CONFIDENTIAL

(March 21, 1954)

My dear Mr. President:

I have received your letter of March 11 making alternative proposals for United States support in military action to unify your country or in enlarging and strengthening your defense forces.

My letter of November 4, which Vice President Nixon gave you when he talked with you last November, expresses the position of this Government with respect to unilateral military action by your Government. As I then wrote, if you should initiate such military action, my obligation to both United States forces and to other United Nations forces would be to plan how best to prevent their becoming involved and to assure their security. I also said that in my judgment the Republic of Korea cannot alone achieve the unification of Korea by a military decision, and unilateral action by your Government would expose your armed forces to disastrous defeat and possible destruction. I well understand your concern for the misfortune of the people in North Korea living under ruthless Communist tyranny, but I believe such an attempt to unify Korea, far from freeing your compatriots in the North, could only result in needless misery and irrevocable loss to the people of your country.

Therefore, I cannot comply with your request for support in military action to unify your country.

Your alternative proposal for support in the strengthening of your defense forces has several aspects. The United States Government fully subscribes to your desire to assure the Republic of Korea sufficient means for preventing a surprise enemy break-through. We will continue to press forward with the program for training and equipping a 20-division Republic of Korea army.

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However, the real sanction against unprovoked Communist aggression in Korea is the knowledge which is conveyed in the 16-power Joint Policy Declaration and our Mutual Defense Treaty, when it comes into force, that any future aggressor will meet prompt, resolute and effective resistance. I re-emphasize to you our readiness and capacity to react instantly if the Communist forces renew hostilities. United States forces will quickly and in strength come to your assistance and powerfully strike the enemy.

As to your request for the immediate training and equipping of an additional 15 or 20 divisions, the United States Government has been studying this matter pursuant to previous requests from officials of your Government. The United States Government will expect to convey to your Government its final conclusion when full analysis has been made from the political, economic and military point of view. As a preliminary reaction, my advisors and I believe that full compliance with your request would dangerously overtax the human and material resources of your country. However, it may be feasible to develop a joint Republic of Korea-United States program to build a carefully trained and mobilizable reserve in the Republic of Korea. This essential aspect of your security would require additional study by both Governments to determine the prudent scale on which to develop such a reserve. As for the assignment of General Van Fleet, this matter can be considered to determine whether the psychological as well as the practical military benefits to be sought would justify requesting General Van Fleet to undertake such a task.

With reference to the Geneva Conference, it is of course for your Government to decide whether or not it will participate. I can only give you friendly advice based on my sincere and unshaken admiration for your patriotism and my desire that whatsoever differences may at the moment exist between our two Governments will not alienate our peoples to the serious harm of both.

A political conference to deal with the problem of Korea was one of the Armistice provisions, and it was a provision your Government accepted.

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It has taken us a long time, longer than the Armistice Agreement recommended, to get the conference set up at a place, with a composition and on terms which would not be in themselves prejudicial. We have finally succeeded. Throughout the world there are many people who sincerely believe that the opportunity thus afforded ought at least to be availed of. Very many in my own country who are dedicated friends of yours and your Government would not understand if after your protestations of desire to unify Korea, you should virtually alone of all nations on our side refuse to attend a conference, the avowed purpose of which is peacefully to create a unified and free Korea. We can all be skeptical of whether or not the conference will in fact achieve that result. However, none of us can wisely ignore the world opinion which demands that in these matters all peaceful processes should be exhausted, however remote may be the chance for success.

We on our side will of course remain faithful to the understanding, in the agreement reached between you and Secretary Dulles, which dealt with the duration of the conference. It will be our effort jointly with you to bring the issues quickly to a head and if in fact, as we must anticipate, the Communist side is unwilling peacefully to unite Korea on acceptable terms, then we must expose that fact to all of the world.

I do not foresee that our two Governments are likely to have any serious differences with respect to tactics and negotiation at the conference. However, it is important that we should concert our positions promptly. We have been holding up discussing these matters with other participants as we think that throughout there ought to be a basic Republic of Korea-United States position, but technical arrangements must be promptly settled.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower