CONFIDENTIAL

Seoul
March 11, 1954

My dear Mr. President:

I am writing this letter to point out that we have been patiently and sincerely cooperating with our Allies in their efforts to unify Korea by negotiation. With the understanding that these negotiations would last not longer than 90 days, we agreed to take no unilateral action until after that time. We had hoped that our friends would become convinced of the futility of attempting to persuade the Communists to agree to a peaceful settlement, and that they would join us in renewed military action as the only way to achieve unification. But the armistice was signed more than six months ago, and now we have nothing to look forward to except a new round of fruitless talks at Geneva.

Our Allies may find reasons to insist on these endless conferences, but we Koreans can set aside our original determination no longer. Our people of the north are dying by the thousands every day, and those who manage to survive are being removed to remote parts of Manchuria to make room for Chinese Communists. North Koreans are begging us to come and save them before all perish or are taken away to slavery. The path of our duty is therefore clear, and we feel that if we fail to answer the call, we are unworthy of assistance from either God or man.

Under these circumstances, I ask you to give your wholehearted support to our supreme effort to unify the north and the south and to drive the Chinese Communist troops from Korean soil. Our armed forces are eagerly awaiting the signal to push north, and are completely confident of victory. We ask from you only moral and material support. United Nations forces now in Korea need not actually participate in the battle, if they do not wish to do so. Koreans will take sole responsibility for the fighting. But we do need adequate arms, ammunition, and other logistics, and air and naval coverage from behind the frontlines. If you grant this request, we shall secretly arrange with General Hull a full program of implementation. When I was in Taipei, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek agreed to move his army to the mainland at the same time, and I know that he will do so. This information must, of course, be kept in strict confidence.

When Vice President Nixon was here, I promised him that I would take no unilateral action without first notifying you. I feel that the time now has come for me to give you such notification.

I should also like to call your attention to the fact that the Communists are reinforcing their armies and their air force in north Korea in total disregard of the Armistice Agreement, and that they have rejected all protests of the United Nations Command. These additional and illegal forces pose a most serious threat to the United Nations and the Republic of Korea.

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Furthermore, the United States is withdrawing two divisions from Korea and has given indication of further withdrawals. Coupled with growing enemy strength, any weakening of the Allied position constitutes an open invitation to a renewal of Communist aggression.

If you cannot comply with my requests for support in our drive to unify this country, I ask that the following alternate program be undertaken for the protection of Free Korea and its Allies:

1. Provide air and naval strength fully adequate to support the 20 divisions of the ROK Army and to assure this Republic of the means for preventing a surprise enemy breakthrough. Reinforce our divisional firepower and stockpile sufficient logistical support, including such items as ammunition and gasoline, as to enable us to stop any attack and hurl it back.

2. Undertake the immediate training and equipment of 15 to 20 additional Korean divisions with the aim of establishing a ROK Army force of from 35 to 40 divisions. Activation of the first additional divisions could be effected as replacements for departing American contingents and therefore would violate the Armistice Agreement in neither the spirit nor the letter. Rapid implementation of this program should make it possible to withdraw all United Nations Forces within six months.

3. Assign General Van Fleet to the task of training and supervising the additional ROK Army divisions. The Republic of Korea would also favor the use of his military abilities to help develop adequately trained forces throughout the Southeast Asia. General Van Fleet earlier achieved a miracle in building up the ROK Army forces, and could do the same for other Free Asian countries that wished his help. The result would be a tremendous buildup of Free Asian defenses without the commitment of United States manpower and at minimum expense. General Van Fleet himself has estimated that 25 Asian divisions can be established and maintained for the same amount of money that one American division costs.

In return for your approval of this alternate plan, we would agree not to take any unilateral action until after the completion of the program. We would also agree to the complete withdrawal of the United States and United Nations forces, and to Korean responsibility for the defense of the United States perimeter as well as of this country. It is scarcely necessary to tell you that these forces would be used only for purposes of defense. As you well know, Korea has never been an aggressor in all its 4400-year history, and I assure you it never will be.

If either of the two proposals is accepted, we shall agree to participate in the Geneva Conference.

Most sincerely,

/s/ SYNGMAN RHEE

The President
The United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C.

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