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THE PROSPECTS FOR AN EFFECTIVE TRUCE IN KOREA

In accepting the UN Command's assurances regarding a Korean truce, the Communists indicated that their probable intention is to sign the draft armistice agreement. They have continued their military build-up, however, and are in good position to exploit whatever conflict may develop between the UN Command and President Rhee before or after the signature.

Rhee's past actions and current statements by South Korean leaders indicate that he cannot be relied on to cooperate with the UN Command in implementing a truce and is capable of precipitating an open rupture at any time.

There are ample indications of a Communist military build-up,

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which raise the threat of major Communist attacks. These might be launched to take advantage of an American-South Korean rupture, or may have been planned to occur in any event in connection with Communist stalling on a truce.

Since 19 June the Communists have expressed willingness to conclude a Korean truce, whether acceptable or unacceptable to Rhee, if given adequate assurances that the UN Command could implement it. On 19 July the Communists accepted UN State Department review completed

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assurances on all points except certain aspects of the prisoner-of-war issue and stated their willingness to discuss preparations for signing.

The Communists stated that only one problem requires settlement before a truce is signed -- that is, where the neutral nations repatriation commission is to take custody of the anti-Communist prisoners. Trouble may arise at once on this point, as Rhee refuses to permit the Commission or the Indian troops to enter South Korea and it is not certain that the Communists would agree to a transfer of the prisoners to the demilitarized zone. It is probable, however, that the Communists do not intend to allow this minor problem to obstruct a truce.

The Communists, having been assured that no more prisoners will be released, have taken a conciliatory line on other aspects of the prisoner issue. Rather than persisting in their demand for recovery of the released prisoners before a truce is signed, they now "reserve the right" to submit the question of released prisoners to the post-truce political conference and to ask for implementation of the 8 June agreement.

The most serious obstacle to an early truce is the possibility that Rhee will make an incendiary public statement to the effect that the various assurances offered the

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Communists do not correctly represent the South Korean position and that South Korea will not cooperate in implementing the truce or will cooperate only for a limited period. On 21 July Rhee's spokesmen, in conversation with Ambassador Briggs, accused the United States of bad faith and threatened to repudiate the Rhee-Robertson agreement and denounce the armistice. Should Rhee make such a statement publicly, the Communists will probably refuse to conclude a truce until given fresh and even stronger assurances.

Assuming that Rhee remains silent and that a truce is signed, the Communists have been assured that South Korean forces will observe a cease-fire and withdraw from the demilitarized zone, and that the safety and ability to function of neutral and Communist personnel required to operate in UN Command areas are guaranteed. Rhee may choose to make trouble at this early stage by refusing to cease fire or to withdraw, and may refuse permission for Czech and Polish members of the supervisory commission to enter South Korea.

The most important assurances given the Communists were that either side may take "necessary" military action against truce violations by the other, that the UN command will not support South Korean forces in violating a truce and will maintain the armistice in the event of such violation, and

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that there shall be no time-limit on the armistice. The Rhee-Robertson talks in fact did not resolve the important differences between the American and South Korean positions on these matters.

Even assuming that South Korean forces cooperate with the UN Command prior to the signing of a truce and in the early stages of its implementation, independent action by South Korean forces is possible at any time if Rhee does not like the progress of events. He may become disaffected to the point where he will take independent action at any stage in the course of further American - South Korean discussions on a security pact, on joint policies toward the political conference, and on American support for South Korean military operations.

The most critical time is expected to be 90 days after the post-truce political conference begins. Rhee publicly stated, immediately following the Rhee-Robertson talks, that his agreement not to obstruct the armistice is limited to this period of 90 days. He reserved the right to resume military action if the conference fails in that period to effect the unification of Korea and the withdrawal of Chinese Communist forces, and he has by no means abandoned his hope of inducing the United States to support him in such an operation. He is still pressing for a specific American commitment to back him

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up in a resumption of hostilities. There is little prospect that either problem--troop withdrawal or unification--can be solved in three months.

In failing to press for recovery of the released prisoners as a condition for a truce, the Communists gave up an instrument for promoting conflict between the UN Command and Rhee. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they do not hope for such a conflict. They may simply have found that no wedge could be driven between the UN Command and Rhee on this issue. They may thus have decided that their best prospect for inciting conflict lay in obtaining assurances from the UN Command on various points where a really substantial difference of view exists between the UN Command and Rhee.

In any case, whether the Communists do or do not desire an American - South Korean conflict, they have placed themselves in a good position to exploit whatever conflict may develop. They have adopted an attitude of sweet reasonableness in their latest statement, they have publicly bound the UN Command to firm assurances that the truce will be implemented, and they have continued their strong military build-up.

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It does not seem likely, however, that the Communists have been using the Panmunjom talks as a screen for a surprise offensive just as a truce is about to be signed. Large-scale attacks of the type which the Communists have been conducting for the past several weeks would be consistent with a genuine intention to sign the truce.

Such attacks might be explained by a Communist desire to show that they are negotiating from strength, or to gain the prestige of being on the offensive when the truce is signed, or to improve their bargaining position in the political conference, or to capture certain areas and installations (e.g., the Hwachon Reservoir power facilities) useful to either military or political warfare later.

There is a possibility, remote though it may be, that the Communists would seize on any incendiary statement by Rhee in the next few days as a pretext for launching a general offensive, or that they would take such action after a truce is signed on the pretext of some trifling violation. It seems much more likely, however, that they would delay such action

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until there was a clear violation of one of the major points on which they have received emphatic assurances from the UN Command, and until they had seen what the UN Command was going to do about it.