

Four Years After

FOUR years ago the American-JT sponsored Republic of South Korea succeeded in involving the United Nations in the Korean war. This world organisation became a combatant in this peninsula. This was hailed as a practical demonstration of the principle of collective security. It was then widely commented that the United Nations had succeeded where the League of Nations had failed. It had enforced the principle of collective security to deter aggression. It was made clear that the United Nations was at war in Korea to repel aggression. That objective was attained long ago when the Communists were driven beyond the Thirty-eighth parallel. Then the protracted truce negotiations began. An agreement was finally reached, and the truce could have been declared during this week. But Syngman Rhee has manoeuvred to delay the truce. So the Korean war now drags on to the fourth year.

Syngman Rhee's advisers do not lack diplomacy. He and his Government have fostered a seemingly popular campaign for unification of Korea. But he does not officially plead this as an excuse for his rejection of the truce agreement. He knows that unification of Korea begs all the political issues involved in the Korean war. He has the preposterous audacity to argue that he is doing what the United Nations should have done. He pretends that he has released the Communist war prisoners to protect their human rights. In anticipation of the argument that this unilateral action prejudices the chances of Korean truce the South Korean President retorts that he does not expect the United Nations' forces to continue the war in Korea, but that he reserves the right to act for the survival of South Korea.

Syngman Rhee has proposed his "terms" for accepting the truce agreement. His offer is coupled with a threat that if Indian troops land to take over custody of the prisoners-of-war, the South Korean forces will oppose them. Syngman Rhee is as obstinate as he is ingenious. Lest any such threat be interpreted as open military defiance of the United Nations, he claims that South Korea will automatically be free from control of the United Nations the moment the truce is declared. Implication is that, with the declaration of truce, the South Korean forces will no longer be

under the UN "Command and that these forces would then be free, to act as ordered by their Government.

Syngman Rhee's hostile actions and threats raise a fundamental issue of principle. Can South Korea be allowed to wreck a truce decided by the United Nations without the world organisation enforcing military sanction to compel South Korea to abide by the decisions taken by it? If the United Nations were right in enforcing the principle of collective security against aggression by North Korea, is not this world organisation doing harm to its prestige by tolerating defiance to it by South Korea? This was what Britain's Prime Minister had in mind when he warned that the world organisation cannot "cast away the fruits" of its resistance to aggression. He warned the South Korean President that unless his Government honoured its undertakings to the United Nations, these fruits including South Korea's safety would be in jeopardy. Sir Winston Churchill, a realist, issued a stern warning that it might be necessary to mobilise the United Nations' military strength "to enforce the policy of peace and good faith".

South Korea's hostile reception to Sir Winston's clear warning is understandable. But it is a serious reflection on the lack of conviction in the moral authority of the United Nations that his warnings have created consternation in some quarters. Suggestions have been made that it might be risky for the United Nations to take any action so drastic as to overthrow the Rhee regime to enforce the decision already taken by it. It is conceded that, if Syngman Rhee succeeds ultimately in sabotaging the truce, the UN Assembly will have to meet. But it is not a little strange that it is seriously argued in some quarters that the Assembly will either have to decide to keep trying or withdraw. Any withdrawal by the United Nations under the threat of Syngman Rhee will deal a serious blow to the prestige of this world organisation. This is realised, but it is hoped that America, who is acting on behalf of the United Nations in Korea, will succeed in forcing Syngman Rhee to obedience.

Both the Indian and the British Prime Ministers have had occasion recently to pay tribute to President Eisenhower for his determined stand in Korea. Recent developments re-

veal the American President's courage and statesmanship in implementing the principles of the United Nations. On behalf of the United Nations America has issued an ultimatum to Syngman Rhee to agree to "the Korean truce, and to help recover the prisoners-of-war. President Eisenhower is wise in his firm stand on this particular issue. It must have come as a surprise to many that Syngman Rhee's action and threats have not created a more hostile reaction among the Communists. This may reflect their eager desire for peace at a high price. But there are other possible consequences which may have far reaching effects. If Syngman Rhee is allowed to wreck the truce the Communists will be justified in making propaganda that the United Nations' signature is not worth the paper on which it is affixed. Britain's Prime Minister and the American President have the sense to realise its sinister implications although those who are impressed with Rhee's anti-Communist outbursts fail to acknowledge them.

This is the wider background against which Syngman Rhee's "terms" are to be assessed. There is nothing new in his demand for a mutual security pact between the United States and South Korea. His demand for the withdrawal of Chinese Communist forces from Korea is also known. But his alternative proposal to this demand is intriguing. His proposal is that if the Communists refuse to withdraw from Korea without the withdrawal of the United Nations' forces, there should, then, be simultaneous withdrawal of Chinese and United Nations forces from Korea. His alternative proposal will be widely endorsed. This is the ultimate aim of the United Nations. Syngman Rhee is right in anticipating that the Communists will not agree to withdraw without a simultaneous withdrawal of the United Nations forces. He has made this alternative offer in the secure knowledge that without the aid of the United Nations forces, he and his regime would be protected under the proposed mutual security pact between America and South Korea.

To secure Rhee's support to the prisoners-of-war agreement President Eisenhower had already proposed such a mutual security pact. Later reports indicated that he had threatened to withdraw the offer in

protest against Syngman Rhee's release of North Korean war prisoners. America has an effective weapon in her armoury to compel the Rhee clique to accept the decisions of the United Nations in Korea. South Korea is entitled to ensure its protection against any aggressor, America has entered into national security pacts with many countries. She is free to conclude a similar pact with South Korea. But any such mutual pact raises all the political problems involved in Korea and the Far East. Neither China nor Russia is a signatory to the Japanese peace treaty. Nor has India accepted the San Francisco treaty with Japan. The Japanese peace treaty has created more problems than it has solved. A mutual security pact between America and South Korea will have similar consequences.

This raises the third condition proposed by Syngman Rhee for his acceptance of the Korean truce. He proposes that the political conference to be held after the armistice should reach a decision within ninety days, and if the conference fails to reach a satisfactory peace settlement within this time limit the armistice should be called off. There is nothing wrong in fixing a time-limit for the conference. It cannot be allowed to drag on for ever in order to perpetuate the twilight between war and peace in Korea, even as prisoners-of-war cannot be kept in permanent captivity. The Communists have agreed to a time limit for the settlement of the question of repatriation of prisoners-of-war. They are not likely to object to Syngman Rhee's proposal for a time limit for the political conference. Whether it would be possible for the conference to reach a satisfactory peace settlement is the more crucial question.

Two questions arise. It is possible that South Korea and, perhaps, America will argue that non-Korean issues cannot be discussed by this political conference. The Communists, however, are known to have claimed that the wording of the specific provision of the armistice agreement entitle them to include Formosa and wider Far Eastern problems under discussion by this conference. There is the more vital question of Red China's admission to the United Nations. Recent statements by Commonwealth Premier's suggest that they favour a just solution of these questions. There is another set of problems. Even if these issues are sought to be excluded from the agenda of the confer-

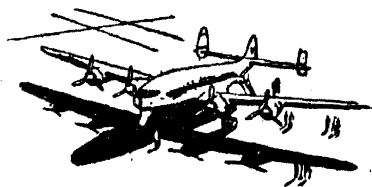
ence, it must include all issues relating to the political future of Korea. Unification of Korea is one of them. China's abiding political and strategic interest in the neighbouring islands of Korea and of Formosa is another. Who is to decide how these problems can be justly settled? Certainly, not the Rhee Government. It is necessary, first to leave Syngman Rhee in no doubt that the United Nations is the world orga-

nisation responsible for concluding a truce in Korea and that no State or a clique within any State, can be allowed to disobey its decision. It will be necessary, next, to make it clear to Syngman Rhee that the political issues involved in "Korea will be settled by the United Nations according to the realities of the situation, without any regard to the preposterous claims by the Rhee clique.

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