

August 3, 1953

Confidential Memorandum, Before Agreeing to the Armistice Agreement

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Summary:

When the United States agreed to a truce talk to end the Korea War, President Syngman Rhee disapproved. He opposed the truce and tried to attack these peace proceedings through a series of events- such as releasing thousands of prisoners of war and creating turmoil for the US government. In order to persuade Rhee to accept the armistice defense, the US dispatches Assistant Secretary of State Walter Robertson to meet with the South Korean president in a series of bargaining discussions. Eventually, under certain conditions and a mutual defense pact with the US, Rhee agrees to the armistice.

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CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

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In evaluating the understandings reached between the Republic of Korea and the United States relative to the truce, the following factors are crucial:

1. The original determination of the Republic of Korea was to accept no truce or armistice so long as the Chinese communists remain in Korea.

2. In the talks with Mr. Robertson, President Rhee offered to postpone his own policy of continuing the war long enough to allow a period of ninety days for the proposed political conference, provided: (1) the United States would agree to a joint resumption of the fighting with Korea, in case the political conference fails to achieve re-unification, or at the minimum would promise to provide moral and material support for a unilateral military effort by the Republic of Korea; and (2) the United States would negotiate with the Republic of Korea a mutual security pact containing assurances adequate to the exposed situation of Korea.

3. Mr. Robertson replied that he had not the authority to grant these two conditions but that he would discuss them in Washington and report back to President Rhee the results of the consideration there. He said he felt confident he could win the support of the Senate to the mutual defense treaty.

4. Upon Mr. Robertson's departure from Korea he was quoted in the press as saying the President Rhee had completely surrendered to him, but there was no word sent back by him regarding the two conditions cited in point 2.

5. On July 24, when it appeared the truce was about to be signed, President Rhee wrote to Secretary Dulles asking for assurances on the two conditions listed in point two, and adding that the position of the Korean Government concerning the armistice would have to be determined in accordance with the answers.

6. On July 25 Secretary Dulles replied: "If, in violation of the armistice, the Republic of Korea is subject to unprovoked attack, you may of course count upon our immediate and automatic military reaction." We took it for granted that this meant U. S. military help in expelling the Chinese communists who are now entrenched in Korean territory, for a foreign aggressive force which holds half of our nation must be considered to be attacking us.

-2-

7. However, on August 1, the Department of State sent a message clearly indicating that the United States does not consider itself pledged to join with us in military action in the event the political conference fails to secure withdrawal of the Chinese troops. Still unanswered is our question concerning the grant of moral and material support for our own efforts.

8. Since we must assume that both the conditions we requested have been rejected, and that we are not to be assured of military aid sufficient to help us solve our problem of the division of our nation, we feel that complete freedom of action has been restored to us, to take whatever steps we may deem requisite for the welfare of our nation. We have gone a long way in our own concessions, making the truce possible, even without any assurance that the concessions we requested in return would be granted. No one, however, should interpret our concurrence thus far as meaning that our promise to abide by the truce terms was not without the conditions which we attached to it.

9. The basic situation of the division of Korea, which occurred through a Russian-American agreement, remains and continues to be a charge upon the honor of the United States, until the ancient and essential unity of Korea is attained. This responsibility the United States has clearly affirmed and re-affirmed.

10. Korea, in turn, pledges its own adherence to a continuation of the anti-communist, pro-democratic and pro-American policies which have already caused the Korean people to endure the worst devastation of modern times. In the future as in the past, Korea will endeavor to be a dependable bastion of freedom and democracy in North Asia and thus a corner-stone for the defense of the free world. Our value as an ally of the United States will be enhanced at the earliest practicable time by the restoration of the unity, in democracy and independence, of our nation.