

While the negotiators at Panmunjom were reaching agreement on the prisoner of war problem the government of the Republic of Korea expressed with increasing violence its opposition to the conclusion of an armistice which would leave the peninsula still divided. In a statement released in Washington on June 5, President Syngman Rhee termed unacceptable the United Nations Command proposals of May 25 which later became the basis for the agreement on the repatriation of prisoners of war. In spite of a letter to him from President Eisenhower stating that the acceptance of an armistice was required of the United Nations and of Korea, President Rhee did not retreat from his position and indeed supplemented his words with action when he connived at the release by South Korean army guards, between midnight and dawn June 18, of approximately 25,000 North Korean prisoners who had refused to be repatriated. He did this on his own responsibility even though the armed forces of his Government had on July 15, 1950, been placed by his voluntary act under the "command authority" of the United Nations Commander, and even though he had given General Clark assurances that he would take no unilateral action relating to an armistice without consultation.

The United Nations negotiators immediately informed the other side of what had occurred. At the meeting of June 20, the communist negotiators delivered a letter of protest. This letter posed three questions. Was the United Nations able to control the South Korean Government and army? If not, did the armistice in Korea include the Government of South Korea? If that Government were not included, what assurance was there for implementation of the provisions of the armistice by South Korea? The letter stated that the United Nations Command must be responsible for the immediate recovery of the escaped prisoners and must give assurances that similar incidents would not occur in future.

On June 23, the President of the General Assembly cabled President Rhee expressing his shock at the latter's unilateral action, which had violated both the repatriation agreement and President Rhee's undertaking to place the Korean armed forces under the "command authority" of the UNC. The President of the Assembly pointed out the gravity of the situation and expressed his hope that President Rhee would cooperate with the United Nations Command "in its continuing determined efforts to obtain an early and honourable armistice."

General Clark replied on June 29 to the communist negotiators, pointing out that the proposed armistice was a military agreement between the military commanders, and that the UNC did not exercise authority over the Republic of Korea, though it did command the Korean army. He assured them that the UNC would make every effort to secure the co-operation of the Government of Korea and would continue its attempts to recover the escaped prisoners of war, though it would be unrealistic to imply that any large number could be recaptured.

Meanwhile, Walter S. Robertson, United States Assistant Secretary of State, was conferring with President Rhee as the personal representative of President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles in the hope of persuading him to adopt a more favourable attitude towards the armistice proposals. As a result of the meetings the UNC was able to inform the communists that the Government of Korea had given the necessary assurances not to obstruct the implementation of the armistice agreement. On July 19 at Panmunjom the communists