unambiguous case of independent action. The thesis provides sufficient evidence of the US's desires and interests to identify when its proxies acted against its will, and the available material is quite explicit in that regard. The elements examined by the thesis can thus give a sufficiently clear picture to make deductions and come to valid insights on the behaviour and agency of proxy forces.

Limitations: Case Studies

Another key limitation of this thesis and the associated findings is related to the circumstances around the cases analysed, meaning that there are countless factors that cannot and are not taken into account. One such factor is the differing historical contexts of the two case studies, which makes a direct comparison difficult. A second issue is the limited availability of information, especially regarding actors' intentions. This means it is hard to tell when a proxy has genuinely acted against the principal's interests and desires, since it is virtually impossible to be certain what the principal wanted. Similarly, it is difficult to tell what the principal was aware of, meaning what they could have objected to.

Although both the Vietnam War and the Korean War began during the early Cold War, the US conduct in Vietnam was informed by its experience in and around the Korean War. Not only did this impact how the US conducted its foreign policy, but it would also be developments that the South Vietnamese would have been aware of, which could have impacted their behaviour. In light of the incredibly difficult nature of analysing subconscious elements within decision-

making, it is essentially impossible within the remit of this thesis to properly explore the implications of being aware of the developments around the Korean War on the decision-making of South Korea. Nevertheless, the thesis is sufficiently broad in manner, and the concepts used to examine the agency of the relevant proxies are so clear that this should not be a major impediment to the validity of this thesis's findings.

Another limitation is determining where genuine agency in contravention of the principal's desires has occurred, given how difficult it is to discern the general will of any political entity, especially outside legislative outcomes. This information is in most cases impossible to attain, as it has either never been written down or otherwise not publicly accessible, not to mention the fact that any sufficiently large structure will have internal competing interests and ideas, making it even harder to determine what constitutes acting against a principal as what may be against wishes of one organ might be in the interest of a different organ of the same principal. The thesis has addressed this limitation by focusing only on instances in which it is absolutely clear that the proxy acted in direct contravention of the principal's instructions or interests, thereby sidestepping the myriad ambiguous instances that could arise.

The case studies have several limitations, especially regarding changing historical attitudes and the limited availability of information on certain issues. Nevertheless, neither fundamentally undermines the validity of this thesis's findings. The first is countered by the conceptual clarity of the concepts used in this thesis and the fact that the thesis does not claim to make any absolute statements or quantify the degree of proxy agency, nor does it seek to quantify the degree of influence of each factor. It instead remains sufficiently broad, where the conceptual clarity can cut through minor adulterations of the background that affect agency. The challenge of insufficient information on certain aspects is countered by the thesis's focus on relatively clear-cut cases, so the ambiguities do not ultimately affect the findings. Despite the limitations inherent in this thesis, the validity of its findings is not in question.

Chapter 5 – South Vietnam

The end of the Second World War was a turning point in Vietnam's history. France had lost control of its possessions in Indochina during the war, leading to a primarily British effort to re-establish control over the area and transfer administration back to France. The reimposition of colonial control was met by considerable Vietnamese resistance (Thuan & Minh Thuan, 2024); across the political spectrum, the anti-colonial struggle had not yet taken on a distinctly communist characteristic. France and Ho Chi Minh had agreed to a certain *modus vivendi*, allowing France to re-establish control in Indochina, which was reorganised as a collective of states in free association with France (Chaoman, 2006), allowing certain autonomies and signalling eventual independence for Vietnam and the other constituents of French Indochina. This would, however, not bring any serious peace to the area, with forces around Ho Chi Minh beginning a campaign to liberate the whole of Vietnam from French domination, aiming to restore the brief period of *de facto* independence in Indochina following the Japanese surrender and before the French restoration of control.

The First Indochina War began in 1946, pitting French and French-aligned Vietnamese forces against nationalist forces aiming to create a sovereign and united Vietnamese state. The French Far Eastern Expeditionary Corps, consisting primarily of local recruits, elements from the French Foreign Legion, and long-serving volunteers, with conscripts from mainland France not being deployed out of political considerations (McGeorge, 1964), fought to subdue the insurrectionist independence fighters. At the same time, France sought to find political solutions to the conflict by creating an alternative Vietnamese government based around Bao Dai, the Emperor of Vietnam. However, even Bao Dai remarked that the solution to Vietnamese self-determination was really a continuation of French rule in a different form (Thomas-Llewellyn, 2025). Consequently, the Bao Dai regime was not very successful at attracting popular support from the Vietnamese, and armed conflict continued.

The First Indochina War ended in 1954 with the signing of three different accords in Geneva, partitioning the country into a communist North and a capitalist South. This was not supposed to be a final settlement but only to end armed hostilities (Thuan & Minh Thuan, 2024). French forces were to withdraw south of the 17th parallel, which they did, and left Vietnam altogether in 1956 as a consequence of US pressure. Vietnam was supposed to be unified following an election in 1956, an election the North was assumed to win based on its larger population and significant communist infrastructure in the South (National Intelligence Council, 1954). However, South Vietnam rejected unification on the basis of this election, arguing that as a non-signatory to the Geneva Accords it was not bound by their provisions and thus not obligated to integrate into the North Vietnamese regime. This naturally led to a continuation of fighting.

The US had been involved in South Vietnam since the First Indochina War (Spector, 1985), having dispatched advisors beginning in 1950 and supplied much financial support, but support began to ramp up far more significantly after the Geneva Accords, in which the French withdrew,

leaving the US as the main Western provider of support. The Tonkin Incident, in which North Vietnamese torpedo boats sank two US naval vessels, marked the beginning of major direct US involvement in the war, it had previously avoided escalating (Kahin & Lewis, 1967). The US would begin to withdraw after the Tet Offensive, which showed that the North Vietnamese were a formidable foe, leading to a period of Vietnamization from 1969 to 1972 in which the US tried to withdraw while building the South Vietnamese forces to such a degree as to enable them to fight on their own (Huei, 2006). Somewhat unsurprisingly, this did not prove successful, and the South Vietnamese regime would survive only an additional three years after the US withdrew, with Saigon falling to North Vietnam in 1975, leading to the collapse of the southern regime and the reunification of Vietnam under a communist government based in Hanoi.

Section 1: Exercise of South Vietnamese Agency

The South Vietnamese regime was a clear proxy force within the meaning of the term as understood by the thesis, being reliant on the US for its very survival. Despite existing at the pleasure of the US, the South Vietnamese regime was able to exercise agency across a very broad spectrum of activities and policies.

The first element in South Vietnamese agency the thesis will look at is South Vietnamese force design, primarily in relation to the South Vietnamese territorial forces, where US advisors were sidelined by the South Vietnamese regime and were unable to develop the force as they would have liked, showing South Vietnamese independence. From this, the thesis will go on to examine how South Vietnam was able to develop Vietnamese Rangers, despite objections from the US side, which were eventually overcome and implemented, even becoming somewhat incorporated into US policies. This again highlights how the US was not controlling the development of the South Vietnamese forces, even if it was vital in enabling their construction, being a key provider of expertise and materiel. Instead, South Vietnam pursued its own policies, dragging the US along and relying on its support but rarely following its advice on major issues.

The analysis of South Vietnam's agency will also be extended beyond purely military elements; for this purpose, the thesis will look at the Buddhist Crisis, the policies of South Vietnam leading up to it, and its conduct during this period of crisis. South Vietnam had a longstanding policy of discrimination against non-Catholics, harming popular support and the government's ability to rule effectively. Not only did this harm the US' chances of winning the war, but it also went against American ideas of religious freedom. When this inevitably caused popular resistance, the South Vietnamese refused to bow to domestic, international, and US pressure to change their policies, continuing on their path. Here again, it is clearly shown that South Vietnam conducted its affairs primarily according to its own ideas rather than those of the US, even if the latter tried to use its leverage to persuade South Vietnam to change its behaviour.

Force Development: Territorial Forces & Rangers

The development of the South Vietnamese Territorial Forces, also called RF/PF in certain instances, the acronyms standing for Regional Forces/Popular Forces, is a key example of

South Vietnamese agency at the expense of US influence. The US intended for these RF/PF forces to act as internal security elements separate from the armed forces (Stone, 2014), supporting the police in keeping order. Nevertheless, the South Vietnamese government built these forces as a supplement to the regular armed forces (Spector, 1985), being equipped in an essentially military fashion rather than in the policing style that would have been required if the initial US plan had been implemented. Instead, the South Vietnamese government built its territorial forces as a secondary army, allowing it to circumvent restrictions imposed on it to limit the size of its armed forces (Piasecki, 2003), much to the dismay of the US leadership. Indeed, the territorial forces would even find a place among the Vietnamese Rangers, elite forces founded against US advice and representing a concept at the time foreign to US military traditions (Spector, 1985), instead drawing from French military practice.

The Territorial Forces are worthy of particular attention due to their vital importance to the South Vietnamese war effort; much of the fighting was in fact, conducted by the Territorial Forces (Sorley, 1999), which generally had higher casualty rates than the regular armed forces. Similarly, the Vietnamese Rangers are relevant in that they were some of South Vietnam's premier fighting forces, having an outsized role in the South Vietnamese war effort (Mason, 2015). Eventually, as the Vietnam War escalated and the situation deteriorated, the US would come to accept the military role of the Territorial Forces and the existence of the Vietnamese Rangers. However, the lead-up to this decision was not driven by the US but, much rather by the South Vietnamese leadership against, the expressed wishes of the US, showing that South Vietnam was able and willing both to act against US instructions and even to change US policy in a clear display of effective South Vietnamese agency.

The Territorial Forces underwent distinct changes during their existence; after being initially founded in 1955. Initially, they consisted primarily of an active-duty security force called the Civil Guard and the Self-Defence Corps, consisting of civilian personnel only occasionally called up to serve. Both of these organisations depended on US support for much of their equipment (Spector, 1985), which did not stop attempts by President Diem to militarise the Civil Guard, create a military force personally loyal to himself, and expand the military capacities of South Vietnam. The Self-Defence Corps was significantly less relevant, having insufficient equipment and virtually no formal training (Jenkins, 1971), as well as being unreliable due to being susceptible to infiltration. The situation was not improved by the fact that most of the organisation's personnel were drawn from some of the most disadvantaged members of South Vietnamese society, having enjoyed little to no education and consequently being of low standards. The Civil Guard, on the other hand, was a far more relevant institution and was subject to much attention by various US entities.

Beginning essentially with the founding of the Civil Guard, the US was supporting its development in the form of experts from Michigan State University and directly through a USAID program (Stone, 2014). Funding was relatively limited, as most support for the South Vietnamese security forces was earmarked for the armed forces under the defence ministry

(Spector, 1985). As a nominally civilian organisation under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Civil Guard was unable to benefit from these funds, meaning it struggled to equip itself adequately. Diem always wanted to treat the Civil Guard as a quasi-military institution (Piasecki, 2009), for the twofold reason that it allowed him to circumvent the limitations placed on the size of the South Vietnamese armed forces, when South Vietnam gained independence, it took over a military force numbering around 250,000 men, which was beyond the size allowed by the Geneva Accords and was thus downsized through American efforts (Stone, 2014), the second reason being that it was disproportionately made up of Catholics and refugees from North Vietnam (Spector, 1985), meaning that Diem, himself a Catholic pursuing policies promoting Catholicism and alienating other religious groups, could rely on it (Roberts, 1965). The importance of the Civil Guard to Diem was clear, and it is no surprise that he invested significant efforts in developing it in his interest.

Despite the valiant efforts of the US advisors from Michigan State University, their recommendations were largely ignored or even undermined when the South Vietnamese adopted diametrically opposed policies, despite the US control over much of the funding for the Civil Guard. For instance, not only was the Civil Guard not made into a police force, but it was in fact placed under the Ministry of Defence for operational purposes beginning in 1955, although the interior ministry continued formally to administer the force (Stone, 2014). This change was not even communicated to the US advisors before it was implemented, making a mockery of their efforts to demilitarize the Civil Guard and shape it in their image. The leadership of the Civil Guard consisted primarily of political appointees (Spector, 1985), being placed there not for their skills or qualifications but for their perceived loyalty to Diem, ensuring that the Civil Guard could be relied on to protect the South Vietnamese President. The US advisors recommended systems to ensure that appointments occurred on the basis of merit. Nevertheless, Diem's constant reshuffling of senior leadership and transferring officers between law enforcement and military organisations, persisted. This policy of constant change made it harder for potential putschists to build the power base necessary to threaten Diem but also made the organisations significantly less efficient. President Diem was understandably more interested in his own survival than in South Vietnamese or US interests.

Although South Vietnamese reliance on US material support prevented President Diem from fully implementing the militarisation of the Civil Guard, he was nevertheless not prevented from reforming the security apparatus in ways contrary to US advice. He was, for instance, not prevented from forming Ranger companies independently of US efforts in 1960, an elite light infantry force specialising in counterinsurgency (Piasecki, 2011). Despite the ostensible civil police character of the Civil Guard, its members were drawn into it to become Rangers, showing that despite US pressure the Civil Guard had never taken on a recognisable police character. US military leaders were not initially supportive of the idea and indeed were not consulted prior to Diem's decision; they questioned the effectiveness of such units and tried to prevent President Diem from implementing his plans to create these essentially commando forces. Commandos as Diem was trying to create them were not a major part of US military tradition

but were present in French forces, France having indeed at one point set up a commando school at Nha Trang. General Williams, who would go on to become Commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (Spector, 1985), seeing the concept as a misuse of resources, always opposed the implementation of commando training in South Vietnam.

South Vietnam, despite relying on outside financial/material support for its security force budget, had considerable latitude to pursue its own agency, acting independently and even dragging the US along in things America did not initially want to do. Diem's unilateral moves were successful in garnering US technical support, with US special forces being dispatched to train the South Vietnamese in order for them to become Rangers; being very much an unloved child, the commando school remained small and initially suffered from poor equipment (Piasecki, 2011). The fact that Diem was able to overrule some of the most senior US military officials shows that he had significant power to act autonomously from US control in the pursuit of his ideas, whilst the reality that he was able to draw on Civil Guard personnel shows that the US could not actually implement its vision for the Civil Guard as a civil police force. These two examples illustrate that South Vietnamese agency was a key driver of developments in the Vietnam War, even sidelining the plans and ideas of the US on which South Vietnam was materially dependent.

Buddhism Crisis & Social Policies

Vietnam is in principle a plurality-Buddhist country, the majority being either irreligious or following a folk religion of some description, but it is also home to a sizable Catholic minority of which President Diem of the Republic of Vietnam was a member. His Catholic faith was clearly visible in his policies (Fisher, 1997), advantaging Catholics and the Catholic Church at the expense of the Buddhist plurality and other religious groups in Vietnam. It comes as no surprise that this sectarian policy alienated significant segments of the South Vietnamese people, caused considerable political controversy, and even resulted in violent confrontations. The US repeatedly and consistently tried to convince Diem to change his policies, end the discrimination in favour of Catholics, and stop the violent means by which he acted against protestors (Scigliano, 1964). South Vietnamese policies on these issues placed significant obstacles in the way of US and South Vietnamese efforts to win the Vietnam War; for the US this meant that Diem's actions were not only against their policy preferences but were actively undermining their efforts to stop the spread of communism. Nevertheless, the US was unable to persuade Diem to change his course of action.

Catholicism enjoyed a special status under French rule, a status which would continue under Diem, much to the frustration of many South Vietnamese. The French in 1950 had curtailed the right of association, restricting the ability of associations to meet and operate, however, the Catholic Church was, unlike other religions such as Buddhism, explicitly exempted from these restrictions (Roberts, 1965). This meant that whilst Catholics were able to worship and go about their business in peace, other religious groups had to apply for special permission to hold their celebrations, which was not always granted or was granted so late that it was impossible

for religious celebrations actually to be organised. Whilst Catholic figures were embraced by the South Vietnamese regime (Van Dinh, 1972), with Catholic priests holding prominent places in military parades and other public ceremonies, Buddhist figures did not have the same level of prominence. Indeed, whilst the state promoted the use of the flag of the Holy See, Buddhists were persecuted for using Buddhist flags. In one of the most egregious incidents of favouritism towards Catholicism at the expense of Buddhism, a Buddhist holy site at Thien But was given to Catholic priests in 1961 to use as a construction site, alienating and desecrating the place in the eyes of Buddhists (Roberts, 1965). It is no surprise that such policies would cause animosity and resistance among Buddhists.

The South Vietnamese government also prioritized arming Catholic militias and Catholic members of the Popular Forces (Spector, 1985), meaning that local security roles could in many cases effectively only be carried out by Catholics. At the same time, Catholic labourers employed by the state were seen to be given better tasks and more security, whereas others were at times randomly reassigned, a fate which was perceived to be far less common for Christians (Roberts, 1965). Resources were also disproportionately controlled by Catholic organisations (Spector, 1985); the South Vietnamese regime disproportionately used Catholic organisations to funnel aid and resources to the local level, meaning that Catholic charities and parishes controlled the distribution of aid, giving them outsized influence. The combined policies ensured that Catholics were seen as massively advantaged by the South Vietnamese government, whilst Buddhists were marginalised. This situation led to considerable unrest, including the so-called Buddhist Crisis, where government forces were used to suppress protestors campaigning against anti-Buddhist policies.

The US was deeply concerned by Diem's anti-Buddhist policies and practices, finding them not only counterproductive but also deeply immoral (Toong, 2008). The Buddhist Crisis, where Diem's policies caused Buddhists to take to the streets to protest their treatment, and which would spiral into violence and violent repression, proved that US concerns were entirely justified; not only did violence spill on to the streets, but loyalty to the regime had eroded to such a degree that many officials did not faithfully execute instructions (Roberts, 1965). Diem had clearly eroded not only the support of the common people but also that of his own administration, and the good functioning of South Vietnam was of course a vital interest of the US. Not only were South Vietnam's anti-Buddhist policies against the expressed wishes of the US, but they were also undermining US efforts to defeat North Vietnam and the Vietcong. Consequently, the US was unsuccessful in applying pressure to motivate Diem to change his policy, and his refusal to heed American advice would be a key contributor to US support for the military coup which would overthrow President Diem.

Communications of the US government show clear evidence of their displeasure with Diem and his handling of the Buddhist situation. Internal US communications clearly paint a picture of Diem's culpability for pursuing unnecessarily harmful policies and describe his handling of the situation as detrimental (CIA, 1963). Some internal communications even express disgust at

Diem's violent methods of repressing the Buddhist protests; clearly, Diem's policies in relation to religion did not please the American personnel in Vietnam. Similar opinions can be seen in official actions of the US, which urged Diem to make concessions to the Buddhists and cease alienating both the people of South Vietnam and the other countries in Southeast Asia which were pressuring the US to take a stand against Diem's policies (Lodge, 1963). The US was not unconcerned by the overwhelming negative consequences of Diem's actions and did inform him that they would be forced publicly to take a stand against him should he not change course on the Buddhist question, but he instead continued following his own way and did not relent. Ultimately, the US did openly criticise Diem, his policies on religion, and his handling of the resulting protests.

US actions against Diem did not limit themselves to public statements (Toong, 2008); they also included cutting economic aid to South Vietnam, and the head of the US advisory mission ordered his forces not to assist in any actions to suppress protestors. These measures would be a clear sign to Diem that he had displeased the US and was risking its support and even consequences. Despite having threatened Diem with the possibility of the US withdrawing military assistance, the US did not go through with this threat, likely not wanting to jeopardize its war against North Vietnam and the Vietcong (JFK Library, 2026). Nevertheless, despite his dependency on the US, the South Vietnamese government did not seriously change its approach. Frustrations with Diem even went so far that the US decided to support a coup to overthrow President Diem (Toong, 2008), which successfully overthrew the Vietnamese ruler. Diem had completely lost the support of the US through his insistence on managing religious affairs without US interference and violently dealing with the consequences of his internally unpopular policies.

The South Vietnamese insistence on advantaging Catholics whilst repressing Buddhists, and Diem's refusal to relent in any serious way even when faced with increasingly challenging opposition, shows a clear instance of the US proxy in the form of the Republic of Vietnam exercising agency. Not only was South Vietnam acting against the interests of the US by alienating both segments of the population and even parts of its own civil service and armed forces, but it was also acting against the expressed wishes of the US. There is no indication that South Vietnam was unaware of how it was acting against US desires and interests, on account of clear US efforts, both through channels of communication and material pressure, to persuade Diem to change his course. The government in Saigon was thus knowingly and unambiguously pursuing a path outside of the role thought for it by the US administration, leaving no doubt that it was exercising agency. This would ultimately result in corrective measures by the US in the form of support for a coup against President Diem, resulting in his overthrow. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the fact that South Vietnam was clearly able and willing to exercise agency despite being aware of its principal supporter's objections and the possibility that this would result in consequences. There must have been some reason that South Vietnam would pursue a policy contrary to that of the US, despite being aware of its own dependency and role as a US proxy force.

Section 2: Factors Affecting South Vietnamese Agency

This section will explore the factors which this thesis has theorised to be principal causes for South Vietnam's exercise of agency, those being the self-conceptualisation of the South Vietnamese regime, meaning how it viewed itself and its relationship to the US. In order to investigate how South Vietnam thought of itself, this thesis will look at how the South Vietnamese regime, and its armed forces, came to be, meaning how they came to be a formally independent state and how they developed after this independence. For its origin, the thesis can simply look at the South Vietnamese entity's history and what influences and what sort of personnel were incorporated into the State of Vietnam and later the Republic of Vietnam. For later development, the thesis will look at training, and in particular officer training, which would be more influential in affecting decisions due to the officer corps' role in forming the military decision-making body, as well as reflecting governmental priorities outside of the mere technical and tactical implementation of military decisions. Another aspect that will be examined is the degree to which South Vietnam was reliant on US support for its ability to act, meaning how vital US financial and material support was in enabling the South Vietnamese to undertake their primarily military actions.

In the area of self-conceptualisation, the thesis will pay attention first to how much the leaders of South Vietnam can be said to have been their own people rather than colonial or American creations, meaning whether they were genuine Vietnamese nationalists or effectively representatives of the US. In that regard, it is less important whether they had actual power than their ideas and how they would have thought about themselves. In the second instance, concerning later developments in the education of the military leadership, the thesis will pay special attention to whether US influence displaced pre-existing traditions, which would indicate that the US had socialised aspiring officers into its way of being. On the other hand, the continuation of pre-existing traditions would indicate that the South Vietnamese leadership continued to be socialised into French or Vietnamese ways of thinking, meaning that the US would have had a less important role in the cognition of the South Vietnamese leadership. On the material and financial independence side, it should be expected that a higher degree of dependence would reduce the South Vietnamese ability to act outside of US desires and interests.

Self-Conceptualisation: Origin of South Vietnam

The US and its struggle were not foundational to South Vietnam, it being essentially a French creation. The State of Vietnam was founded out of French attempts to find a political solution to the Indochinese independence movements (Thuận & Linh, 2024), hoping that the creation of a Vietnamese state with a prospect of gradual independence would decrease the appeal of an armed independence struggle. The State of Vietnam did eventually attain full independence outside of the French Union, an organisation being essentially the continuation of the French Empire. Vietnam would officially become a republic in 1955 as a result of an internal power

struggle (Chapman, 2006), resulting in the overthrow of Emperor Bao Dai of Vietnam and the inauguration of his former Prime Minister, the more US-aligned Ngo Dinh Diem, as President of the Republic of Vietnam. There was considerably more US influence in the Republic of Vietnam than in the previous State of Vietnam, the French withdrawing from the region and leaving the space to be filled by US influence. Nevertheless, French cultural influences remained prominent (Collins, 1975), and the Republic of Vietnam should not be seen as an American creation but much rather as a consequence of developments beginning under French rule and being driven by Vietnamese actors acting independently. A combination of Vietnamese nationalism present in the founding of the State of Vietnam and continuing into the Republic of Vietnam meant that there was a genuine constituency for the South Vietnamese regime, which was reinforced by anti-communism, making the survival of South Vietnam imperative for rightist and anti-communist forces in Vietnam and thus creating a natural allegiance.

South Vietnam emerged as an independent state from the negotiations between France and Vietnamese nationalist leaders who found themselves in opposition to the communist-aligned Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North (Reilly, 2016). The southern Vietnamese entity consisted of a wide coalition of Vietnamese forces including quite revolutionary groups such as the Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng, which had in the 1920s engaged in violent struggle against the French, assassinating French officials and collaborators (Nguyễn, 2015). Ultimately, they would cease their armed struggle and come to support the Bao Dai solution and the founding of the State of Vietnam in the hope that this would lead to gradual independence from the French (Reilly, 2016). The VNQDD is but one example of a revolutionary nationalist Vietnamese organisation which would come to a negotiated peace with the French and accept the French-created State of Vietnam; nevertheless, their past still shows that they were indeed a very nationalist Vietnamese organisation, proving that South Vietnam had genuine nationalist support from some elements of Vietnamese society.

The fear of communism was another key driver of support for the South Vietnamese regime. Although associated with the anti-colonial struggle, communism was deeply unpopular among certain segments of the Vietnamese population, being one of the drivers of Vietnamese flight from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. This included over one million Catholic Vietnamese who feared that they would face religious persecution under the rule of the DRV and its communist regime (Vân Nguyen, 2016), and also included former French military and civilian personnel who similarly feared retribution for their past role in maintaining French rule. Other groups with significant opposition to communist rule were segments of middle- and upper-class Vietnamese, who would not be able to maintain the same standard of living under communism that they could under capitalism (Masur, 2002). The groups mentioned here all had serious stakes in the survival of the South Vietnamese regime, building personal ties to it.

Although the State of Vietnam was created by the French to serve their aims, there was a genuine constituency for their effort. South Vietnam was not a purely artificial entity but responded to the genuine aspirations of a significant section of the Vietnamese population.

Vietnamese nationalists were heavily involved in the State of Vietnam and later the Republic of Vietnam; especially with North Vietnam becoming clearly communist, many Vietnamese sought to escape this communist regime and actively fight against Vietnam falling under communism. At the same time, certain policies of North Vietnam alienated some elements of Vietnamese society, driving them into the arms of the South Vietnamese government. Especially certain demographics, such as businesspeople, landlords, or Catholics, had genuine concerns about the possibility of a North Vietnamese victory, consequently supporting the existence of South Vietnam. Despite the influence of the US, South Vietnam was very much a state of the Vietnamese and did not just exist as an American tool to stop the spread of communism.

Self-Conceptualisation: Training

The US took a very active role in training the South Vietnamese forces, being given responsibility for training and organising the entire Vietnamese armed forces before Vietnam had even attained full independence, taking over that responsibility from the French. Nevertheless, different elements of the South Vietnamese forces received very differing degrees of attention. This means that dependence on US training did not affect all units equally, and so it would be wrong to talk about complete training dependency. However, most of South Vietnam's more elite and specialised units did rely almost exclusively on US training capacities and in certain cases even active advisory support in operations (Spector, 1985). Such complete dependence affected especially those involved in clandestine operations, acting in cooperation with the CIA. The most important and consequential element of training affecting strategic and thus more deciding action for the overall dependency would be expected to be found in officer training, seeing as commissioned officers are key decision-makers rather than enlisted soldiers, who might benefit from US training but would have very little influence on higher-level decision-making.

In essence, it can be said that although the South Vietnamese forces were not dependent on US training in order to be able to operate, their most effective and thus important elements were. However, this did not necessarily affect the culture of the officer corps and thus the higher decision-making apparatus. This means that US training was not vital for the existence of the South Vietnamese forces but was very much vital for their combat effectiveness. Officer training shows a clear picture of a continuous tradition predating the US and its influence, indicating that the US had little influence on the decision-making culture and thus did not necessarily impact strategic decisions very much, leading to a situation where South Vietnam had significant agency in strategic military developments.

The Vietnamese National Military Academy at Dalat was the premier officer training institution of South Vietnam. The academy was founded by the French to improve the training of infantry officers but later took on a more comprehensive role (Collins, 1975), becoming the most competitive initial officer training institution of the South Vietnamese armed forces, accepting just under 11% of applicants in 1968. The academy was not only supposed to be the basis of

the professional element of the South Vietnamese armed forces, but its graduates were also asked to play a special role in the South Vietnamese nation-building project. In 1969 President Thieu of the Republic of Vietnam explicitly asked the cadets of the academy to play a leading role in the efforts to develop and consolidate the Vietnamese nation (citation), illustrating their vital role beyond their military effectiveness.

The US played a key role in the development of the academy, providing both funding and development assistance to the institution; nevertheless, the academy's staff was entirely Vietnamese (Clarke, 1988), meaning that its cadets would have been primarily socialised into Vietnamese and French military traditions, even if there was a clear US presence and influence on training at the institution. Founded in 1950 by the French, the course at the academy was initially only nine months long, control over the institution was given to the Vietnamese in 1954, coinciding with the Geneva Accords, the course of instruction being extended to a full year the following year, and in 1956 the course was again extended to last two full years (Collins, 1975). From 1959 to 1963 the academy was a four-year degree-granting institution, however then being reduced to two years in response to the increased need for officers as a consequence of the Vietnam War. Again, it was extended to four years in 1966, which would remain the duration of education at the academy until the defeat of South Vietnam.

American involvement in the academy can be clearly seen in the fact that the extension from two to four years of instruction at the National Military Academy was the result of a report by US advisors which concluded that the two-year course was of seriously poorer quality, both in its content and in its staff (Clarke, 1988). The South Vietnamese armed forces had used the academy's staff as a repository for some of their worst officers, with predictable effects on the teaching conducted at the institution. It was for this reason that the US pushed for a reform of the institution along the lines of the US Military Academy, West Point (Collins, 1975). The close connection between the two institutions' approaches can be seen in the fact that one of the National Military Academy's cadets would become the first Vietnamese to study at West Point after transferring from the South Vietnamese academy. At the same time, US advisors were present at the institution with the mission of raising the academic standards of the officer commissioning course, showing the influence the US had on the training.

Despite the considerable influence of the US, the superpower did not exercise absolute control. The curriculum of the South Vietnamese institution, despite being based on the West Point model, was not the result of a US dictate, but instead a compromise between different South Vietnamese figures and their competing priorities for officer training. French traditions also continued to play an active part in the practices of the National Military Academy, as can be seen in the fact that its graduation ceremonies were based on the practices of the French Military Academy of Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan (Clarke, 1988), showing that the South Vietnamese academy was not entirely absorbed by American practices, continuing its old traditions dating back to French rule.

There is a clear pattern of US involvement with teaching and training at the Vietnamese National Military Academy; nevertheless, it managed to keep its traditions dating from before American involvement alive and otherwise seems to have remained a Vietnamese institution. The teaching staff remained entirely Vietnamese, and the curriculum was largely the result of Vietnamese senior officers considering the needs of their armed forces, even if they based the structure on the US Military Academy, West Point. Clearly the traditions of the US did not manage to penetrate the South Vietnamese institutions sufficiently to replace those of the French, suggesting that the US did not socialise the cadets into its own structures, the officers remaining Vietnamese in character, meaning they would not place the interests of the US ahead of their own and those of South Vietnam, even if they benefited from American training and education practices.

Material Dependency: Financial & Military Support

The US provided significant support to the South Vietnamese forces in a variety of forms, including financial support, material support, training support, and even active participation in the conflict. Initially, South Vietnamese forces were primarily French equipped, having been created under French tutelage and control. As the Vietnam War continued, French equipment was slowly replaced with American-made supplies; at no point was there any serious domestic weapons industry in South Vietnam, with its forces being dependent on a combination of grants and regular purchases of US material (Spector, 1985). This direct material support and reliance made France, and later the US, absolutely indispensable for fighting the war; South Vietnam would have been unable to adequately equip its forces. In that sense, a pronounced material dependency of the South Vietnamese forces on the US did exist.

The South Vietnamese war effort was deeply intertwined with American support, the US being vital for both paying and equipping the forces of South Vietnam, meaning that the US had serious leverage owing to its indispensable role in providing the resources necessary for South Vietnam to continue fighting the Vietnam War. Indeed, when the US decided to withdraw support in the early 1970s, South Vietnam quickly found itself in a position where it was no longer able to continue the war, being deprived of the support which enabled it to function. South Vietnam was not able to pay its forces without US assistance, let alone continue to supply them properly. This obviously had disastrous consequences, South Vietnam being defeated in 1975, the absence of US support being the leading cause. It would stand to reason that the US would have serious leverage over South Vietnam in view of the fact that it was the enabling factor for South Vietnam to even fight the war and ensure its continued existence.

US support for South Vietnam predates the founding of the Republic of Vietnam, covering as much as 80% of the costs associated with fighting the Vietnam War as early as 1954 (Cain, 2024), which was the year that the State of Vietnam gained full independence from France. Military assistance was one of the most important elements of aid; in 1975, when South Vietnam fell to the North, its forces had about \$2 billion of American weapons (Associated Press, 1975), whilst the entire approved South Vietnamese government budget for the same

year was less than \$1 billion (CIA, 1975), meaning it held about twice as much value in weaponry provided by the US as its entire annual budget. The budget is here given in US dollars and is rendered into dollars from piastres according to the black-market exchange rate recorded by the US. This is an approximation and would be different if the official exchange rate had been employed; nevertheless, it illustrates the incredible amount of military aid that South Vietnam received and how it would not have been able to muster the same without the US. On an economic front, South Vietnam's dependence was also quite pronounced, South Vietnam only being able to import modern cars due to US assistance (Masur, 2002). This import of modern consumer goods was important as a legitimising tool, showing the middle classes that the South held promise in providing a standard of living that was in excess of what they could expect in a communist-dominated state.

South Vietnam and in particular its military efforts were clearly dependent on US support; it is no surprise that the US withdrawal and the associated reduction of support caused disaster for South Vietnam and the reunification of Vietnam under a communist-led government. The US was thus a vital pillar of South Vietnam's existence and an enabling factor, including in its ability to provide a standard of living sufficient to secure buy-in to the regime by sufficient elements of the population to maintain the state. It stands to reason that this immense degree of material dependence would mean that South Vietnam would be beholden to the US in order to continue operations. It also stands to reason that the US would have a significant degree of control over how the resources it provided were employed and thus be able to direct the path of South Vietnam. The material and financial dependence of South Vietnam should cause its agency to be severely restricted and bring it into line with US policy and interests at the expense of its own ability to act independently.

Chapter 6 – South Korea

The Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, declared independence in 1948. The Korean Peninsula had become a part of the Empire of Japan in the early 20th century and was ruled by Japan until its defeat in the Second World War. Korea was subsequently divided between a US and a Soviet zone of occupation along the 38th parallel, with the US being responsible for the administration south of this line. Theoretically, the Allied Powers had decided as early as 1943 that Korea ought to be a free and independent country, and the Yalta Conference agreed that prior to final Korean independence, it should be ruled as Trust Territory jointly administered by four of the allied powers (Grey, 1951), the US, the USSR, the UK, and China. However, political disagreements prevented Korea from ever becoming a Trust Territory, instead remaining divided into the two zones of occupation. These zones later became the basis for the two Korean States in the form of the Soviet aligned Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North and the US aligned Republic of Korea in the South.

Preparations for Korean independence were initiated by the Japanese even prior to the end of the Second World War. When it became apparent that Japan would soon lose the war (Stueck & Yi, 2010), the Japanese Governor-General of Korea initiated the creation of the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI). Lyuh Woon-hyung, an independence activist leaning more to the left or centre-left, became the CPKI's first leader, giving it a somewhat leftist orientation (Stueck & Yi, 2010), which would later cause some dispute and can be seen as emblematic of the deep internal division of Korea, extending into general Korean and South Korean politics. The CPKI would continue to be active in both Korea was following the Japanese surrender and the commencement of Soviet and US administration of the peninsula, although in somewhat altered form.

The division of Korea was intended to be a temporary situation. The UN and both the US and USSR agreed in principle that the peninsula should be united as a trusteeship and later emerge as an independent country (Shin, 2017). The trusteeship efforts failed on multiple fronts. Namely the details of this joint trusteeship could not be agreed upon and that there was internal opposition to the idea in Korea. Although some elements, including the Korean Communist party, which was closely aligned with the USSR, supported the implementation of a joint trusteeship over Korea (Doh, 2024), other elements, on the other hand, opposed this prospect and the associated delay of Korean independence, leading to the creation of the Anti-Trusteeship movement. The UN was clearly in favour of a united Korea and formed the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNOK), which sought to hold elections throughout Korea in anticipation and preparation for unification. A UN resolution was passed to that effect (United Nations General Assembly, 1947). The Soviet Union however, opposed this effort, citing concerns that rightist candidates had a structural advantage in the South as a consequence of US policies (Landon, 1948), a concern shared by UNOK, which however sought to conduct the election regardless. The election ended up only being held in South Korea as a consequence of

Soviet opposition, entrenching the division of Korea. This effect of the election was widely understood at the time and the decision to hold the election in this context has been much criticised as a response.

Section 1: Exercise of South Korean Agency

South Korea in the aftermath of the Second World War was considerably dependent on the US for both economic support and security. However, this did not mean that South Korea always followed US advice or encouragement. Although it followed the US in matters relating to high politics, notably security and defence, South Korea did not choose to do so in matters of low politics, instead pursuing independent trade and economic policies.

In the economic domain, South Korea's agency is quite apparent. South Korea pursued a cronyist economic policy, creating conditions for favoured companies to rise not through their own merit but based on government support and de facto subsidies. Corruption was allowed to permeate both the economy and the state apparatus, much to the frustration of the United States, which saw President Syngman Rhee of the Republic of Korea as unwilling to make substantive efforts to address the corruption inherent in the South Korean system, thus harming South Korea's economic prospects and, by extension, South Korea's usefulness as a partner to the United States. At the same time, South Korea frustrated the United States with its initial refusal to engage economically with Japan, which the United States thought would be very beneficial to South Korea.

South Korea was far more aligned in defence matters, even though it had ideas of its own with its leadership wanting to pursue an aggressive policy towards North Korea, it did not undertake any such action. Indeed, there is clear evidence that South Korean efforts to shape its armed forces were frustrated by US interference, forcing South Korea to abide by American plans and priorities in creating its armed forces. The US aimed not to escalate the conflict on the Korean peninsula, avoiding actions that could be interpreted by the USSR as hostile and ensuring that South Korea could not do anything that would similarly jeopardize Korean stability. At the same time, the US did not tolerate South Korea politicising its military leadership, successfully exercising pressure to prevent such developments. In that sense, South Korea had no or only very limited agency in security matters, falling in line behind US leadership.

Trade & Economy

One of the key aspects that illustrate South Korean agency is its refusal to engage with Japan in a productive until relatively late. Despite Japan being occupied by the US and later becoming a key ally of the US in Asia, South Korea did not maintain any diplomatic relations with it until 1965 and did not maintain a proper economic relationship with it either. The US was critical of this stance, finding it rather unwise, as South Korea was unable to benefit from Japanese investment and trade. Additionally, the enmity between the two US allies made things more difficult for the US and reduced their value as US partners.

Cooperation between Japan and South Korea was initially rather tense. Japan was the former colonial power ruling over Korea and was notorious for its harsh rule (David, 2016), including numerous atrocities such as the forced recruitment of Korean women as comfort women, who were essentially subjected to sexual slavery. In light of Korea's history with Japan, President Rhee did not want to work with Japan- He had a pronounced dislike for the Japanese and also fearing that economic cooperation with Japan would lead to Japanese industry dominating Korea as it had prior to the Second World War (Seth, 2013). For this reason, South Korea did not sign a peace treaty with Japan until 1965, which enabled South Korea and Japan amicably. Rhee even pursued a particularly hostile policy towards Japan, leading to frequent confrontations between the respective countries' fishing vessels and continuous tensions between Japan and South Korea. This challenged relationship prevented South Korea from receiving Japanese investment and largely restricted Trade with Japan, limiting possibilities for economic growth. The US felt that this hostility between Japan and South Korea was unnecessary and counterproductive, consequently encouraging Rhee to change course. Despite being extremely economically reliant on the US as both a trading partner and source of financial aid, they failed to achieve this (Dionisopoulos, 1957). South Korea thus prioritised its historic animosity with Japan at the expense of its economic capabilities and in direct contradiction to the US' desires to strengthen the South Korean economy and making the country a viable competitor to the Soviet-aligned North Korea. This not only reduced the legitimacy of South Korea, contributing to lower standards of living in the South, but also negatively affected its military capabilities. A strong economy was necessary to supply and pay for military forces. Meanwhile, North Korea had both larger armed forces and a higher standard of living (Pak, Schwekendiek & Kim, 2011), drawing on significant Soviet support. This meant that the capitalist South could not provide a standard of living that would have made its system better for the average Korean than the communist system enacted in the North, challenging the very desirability of the continuation of the Republic of Korea.

The internal policies of South Korea and its policies towards imports continue to not align with what the US would have liked South Korea to do. Rather than implementing a genuinely free market as the US would have preferred, South Korea established a cronyist and corrupt economic system in which the State chose winners and padded their earnings with considerable subsidies, enabled by US economic support. This not only meant that South Korea did not implement the free-market system championed by the US and the wider West but also reduced its economic capacity by enabling considerable inefficiencies at the expense of the wider economy. This situation undermined the strategic objectives of the US, which were to promote free-market capitalism, and also prevented South Korea from developing its full economic potential. This would have made them a more important partner to the US and contributed to its ability to fund its own defence.

Beside the somewhat petty corruption present in any country, including small scale bribery and graft, which was quite pronounced in South Korea during the 1940s and 50s, the South Korean government operated a system where certain favoured traders were able to amass enormous

wealth. This level of organised wealth concentration extended to the degree that the US saw its interests threatened to a serious degree by its continuation (Farley, 1961). The South Korean economy under President Rhee was isolated from the global market, with access essentially being controlled by the government, which allowed only very limited groups to access international markets (Moran, 1998). The significant distortion of the market conditions between the South Korean economy and the international market allowed those with access to both to exploit this situation and gain enormous wealth for themselves. Essentially, South Korea restricted the import of goods, issuing only limited number of import licenses, which meant that these favoured traders were able to relatively cheaply buy foreign goods and resell them in South Korean domestic market at overvalued prices (Seth, 2013). This was an overall detrimental policy, as South Korea had few natural resources, meaning it was reliant on imports for raw goods, which would have been artificially made more expensive by import restriction and consequently disincentivizing production in South Korea. It also meant that certain Koreans with access to import licenses were able to make tremendous profits without making any or at least no major contribution to production or other useful economic activity. The only way this system was able to be maintained was through significant US aid and an artificially overvalued currency (Moran, 1998). It comes as no surprise that the US was frustrated by South Korea's slow economic growth despite significant US economic aid in the period prior to the 1960s, seeing it as serious cause of concern. The internal and import policies severely restricted South Korean economic development, preventing it from operating at the most efficient level that it could, with its market being distorted by the government without benefiting the Korean people and economy but rather just enriching the few. Here again it is apparent that the US ally is squandering the opportunities provided by the US, both wasting US resources and not building the capacities which would make it a strong ally of the US.

In the economic domain, South Korea clearly showed its ability to exercise agency, both through its restrictions on trade and its foreign policy that prevented economic and other cooperation. South Korea chose to pursue these policies despite the US desiring South Korea's development, which the US even considering its interest and standing in the world to be negatively affected by South Korea's policy (Farley, 1961)- This nevertheless did not stop South Korea from pursuing its own ideas. It's worth noting that South Korea was entirely dependent on the US and was indeed only able to pursue these policies because of US financial support, meaning that the US would have been able to apply significant pressure on South Korea to change its ways (Moran, 1998). South Korea's exercise of agency, as seen in its actions contradicting US interests and wishes for South Korean behaviour, occurred in what can be considered "low politics", or not vital to the survival of either South Korea or the US, even if they were of course impacted by the implications of South Korea's actions and associated developments.

Security & Defence

The agency exercised in domains related to economics and other areas not directly related to security did not extend to defence matters, South Korea remaining loyal to and abiding by US leadership. During the Korean War South Korea was effectively unable to exercise much agency, having been kept deliberately weak by the US out of fear that President Rhee would attack North Korea if he could. Essentially, the South Korean government did not manage to exercise much agency in the Korean War as the US had feared that giving them the tools to do so would have encouraged them to pursue policies contrary to US strategy. This however meant that South Korea was far less useful in the Korean War than it could have been, essentially being confronted with challenges that it was not prepared for. This meant that South Korea did not have any serious agency in operational military matters, not because it necessarily did not want to but because it lacked the tools necessary to do so.

The US conceptualised the South Korean Armed Forces as an internal security force, which was reflected in its training and equipment (Kim, 2001). Rhee pursued an openly hostile policy towards North Korea and other communist forces and was adamant that Korean independence ought to mean the unification of the peninsula under a single government, expelling communist influence. In South Korea itself, the US prevented Rhee's efforts to undertake serious ideological vetting of aspiring Korean officers, meaning that communists and other leftists managed to acquire positions and influence in the South Korean forces (Millett, 1997). At the same time, the US was fearful that if Rhee were given forces strong enough, he would use those to strike against the North, prompting the US to curtail support for South Korea's armed forces (Stueck, 2010). Consequently, the South Korean military was not equipped to fight a conventional war; lacking artillery, anti-air and anti-tank weaponry, as well as having absolutely no tank or other armoured vehicles of its own (Kim, 2001). The training standards of its leadership were also insufficient, for one, having not nearly enough officers, especially at the junior level, nor nearly enough training in more specialised tasks or combined arms operations. Public order forces do not need advanced war fighting equipment or training, and thus the South Korean army was not trained in them, such was their dependence that they would have needed US assistance to conduct such training. The training deficits were exacerbated by the rapid increase in the size of the Korean military. The Korean War changed the US approach to South Korea, leading to far greater support for the South Korean forces (Stueck, 2010); US instructors started training Korean personnel in all the tasks that could be fulfilled, and countless South Korean officers even received training in the US itself, leading to increasingly competent forces operating along US lines. South Korean divisions were also augmented with US forces to close the gaps that could not be closed with South Korean personnel; notably, the US provided artillery support, which was a key tool and continues to be vital on the modern battlefield today.

American reticence in training and arming the South Korean forces meant that they were absolutely dependent on the US for aid when the Korean War began. Essentially, the US policies prior to the Korean War, aimed at creating the South Korean army, deepened the

dependency on the US during the war itself. As a result, the South Korean forces were quite weak and not ready to engage in warfare until after the Korean War had effectively concluded. The US was called upon to provide stopgap measures to enable the RoK Army to function at all. This meant that South Korean forces had little room to exercise their own agency, simply lacking the capacity to do so. As such this thesis concludes that South Korea did not have any agency in the operational military domain and had extremely limited agency in other defence matters, being beholden to the US for security matters. The cause of this can be seen in weakness of the South Korean forces as a result of limited American support and the reliance of Korean officers and enlisted soldiers on US training and doctrine meaning, that there was no room for Korean independent actions.

Section 2: Factors Affecting South Korean Agency

The thesis will now cover the factors this thesis investigated in relation to their impact on agency. First, the self-conceptualisation of South Korea will be explored, beginning with the ideological dimension, particularly how it viewed communist North Korea represented and to a certain degree still represents. This will provide insight into how the government in Saigon viewed the foundational threat to South Korea, which would have consequences on its general behaviour, as this posed a serious challenge to its continued existence. After this, the section will examine the origin of the South Korean armed forces, focusing on what this meant for its officer corps and the socialisation of its military leaders. Then, the material and financial dependency of South Korea will be examined, demonstrating how much breathing room the RoK and its armed forces had, as well as illustrating how important the US was for the South Korean defence capabilities and thus the degree to which it was able to act on its own and exercise agency.

South Korea's self-conceptualisation is evaluated in one part by its relationship with communism, as the ideology was a central organising principle during the Cold War, separate from national ideas. Communism, for both its proponents and opponents, can thus be used to organise support for or against, which, while legitimizing it, places the entity engaging in that practice in an intractable position as part of the Cold War. It only provides legitimacy when fulfilling its role as partisan in this global ideological conflict, which includes following the lead of one or the other superpower, necessitating a degree of obedience. When looking at the origin and development of the South Korean forces, this thesis will pay special attention on how the US was involved in building the Korean armed forces and socialising its members, especially its officer corps. An armed force whose leaders are socialised into accepting the leadership of a foreign military, by abiding by its training and doctrine, would be expected to follow more closely the advice and encouragement it would receive from that military, even if that would not be strictly necessary. Finally, this section will consider the degree to which South Korea was dependent on US material and financial aid to supply and equip its armed forces, as well as to support its wider economy. A high level of such dependency would indicate that the South Korean relationship with the US is of utmost importance, suggesting the RoK would have to

adhere closely to the US to maintain this relationship whilst also giving it more material and thus capacities for action. Higher capacities could lead to a higher ability to exercise agency.

Self-Conception: Relationship to Communism

One of the factors that motivated South Korean affinity towards the US was anti-communism. Under Japanese rule, many Koreans found themselves collaborating with the Japanese in some form or another (Kim, 2017), especially in business and industry, as a close relationship was very advantageous for doing business and building wealth. In the aftermath of the Japanese defeat, leftists started accusing many such individuals of having behaved in a treasonous and anti-Korean fashion (Doh, 2024). This naturally meant that such persons had an incentive to counteract these claims, which they could do by opposing the pro-trusteeship movement, associated with left wing politics. The establishment of a trusteehip over Korea would have delayed Korean independence and would have been another period of foreign rule (Shin, 2017), making it easy for right wing parties to paint the Korean supporters of a trusteehip as anti-Korean, thus distracting from their own complicity in the Japanese rule over Korea. At the same time, the Soviet administration in the North Korea implemented policies to expropriate Koreans who had collaborated with Japanese (Kim, 2024), while the US did not discriminate against Koreans based on their past under Japanese rule. This bound these forces to the US and made them amenable to working with the US, ultimately becoming loyal partners embedded within anti-communist thought.

Korean independence was lost in no small part due to the Korean elites themselves allowing the Japanese takeover of Korea. Particularly emblematic are the Five Eulsa Traitors (Tae-Jin, 2016), a group of Korean government ministers who signed the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905, making Korea a protectorate of the Japanese Empire. They were not the only Koreans to take on important government roles during the Japanese rule of Korea. This included Shigenori Tōgō, a Korean who had an illustrious career in the Japanese diplomatic service (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2026), even holding multiple ministerial posts as part of the Japanese government. Such collaboration extended to the military service of Koreans in the Japanese armed forces, including as officers, some even reaching general ranks. In industry, countless Koreans found themselves working in Japanese factories; however, Korean elites had more decisive involvement, managing factories and supplying resources vital to the Japanese war effort and earning considerable wealth in the process (Kim, 2017). In the aftermath of the Japanese defeat, the US asked Korean officials employed by the Japanese colonial administration to continue working until replacements could be trained. At the same time, Japanese affiliated industrialists continued to enjoy their wealth and were vital to the Korean economy (Doh, 2024). Leftists in Korea favoured taking immediate action against these perceived traitors, while right-wing actors preferred delaying action until Korean unification and independence in order to take advantage of the former collaborator's skills and economic contribution (Shin, 2017). The Soviet administration followed the leftist view (Kim, 2017), expropriating collaborators and also

introducing land reforms, alienating former landlords, pushing them south, and creating animosity.

Right-wing efforts to avoid punishing former Japanese collaborators made it easy for leftists to portray them as anti-national and anti-independence forces (Kang, 2017), effectively continuing to allow perceived traitors to go unpunished and endorsing their actions by implication. At the same time, many right-wing figures were themselves Japanese collaborators to a certain degree. For instance, almost half of the conservative Korean Democratic Party's (KDP) leaders had studied in Japan (Kim, 2017). Additionally, many lower-level officials of the former colonial administration, such as bureaucrats, former police and military personnel, felt the need for protection, which they could find on the right-wing of the political spectrum, while left wing factions felt the need to punish these former collaborators. The leftist animosity against these groups naturally created a counterreaction in that these former collaborators became hostile to these groups (Doh, 2024). One of the key leftist groups was the Korean Communist Party which was aligned with the Soviet Union and therefore also supported a trusteeship (Kim, 2017). Although the idea for a trusteeship was initially introduced by the US and was met with Soviet scepticism, the efforts to implement a trusteeship were decided in the USSR and commonly associated in Korea with the Soviet Union (Doh, 2024). Right-wing factions thus attacked leftists accusing them of trying to delay independence by supporting the trusteeship, acting in an anti-Korean manner, which had the effect of distracting from many right-wing figures' association with collaboration and the associated stigma.

Korea, particularly South Korea experienced a significant anti-communist movement, reinforced by the need of certain segments of the Korean population to protect themselves from reprisals, most likely emanating from leftist forces in Korean society (Kim, 2017). This was coupled with the reality that communist policies in northern Korea had harmed bourgeois elements within Korean society, naturally creating animosity. The anti-communism present in South Korea was a tool to protect former collaborators by portraying them as patriots and depicting leftists as hostile to Korean independence. In that sense (Shin, 2017), anti-communism became part of the identity for significant segments of the South Korean population, creating a natural allegiance to the US. America was the foremost anti-communist power and orientated much of its foreign policy towards combating communism. It follows, that the ruling elites of South Korea, grounded in anti-communism, would have to support and abide by US policy and its goals in preventing the spread of communism, thus legitimizing a certain allegiance between South Korea and the US. It follows that South Korea's agency would be limited by the important anti-communism played in the self-conceptualisation of the South Korean regime and thus have a clear impact on its actions.

Self-Conceptualisation: Origin and Development of the South Korean Forces

The origins of the South Korean military essentially lie in the hands of the United States and its occupation of South Korea. Although many Koreans served during the Second World War, as a colony, Korea had no armed forces of its own after the war ended. Instead, the only official

military presence in Korea came from the Soviet and US soldiers occupying their respective halves of Korea. The US quickly found itself in a predicament: its remaining forces in Korea were largely unable to speak any form of Korean, and many, if not most, of the US soldiers were tired and demoralised from the preceding war and would have preferred to go home rather than occupying a foreign and, to them, alien country (Millett, 1997). The challenges inherent in the situation meant that Koreans had to play a large role in policing the country. The Korean National Police took on vital security functions, although they showed unfortunate continuities with the Japanese colonial police, from which most of the police personnel were taken over, leading to corruption and rather violent policing practices. The US quickly realised that a dedicated military force would be necessary to both defend South Korea and assist in public order measures (McCune, 1948). This led to the establishment of the Korean Constabulary by the US Army Military Government in Korea, which would become the nucleus for the later Republic of Korea Army. Throughout these early developments, the US played an absolutely vital role in developing the Korean forces, taking over major responsibilities, especially in the training of cadres of the Korean armed forces.

The Constabulary came into being in 1946, ostensibly to support the Korean Police, which was struggling to maintain order in South Korea (Millett, 1997). Initially, both the Constabulary and the Police were administered by the Bureau of the Armed Forces, indicating their nominally aligned roles. After the two organisations were placed under different Bureaus, the Constabulary was briefly under the Bureau of National Defence, which was quickly renamed the Department of Internal Security. The Constabulary was very much an American creation; its initial chiefs were American military officers, and training was conducted by US military advisors. Despite the US being instrumental in the creation of the Constabulary, Japanese influences remained strong. Since the US prioritised Koreans with military experience for the Constabulary (Kim, 2001), many Korean veterans of the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces were recruited into the Constabulary, assuming leading roles in the organisation.

The importance of the US in creating and shaping the Constabulary cannot be overstated, even if the urgency with which the Constabulary had to be staffed and the refusal of the police to cooperate with the Constabulary somewhat hampered the US in moulding the Constabulary as it would have liked to (Millett, 1997). Initial officer recruits had to pass through the English Language School, which, as the name suggests, taught the English language but also acted as a screening system for potential Constabulary officers. Other aspects which show the importance of the US include the competition between the Korean National Police and the Korean Constabulary. Both organisations received weapons from the US and hoped to become the core of a future Korean army, with the police at a point even having better arms than the Constabulary (Lee, 1987), the latter having to rely on leftover Japanese equipment whilst the police had access to American weaponry to serve with on duty. The conflict between the two in respect of US military patronage showed how vital US favour was for these organisations and how they sought to please the US, adapting to its needs and desires. The development and training of the Korean armed forces show a clear pattern of deep US involvement to a degree

where it would be expected that the socialisation of RoK military personnel would have been deeply influenced by American efforts, with military leaders getting used to adapting US methods and ideas. In that sense the RoK forces would have been a thoroughly Americanised force, indicating little potential for independent agency.

Material & Financial Dependence

South Korea was extremely reliant on the US for material and financial support, both in the civilian and military spheres. In the aftermath of the Second World War, South Korea was an incredibly poor country, with little access to natural resources or any other unique, desirable features. It did not have an easy solution to its economic problems. Consequently, it also did not have sufficient resources of its own to fund its military and to purchase or build the equipment necessary to outfit its fighting forces. There were few opportunities for South Korea to attract the kind of investment or support necessary to jumpstart its development. Most of East Asia was still ravaged from the Second World War and remained very underdeveloped, which meant that the US was a crucial lifeline for the South Korean state and its armed forces, consequently giving the US significant leverage to potentially change South Korea's behaviour. At the same time, US military support prior to the Korean War was somewhat limited and did not allow South Korea to build significant military capabilities, reducing its independent warfighting ability and thus limiting the degree to which it was able to act.

Data on the South Korean economy prior to the Korean War is hard to come by; however, the situation is quite clear. In 1960, seven years after the ceasefire ending the active phase of the Korean War, Korea had a GDP per capita of less than \$160 in today's currency (World Bank, 2024b). At the same time, the US had a GDP per capita of around \$3000 (World Bank, 2024c), whilst Japan had a GDP per capita of just over \$500 in today's currency (World Bank, 2024a). South Korea was clearly a very poor country, even after having considerable time to develop after the Korean War. This shows how bad its economic situation was, being considerably poorer than its former colonial overlord and absolutely paling in comparison to the US. The US provided an enormous amount of economic aid to South Korea between 1945 and 1960. During this period, South Korea received over \$2 billion in economic aid from the US (Sial, 2018), of which around 80% was used to support the economy. Military aid was also significant; US military aid to South Korea accounted for about three times South Korea's own military expenditure (Moon & Lee, 2010). This means that there can be no doubt that South Korea's military could only function due to US military assistance. Although the US provided a significant amount of military aid to South Korea, it only did so after the Korean War began, having previously deliberately limited military support in order to not upset the Soviet Union (Stueck, 2010). This naturally meant that the RoK forces prior to the Korean War did not receive all of the equipment necessary to fight a war, leaving them lacking capabilities.

South Korea's poverty and reliance on US assistance around the time of the Korean War suggest that the Republic of Korea had little room for manoeuvre, stemming from its general weakness and particular dependence on the US. South Korea had a very low GDP per capita in

comparison with the US and other US allies such as Japan in the region. This alone demonstrates that South Korea could afford a relatively minor military force by itself. Nevertheless, the situation was even more difficult when considering that South Korea's economy was propped up by a massive number of US foreign aid, meaning that without the US it would have been even weaker economically and even more so militarily. The fighting forces South Korea was able to maintain were only possible due to US financial and material support, highlighting the absolutely vital part the US played in enabling the South Korean armed forces. The material and financial situation of South Korea around the Korean War depicted a weak country, dependent on external assistance from the US. This also means that South Korea's ability to act independently from the US was severely limited.

Chapter 7 – Discussion

Having now looked at how South Korea and South Vietnam did or did not exercise different aspects of agency and the factors which might have influenced the behaviour of these states, notably their self-conceptualisation and their dependence on the US for material and financial assistance, it is now time to compare and contrast the two case studies. This will be done by first examining the exercise of their agency, namely, in which areas the two proxies were able to exercise agency and in which they were not. Paying special attention to examining where the differences lie in their exercise of agency. This will provide a good base from which to contrast the differing factors and their impacts.

After establishing where agency occurred in the case studies, the discussion will move on to compare the different factors that have impacted the case studies, beginning with the self-conceptualisation of the proxy actors, followed by their respective dependence in material and financial terms. Each of these will provide initial insights in their own right, which will then be generalised in a separate section, enabling general insights into the behaviour of proxies to be drawn and allowing the thesis to determine general rules for proxy agency within the limitations of the thesis.

General Exercise of Agency

In both case studies, both South Vietnam and South Korea were at certain times able to exercise agency. However, it is somewhat notable that they did so in different domains, whereas South Korea's agency was mainly limited to economic concerns and other low politics measures. South Vietnam, on the other hand, exercised far greater agency, extending into security matters as well as military concerns. More explicitly, South Korea acted against US advice and insistence mainly in trade relations and economic governance; its security apparatus, on the other hand, did not show any serious signs of acting outside US parameters.

Essentially, South Korea's agency did not touch elements vital for state survival or core US interests, here meaning their ability to stand against the spread of communism. South Vietnam, on the other hand, exercised agency directly in military and security matters, clearly undermining US intent, creating military formations acting outside of US doctrine, militarising policing forces against US advice and employing harsh and counterproductive internal security measures, even despite US pressure to stop. The thesis could not find any serious instances of the South Korean armed forces being used or acting in a manner which did not please the US; however, the RoK did maintain an independent foreign policy in which it showed little difference to the US, implementing a foreign policy built on old animosity against the Japanese. This ongoing conflict with Japan, a US ally, limited economic cooperation between South Korea and Japan, frustrating the US. At the same time, the RoK did not implement a proper form of liberal capitalism; instead, it relied on a state-led, cronyist system, much to the frustration of the US and at odds with the values the US and its allies claimed to champion during the Cold War.

The fact that South Vietnam's agency extends to high politics suggests that there is something which differentiates the conditions between the two powers. Implicit is the understanding that matters directly relating to security are treated differently from other issues, being more vital and commanding greater priority in the proxy-principal relationship. It follows that security and defence matters would be more closely linked to the principal, while other issues would receive less attention and thus command less adherence to the principal's wishes.

Self-Conceptualization

The two case studies have drastically different origin stories: one born out of the US occupation of South Korea, the other a recently decolonised French territory, giving them different understandings of themselves and their relationship with their principal. This differing history extends to their armed forces, which have very different histories, leading up to their respective wars.

It is interesting to note that both proxies were far more bellicose than the US, the latter in both cases trying to rain on its proxy and prevent it from escalating, showing the proxies to have a degree of drive separate from the US to begin with. There is, however, a clear difference in the history leading up to the wars that distinguishes the two: South Korea's defence and security apparatus did not exist prior to the US involvement, whereas South Vietnam had a preexisting military tradition. This naturally means that South Vietnam's military and political leadership had experience planning and undertaking military actions outside of the US paradigm. The South Vietnamese military's understanding of itself is thus not necessarily caught up in US policy but rather derives from a separate historical process in which the US was only a later addition. In the South Korean case, however, the very existence of the military stems from US efforts to supplement the Korean National Police, and the development of the armed forces was entirely in the hands of the US, with its leadership at first consisting of US officers. That means the South Korean armed forces were created as a dependent of the US, and their leadership was socialised to follow US policies in doctrine and priorities.

The US being more responsible for South Korea's military development than for South Vietnam's lends itself to explaining why South Vietnam exercised greater agency than South Korea in the military sphere. Whereas South Vietnam knew it could act without the US, having done so before the US became heavily involved, South Korea had no such history. It thus lacked the confidence to take independent action, whereas South Vietnam saw it as self-evident that it could and was allowed to pursue its own initiatives and policies. In that vein, the history of South Vietnam, separate from the US and the associated ownership of its destiny, shows that South Vietnam was willing to exercise a higher degree of agency than South Korea, whose armed forces were entirely a creation of US policies and which fulfilled its role as dictated by the US. The forces of the two proxies, by their origin, had different roles in relations to the US, the South Vietnamese forces were the forces of the Republic of Vietnam, supported by the US, whereas the forces of South Korea, were Korean forces created by the US to support its

governance of South Korea during the US occupation of South Korea, fulfilling the role as US supporting force.

Financial & Material Dependence

The thesis has found that both case studies show a high degree of material and financial dependence on the US. However, the leverage associated with this dependence does not necessarily seem to correlate with less agency on the part of the proxy forces. Instead, the proxies' weakness, stemming from the degree of financial and military support they receive, seems far more important than the theoretical ability of the US to withdraw support. This essentially means that weaker proxies are more obedient than stronger proxies, whilst the amount of aid received is of secondary importance. South Korea exercised less agency than South Vietnam, because, having initially received relatively little support, it lacked the capacity to act on its own. South Vietnam, on the other hand, received much more significant support, enabling it to direct resources, including some provided by the US, as Saigon saw fit.

The South Korean armed forces were kept artificially weak by the US, leaving the South Korean army with very limited capacity and little to no spare resources. In this context, essentially all developments in the South Korean armed forces were derived from the US. Equipment came from a combination of leftover equipment from the defeated Japanese armed forces and material provided by the US. In the absence of other sources of equipment, it could hardly build the material necessary to act outside the US-created structures and efforts. They even had to rely on US augments to operate combat-ready divisions, lacking the organic elements necessary to field an appropriately equipped combat force. In areas where South Korea was not constrained by capacity limitations, it did indeed exercise agency, as evidenced by its actions that ran counter to US interests and desires in the economic and foreign policy domains. Clearly, South Korea's exercise of agency was influenced by its capacities in certain domains, whilst the absence of those capacities in military matters constrained its ability to act independently.

South Vietnam was far more able to exercise agency in military matters, being the driving force behind many developments, both in the organisation and equipment of fighting forces and in internal security operations. This higher level of agency in South Vietnam can be attributed to South Vietnam's greater military capacity and US support, which enable these capacities to be built and maintained. Whereas the South Korean forces had to be built from the ground up and were only entrusted with a supporting role, focused on internal security, South Vietnam had already developed military forces prior to US involvement, which had already proven themselves in battle, fighting in the first Indochina War and continuing in the second. US support to the South Vietnamese forces began when they were already engaged in fighting, and they thus received far more significant support, including heavier military equipment not initially available to South Korea. This higher level of support also meant that the South Vietnamese had superior military capabilities and were thus able to undertake actions without needing specific US support. In that sense, the higher level of exercised agency in the South Vietnamese case

can be at least in part attributed to the greater levels of material and financial support received, which built their capacity for independent action.

General Insights

It has now become clear that self-conceptualisation, as well as material and financial dependency, affects the degree and domain in which agency is exercised. In the military domain, these factors are relevant because a proxy that must act independently must think of itself as capable of acting on its own, meaning it must rely on doctrine and instructions provided by foreign powers. On the other hand, a proxy that has never considered acting without foreign promotion is unlikely to act on its own unless there is a significant reason to do so. Essentially, this means that if a proxy is socialised to believe they can and must act independently, they will do so; if they are instead socialised into dependency, they will act accordingly and not exercise agency.

The financial and material assistance is also relevant, as it enables the proxy to build capacity for action. The thesis could not find evidence that greater support would lead to greater loyalty and adherence to the principal's interests. The thesis found that the capabilities of a proxy had a far greater impact, in that proxies with a higher capacity for action are more likely to use it, regardless of where those capacities come from. Stronger proxies are thus harder to control, meaning that a more generous principal might paradoxically set the conditions for them to lose or diminish their influence over their proxy. Material support thus only, by extension, influences the behaviour of a proxy.

Naturally, these two findings must be taken together, and neither will have absolute determinative power over the behaviour of a proxy force. The actions of a proxy are influenced by a myriad of factors, including those examined in this thesis and those that could not find a place in this thesis or are nigh impossible to study to a sufficiently systematic level, where properly founded insights could be reasonably made. These include internal politics and perception factors, which would require extensive study to yield generalizable findings.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This thesis has now examined at length the agency of proxy forces in the case studies of South Vietnam and South Korea, finding clear evidence that self-conceptualisation and material dependency do impact proxy behaviour. The connection between self-conceptualisations and independent agency is quite straightforward and as initially theorised. A higher level of separation from the principal in the proxy's self-conceptualization is associated with greater independent agency. The correlation of financial and material dependence is not quite so straightforward, and the findings did not align with the expectation. The thesis could substantiate its theory that a higher level of dependency would lead to more reliance on a proxy, instead of finding that the proxy's capacity to act was far more influential. In that sense, the dependence had only a second-order effect on the level of agency, as more support would correlate with higher capacities to act, which the proxy would use to exercise independent agency.

In the South Vietnamese case study, this thesis was able to find that South Vietnam had a significant degree of agency, extending into security, as could be seen by the fact that it could determine its military organisation in a manner not aligning with US desires and even pioneering new tactics against the advice of the US. This agency also extended into political and social matters, as was shown by examining the Buddhist Crisis, where Buddhists rose up against their mistreatment by the South Vietnamese regime. The US tried very hard to convince the government in Saigon to change course, but South Vietnam would not be influenced and held its ground, much to the US's frustration. The agency is apparent in the South Vietnamese ignoring American attempts to change its policy on religion and how Saigon dealt with protesters.

Some key factors that influenced the extent to which South Vietnam exercised agency were evident in its self-conceptualisation. The South Vietnamese state structure predated the Americans and had a genuine constituency in Vietnam, meaning that it had an independent existence, and this independent tradition continued despite significant US support. This can be seen in the fact that, despite taking much US assistance, South Vietnam never fully adopted US tradition in its training of officers, showing a continuity predating the direct involvement of the US in the Vietnam War. On the material and financial levels, South Vietnam was fully dependent on the US, receiving generous support that enabled it to maintain the level of armed forces it did. This meant it had significant capabilities, contingent on US support.

In the South Korean case study, the thesis found less agency exercised by South Korea. It only exercised agency in domains not directly related to security matters. In economic and trade matters, South Korea greatly frustrated the US by pursuing policies contrary to American economic and ideological orthodoxy. At the same time, it refused to cooperate productively with Japan, continuing its old feud and disregarding its status as a US ally. These South Korean agency exercises, contrary to US interests and ideas, greatly frustrated the US. In defence

matters, the thesis could not find comparable exercises of agency, as the RoK armed forces are too weak and dependent on the US to do much of anything on their own.

The explanation for this lack of military agency can be found in the fact that the RoK forces are essentially entirely a US creation, being trained and built under US direction. They had no real preexisting tradition separate from US leadership, and it was a very weak force that relied almost entirely on the little equipment provided by the US. This meant that the South Korean forces were so weak they could not operate effectively without direct US support, preventing them from acting independently. This is further exacerbated by the fact that its leaders would have been socialised to follow US doctrine and methods, meaning they would be taught to act outside of US interests and aims. Neither of these limiting factors would necessarily have applied outside the defence sector.

Comparing the two case studies, it becomes apparent that both proxy actors exercised agency to some degree, although the conditions in relation to South Korea were less conducive to independent agency, especially in defence matters. The notable differences in the conditions across the case studies are primarily in self-conceptualisation, and, to a lesser degree, in financial and material dependency. Whereas South Vietnam had a long-established US military tradition that it managed to maintain, South Korea did not have such a legacy to build on, making it essentially an American creation. The South Vietnamese thus had the opportunity to be socialised to act independently of the US, whereas the South Koreans were socialised to accept US leadership in almost all matters. Both South Korea and South Vietnam were heavily dependent on the US for material and financial aid, the only difference being that South Korea was deliberately kept weak by the US, so it lacked the same capacity for independent action. It thus appears that dependency does not necessarily create obedience, but rather does capacity breed independence. The comparative analysis of the case studies leads to the finding that the propensity of capacity to lead towards action is greater than the effect of dependency in creating proxies who abide by their principal's advice and instructions.

The finding that a more independent self-conceptualisation led to more independent action aligns with the thesis's initial expectations. However, the idea that greater dependence would lead to closer alignment could not be substantiated from this analysis. Instead, the capacities created through military and financial aid outweigh the adherence that might have been induced by the proxies' dependency. Material and financial dependency proved to be a factor that did have some influence on proxy agency, but in the way initially expected: rather than the dependency having a significant effect in its own right, its second-order effects proved more important.

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