THE KOREAN ARMISTICE NEGOTIATIONS

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The Origins of the Negotiations

The origins of the Korean armistice negotiations date from Communist China's massive intervention in the Korean Conflict in November 1950. The Chinese move, coming at a time when victory appeared within grasp of the United Nations, created what General MacArthur described as "an entirely new war" and, as such, compelled the Truman Administration to reassess its entire war policy. From this re-evaluation came the decision to seek a truce.

The U.S. Government formulated the outline of its new policy during the trying days of November-December 1951, as the Chinese Communist armies rolled back the United Nations forces from North Korea. Two events stand out during this period: the National Security Council meeting of November 28 and President Truman's discussions with British Prime Minister Attlee from December 4 through December 8. At the National Security Council meeting, President Truman, Secretaries Acheson and Marshall, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that the United States should not respond to Peking's entry into the war by spreading the conflict to Manchuria and/or China Proper. They felt that an escalation in this direction might prompt the Soviet Union to intervene. In addition, it would hamper American plans to build up U.S. military strength in Europe, where many believed the main Communist challenge lay.[1/]

1/ Truman, Harry S. Memoirs, Vol. II. Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Co., 1956, p. 385-387.

The Truman-Attlee meetings also focused on the Korean situation. The British were anxious for peace talks and strongly pressed this point. President Truman and Secretary of State Acheson asserted their willingness to negotiate but expressed pessimism over the immediate prospects of talks, at a time when the Chinese offensive was achieving so much success. The Secretary of State was of the opinion that the Allies would have to stabilize the military situation before talks could be held; without a reversal of the Chinese thrust, the United Nations would be in no position to negotiate from "a position of strength."[1/] This viewpoint turned out to be correct.

Thus, within a short period of time, United States policy toward Korea had abruptly shifted. The final communique of the Truman-Attlee meetings expressed this change:

> For our part, we are ready, as we have always been, to seek an end to the hostilities by means of negotiation. The same principles of international conduct should be applied in this situation as are applied, in accordance with our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, to any threat to world peace. Every effort must be made to achieve the purposes of the United Nations in Korea by peaceful means and to find a solution of the Korean problem on the basis of a free and independent Korea. We are confident that the great majority of the United Nations takes the same view. If the Chinese on their side display any evidence of a similar attitude, we are hopeful that the cause of peace can be upheld. If they do not, then it will be for the peoples of the world, acting through the United Nations, to decide how the principles of the Charter can best be maintained. For our part, we declare in advance our firm resolve to uphold them. [2/]

1/ Ibid., p. 398.
2/ Ibid., p. 411-412.

The Truman Administration had now ruled out escalating the conflict as a means of pushing the Chinese out of North Korea; thus, the aim of unifying Korea, as expressed in the United Nations resolution of October 7, 1950, was, for all immediate practical purposes, shelved. Instead, the U.S. Government adopted a policy of limiting the war while attempting to contain the new Communist drive. If the United States could achieve this objective, it was prepared to seek an end to the fighting through the negotiating process.

The validity of Secretary Acheson's remarks concerning the timing of peace talks became apparent during the six months following the Truman-Attlee conversations. The Communists apparently believed at this time that they could inflict a total defeat on the United Nations forces and conquer all of Korea; thus, negotiations did not interest them. Following the initial Chinese thrust, the Communists undertook two major offensives during the first half of 1951. The first, the New Years Eve offensive, succeeded in capturing Seoul and drove the Allied forces to a line about 40 miles south of the city. At this point, however, the United Nations held and launched a counter-attack on January 25 which, by April, had pushed the Communists out of most of South Korea. On April 22, the Chinese and North Koreans began a new assault all along the line which Radio Pyongyang claimed would destroy the United Nations. Red forces once again moved across the 38th parallel, but this time they were unable to take Seoul. By May 19, the drive had expended itself.

The Chinese Communists revealed their attitude toward armistice negotiations in December and January 1950. On December 14, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution establishing a three-man group to determine the basis on which a cease fire could be arranged. Radio Peking's answer to this action amounted to a complete thumbs down on the holding of talks. In effect, Communists demanded a U.N. withdrawal from Korea, U.S. withdrawal from Formosa, an end to all Western rearmament, and recognition of the Peking regime.[1/] Nevertheless, the study group continued its work and submitted on January 11 a report calling for an immediate truce and subsequent arrangements for a political settlement of the Korean question.[2/] The General Assembly approved the report two days later and promptly forwarded it to Peking. The Chinese Communist rebuff of these proposals came in the form of a telegram from Foreign Minister Chou En-lai to the General Assembly on January 17. Chou charged that "the purpose of arranging a cease-fire first is merely to give the United States troops a breathing space." His demands included:

> (1) Negotiations should be ended among the countries concerned on the basis of agreement to the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea and the settlement of Korean domestic affairs by the Korean people themselves, in order to put an end to the hostilities in Korea at an early date.

1/ Leckie, Robert. Conflict: the history of the Korean War. New York, The Hearst Corp., 1962, p. 203.

2/ U.S. Department of State. The record on Korean unification, 1943-1960. Washington, Department of State, 1960, p. 114.

(2) The subject-matter of the negotiations must include the withdrawal of United States armed forces from Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits and Far Eastern related problems.

(3) The countries to participate in the negotiations should be the following seven countries: the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France, India and Egypt, and the rightful place of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations should be established as from the beginning of the seven-nation conference.

(4) The seven-nation conference should be held in China, at a place to be selected. 1/

This position remained basically the same until June 1951.

As the tide of battle flowed in the direction of the United Nations, following the launching of the "Ridgway offensive" of January 25, the Truman Administration decided to renew its pursuit of a negotiated settlement. In March, the Department of State drew up a statement for submission to the United Nations declaring that since the Communists had been driven back roughly across the 38th parallel, the United Nations was willing to undertake cease-fire talks. This plan, however, never came to fruition because of the MacArthur controversy and the Chinese spring offensive. The aim, nevertheless, remained unaltered.

The events which lead directly to negotiations were: (1) the United Nations offensive of May-June 1951; (2) the change in the Communist position; and (3) U.S. military-diplomatic moves to initiate truce talks.

1/ Ibid., p. 115-116.

The United Nations counter-offensive of May-June 1951 began immediately following the termination of the Communist assault on May 19. Spearheaded by the Eighth Army under General James Van Fleet, the Allies pushed the Chinese and North Koreans completely out of South Korea except for a small section in the extreme northwest. By the middle of June the United Nations had driven slightly north of the "Kansas" Line, where they had stood on April 22. Furthermore, Chinese losses were heavy. For the first time, large numbers surrendered; the United Nations took 17,000 prisoners during the last two weeks of May. The Communists also suffered an estimated 200,000 casualties.

This severe defeat apparently ended any Communist hope of conquering Korea by force of arms. Indeed, for the moment at least, the military initiative lay with the United Nations. At this juncture, Communist policy changed; they offered to negotiate. On June 23, Jacob Malik, the Soviet representative to the United Nations, proposed the opening of peace talks minus the conditions which Peking had previously attached:

> The Soviet peoples further believe that the most acute problem of the present day -- the problem of the armed conflict in Korea could also be settled. This would require the readiness of the parties to enter on the path of a peaceful settlement of the Korean question. The Soviet peoples believe that as a first step discussions should be started between the belligerents for a cease fire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the thirty-eighth parallel. 1/

1/ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. The United States and the Korean problem. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953, p. 57.

Two days later, the Peking newspaper, Peoples Daily, endorsed the Soviet position.

One can easily see the new Communist position by comparing Malik's statement with Chou En-lai's telegram of January 17. Gone are the demands that peace talks should aim at the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Formosa.

The successful United Nations counter-offensive also raised the question, particularly among American policy-makers, of military-diplomatic objectives. As stated previously, the Truman Administration held fast to its policy of seeking a negotiated armistice. Now in May and June 1951, with American and allied forces pushing into North Korea, the United States decided that the counter-offensive should aim at establishing a line north of the 38th parallel suitable for defense.[1/] American officials held the opinion that such a position, once attained, would provide maximum security to South Korea, while enhancing the prospects of cease-fire talks. Basically, this constituted the application of Acheson's "negotiations from a position of strength" principal which he had enunciated six months earlier. Thus, in May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told General Matthew Ridgway, commander of U.N. forces, not to advance beyond the vicinity of the "Kansas" line.

1/ Truman, op. cit., p. 484.

Meanwhile, the United States continued to make known its desire for truce negotiations, and these were, in turn, passed on to Moscow and Peking. Following the Malik speech and Communist China's endorsement of it, American representatives in Moscow entered into conversations with Soviet officials. Then on June 29, the National Security Council instructed General Ridgway to send a message to the Communist High Command asking for a meeting to discuss the terms of an armistice. On July 1, the day after they received Ridgway's proposal, the Chinese and North Koreans answered in the affirmative.

The Armistice Negotiations

It may be sueful at this point to examine the scope of the Korean armistice negotiations. For its part, the United States was determined to discuss only military matters with the Communists in order to achieve an early cease fire.[1/] American officials believed that an inclusion of political topics in the talks would only complicate the problem of ending the fighting and might drag out the negotiations indefinitely. The Communist position, as stated by Mr. Malik on June 23, appeared to coincide with this viewpoint. Malik pointed specifically to the need for a truce and did not reiterate the demands which Chou En-lai had set forth 5 months earlier. Furthermore, Deputy Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had assured

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1/ Ibid., p. 484.

the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow that the armistice negotiations "would be limited to strictly military questions without involving any political or territorial matters."[1/]

On July 10, 1951, the United Nations and Communist delegations met for the first time at Kaesong, a site which the Reds had suggested in their reply to Ridgway's message. The first item of business was the adoption of an agenda, and it soon became apparent that negotiating with the Chinese and North Koreans would be no easy task. North Korean General Nam Il, the head of the Communist delegation, insisted that the agenda itself make reference to the establishment of the 38th parallel as the final cease-fire demarcation line and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea. The U.N. team, lead by Admiral C. Turner Joy, rejected both of these demands on the grounds that the position of the demarcation line was a subject for negotiation and could not be pre-determined and that the issue of withdrawal of foreign troops was a political question not appropriate to the conference. After two weeks of haggling, the Communists accepted an agenda resembling that proposed by the United Nations:

(1) Adoption of agenda.

(2) Fixing a military demarcation line between both sides so as to establish a demilitarised zone as a basic condition for a cessation of hostilities in Korea.

(3) Concrete arrangements for the realisation of a cease-fire and an armistice in Korea, including the composition,

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1/ U.S. Department of State, op. cit., p. 126.

authority and functions of a supervising organisation for carrying out the terms of a cease-fire and armistice.

(4) Arrangements relating to prisoners of war.

(5) Recommendations to the governments of the countries concerned. 1/

On July 27, the two sides took up Item 2. The Communists pressed for the establishment of the 38th parallel as the demarcation line, while the United Nations proposed a line running roughly along the battle front. The Allied position was thus in accordance with the U.S. Government's goal of achieving a cease-fire along the most defensible position north of the parallel. Deadlock ensued which continued until November.

In the meantime, another controversy arose, this one over the negotiating site. The U.N. team soon realized the Kaesong was not a truly neutral zone but was, in fact, controlled by the Communists. Red troops violated the zone on several occasions, causing incidents. The Communists initially refused to admit Western newsmen in Kaesong while allowing their own reporters to roam freely; they reversed their position only after the United Nations had declined to attend the sessions without the presence of free world correspondents. In August, the Reds charged that the United Nations had dropped a napalm bomb in the conference area. When the Allies rejected the accusation, the Chinese and North Koreans broke off the talks.

1/ Rees, David. Korea: the limited war. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1954, p. 292.

While the negotiations were "recessed," the United Nations pressed for a change of the site. On September 6, General Ridgway proposed in a radio broadcast that the truce talks be moved to a more suitable place. After several meetings between liaison officers, the Communists suggested early in October that the negotiations be transferred to Panmunjom, a hamlet about 5 miles east of Kaesong. The United Nations agreed; and after liaison officers had worked out the regulations governing the new site, the conference resumed on October 25.

During September and October, the fighting had also intensified. Late in August, following the breakdown of the negotiations, the Chinese had attacked the South Koreans at "Bloody Ridge" and had achieved some success. Thereupon, the United Nations decided to counter-attack with the objectives of securing stronger positions along the battle front and inflicting heavy casualties on the Communists.[1/] Correspondent with this, the Allies launched Operation "Strangle," a major air interdiction effort designed to isolate the Red lines from the supply routes running down from the Yalu River. By November 1, the United Nations had secured what was considered to be the strongest possible defensive line north of the 38th parallel. On the whole, the offensive had been quite successful.

At this juncture, the Communists made a major concession: they agreed on October 30 to a demarcation line based on the actual line

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1/ Ibid., p. 299.

of contact. In subsequent meetings, however, they disputed the position of the battle front, claiming areas as much as 20 miles behind the U.N. lines. Admiral Joy proposed on November 5 that the final demarcation line be the line of contact at the time of the signing of the armistice. The Communists refused and demanded an immediate cease-fire, while discussion of the other agenda items proceeded.

Meanwhile, the United Nations continued the military pressure at the front. However, by now, U.S. officials believed that they could arrive at an arrangement on the demarcation line. Therefore, on November 12, General Ridgway ordered General Van Fleet to cease offensive operations.

On November 17, the United Nations made a new proposal which provided that the current battle line would constitute the demarcation line, if the two sides signed an armistice within 30 days after agreement on the proposal. If the negotiators failed to sign a truce agreement within this time period, the cease fire line would be the line of contact at the time of the initialing of the cease-fire. Ten days later, the two sides ratified the agreement.

As it turned out, the 30 days expired without the signing of a truce. Militarily, the relaxation of the U.N. pressure dating from November 12 gave the Communists a welcome opportunity to strengthen their positions along the front. By the end of 1951, they had built up a vast 14-mile deep defense network -- "deeper than anything on

the Western front in World War I"[1] -- and they continued to strengthen it throughout 1952. In fact, the new Communist network contained facilities designed for protection against nuclear attack. In effect stalemate had been achieved. Neither side could now hope to launch a major attack without suffering heavy losses in terms of both men and material. In his memoirs, President Eisenhower evaluated the Chinese defenses:

> The Chinese and North Korean Communists had sat on the same defensive line for a solid year and a half. Being diligent workers, they had done a remarkable job of digging interlaced and underground entrenchments across the entire peninsula, with positions organized in depth. They had partially overcome former logistical deficiencies by bringing in large quantities of artillery and stores of ammunition during quiet periods, and had a force in Korea superior in numbers to that of the ROK and United Nations forces combined. 2/

Thus, for the next year and a half, the fighting in Korea consisted of day to day skirmishes along the front, none of which amounted to a significant offensive effort.

Following the agreement of November 27, the negotiators turned to agenda items 3, 4, and 5. With respect to Item 5, they achieved relatively quick agreement. On February 16, 1952, the Communists submitted a draft proposal which Admiral Joy accepted the next day. It provided that the military commandors on both sides would recommend to their respective governments that a political conference on the

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1/ Ibid., p. 301.
2/ Eisenhower, Dwight D. Mandate for change, 1953-1956. Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1963, p. 179.

Korean question be held within three months after the initialing of the armisitice.

On Item 3, the U.N. team attempted to obtain agreement on an armistice commission possessed of broad powers to enforce the terms of a truce. In general, the Allied proposals were:

(1) No buildup of forces after the armistice.

(2) Formation of an armistice commission with supervisory powers to administer the agreement. The commission would have "free access to all parts of Korea" and the right of aerial reconnaissance throughout the peninsula.

(3) The construction of new airfields would be prohibited. 1/

The Communist position accepted in principal an armistice commission composed of neutral nations. The Chinese and North Koreans, however, turned thumbs down on the commission having free access to all parts of Korea and the right of aerial reconnaissance and the prohibition on airfield construction, claiming such activities would be interference in the internal affairs of North Korea. They proposed that both sides be prohibited from introducing new forces into Korea after the truce "under any pretext" and that the armistice commission be composed of the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia along with Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. The former proposal constituted a trap cleverly designed to force the withdrawal of the United Nations Army, since this provision would have prevented the

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1/ Rees, op. cit., p. 311-312.

United States and the other allied countries from rotating their troops.

In the course of these discussions, both sides eventually made concessions. The Allies dropped their demand that the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), as it would be called, have the right of free access to all parts of Korea; instead it was agreed that the body would station inspection teams at 10 ports of entry, five in the north and five in the south. The United Nations also gave in on the issue of aerial reconnaissance and ultimately agreed to permit the construction of airfields. For their part, the Communists were unable to obtain Allied consent to the inclusion of the Soviet Union on the NNSC. Under the final terms of the armistice, the commission members were Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Switzerland. The Reds also had to give up their proposal that neither side should introduce new forces into Korea. In the end, the negotiators agreed to a monthly troop rotation figure of 35,000.

Item 4, the issue of prisoner of war repatriation, proved to be the toughest obstacle to achieving a cease-fire. The first deadlock occurred over the POW lists which the two sides exchanged in December 1951. The Communist list contained the names of only 7,000 South Koreans and 3,200 Americans. Yet in March 1951, Radio Pyongyang had claimed 65,000 captives. The U.N. team immediately accused the Chinese and North Koreans of withholding information concerning approximately

50,000 South Korean Prisoners of war. General Nam Il and his colleagues professed only ignorance.

This issue was soon obscured, however, by the dispute over voluntary vs. forced repatriation. For over 15 months, the Communists insisted that all prisoners be exchanged regardless of individual wishes, while the United Nations held that prisoners had their right to refuse repatriation. In 1952, U.N. personnel screened their 132,000 Communist captives and found that only 83,000 wanted to return to Communist China and North Korea.

The Eisenhower Administration and the Conclusion of the Armistice Agreement

The advent of the Eisenhower Administration brought a change in U.S. policy toward the Korean War. During his trip to Korea in December 1950 as President-elect and in subsequent conversations with his advisers, General Eisenhower became convinced that the United States should attempt to pressure the Communists into reaching an agreement by raising the possibility of a renewal of full-scale American military operations; and this included air strikes in Manchuria and a blockade of the China coast.[1/]

Upon the assumption of office, the new President put this policy into effect. Diplomatically, the United States informed Communist China at Panmunjom and through Indian channels that this country reserved the right to escalate and expand its military effort unless

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1/ Eisenhower, op. cit., p. 179.

the opposing sides concluded a truce at an early date. Militarily, the new Administration made the following moves: (1) It moved atomic weapons to Okinawa; (2) It authorized military aid to South Korea with the objective of increasing the size of the ROK Army from 460,000 to 525,000 and organizing two new divisions; (3) The U.S. Air Force moved new units into Korea; (4) A Marine division was sent to the Far East. In addition, President Eisenhower asserted in his State of the Union message of February 1953 that the U.S. 7th Fleet would no longer screen the Chinese mainland from Chinese Nationalist attacks, although here he did disavow any offensive intentions.

The first break in the negotiations came on March 30, when Chou En-lai announced Communist China's acceptance of the principal of voluntary repatriation supervised by a neutral nation. The new Chinese stance closely resembled a proposal which India had placed before the United Nations the previous December. At that time Peking had rejected the New Delhi plan. Following Chou's declaration, the negotiating teams worked out technical arrangements for the exchange.

The exact status of the non-repatriates -- those who refused to go home -- remained unclear. On April 26, Nam Il proposed that all non-repatriates be sent to a neutral state where, during a six months period, their governments would have the opportunity to persuade them to return home. After this, the remaining non-returnees would stay in the custody of the neutral state until a post-war conference dtermined

their disposition. The United Nations team rejected this plan on the grounds that it meant possible permanent or semi-permanent internment and thus constituted an instrument to pressure the non-repatriates to change their minds. Nam Il submitted a recast proposal on May 7, but it also called for indefinite internment and was therefore turned down.

On May 23, the United Nations submitted a new plan providing for the transfer of non-repatriates to a National Nations Supervisory Commission made up of an Indian chairman and Indian forces. During a 90-120 day period, their governments could attempt to persuade them to return home. Following this, those remaining would either be released or else their disposition would be referred to the U.N. General Assembly. The Allies termed the offer their last, and the United States informed Communist China through Indian channels that it intended to resume full-scale operations, unless the two sides agreed to an armistice immediately.[1] On June 4, the Chinese and North Koreans accepted the United Nations' plan with only minor changes.

This agreement opened the way for the drawing up of the final armistice, although the Allies experienced difficulties with South Korean President Rhee and engaged in heaving fighting along the front in July. Finally, on July 27, 1953, United Nations and Communist negotiating teams initiated the truce agreement at Panmunjom.

1/ Rees, op. cit., 417-419. U.S. Department of State. The Korean problem at the Geneva Conference. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954, p. 48. At the Geneva Conference, Secretary of State Dulles asserted in a speech of April 28, 1954, that: "It came only after the Communists realized that, unless there was a quick armistice, the battle area would be enlarged so as to endanger the sources of aggression in Manchuria. Then and then only did the Communist rulers judge that it would be expedient to sign the Armistice."