

July 7, 1953
**National Security Council Report, NSC 157/1, 'US
Objective with Respect to Korea Following an
Armistice'**

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Summary:

NSC 157/1 analyzes the situation following the armistice in Korea and the problem of Korea's division in half. The report analyzes the North Korea/Communist, US, and South Korean positions regarding reunification. Although a unified Korea allied militarily with the US is not seen as a possibility, the report concludes that it might still be possible to achieve "a unified, neutralized Korea under a substantially unchanged ROK [South Korea]."

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*Report by the National Security Council¹*TOP SECRET
NSC 157/1

WASHINGTON, July 7, 1953.

U.S. OBJECTIVE WITH RESPECT TO KOREA FOLLOWING AN ARMISTICE

THE PROBLEM

1. To determine the basic U.S. objective with respect to Korea.

ASSUMPTION

2. An armistice is concluded.

DISCUSSION

3. *Background.* The armistice terms call for a political conference on Korea within 90 days after the signing of the armistice. The conference will be between the Communists and the UN, with the Republic of Korea associated with the latter. U.S. tactics should be determined in the light of what the U.S. basic objective is with respect to Korea, within the limits of the feasible: The achievement of a unified Korea under the Republic of Korea, tied into the U.S. security system and developed as a military ally, is not a practical possibility under present circumstances. This objective could be achieved only by the forceful expulsion of the Communists from Korea and was in effect relinquished when the present armistice was accepted.

4. *Alternative Feasible Objectives.*

a. A Korea divided for an indefinite period on the present demarkation line with the Republic of Korea tied into the U.S. security system and developed as a military ally.

b. A unified, neutralized Korea under a substantially unchanged ROK. (Such an objective would entail Communist agreement to a unified Korea with a U.S. political orientation in exchange for U.S. agreement to remove U.S. forces and bases from Korea and not to conclude a mutual security pact with Korea. This objective should also

¹ In a covering memorandum to the NSC, July 7, Gleason explained that the NSC, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Director, Bureau of the Budget, adopted the Conclusion and Recommendation contained in paragraph 9 of this report. President Eisenhower on July 3 approved the Conclusion and Recommendation and directed its implementation by all appropriate Executive departments and agencies under the coordination of the Secretary of State.

ARMISTICE ATTAINED

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involve guarantees for the territorial and political integrity of a unified Korea under the ROK and its admission to the UN and possibly would involve limitations on the level and character of the ROK defense forces.)

5. *Communist Position.* The Communist acceptance of the present armistice indicates that they would be prepared to acquiesce in the first alternative which would in effect represent a continuation of the *status quo*. The Communists might conceivably regard the second alternative as preferable to the first. The Communists have little to fear from the Koreans themselves, who occupy a small country disorganized and weakened by war and entertain no irredentist aspirations at the expense of China or Siberia. Communist concern over Korea arises primarily from the fact that it could serve as a base or jump-off place for U.S., or perhaps ultimately Japanese, power. Even though the unification of Korea on a neutralized basis would mean the sacrifice of the satellite North Korean regime and of considerable prestige, the Communists might possibly be prepared to accept this sacrifice as a means of preventing the establishment of U.S. bases within a few hundred miles of Manchurian and North Chinese industrial, transportation, and port facilities. Moreover, the Communists would rid themselves of an economic liability which North Korea, as a result of the war, would represent for some time to come. From the global point of view the Communists might conceive of a Korean settlement of this kind as providing an opportunity for "deeds" of a peaceful nature which might not be of net disadvantage to themselves.

6. *The Position of U.S. Allies.* Most of the nations of the free world, both European and Asian, would probably be strongly in favor of the neutralization of Korea both because such a settlement would appear to remove an area of dangerous friction between the U.S. and the Communist world and thus reduce the danger of general war and because the creation of a strong U.S. position in South Korea would result in a drain on U.S. resources which otherwise would be available for investment elsewhere. Nationalist China, which tends to fear any relaxation of tension between Communist China and the U.S., would doubtless regard unfavorably the neutralization of Korea. The Japanese, on the whole, would support such neutralization.

7. *The Position of the ROK.* The strong and highly emotional objections of President Syngman Rhee and the people of the ROK to any continuation of the division of Korea have been made abundantly plain. A settlement providing for a united and independent Korea under the ROK could be expected to appeal to them in meeting their primary objectives. It is possible that President Rhee would rather be the liberator and unifier of his country than President of a truncated Korea, even though this Korea were allied with the U.S. Even though Rhee might place little value on any Communist guarantees, he might consider that

a guarantee of Korea's integrity by both the U.S. and the Communist bloc would provide Korea with adequate security.

8. *U.S. Interest as Between the Two Feasible Alternatives.* An independent and united Korea has been a constant U.S. political objective. This objective can now feasibly be achieved only through the neutralization of Korea. The relinquishment of its military position in Korea which would result from neutralization would not be critical for the U.S. In the event of general war, the desirability of attempting to defend Korea would be problematical. With respect to the danger of local aggression against Korea it would in any case be only the prospect of retaliation by the U.S. forces that would deter such aggression. The danger of internal subversion or indirect aggression in Korea could and should be countered by adequate Korean security forces and U.S. covert activity and economic assistance. On the positive side, the security of Japan would be favored by the withdrawal of Communist military power (including air forces) beyond the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. The savings made possible for the U.S. by its being relieved of the necessity of supporting U.S. bases in Korea and large, heavily-armed Korean forces would make possible a strengthening of the military position of the free world in other areas. The unification of Korea would probably be generally regarded as a significant accomplishment by the United Nations, to the enhancement of its prestige. The unification of Korea under the ROK, even on a neutralized basis, would probably also be widely regarded as a more constructive result of the war and more to the credit of the U.S. than the restitution of the *status quo ante*.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

9. It is in the interest of the United States and should be the U.S. objective to secure a unified and neutralized Korea under a substantially unchanged ROK. Such an objective would entail Communist agreement to a unified Korea with U.S. political orientation, in exchange for U.S. agreement to remove U.S. forces and bases from Korea and not to conclude a mutual security pact with Korea. This objective should also involve guarantees for the territorial and political integrity of a unified Korea under the ROK, the admission of the ROK to the UN, and ROK military forces sufficient for internal security and capable of defending Korean territory short of an attack by a major power.