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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

#78499

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 July 1953

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 367

SUBJECT: Syngman Rhee and the Korean Armistice

1. Communist overtures for a cease-fire in Korea had caused President Rhee and the ROK Government to undertake an aggressive political campaign against the conclusion of an armistice. We then estimated that, although this campaign could possibly lead to unilateral ROK actions which might adversely affect the UN position in Korea, Rhee was in fact overstating his case in order to gain a security commitment from the US. We did not believe that Rhee actually intended, at least for the immediate future, to carry out his threat to "fight it out alone."

2. Present situation. Recent events, however, dictate a re-examination of this estimate. Since early May, Rhee's campaign became increasingly more aggressive and culminated on 18 June in the unilateral release of approximately 27,000 North Korean POW's. This action halted apparently successful progress towards a truce at Panmunjon. On 20 June the Communists asked the UNC whether the UNC could control the ROK Government and army, whether the armistice would include the ROK, and whether the UNC could give assurances that the ROK, with or without being included in the truce, would implement an armistice once reached. Meanwhile, Rhee threatened that he would not accept or participate in an armistice, that he would withdraw ROK forces from the UNC if an armistice were signed, and that he would not permit Indian troops to enter ROK territory to repatriate POW's. Moreover, he refused a 6 June US offer to conclude a mutual security pact following an armistice. Instead he insisted that a US security pact be concluded before the signing of an armistice, that all non-Korean armed forces be removed from Korea immediately following an armistice, and that post-armistice political discussions be limited to a period of three months with the stipulation that if no satisfactory result were then agreed upon, the armistice would be considered ended.

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3. On 26 June Assistant Secretary of State Walter Robertson arrived in Korea for conversations with Rhee. Employing a somewhat more compromising approach, Rhee informed Robertson that the ROK would accept a Korean armistice provided the US approved these modifications:

- a. The UNC to move remaining North Korean anti-Communist POW's to the demilitarized zone for takeover by the UNRC;
- b. The UNC to place a 90-day limit on the political conference;
- c. The US to provide economic aid and to build-up the ROK Army to approximately 20 divisions, as previously promised by the US;
- d. The US to give an immediate guarantee of a mutual defense pact.

4. On 27 June, Robertson and General Clark presented Rhee with an aide memoire in which the US Government, in return for ROK assurances that it would accept the authority of the UNC and support an armistice once concluded, accepted points (a), (c), and (d) above. The US representatives stated that the US could not impose any time limit on other governments participating in a political conference. There was a proviso, however, that if, it became clear after 90 days that the conference "is not making progress and is being exploited by the Communists to infiltrate and propagandize or otherwise embarrass the ROK," the US Government "would be prepared to act in concert with the ROK with a view to retiring jointly with the ROK from the political conference."

5. On 28 June, Rhee answered the US aide memoire by introducing new proposals:

- a. The US to build up ROK sea and air forces sufficient to support 20 divisions;
- b. The US to support the formation of more than 20 divisions if necessary to balance a Communist build-up;
- c. The UNC also to move Chinese Communist POW's to the demilitarized zone;
- d. The UNC to permit a maximum of only one week in which the UNRC could supervise and question non-Communist North Korean POW's;
- e. The political conference to accomplish (within 90 days) the "common objective of reunifying Korea under its only legal government and of evacuating the Chinese Communists from Korea;"

5. If agreement on unification were not accomplished within 90 days, then the US and ROK delegates would "withdraw from the political conference and immediately resume the military operations jointly without consulting any other nation or organization for the purpose of accomplishing the original objectives by military means."

In return for US acceptance of these proposals, the ROK would agree to continue to accept the authority of the UNC, "so long as the UNC cooperates and supports the ROK in its efforts to promote the common cause by settling the war with victory."

6. On 29 June, Robertson and Clark told Rhee that this program, represented by Rhee as "an agreement reached" between himself and Robertson, contained so many inaccuracies and was so irrelevant that it could not provide a basis for discussion and was therefore being returned to Rhee as unacceptable. General Clark thereupon informed Rhee that it was necessary for the UNC to reply to the Communist questions of 20 June and that the UNC was proceeding with armistice negotiations.

7. The situation remains deadlocked as of 30 June. The Communists have rejected the UNC proposals of 29 June, made without prior reference to the ROK Government, that a date be agreed on for signing a Korean truce. Rhee, meanwhile, has told Clark and Robertson that he will study and perhaps revise the ROK aide memoire of the 20th. Late news reports do not indicate what revision, if any, Rhee has made of his demands.

8. Probable Developments. We believe that the unification of Korea under his leadership remains Rhee's all-consuming desire. Recent ROK tactics suggest that Rhee's present policies are designed to frustrate the conclusion of an armistice and to force the US to underwrite his aspirations to unify Korea by force; or, if an armistice is concluded, Rhee would hope to prevent by unilateral means the implementation of an armistice and to force the US to underwrite such tactics.

9. The actual tactics which Rhee will adopt in the immediate future may be influenced to a great degree by US policy. Rhee may well feel that additional demands on the US will continue to bear fruit since his adamant stand already has caused the US Government to back down on the question of a security pact, to agree to his requests concerning the disposition of North Korean POW's, and virtually to commit itself to join the ROK in walking out of a political conference. Rhee will therefore doubtless continue his attempts to gain added commitments from the US. Rhee's tactics may also be influenced by the degree of support

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within the ROK for his unilateral schemes. The key consideration to Rhee's domestic support is the loyalties within the army. It has been generally believed that ROK army leaders would follow UNC directives and defy Rhee in the event of a showdown.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we do not feel that we can give any firm estimate of Rhee's probable behavior. We feel, tentatively, that Rhee's threats have been overstated in order to bluff the US into added commitments, and that Rhee will accept an armistice if forced to by US pressure and/or by uncertainty about the ROK army. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Rhee will actually attempt to "fight it out alone" in Korea. Rhee may back down, accept UNC direction, and abide by an armistice. Or, motivated either by determination to go it alone at any cost, or by desire only to bluff the US into ever deeper commitment to the ROK, Rhee may order any of a number of actions.

10. Indicative of the fluid situation in Korea is the fact that the following have all been reported as moves which Rhee may take: a step-up in the tempo of "public" demonstrations against an armistice; strikes or slowdowns by, or the withdrawal of, some 90,000 ROK Service Force personnel assisting UNC logistic efforts in Korea; the attempted freeing of Chinese Communist POW's, and possibly closer ROK cooperation of some kind with Chiang Kai-shek against an armistice; the attempted seizing of UNC fuel and arms dumps; the withdrawal of all ROK forces from the UNC; armed action against the NERC; an attempted general offensive against the Communists; and the withdrawal of ROK units from the line.

[REDACTED]

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