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Today And Tomorrow . . . By Walter Lippmann

Surprised Again

THE CONTROLLING fact, to which we must adjust ourselves, is that since Dr. Rhee has deprived Gen. Clark of his command and authority over the South Korean troops, the United Nations does not have the authority to speak for the Rhee government in war or peace. The rupture is complete. Almost certainly it is irrepairable.



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FOR DR. RHEE carried out his decisions behind a screen of deliberate deception. In order to prevent the U. N. commander from taking measures to forestall the violation of his authority and the release of the prisoners, Dr. Rhee gave his personal assurance to Gen. Clark and to Mr. Briggs, our Ambassador, that he would not do what he was in fact secretly getting ready to do.

The Rhee government admits this. On Saturday the acting Prime Minister wrote to Gen. Clark that they had deliberately broken their promise to consult him before taking any unilateral action. The reason given for this deception was, however, as false and as full of guile as was the original promise. "Even to be consulted, however slightly," wrote the acting Prime Minister, "about our own contemplated action would have been unbearably embarrassing to you." The real reason, of course, for deceiving Gen. Clark was not to save him embarrassment but to keep him from taking preventive action.

WHAT, IN VIEW of all this, are to be our relations with the Rhee government? The situation is unprecedented, cer-

tainly in our experience. For while we have no authority that Dr. Rhee recognizes, we are in a thousand different ways entangled with his government, his army, and his people. We cannot sign an armistice which binds him. And in the unlikely event that he himself agreed to the armistice, his promise cannot be relied upon. On the other hand, if we sign an armistice without him, we cannot permit him to continue the war. For if his front were broken, as almost certainly it would be, the position of the U. N. troops in South Korea would be gravely threatened.

The crux of the matter is that Dr. Rhee is demanding a free hand for himself whereas we are much too deeply engaged in Korea to be able to give him a free hand. We cannot let him fight his own separate war. Much less can we supply him with the munitions to fight his war with him and for him and under him. We cannot leave Korea now without abandoning it first to anarchy and then to absorption into the Communist orbit. We cannot stay in Korea with the Communists, whom we dare not trust, in front of us, and with the Rhee government, which cannot be trusted, behind us.

KOREA IS too small a place for two contradictory military commands, for two contradictory military operations and for two contradictory policies. The one or the other—his or ours—is going to have to prevail. Since we cannot yield to Dr. Rhee, we are compelled to assert our own authority over his government and over South Korea. If we do not assert our own authority, we shall expose our troops to serious trouble, and we shall jeopardize all the great interests which we and the other United Nations have paid such a heavy price to maintain.

THIS IS A bitter experience, all the more so because it is not the first time in recent years that we have been surprised at a critical moment. There was Pearl Harbor. There was the original North Korean aggression in June, 1950. There was the Chinese intervention in November, 1950. And now there is this affair. All these four surprises have been very costly and very embarrassing, and we must ask ourselves whether there are elements common to all of them which might teach us something for the future.

In all four cases there was ample warning in advance to have called for the utmost alertness and caution. It was known that the Japanese fleet was on the move. It was known that there was a buildup in North Korea. There was explicit warning from Peking and through diplomatic channels that the Chinese would intervene if Gen. MacArthur crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. Dr. Rhee and his National Assembly have announced publicly that they would not accept the armistice.

IN ALL FOUR cases the warnings were disregarded. And in all four, it would appear, they were disregarded because our high command had too much confidence in its own preconceived ideas—as to what the Japanese naval strategy ought to be, as to what the North Koreans were up to, as to the unreliability of information from the Indian ambassador in Peking, as to the sincerity of Dr. Rhee's personal attachment to the United States Government.

If these are the errors of immaturity and inexperience, as indeed they are, there can be no doubt that we shall outgrow them eventually. But enough is getting to be enough.