A Fly in Amber: Carter's Korea Troop Withdrawal & The Recasting of U.S. Hegemony and Korean Agency

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Abstract

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During the long 1970s, the U.S.-ROK alliance underwent a highly contested process of reassessment and restructuring. President Jimmy Carter's troop withdrawal policy was an important episode during which this larger process crescendoed, resulting in a more mature if still hierarchical alliance relationship. Emerging out of the earlier Nixon Doctrine and Vietnam withdrawals, Carter aimed to make more flexible the U.S. military presence in South Korea and pass a greater share of the defense burden onto Seoul, without at the same time undermining U.S. credibility and control. As it happened, Carter faced enormous opposition and ultimately failed to execute his policy.

Many within the U.S. foreign policy and national security bureaucracy viewed U.S. combat forces in South Korea as so deeply embedded within a wider hegemonic structure in East Asia that they could not be withdrawn without undoing that very structure. Despite the ultimate cancelation of the policy, examination of previously unavailable U.S. and Korean documents and oral history and field interviews, reveals that the policy processes itself produced several important outcomes, namely: the reconstitution of a patron-client relationship into a more relatively equal and integrated one; enhancement of ROK defense capabilities and operational decision-making within a new

alliance command architecture; and emergence of a more assertive nationalism and even anti-Americanism among both conservative and opposition elements within South Korea. These outcomes represented a key turning point in the alliance and remain salient today.

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There are others, many others. They all shaped this project. It stands on their support. All the errors, though, are my own.

DEDICATION

To Bill’s friends and the Korean people

A Fly in Amber: Carter's Korea Troop Withdrawal & The Recasting of U.S. Hegemony and Korean Agency

Introduction

Upon entering office in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter quickly moved to implement his campaign promise to remove all U.S. ground combat forces from the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea). Nevertheless, by mid-1979 Carter's troop withdrawal policy had come to naught. On July 20, 1979, Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, announced that further troop withdrawals would be put in "abeyance," and that the timing and pace of further withdrawals would be reexamined in 1981. [1] Nevertheless, the language of abeyance notwithstanding, most observers understood Brzezinski's announcement spelled the end of what many perceived to be a precipitous, even impetuous withdrawal policy. Of course, Carter was soundly defeated by Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election, following which the latter quickly embraced Seoul's newly-minted authoritarian Chun Do Hwan at the White House and firmly put to rest any further discussion of U.S. troop withdrawals from South Korea. Indeed, Reagan would end up increasing deployments.

There is no single reason for why Carter failed to execute his policy. He failed, in part, due to how he attempted to implement it and the opposition aroused by his approach. In this respect, of central concern to various actors involved was the lack of diplomatic effort by Carter preceding

[1] "Jimmy Carter: United States Withdrawals From the Republic of Korea Statement by the President," accessed August 15, 2016, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32622; Rich writes: "Although conveyed in a manner which emphasized that the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces remained in principle a policy goal, this was no mere temporary hold on withdrawals as announced in February…all important withdrawals were now completely held in abeyance at least for two years, or until after the conclusion of the new policy review which would be held in the Spring of 1981 (either the first year of Carter's second term or the first term of a new administration)," see, Robert G. Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea: A Case Study in Nation Security Decision Making," Nautilus Institute: For Security and Sustainability. September 27, 2012. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://nautilus.org/foia-document/u-s-ground-force-withdrawal-from-korea-a-case-study-in-nation-security-decision-making/, 30.

the announcement of the withdrawal policy. To many, Carter was putting the cart before the horse by pushing for the ground force withdrawal before fostering or achieving a more stable diplomatic settlement between North and South Korea, Washington and Pyongyang, or among the regional powers. Observers also perceived the policy as moving too fast and too soon. Seoul still needed time to develop its own defense capabilities and complete its ongoing Force Improvement Program (FIP) before taking on the additional burdens borne of the withdrawal program. The four-to-five-year timeline for the withdrawal was considered too fast, and thus faulted for being pre-fixed and seemingly arbitrary rather than determined by conditions on the ground. Lastly, observers criticized how Carter failed to properly consult the several concerned parties involved before announcing the policy: from his own foreign and national security bureaucracy, to Congress, to allied governments in Seoul, Tokyo and other reginal capitals. From this perspective, Carter's troop withdrawal went from a poorly-vetted campaign promise directly to a predetermined and unilaterally introduced policy.

In addition to opposition borne of his approach, Carter also failed due to several important near-term variables, which complicated the implementation of the withdrawal. First, there were issues in Congress. The emergence of the Koreagate scandal created tensions in the U.S.-ROK relationship at the highest levels of government but also soured congressional attitudes toward Seoul. This led lawmakers to oppose consideration of the military transfer legislation that was an essential element of Carter's withdrawal program, both due to their disapproval of Seoul's actions as well as concern regarding the possible political costs of supporting such massive aid in light of the Korean influence-buying controversy.

Moreover, a vocal minority of new internationalist lawmakers were opposed to the withdrawal on human rights grounds. Not only were they against further provision of military

assistance to the authoritarian government of Park Chung Hee, but they also saw the withdrawal as decreasing Washington's leverage over Park while simultaneously increasing his sense of insecurity. From their perspective, the withdrawal threatened to spur worse political repression in its wake, much as President Nixon's 1971 withdrawal had factored into the onset of Park's *Yushin* system. Lastly, there were a notable number of representatives and senators opposed to the withdrawal *per se*, who believed the policy needed to be fundamentally reconsidered. Due to the legislative logjam borne of the confluence of these various groups' misgivings, Carter was forced in April 1978 into his first official alteration of the policy, announcing the initial phase of the withdrawal would be drawn-out or extended. Instead of removing one full combat brigade by the end of 1978, the administration would only remove one battalion (roughly 800 men) and various non-combat support elements. As it turned out, these were the only ground combat troops removed during Carter's term of office.

A second important proximate variable was the emergence and leak in late 1978 of new intelligence estimates on North Korea's order of battle.[2] The new estimates showed Pyongyang possessed larger, more heavily armed, and more offensively deployed forces than previously thought. In fact, intelligence reports to this effect had preceded Carter's arrival in office and were part of the administration's initial policy review and underpinned certain officials' early opposition to the policy. However, the new estimates did not achieve consensus within the U.S. intelligence community and among the informed public until late 1978 or early 1979. At that point and in combination with extant doubts about the policy itself, Carter was forced to initiate another internal

[2] An order of battle, Wood writes: "is a systematic tabulation of numbers and locations of personnel and equipment for a given nation or military unit. They are usually divided functionally into ground, naval, and air orders of battle," see: Joe Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President: Jimmy Carter and American Troops in Korea," CIA: Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, accessed December 10, 2015, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0006122495.pdf, 111.

review of U.S. Korea policy, leading to the withdrawal program's ultimate abeyance; code, most observers understood, for its cancellation.

A third factor, beyond the more Korea-specific variables above, was the broader shift in Carter's foreign policy. Initially, Carter entered office intent to further a process begun before his administration of de-emphasizing East-West confrontation within a more complex, post-Vietnam international order. Yet, due to a series of international crises, a resurgent Soviet threat abroad, an assurgent neoconservatism at home, and the gradual ascendance of Zbigniew Brzezinski's more hardline views over those of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Carter turned back toward a more orthodox Cold War policy orientation. By 1979, the character of the Carter Administration's foreign policy had "change radically…continuing and completing a shift which had begun in 1978."[3] As a consequence, the withdrawal program, which critics had long characterized as a sign of American retreat, was further branded as a dangerous indication of American weakness at a time of enhanced Soviet Far Eastern deployments and increasing instability among U.S. allies.

These factors, from the nature of Carter's approach to the policy to the several Korea-specific and international developments outlined above, were all important variables, which help to explain his failure to implement the withdrawal. However, back of these several more proximate or near-term variables, were more significant obstacles to Carter's policy; obstacles borne of several basic patterns deeply embedded in the U.S.-ROK relationship, which made it highly resistant to change.

Existing Accounts & Contribution

[3] Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 9.

This dissertation builds upon various secondary accounts of Carter's withdrawal policy. The most thorough accounts are, single book or dissertation chapters in larger works on modern U.S.-Korea relations. These accounts often examine the withdrawal as one of several important elements of the relationship in the 1970s.[4] Additionally, several books, which focus on the Carter Administration's overall foreign policy, offer more condensed accounts of the troop withdrawal policy. These accounts situate it among a wider range of the administration policies, which received more attention than U.S. Korea policy under Carter. Although brief, these respective accounts do a fair job relating the withdrawal policy to patterns in Carter's leadership and management style, the administration's bureaucratic culture, its relationship with Congress, and also in relation to the highly contested domestic political currents at that time, which sandwiched Carter between the liberal leftwing of his own party and an ascendant neoconservatism on his right.[5] There are also several individual memoirs, which offer insightful if also relatively brief accounts of the withdrawal policy.[6] Lastly, there is a dissertation, a Master's thesis, and several peer-reviewed journal articles that center more directly on the policy itself.[7]

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[4] Representative examples include: Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001); Chae-Jin Lee and Hideo Sato, *U.S. Policy toward Japan and Korea : A Changing Influence Relationship* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1982); Chae-Jin Lee, *A Troubled Peace : U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Joo-Hong Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Peter J. Hayes, "Pacific Powderkeg: Amreican Nuclear Dilemma in Korea," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1989);

[5] For more recent accounts of the Carter Administration's foreign policy, see: Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); for a concise but helpful summary of other works on Carter's foreign and national security policy, see Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 3-4.

[6] William H. Gleysteen Jr., *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Harold Brown and Joyce Winslow, *Star Spangled Security: Applying Lessons Learned over Six Decades Safeguarding America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012); James V. Young and William Whitney Stueck, *Eye on Korea : An Insider Account of Korean-American Relations* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003).

[7] Tae Hwan Ok, "President Carter's Korean Withdrawal Policy," (Ph.D. dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 1990); Aaron Brown Savage, "The Pains of Withdrawal: Carter and Korea, 1976-1980," (M.A. thesis, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, 2011); Lyong Choi, "Human Rights, Popular Protest, and Jimmy Carter's Plan to Withdraw U.S. Troops from South Korea," *Diplomatic History 41, no.5 (March 2017):* 933-958.

Existing accounts describe, explain or frame Carter's withdrawal policy in various ways. Some provide a roughly chronological narrative of Carter's policy without a unifying logic or interpretive framework. Others give too much causal weight to short-term variables in explaining Carter's inability to carry-out his policy. For example, some emphasize the president's management style, his relationship with Congress, bureaucratic politics within Washington D.C., or the several Korea-specific developments mentioned above, namely, the Koreagate scandal, increasing human rights criticisms of Park's *Yushin* system, and the emergence of new intelligence reports on North Korean, all of which complicated or cast doubt upon the withdrawal. These are all important factors, and no account of Carter's policy, including the present project, would be complete without incorporating them.

The present project improves upon and contributes to the existing literature in several salient ways. First, it fills an historical gap. Although there are existing accounts, almost none of them adopts Carter's withdrawal policy as its guiding or central focus; this project does.[8] Whereas most existing accounts understandably frame Carter's policy as one part of a larger tapestry of issues in the U.S.-ROK relationship (which, of course, it was), the current project essentially inverts that by examining the withdrawal policy intensely to get a sense of deeper patterns in the relationship. As a result, the present account provides the most authoritative, deep-descriptive account yet of Carter's withdrawal policy, calling on a more extensive array of empirical sources than other accounts.

Second, in addition to offering a more thorough account, this dissertation project improves upon existing accounts by situating Carter's policy within a larger protracted effort by successive

[8] The two exceptions to this are the Master's thesis and dissertation cited above. However, the former is a relatively limited account, while the latter was published nearly thirty years ago and did not have access to a diverse trove of recently released and declassified documents.

administrations in the 1970s to recast U.S. hegemony in a changing international system.[9] The president's withdrawal policy was a specific attempt within this larger transformation, and demonstrates the contradictions and limitations therein. This approach takes it cue from Gaddis Smith's work on the Carter's administration's diplomacy, which, although written only five years after Carter's term ended, remains one of the more concise and cogent analyses of Carter's consequential if fraught administration.

Smith argues the uniqueness of the administration's foreign policy was rooted in the intensity and multiplicity of the issues addressed, not in the novelty of the issues themselves. He writes: "Every idea, every objective, every achievement, and every failure was tied to previous American experience and international events. Thus…one cannot understand the Carter years except in the long context of the twentieth century. Conversely, one can understand the sweep of American foreign policy in the twentieth century better after a close examination of how perennial themes and problems were expressed or confronted in the Carter years." [10] The present study is less ambitious and more focused, but adopts a similar framing.

The ideas, objectives, achievements, and failures of Carter's approach to Korea, in particular related to his withdrawal policy, were tied to those of previous administrations, and thus one cannot properly understand his withdrawal policy without situating it in a longer process. Moreover, because of the highly contested nature of his withdrawal policy, one can better understand the longer sweep of U.S.-ROK relations in the 1970s following a close examination of the policy itself. During the long 1970s (1968-1981), the U.S.-ROK alliance underwent a highly contested process of reassessment and restructuring. Initiated late in the Johnson Administration,

[9] For a comprehensive examination of this larger effort across the Nixon, Ford and Carter Administrations during the long-1970s, see, Daniel J. Sargent, Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[10] Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 4.

continuing with the Guam Doctrine and President Nixon's withdrawal of one of two remaining U.S. Army divisions from South Korea in 1971, and traversing the Ford interlude, this process crescendoed under Carter with his troop withdrawal policy. The result was a more mature if still hierarchical relationship. Moreover, the outcomes and logics inbuilt in the process remain salient today, forty years later.

Third, and finally, the present project differs from other historical accounts insofar as it uses a more explicit conceptual framework. Although not a theoretical work, it calls on aspects of constructivist IR theory, critical historiography, and elements of historical institutionalism, and employs concepts of hierarchy and hegemony (what Martin Lefler calls preponderance) and critical conceptions of sovereignty to frame the narrative.[11] These critical theoretical frames help identify basic patterns in the U.S.-South Korea relationship; patterns which were seared firmly in place by the Korean War, reaffirmed or reconstituted over time in a path-dependent manner, and played a crucial role in Carter's failure to execute his policy.

What is meant by Basic Patterns?

Before setting forth the basic pattern of the U.S.-ROK relationship, it is important to clarify exactly what is meant by *basic*. First, basic means fundamental. These patterns are inherent qualities of the relationship; ones that are essential to it. They are evident from the earliest days of the relationship. Second, following certain principles from historical institutionalism, basic means enduring. The patterns are sticky. Official policy and thinking are mediated in decisive ways by these patterns, which were constituted in a specific historical context, at a specific historical moment, a critical juncture. However, they maintain their salience after the initial context and

[11] Melvin P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

conditions evolved and even dissipated. They exhibit path dependent characteristics and exist in a historical process, through which they are reconstituted, until some shock or upheaval introduces opportunity for change. They also facilitate or constrain the actions of groups and individuals but never completely.[12]

Third, basic means that the patterns operate on an almost unconscious, taken-for-granted, level. Having said that, they are still regularly invoked openly by officials in the policymaking process over time. They can be observed and traced in the discourse and texts surrounding the relationship, both public and private. However, to be clear, none of the participants or policymakers themselves describe these patterns as such. Rather, the language of basic patterns is my own. Fourth, the patterns are particularly evident when they are contested or challenged, during periods when the U.S.-ROK relationship undergoes pressures for change.

Basic Patterns in the U.S.-ROK Relationship

The basic patterns of the U.S.-ROK relationship are rooted in its foundational years, 1945-1954. The period began with the landing of the U.S. XXIV Corps lead by General John R. Hodge in September 1945, and ended with the final codification of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty and its Agreed Minute in November 1954. These patterns developed and were solidified during this period, and emerged from several consecutive and interconnected roles the U.S. played, namely: as liberator, occupier, creator, savior and protector. The Korean War was the essential critical juncture, which not only reaffirmed earlier, pre-war developments and policies, but also more fully institutionalized them as essential elements of the U.S.-South Korea relationship. What follows is an outline of these basic patterns, organized along a three-part, tiered framework:

[12] For an excellent description of historical institutionalism and its key concepts see: Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

international & regional; bilateral, peninsular; domestic-level. Importantly, the outline also grounds each pattern within larger critical historiographical and conceptual critiques.

International & Regional Patterns

The first basic pattern is *the U.S. relationship with the ROK is almost entirely derivative of broader interests.* From the perspective of U.S. strategists and policymakers, southern and later South Korea possessed no inherent value. In fact, it was considered a strategic liability, one to disengage from as quickly as possible and even bypass in the case of a wider war with the Soviet Union. However, soon after General Hodge and the XXIV Corps arrived to disarm Japanese Imperial forces, the U.S. approach to Korea became tied to wider Cold War imperatives.

The first larger imperative was the security of Japan, which was of crucial importance to emergent Cold War strategic and political-economic thinking. This included Kennan's strategic containment vision, wherein Japan was one of five basic power bases or industrial nodes, four of which were under U.S. control. For Kennan, the "main task of containment" was to make sure Japan (and the remaining core states) did not fall under Soviet control.[13] In political-economy terms, Japan along with Western Europe was a key regional economy and engine of growth in Dean Acheson's world-economy vision. Japan's reconstruction was directly linked to a larger US political-economic vision that deliberately sought the creation of a tiered global economy, which stitched together the U.S. market (as core) with key regional industrial nodes, namely, Germany and Japan (as regional cores).[14]

[13] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.

[14] Significantly, Acheson's vision possessed its own logic, independent of the emergent strategic and ideological bipolar cold war standoff. It was grounded in the imperative of free-market capitalist expansion, which was itself borne of the expansionist origins of the American state. For a thorough examination of this theme and the critical review of related historiography, see: Perry Anderson, "Imperium," *New Left Review* 83 (2013): 5-111.

U.S. policy toward South Korea fit within both visions: first, South Korea was to be built up as one of several pro-western, anti-communist, and, as Gaddis wrote, "independent centres of power" with "both the means and will" to resist Soviet or Soviet–inspired pressure; second, it was linked to the U.S. plan to replenish Japan as a regional economy integrated within the U.S.-led capitalist "grand area."[15] The U.S. supplied large amounts of agricultural aid, which was meant to transform the ROK into a supplier of surplus rice for Japan's own industrial recovery. (Lee, 13) However, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which the heavily militarizing effect of the Korean War, in the near-term South Korea became more security-bulwark than economic appendage.

This points to a second larger interest, namely, the Korean Peninsula as a key strategic outpost in the wider bipolar conflict. For the U.S., the Korean Peninsula became a key bulwark both as part of its own overall forces but also in terms of the supplementary role of the ROK military itself. As noted, U.S. military strategists viewed the peninsula as a strategic liability, militarily inconsequential in and of itself. However, due to several notable shifts in the international system, the globalized reconceptualization of national security embodied in NSC-68, and the catalyzing effect of the Korean War, the U.S. peninsular deployment took on increased importance. Although the immediate purpose of U.S. forces was deterrence of further Communist aggression, they fit within a larger, more aggressive Cold War orientation.

More than just a defensive bulwark for Japanese security, the peninsular-based U.S. forces' forward, mainland deployment provided closer access to China and the USSR in the case of a

[15] Gaddis, *Strategies*, 56; On the capitalist grand area, see: Bruce Cumings, *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 6; Cumings notes that the "grand area" term was used during deliberations of the Council of Foreign Relations during World War II. See: Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: the Council on Foreign Relations and United States foreign policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 135-140; see also: Walter LaFeber, *The Clash : U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 271.

larger conflict.[16] Moreover, the immediate threat environment on the Korean Peninsula and attendant alliance arrangements provided the US with high-level training and preparedness for its troops. In short, the U.S. peninsular presence, included in the Department of Defense's General U.S. Force Structure in the Western Pacific, provided a key strategic platform for the training and potential deployment of U.S. troops elsewhere (i.e. Vietnam). Following Vietnam, the USFK remained the last mainland foothold of its kind, in a sense enhancing its strategic importance. It was seen as a symbol of wider U.S. leadership and credibility in the region.

Importantly, the peninsula was also a key outpost considering the role envisioned for the ROK military. For U.S. policymakers, the ROK military was seen as an extension of U.S. forces. From the earliest formation of the Korean constabulary during the period of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK; 1945-1948), American officials aimed to create interdependent yet indigenous anti-communist forces as part of its increasingly global conception of national security.[17] On this point, we introduce our first historical critique. As Steven Lee notes, U.S. policy toward South Korea fit within the concept of "informal empire" explored by historians such as Gaddis and Geir Lundestad.[18] However, it is necessary to distinguish the nature and application of informal empire in the developed First World from that in peripheral Third World areas; areas whose political structures, economies, and military forces were far less developed and were often only recently emerging from formal colonial control.

Whereas U.S. "informal empire" in Western Europe was relatively passive, even invitational in nature ("empire by invitation") and primarily aimed at influencing its European

[16] Nam, *America's* Commitment, 76-77.
[17] Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 7.
[18] John Lewis Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revision Synthesis on the Orgins of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 7 (summer 1983): 171-90; Geir Lundestad, *The American 'Empire,'* (London: Norwegian University Press, 1990).

allies' external relations, American policy along the global periphery was far more active and interventionist. In addition to hegemonic influence over its foreign policy, between 1945 and 1954 the United States overwhelmingly directed and influenced the internal economic and political orientation of South Korea (see below).[19] Recasting Gaddis' above point, Lee correctly notes that in peripheral areas the American objective was "to create interdependent centers of power, not independent ones."[20] This included explicit plans before and more concertedly after the Korean War, to foster the ROK military as a supplemental, free world force on the American side.

The process of cultivating interdependent yet indigenous ROK forces for internal order and external security also involved an inherently hierarchical element. From its inception, the ROK military was almost entirely dependent on the U.S. for material, armaments, ammunition, and spare parts; its units and training mirrored the U.S. example in isomorphic fashion; and the U.S. maintained significant influence within the ROK military, including over promotions in the officer corps. Although the long-term U.S. objective was to increase ROK defense capabilities, lessen its dependence on U.S. assistance, and pass off more local responsibility to South Korea, U.S. strategists also saw increased Korean strength as an enhancement to overall free-world forces, with potential involvement in U.S. conflicts.

In later years, the supplementary role of the ROK military was made more explicit in the US "More Flags Campaign" and attendant pressure on Seoul to provide combat forces in Vietnam, as well as in the later "Koreanization" of ROK defense alongside simultaneous inclusion of ROK forces in U.S. "Total Force Planning."[21] In other words, the flip side of the local US commitment

[19] Lee, *Outposts*, 5.
[20] Ibid, 11.
[21] On the "More Flags" campaign and the massive South Korean commitment to Vietnam, see: Tae Yang Kwak, "The Anvil of War: The Legacies of Korean Participation in the Vietnam War," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2006); on "Koreanization" and "Total Force Planning," see: testimony by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird before the House Armed Services Committee, cited in Department of Defense, *Annual Defense Report FY*

to ROK security, wherein the U.S. bolstered South Korean defenses and fostered ROK defense modernization, was the understanding that ROK forces would serve the reverse purpose, namely, inclusion in U.S. strategic planning and policy beyond the Peninsula.[22]

To recapitulate, the importance of the aforementioned critique is that it shifts focus to the specific manner in which U.S. informal empire was conceived and implemented in South Korea. In doing so, we provide nuance to our understanding of the U.S.-ROK relationship. Although the relationship was derivative of larger U.S. interests within a strictly bipolar contest, it also consisted of distinctly hierarchical arrangements with their own inherent logic. We turn now to the basic pattern of the relationship on its bilateral, peninsular level, which offers a more explicit elucidation on this hierarchy and a critical reassessment of South Korean sovereignty.

Peninsular & Bilateral Patterns

The second basic pattern is *the U.S. is the hierarchical guarantor of South Korea's external sovereignty*. There are two elements to this pattern. The first, from the American perspective, is a keen awareness of its superordinate position vis-à-vis its smaller ally and deliberate intent to exert relative control over South Korea's actions. The second element, rooted more in the Korean view, is the unconventional, even exceptional nature of ROK sovereignty.

1973, 32-35; see also, National Security Decision Memorandum 48, which officially formulated a plan for Koreainzation of ROK defense, as cited in Nam, *America's Commitment*, 98 (footnote 66).

[22] It is important to note the South Korean view of this arrangement. This was not a passive arrangement, to which the Koreans were unwittingly subject. From their perspective, being a junior partner or client in the larger U.S. Cold War project provided numerous advantages; advantages they were quick to identify and leverage for their own benefit. Nor was South Korea simply subject to U.S. dictates. In fact, Koreans often proved eager and willing to play a supplementary role in U.S. conflicts even before the Americans were willing to accept such contributions. This was manifest under Rhee Symgman, Park Chung Hee, and explicitly under Chun Doo Hwan, who saw a vigorous effort to promote the ROK as a "strategic asset" for the U.S. as a key way to bolster American support for his regime and thus legitimacy.

The American desire to maintain influence over South Korean actions was grounded in several interconnected factors, which included: U.S. reticence to take on an Asian mainland commitment; its inability to disaggregate that commitment from concrete regional imperatives as well as more intangible questions of U.S. credibility and prestige; and U.S. officials' difficulty in dealing with Rhee Syngman's persistent attempts to disrupt events and draw the U.S. into greater involvement before, during, and after the Korean War. Before outlining the several ways the U.S. exerted control, we turn back to the critique above regarding hierarchy within the so-called U.S.-led free world.

Critical Cold War historiography and several Korea-focused historical accounts provide support for contextualizing the issue of hierarchy. These studies shift the focus from the "contest-of-power" dimension of the cold war, which stresses the global contest over strategic control and economic ideology between the United States and the Soviet Union, to its "relations-of-domination" dimension, which emphasizes the implicit but no less crucial hierarchical nature of the bipolar divide.[23] While the cold war certainly was characterized by a division of the world into separate blocs of states and ideological spheres, it also included the establishment of relations of domination within each sphere, which involved measures taken to police threats and resistance to this hierarchical formation.[24] South Korea is a quintessential case insofar as its very emergence as a juridical state was structured within both dimensions.

The U.S. was intent to exert significant influence over South Korea's actions and could do so due to the asymmetrical nature of the relationship. The American mechanisms of control were multifaceted. As mentioned, the U.S. maintained notable influence over both the ROK military and defense modernization. Consequently, U.S. officials used this influence to limit the kind of

[23] Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 2.
[24] Ibid, 48.

weaponry South Korea possessed, the pace at which they developed new capabilities, and the orientation of South Korean forces, in particular their gradual repositioning into more frontline positions. Such measures allowed the U.S. to limit the ROK's ability to undertake more aggressive and potentially destabilizing polices toward North Korea.

In addition, U.S. peninsular deployments and command arrangements also hemmed in South Korean actions. U.S. armistice keeping responsibilities, frontline deployments, and, importantly, its retention of the operational control of the South Korean military all inhibited Rhee Syngman and later Park Chung Hee's freedom of action in either instigating conflict with the North or responding too forcefully to repeated North Korean provocations. In sum, the U.S. presence and authority served what Cuming's referred to as a dual deterrent role; deterrence of further Communist aggression but also deterrence of their own ally. With this authority structure in mind, we turn to the second element of the basic pattern, the unconventional nature of South Korea's external sovereignty.

External or Westphalian sovereignty is defined as political organization based on the exclusion of external actors from the authority structures within a given territory.[25] Put differently, external sovereignty is the authority or power of the state to defend and preserve its territorial integrity and protect the life and property of its citizenry.[26] However, inherent in this definition, employed by conventional theories such as structural realism (neorealism) and neoliberalism, are certain assumptions regarding the equality between and spatial exclusivity of nation states. We utilize a constructivist critique to problematize these assumptions and thus recast our view of South Korea's sovereignty.

[25] Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)
[26] Robert Gilpin. *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Both structural realism (materialism) and neoliberalism (rationalism) share the assumption of the formal or sovereign equality of states. This is problematic for two reasons. First, materialist assumptions overlook *de facto* hierarchies by treating dominant-subordinate state relationships as if between sovereign equals under anarchy. Second, rationalists assume that states are spatially inviolate and behave under social contract-conditions as free and independent actors.[27] These views on sovereignty are inherently dubious, particularly so for South Korea. For its entire political existence it has occupied a spatially compromised and subordinate position in relation to the United States, in that: the U.S. has not only stationed forces within the ROK's sovereign territory, but stationed them in a forward, tripwire position, preserving, in a very literal sense, the territorial space of the ROK; and in terms of a taken-for-granted-authority of a sovereign state, specifically control over its own military, the U.S. has maintained ultimate operational control over ROK forces since the Korean War.

South Korea's unconventional sovereignty, like the other basic patters analyzed here, emerged from the formative period and lived historical process of the U.S.-ROK relationship. Before the Korean War, ROK elites "moved heaven and earth" to retain U.S. troops, understanding that "although Korea was nominally an independent country it was actually dependent on the United States for its very existence."[28] The fear of a tenuous U.S. commitment and the shock of the war itself bolstered this sentiment. The U.S. was its literal savior, insofar as its intervention prevented the ROK from being swallowed whole, checking and then pushing back the violent

[27] This conceptual critique is adopted from: Alexander Wendt and Friedheim, Daniel, "Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State," *International Organization* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1995): 689-721.
[28] On moving "heaven and earth," See Ambassador Muccio's remarks, cited in: William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 187; Yun Cho Yang, vice-chairman of the ROK National Assembly in the spring of 1950, made the remarks about the nominal and highly dependent status of South Korea while speaking with a U.S. Embassy official, see: *FRUS*, 1950, Volume VII, Korea, Document 27: *The Chargé in Korea* (*Drumright*) *to the Secretary of State*. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/d27

retraction of South Korea's sovereign space. Following the war, the U.S. remained the ROKs hierarchical protector, which arrangement Rhee accepted as the price for retention of U.S. forces and a Mutual Defense Treaty.

Domestic Political Patterns

The third basic pattern is that *the U.S.-ROK relationship strongly influenced domestic politics within South Korea*. This pattern emerged from the several consecutive roles played by the U.S. in Korea: as liberator, occupier, and creator. The United States liberated southern Korea from Japanese colonization. Thus, Koreans were not responsible for their own long-sought independence, and immediately were occupied by the foreign power that was. Later, through its occupation policy and efforts at the newly established United Nations, the United States created South Korea as a political and juridical entity.[29]

This process included: the violent suppression of leftist elements within South Korea; the general de-politicization of South Korean society and severe circumscription of its political culture; the selection and eventual support of a conservative and deeply anticommunist political elite, under the leadership of Rhee Syngman and former colonial bureaucracy; and an international effort to secure recognition and thus legitimacy for a fragile and insecure state.[30] In short, not only

[29] See: Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956). Goodrich's account is an excellent study of the U.S. policy toward Korea at the United Nations. The study covers the breakdown of negotiations between the United States and the Soviets, the move to hold U.N. sponsored elections, and the ultimate use of such elections as well as U.S. pressure within the General Assembly to legitimate the newly created South Korean state; see also: Soon Sung Cho, *Korea In World Politics, 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[30] Bruce Cuming's two volumes are still the most authoritative on this period. Although Soviet and Eastern European archives have led to corrections of certain parts of Cuming's argument, they did nothing to alter what literally hundreds of U.S. government documents show, which is to say, the deep U.S. involvement in selecting and protecting a conservative, anti-communist and collaborationist political leadership, as well as complicity in the violent eradication of leftist elements within South Korea before the Korean War, see: Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); see also: Hyun Sook Kim, "The Politics of Repression, Resistance, and

was the U.S. crucial for South Korea's external security, the ROK's political elite depended on the U.S. for essential political, economic, and military support to maintain their internal legitimacy and rule. Furthermore, and contradictorily, opposition groups also looked to the United States as both a model of liberal democracy and the foreign power most responsible for the establishment of democratic institutions within South Korea, but also a strategic partner in their struggle against undemocratic, repressive rule within South Korea. As a consequence, even after the occupation period, the U.S. maintained a sort of hegemonic presence in the South Korean body politic, the different elements of which worked at cross-purposes, often intensely so.[31]

As is the case of the first two patterns, the Korean War was the critical juncture that solidified these pre-war developments. During the war, the U.S. not only preserved and pushed back the ROK's sovereign boundary, but provided active assistance (and sometimes participated in) the eradication of those identified as opponents of the regime within that space. As a result of the war, a much more centralized ROK state emerged, with a large and militarized coercive apparatus underpinned by a comprehensive anti-communist ideology, which the war itself did much to instill among the South Korean people. Importantly, the war also shifted the U.S. from a "minimum to maximum commitment," manifest in a massive economic and military aid program for South Korea's post-war reconstruction and stability.[32] Similar to before the war, ROK elites saw U.S. assistance and its continued commitment as essential to the legitimacy of their rule.

Revolution: State-making in Postwar Korea, 1945-1948," (Ph.D. dissertation, New School of Social Research, 1992); on the foundational cleavages and violent retraction of political culture in the ROK during this period, see: Jang Jip Choi, "Political Cleavages in South Korea," in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, ed. Hagen Koo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 13-50.

[31] For the most thorough English-language account of this deeply embedded if contradictory structure, which traces its evolution over time, from the period of post-Korean War reconstruction and deprivation, through South Korea's rapid state-led industrialization and modernization to its eventual political liberalization, see: Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[32] Nam, *America's Commitment*, 36-37.

Here one might invoke a final conceptual critique, namely, that the neorealist perspective is not structural enough. As Wendt argues, state identity and interests are not exogenous to the international system but deeply influenced by it. In this regard, neorealist theory does not go far enough in considering how the relative balance of power or relations of dominance-subordination (hierarchy under anarchy) have constitutive effects for state identity and thus may determine state interests.[33] Gourevitch's "Second-Image Reversed" supports the point. He highlights the South Korean case as an example where the international system itself is an explanatory variable, and the domestic structure a consequence of it. In other words, the South Korean domestic structure "derives from the exigencies of the international system," more specifically the imperatives of U.S. foreign and national security policy in the early cold war.[34]

Research Design & Methods

In terms of research design, this project is a single, in-depth historical case study of President Carter's troop withdrawal policy, tracing it from its origins to its eventual abeyance. In addition to embedding Carter's policy within a longer rolling policy reassessment over several administrations during the long 1970s, certain assumptions frame the study of the policymaking process under Carter.[35]

The first is that Carter's policy emerged from the interaction of several circles of actors. These included: the president and his principal advisors; key civilian members of the U.S. foreign policy and defense bureaucracy, primarily on the National Security Council (NSC) and at the

[33] Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[34] Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32, no. 4 (1978): 881-882.
[35] Although these assumptions are applied to my specific case, they possess traction for a wider range of cases of U.S. foreign policymaking. I have borrowed aspects of them from another studies, see: James S. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 1-13.

Departments of State and Defense, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); Congress, particularly members of the foreign policy and armed services committees and subcommittees in both the House and Senate; the U.S. military, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to the regional commanders and officers in the field in South Korea; and the South Korean government, specifically the ROK Blue House, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, and Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA); civil society actors within South Korea, in particular key political opposition leaders and dissidents; and, lastly, the informed public in the United States.[36]

The second assumption is that the importance of each circle of actors can vary, which runs counter to the traditional portrayal of U.S. foreign policy, which posits a concentric circles model. The concentric circles (or presidential preeminence model), places the president at the center of policymaking, and suggests the influence and relevance of the different circles decreases with their relative distance from the center. Rather, my analysis shows the influence of different circles changes throughout the process, which leads to a shifting constellations model or image.[37] The varying influence of different circles rests on the important distinction between individual policy decisions and the policymaking *process* itself. Policy decisions involve particular events and clearly identified decision-making groups, but are only one part of a process that begins before the decision memorandum arrives on the president's desk and continues after it leaves it.

The policymaking process consists of several stages: *agenda setting*, during which problems are identified and defined, and priorities are determined; *formulation*, in which options are considered and a choice is made; *legitimation,* in which steps such as executive orders or congressional authorization and appropriation are taken to gain approval and provide for

[36] By informed public I mean

[37] In this sense, then, my single-case study contributes to the literature on U.S. foreign policymaking (even more specifically, alliance-related foreign policymaking) insofar as it serves a theory testing or theory-supporting role.

implementation; *implementation*, in which specific steps such as the provision and expenditure of funds, the dispatch of personnel, and other measures are taken; and *evaluation,* in which specific actions to implement the policy are reviewed through such actions as executive branch policy reviews, congressional hearings, and budget and funding debates. However, as Scott observes: "policy may develop from the collective results of discrete actions taken by bureaucrats to deal with day-to-day events. Hence, actions taken at the implementation stage may shape policy as much as specific, formal decisions made at the formulation and legitimation stages." Put differently, the policy making process is non-linear, with a clear start and end. Rather, it moves in cycles, with the implementation and evaluation stages feeding back into the agenda setting and formulation stages. Also, at the different stages, different circles of actors are more relevant and influential than others.

The third assumption is that each circle of actors is made up of a diverse array of individuals, all of whom possess their own perspective and preferences. These diverse individuals often form rival alliances that cut across the different circles. Rival alliances: "form when like-minded individuals from different circles unite to force their preferences into policy. Rival alliances thus represent an avenue by which individuals in different circles attempt to pool the resources at their command, thereby increasing their respective influence on the broader policy." The present project shows such behavior and patterns are repeatedly evident within my case. Moreover, such rival alliances include various Korean actors throughout the process. Although it is a U.S.-centric account, it is not simply an American narrative.

For a research method, I use historical process tracing to properly examine the non-linear policy-making process surrounding Carter's policy and its several stages, actors and feedback loops. Process tracing focuses on the causal process or pathway, and supports my historical

explanation by helping infer and construct a causal chain account of how various conditions and variables interacted over time to produce a continent yet patterned historical outcome. As noted above, my empirical data consists of extensive yet mutually-corroborating sources.

In terms of government data, one important source is a compilation of hundreds of U.S., ROK, U.N., U.K. and East European government documents. This collection of over 700 pages of formerly classified documents, titled "The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979," was compiled by the Wilson Center's North Korea International Documentation Project. It spans Carter's policy and provides a rich array of primary historical text.[38] George Washington University's National Security Archive also provides several thematically-organized and easily accessible digital archives, focused on various aspects of the U.S.-ROK relationship germane to this project.

In reading formerly classified or secret government reports, memorandum, and memorandums of conversations, I follow Trachtenberg's simple but important advice: "documents are not necessarily to be taken at face value, and one has to see things in context to understand what they mean. One has to get into the habit of asking why a particular document was written – that is, what purpose was it meant to serve."[39] They are read as purposive forms of communication: Who wrote it? Why was a specific document written? What purpose was it meant to serve?[40] Also,

[38] For over 700 pages of formerly classified U.S., ROK, DPRK, U.N. and East European diplomatic and other government documents, see: Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, and Charles Kraus, "The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979," The Wilson Center: North Korea International Documentation Project, accessed October 1, 2016, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/NKIDP_The_Carter_Chill_Briefing_Book.pdf (hereafter referred to as *The Carter Chill*); additional sources of declassified documents include George Washington University's National Security Archive's various digital briefing books, such as: "How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea," The National Security Archive, accessed on August 1, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/korea/2017-06-01/how-do-you-solve-problem-south-korea.

[39] Trachtenberg indicated as much in a personal letter to Alexander George, see: Alexander L George and Andrew Bennett, *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005) 107.

[40] George and Bennett, 107.

in order to judge the influence of a memo written by a lower-level official, once can look to see who initialed it and, more importantly, if higher-level officials added marginal comments, which can be quite important.[41] It is crucial to understand the purpose of the document and the events leading up to it in order to properly interpret its meaning. As George and Bennet write, summarizing Larson: "The author of a memorandum or speaker at a meeting may be trying to ingratiate himself with superiors, create a favorable impression of himself, put himself on the record in case of leaks, or persuade others to adopt his preferred policy."[42] In order to complement and elucidate internal documents, extensive press accounts are also consulted.

Deep reading of contemporary press accounts in leading newspapers can be essential for determining the context of documents. "News accounts can help to establish the atmosphere of the times, the purpose of speeches or statements, or the public reaction to a statement. Newspapers help to show what information policymakers had and provide clues as to what events they regarded as important…In this way, newspapers help us to recapture the perspective of officials at the time."[43] In addition, contemporary editorials and opinion pieces serve as further historical text, which represent the views and actions of the informed public, an unofficial yet influential circle of actors in the policymaking process.

The project also utilizes a large cache of oral history interviews with U.S. officials from within the U.S. embassy in Seoul, the Departments of State and Defense, and various executive branch positions, compiled and published by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, which other accounts either did not cite or have access to.[44] Added to this are several original field

[41] Deborah Larson noted as much in a personal letter to Alexander George, see: George and Bennett, 104-105.
[42] Ibid; see also: Deborah Welch Larson, "Sources and Methods in Cold War History: the Need for a New Theory-Based Archival Approach." In *International History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Differences and Crossing Boundaries*, eds. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elma (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 327-350.
[43] Ibid.
[44] For an extensive, 1,300-page collection of oral history interview transcripts, which covers the U.S.-ROK relationship from 1945 until 2002, and includes in-depth interviews with a diverse array of American officials

interviews and interview data from a series of after-action case studies sponsored by U.S. government departments and agencies, which cover aspects of the withdrawal policy.[45] Interviews serve a similar purpose to some of the data above, but are particularly important for shedding greater light on the thinking behind-the-scenes. Importantly, most of the interviews are conducted after the interviewees have retired and after the events in question. This often results in more honest and revealing testimony. On the other hand, one must account for an individual's bias as well as gaps in their memory regarding distant events. Nevertheless, this is where my other data, as additional within-case observations, increases the veracity of my claims, insofar as I can check the interviewees' testimony against earlier statements and documents. In the case of contemporary interviewees, this same data can be used to challenge their recollection or refresh their memory of events.

An additional set of primary documents are congressional reports and transcripts of hearings. For the purposes of this study, these various congressional reports serve several important purposes. As primary historical text they reveal the perspectives of the various actors involved in the withdrawal program, within which one can observe the basic patterns at work. Like contemporary press accounts, the hearing transcripts provide further context. They contain extensive questioning by lawmakers of key members of the executive branch, military officials, and nongovernmental personnel, and therefore help to elucidate the thinking at the time among these different circles of actors.

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directly involved in the relationship both in South Korea and Washington D.C., see: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Korea.pdf.

[45] For a case study of Carter's withdrawal policy sponsored by the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service Institute, see: Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea: A Case Study in Nation Security Decision Making,"; for a CIA-sponsored case study laying out the background on the intelligence studies, which contributed to the cancellation of Carter's withdrawal plan, see: Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President."

Next, the process of producing the reports, including the study missions, extensive interviews and hearings that were part of it, fostered a more nuanced understanding among U.S. lawmakers about the different aspects of the withdrawal policy and its potential outcomes. Consequently, for most, it sharpened their existent reservations or even outright opposition to the plan. As a result of this process, different committees and subcommittees and their respective chairs and members developed or deepened their interactions with different circles of actors (i.e. military officers, diplomatic officials, bureaucratic personnel, allied leaders and their advisory staffs), and would go on to echo and magnify their perspectives back in Washington.

The reports and hearings themselves also represent stages in the policymaking process, specifically the *legitimation* and *evaluation* stages, wherein one observes the activity of the different circles of actors and rival alliances noted above. Not only their compilation but also their release at key points in time, often increased the informed public's awareness of the withdrawal and general opposition to it. They also influenced discussions within the Carter administration and a growing awareness of the constraints it faced and the attendant need to make further adjustments to the policy. As the literature on process tracing suggests, the reports and hearing transcripts are additional "diagnostic pieces of evidence" (or observations within the case), which corroborate other sources and add further plausibility to my claims.[46] Moreover, by examining classified memorandum against the statements made in public hearings, one may determine what information was concealed as well as the executive actors' internal deliberation regarding how to approach public discourse surrounding the policy.

Lastly, various secondary accounts and memoirs are also valuable. Although my single historical case study is intently focused on Carter's policy, it is necessary for me to situate it within

[46] Henry E. Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking social inquiry: diverse tools, shared standards* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004) 208.

the overall context of his administration. The secondary literature helps to establish the larger historical context. First, Carter's withdrawal policy was only one of among various other foreign and domestic policies that occupied the attention of the president, his advisors, and the other circles of actors involved. In many cases, these policies took precedence over U.S. Korea policy. Second, Carter's Korea withdrawal policy was also directly and indirectly influenced by these other policies; sometimes in significant ways. Consequently, I must include secondary accounts in order to fill out my analysis.

The Problem of the Counterfactual

In offering these basic patterns and logics as the main reason why Carter failed to execute his policy, this project implicitly offers a causal account. By asserting that it was the persistent operation of these patterns, or their invocation by the officials involved in the policymaking process, rather than the more proximate variables (i.e., Koreagate, intelligence on North Korea, or Carter's governing and management style), the implicit argument is that even were these near-term variables not at work the same outcome would have occurred. Carter still would have failed to execute his policy. Put differently, the dissertation argues against the counterfactual claim that Carter would have succeeded in the implementation of his troop withdrawal policy had Koreagate and new intelligence assessments on North Korea not emerged and had he been more deliberate and measured in his attempt to introduce and implement the withdrawal.

In theory, such a counterfactual claim might serve as a second case, and the real and counterfactual cases together might constitute a controlled comparison. As George and Bennett note, such a claim rests on the supposition that the causal variable or variables in question were a necessary condition for the observed outcome, and also assumes the causal variables identified

operated independently of other causal variables. George and Bennett highlight the problem with such assumptions. However, they also pinpoint the solution. They write:

> Such assumptions are often difficult to substantiate, a fact that makes the use of a counterfactual problematic. Thus, one must recognize that a plausible useful counterfactual case is often not possible and, if attempted, does not add much, if anything, in support of a within-case historical explanation. It is very difficult if not impossible to conduct a plausible, useful counterfactual when the explanation for a historical event is very complex…For these reasons, we believe that the burden of supporting a historical explanation must be met not be using a counterfactual but by employing the process-tracing method in order to infer and construct a causal chain account of how various conditions and variables interacted over time to produce the historical outcome. In any case, counterfactual support for the explanation of a historical outcome is not needed if that explanation is supported by a strong theory or generalization; or if the causal chain is highly plausible, consistent with the evidence, and survives comparison with alternative explanations.[47]

In sum, rather than engage in a counterfactual thought experiment, the deep-descriptive, process-tracing method I use demonstrates that my argument is the most consistent with the evidence and therefore the most plausible. Moreover, my work does not attempt to isolate my explanatory variables from those of other accounts. Indeed, as noted, my analysis accounts for other factors (i.e. Carter's governing style, bureaucratic politics in Washington D.C., and more near-term Korea-related events) but describes them as proximate variables rather than determinant ones.

Ultimately, and most important, in the actual event, tracing the process of Carter's withdrawal policy from its origination to its ultimate abeyance or cancellation, shows all of these factors were at work. My processual, deep-descriptive account strives to demonstrate this, and, in so doing, to demonstrate that behind or underpinning the various actors or stakeholders' positions and behavior, were these basic patterns, and that Carter's leadership or management style and Korea-specific factors such as Koreagate and North Korean military buildup merely reinforced them.

[47] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 230-231.

Rather than argue what might have been had one or another variable not been present is not my goal. Instead, the aim is to describe what did in fact occur and in providing a deep-descriptive account of how it happened, cull out these basic patterns. Organizing the narrative in a chronological manner, focused around key points in the withdrawal policy process, demonstrates that from very early-on in the initial stages of the process, these basic patterns framed the thinking of key officials and how they responded to, formulated and began to implement the policy; and, indeed, how later in the process they saw emergent factors, such as Koreagate and the new intelligence assessments on North Korea's order of battle in instrumental terms; useful devices to be used to achieve preexisting aim, namely, to delay, dilute, and ultimately check the withdrawal policy.

Chapter I: Antecedents

In the September 7, 1975 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, Richard Holbrooke wrote an article titled, "Escaping the Domino Trap." In it, Holbrooke, then the editor-in-chief of the upstart magazine, *Foreign Policy*, explored the proper role for the United States in post-Vietnam Asia. Writing six months after the final U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, and with Sino-U.S. rapprochement another crucial background event, Holbrooke analyzed the challenges and opportunities U.S. policymakers faced as they reassessed U.S. policy in the region. He thoughtfully grappled with the stark limits of U.S power, evinced by the nightmarish failure in Vietnam, within a more complex international environment characterized by increasingly fluid relationships and the undoing of early Cold War certainties regarding a monolithic communist threat.[1]

Similar to others within the wider U.S. foreign policy-making community, Holbrooke was attempting to strike a balance between two potential follies: learning (and reacting) too much or too little from recent events. On the one hand, he hoped to avoid a precipitous U.S. retreat from the region and stressed Washington must maintain its international commitments. On the other hand, he cautioned against resurrecting "the old containment policy" by not sufficiently grasping the limits of U.S. military power and the flexibility afforded by Nixon's opening to China. In short, similar to officials in the Nixon and Ford administration, Holbrooke aimed to recalibrate U.S. policy in order to bring ends in line with means, while still preserving U.S. preponderance in the region. To do so, he offered five intertwined conclusions.[2]

[1] Richard Holbrooke, "Escaping The Domino Trap," *New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 1975, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/09/07/archives/escaping-the-domino-trap-after-the-debacle-in-vietnam-where-do-we.html.
[2] Ibid.

First, the "myth" of dominoes, where a country's "internal political tilt and posture" is a "reflection of American power and influence" was no longer valid. The postwar "demicolonial era," during which the U.S. was openly or secretly involved in the internal affairs of nearly every country in the region, was over. Although American power was not in retreat, Holbrooke assured, "this time around, one can hope, it will not be necessary to worry about every political event on the mainland of Asia. Acceptance and a degree of detachment will be a major step forward, one that Asians will appreciate." The new environment provided, indeed required, detachment and flexibility, underpinned by an awareness that not every setback was an existential crisis deliberately designed by an undifferentiated communist menace.[3]

Second, although U.S. policymakers could and should now assess each situation on its own merits and pursue a differentiated response, they must also "recognize that we remain a Pacific power, if not an Asian power." While this might translate into a greater emphasis on the role of naval power, rather than mainland deployments, as the key to American power, "the simple fact is that we are a two-coast nation," and "still the major external force in the area." Any reassessment must keep this simple fact in mind and not alter U.S policy in a manner that undermined its predominant position. Third, the United States must accept its role "as part of the delicate triangular relationship with China and the Soviet Union, but not overplay it." Above all, it must play stabilizer and prevent a war between the two Communist superpowers, a war which would serve no one's interests, cause untold destruction, and easily involve other countries, including the United States.[4]

Fourth, and related, U.S. policymakers must understand the importance of Japan to U.S. policy in the region, as well as the contradictory yet productive dynamics of this "special

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

relationship." Japan and the United States would continue to be military partners (with Washington taking the overwhelming portion of the defense burden), economic rivals, and political allies. Added to that complicated mix was a shared interest in improved relations with Beijing and a mutual hostility toward increasing Soviet ambitions and deployments in the region. While accepting, even encouraging Tokyo to adopt a more assertive political role and a greater role in its own self-defense, the U.S. should not abandon its position "as the military arm of Japan." Abdication of its responsibility as Tokyo's ultimate protector could result in it pursuing nuclear or nonnuclear remilitarization. Such a development "would unsettle Asia in a profound way," make it harder for Beijing and Tokyo to settle their differences, and tempt the Russians toward even more aggressive behavior in the disputed waters and islands north of Japan.[5]

For his fifth and final conclusion, Holbrooke observed: "We must find some way to solve the delicate problem of our presence in Korea." For it was in Korea where the U.S. would most acutely face the dilemma of how best to apply the lessons from Vietnam, or, more aptly, how best to strike the balance somewhere between applying them neither too much nor too little. Holbrooke highlighted that South Korea was a client state long dependent on U.S. protection. Park Chung Hee's regime had a narrow political base and was increasingly prone to authoritarian repression. Still, the United States kept 42,000 troops stationed in the country, and had recently taken to "issuing warnings that we will use whatever force is required to counter any aggressive behavior from the North." Holbrooke's latter remark was a reference to Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger's June 1975 statement that the U.S. deployed tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, reportedly the first public acknowledgement of what had long been an open secret. In short, the United States appeared over-committed to a disreputable ally. Holbrooke observed, "we run the

[5] Ibid.

risk in Korea as great as we did in Vietnam: that we may get trapped in a small and secondary country to which we must remain committed." It was time to think about how to disengage from or, at the very least, reduce such a commitment.[6]

Holbrooke continued: "If that were the whole story, it might be possible to withdraw gradually and risk the creation of "one Korea." Yet it was not so simple. For what happened in Korea had a direct connection with what happened in Japan, and, as Holbrooke had argued, what happened in Japan had profound consequences for the region. If the Americans were seen to "walk out of Korea, turn their backs on their commitments there, if they are pushed into the sea as they were in Vietnam," it would undermine Japanese perception of the strength of the American commitment to their own defense, providing Japan's rightists a trump card "with which to argue for the remilitarization" of the country, with spillover effects for other powers and relationships in Northeast Asia.[7]

It would appear, then, that Vietnam taught disparate, even conflicting lessons. On the one hand, the overwhelming failure of attempting to uphold a regime that lacked its own internal legitimacy and support, as in South Vietnam, pointed to the need to avoid repeating such a costly mistake. However, on the other hand, the same images of failure, of ignominious withdrawal and abandonment, must also somehow be circumvented. The language of falling dominoes needed to be forgotten, but lines still needed to be drawn, somewhere.[8]

In the near term, Holbrooke counseled caution. "The period of time between now and the 1976 election is a period in which we cannot make any significant changes in our Korean policy. We are living in a strange interlude after Vietnam, after Watergate, with a President whom no one

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Holbrooke's subtitle read: "After the debacle in Vietnam, where do we draw the line in Asia? Or do we draw any line at all?"

except the people of Grand Rapids, Mich., has ever elected—not a likely time for changes in policy." However, it was not too early to "look beyond 1976, to the time when we should reconsider our position in Korea." Furthermore, the factors above, namely, Park Chung Hee's growing reputation for repression and the perception of an exposed and overextended U.S. "tripwire" in Korea, could spur a newly assertive Congress to hastily vote to cutoff or limit U.S. involvement in Korea. In order to preclude such precipitous action and ensure a more thorough and deliberate process, the executive branch should take the lead.

Holbrooke's views on Asia and Korea specifically were important in that he would soon translate them into action. While originally a supporter of Sargent Shriver for the 1976 Democratic nomination, in early 1976 Holbrooke joined then candidate Jimmy Carter's campaign, taking lead of the campaign's foreign policy task force. Upon Carter's election as the 39th President of the United States, Holbrooke, at thirty-six years of age, became Carter's Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He was thus in-charge of day-to-day U.S. policy in the region.

Due to his involvement in the Carter campaign, many mistakenly assumed that Holbrooke was the father of Carter's Korea troop withdrawal policy. George Packer wrongly asserted as much in his recently published biography of Holbrooke, writing: "Where did the idea come from? Of course, from Holbrooke's 1975 piece in the *New York Times Magazine*." While the ideas he expressed in the piece likely helped to solidify his spot as part of the campaign, he would just as quickly jettison them once in office.[9] Moreover, Carter had been publicly speaking of a Korea withdrawal well before the piece ran or his association with Holbrooke had begun. In fact,

[9] Holbrooke spoke in a manner that likely encourage Carter to think he would dutifully carry out his policy preferences, telling the candidate: "I'll serve you in any capacity you want – I'll be honored. But the job that would really excite me would be Asia. The Far East is where America has had its great problem over the last thirty years. Our last three wars have started out there, and we've had the greatest domestic battles over who lost China and Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia. And I think that your administration could be the turning point. We could put back together a coherent policy that ended this and built a logical position in Asia."; see: George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and The End of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), ch. 6, Kindle.

Holbrooke possessed a more informed, nuanced, and circumspect perspective than Carter, particularly of the several obstacles and potentially destabilizing outcomes of any Korea withdrawal. Moreover, as the analysis below shows, he became one of the most active opponents of Carter's policy within the foreign policy bureaucracy and worked tirelessly with others to water down and mitigate its effects.

Holbrooke's commentary was also significant insofar as it reflected a wider rethinking of U.S. policy in East Asia during the mid-1970s. In truth, such a reassessment had been ongoing since the late 1960s under President Johnson, picked up steam in the wake of the Nixon or Guam Doctrine, and directly influenced policy under Presidents Nixon and Ford. Nevertheless, the recent shock attending the final withdrawal from Indochina once again put the matter in stark relief. Indeed, following the departure of the last helicopter from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in April of 1975 and the final withdrawal of most U.S forces from Thailand, South Korea remained the last Asian mainland deployment. As a result, U.S. policy toward Korea once again gained particular attention.

Jimmy Carter's ideas on Korea and his withdrawal policy in particular did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, there were preexisting currents of thought as well as concrete policy discussions calling for significant reassessment of U.S. policy toward South Korea, with particular focus on how to recalibrate if not entirely remove the remaining, forward deployed U.S. presence. Attendant to these discussions, were the same considerations Holbrooke grappled with. Elusive as it was, the objective was to adjust the physical U.S. presence in such a manner that the United States achieved some flexibility in its commitment, while at the same time maintaining the credibility of that commitment and preserving relative American predominance in the relationship; to gain flexibility that protected against immediate entrapment in a conflict, while at the same time preventing a

conflict from starting. This chapter charts these earlier policy discussions, from the late Johnson Administration through the Nixon Administration's removal of one of two remaining U.S. army divisions from South Korea.

U.S. Forces in Korea & Troop Withdrawals Before Carter

When the Korean War Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953, the United States had 302,483 military personnel deployed in South Korea, the bulk of which were part of the U.S. Eighth Army under the UN Command (UNC).[10] Shortly following the cessation of hostilities, the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea, signed on October 1, 1953 and entered into force on November 17, 1954, provided the political and legal basis for the ongoing stationing of U.S. forces in the country. Article IV of the mutual defense treaty read: "The Republic of Korea grants, and the United States of America accepts, the right to dispose United States land, air and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea as determined by mutual agreement."[11] Nevertheless, nothing in Article IV obligated the United States to station troops on South Korean soil in perpetuity. As was the case with the treaty itself, in theory, either party could unilaterally call for the termination of the U.S. presence.

From the outset, U.S. and even ROK officials assumed U.S. forces gradually would be reduced and eventually withdrawn as South Korea recovered from the war and gained the ability to defend itself free of American protection. There was a quick initial reduction of U.S. forces following the war. By 1955, overall U.S. forces had been reduced from their wartime high of nearly

[10] "United Nations Command: Troop Strengths," United States Forces Korea: We Go Together, accessed October 2017. http://www.usfk.mil/About/United-Nations-Command/
[11] "The Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea," Yale Law School: The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed January 2, 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp#1

330,000 to about 75,000 personnel, and by the late 1950s the bulk of U.S. forces consisted of two army divisions, the Second (2ID) and Seventh (7ID) Infantry Divisions. 2ID occupied a frontline position in the Western portion of the DMZ, placing it directly in front of any future invasion, while 7ID was stationed in a reserve role further south. While the total number would fluctuate between 50,000 and 65,000 personnel over the next decade, these two infantry divisions served as the backbone of the physical U.S. presence up until Nixon entered office in early 1969.[12]

Over the same period, an important shift occurred in the command architecture of U.S. forces in South Korea. On November 20, 1954 the U.S. Eighth Army, while still under the UNC, was merged with U.S. Army Forces Far East (AFFE) as the major command in the region. On July 1, 1957 AFFE was discontinued and the United States Forces Korea (USFK) was officially activated, and the Eighth Army was consolidated with USFK and the UNC in a tri-command headquarters in Seoul. As a result, the local four-star U.S general now wore three separate command hats, as the Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command (CINCUNC), of the USFK (CINCUSFK), and of the Eighth Army.[13]

Each command had its own separate yet complimentary role. As CINCUNC, the four-star general was tasked with supervision of the Armistice Agreement and, in the case of renewed hostilities, would receive forces from other UN members states deployed to defend South Korea and be responsible for their operational control (OPCON) and combat operations. As CINCUNC, the four-star general held the OPCON of all of the ROK Armed Forces, with such authority granted, "only to defend the Republic of Korea from Communist aggression."[14] Simultaneously,

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[12] Tim Kane, "Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2005," The Heritage Foundation, published May 24, 2016, accessed on January 10, 2017, https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/global-us-troop-deployment-1950-2005.
[13] "History," Eighth Army: Strong And Getting Stronger, last modified July 6, 2018. http://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/site/about/history.asp
[14] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Hearings before the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, vol. II, pt. 5-11, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, 1588 (hereafter cited as "Symington Hearings")

in his role as CICNUSFK, he was responsible for training U.S. forces, evacuating U.S. civilians if instructed by the U.S. ambassador to do so, and facilitating the complex logistics surrounding the wartime reception of significant numbers of U.S. forces deployed to the Korean Peninsula from the United States, Japan, and other locations. In short, the position was mostly a planning and coordinating one, and in it he reported to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC). Finally, as the commanding general of the Eighth U.S. Army, he reported to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Army, Pacific (CINCUSARPAC), and had command of the U.S. military ground force, the Eighth Army.[15]

Despite these various changes in command architecture, during the 1950s and much of the 1960s, the defense of South Korea (in terms of operational planning and control) remained almost entirely the responsibility of the U.S four-star general and the multinational UNC under his watch. However, South Korea gradually took on a greater role in its own defense due to the professional growth and development of the ROK armed forces and as U.S. officials gradually implemented further reductions of U.S. forces. As early as 1965, it was recognized that wartime operations would be significantly improved by increasing ROK participation in the planning structure. This led to the development in 1968 of a combined ROK-US operational planning staff, as an adjunct to the UNC, USFK, and Eighth Army tri-command Headquarters and the U.S.-led "I" Corps (Group).[16] More substantial changes would occur in the bilateral, alliance command structure with the 1971 withdrawal of 7ID under President Nixon (examined below) and in the midst of the planned withdrawal of remaining ground combat forces of 2ID under President Carter.

[15] Symington Hearings, 1589.
[16] "Mission of the ROK/US Combined Forces Command," United States Forces Korea: We Go Together, accessed October 2017. http://www.usfk.mil/About/Combined-Forces-Command/

As early as 1963, defense personnel at the Pentagon began to discuss troop reductions. In 1966, President Johnson's Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, voiced concern that U.S. troop levels in South Korea were out of proportion to the Pentagon's perception of the North Korean threat and that the ROK had sufficient strength to take on a greater share of their own defense. For these and additional budgetary reasons, Secretary McNamara proposed troop reductions. Nevertheless, according to one of McNamara's aides, no such plans were developed or carried out because of President Johnson's prevailing interest in enlisting allies to make combat contributions in Vietnam, as part of his "More Flags Campaign."[17] Removing U.S. forces from South Korea, it was believed, would undermine Seoul's willingness to contribute. As it turned out, Seoul sent more combat forces to fight in Vietnam than any other U.S. ally, and, on a per-capita basis, as similar number of ROK military personnel served in Vietnam as did Americans.[18]

During the same period, Ambassador William Porter and his deputy at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, George S. Newman, both wanted to begin to remove ground troops from the country. Newman, who served as Deputy Chief of Mission from 1966 to 1968, recalled that one of their concerns was that South Korea, by some sort of precipitous action or attack on the North, would automatically entrap the United States in a conflict. However, similar to President Johnson, both felt the role of ROK combat forces in Vietnam was so important they did not even think to suggest withdrawal of forces.[19]

Not everyone felt similarly. General Charles H. Bonesteel, the four-star U.S. commander at the time, reportedly believed the United States was "being lulled into a false sense of security"

[17] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations: Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 95th Cong., 2d sess., 1978, H. Rep., 61. (hereafter cited as "Fraser Report"), 61.
[18] Kwak, "The Anvil of War," iii.
[19] Fraser Report, 61.

and was firmly against any troop reductions.[20] Similarly, Secretary of State Dean Rusk argued current U.S. force levels were necessary for security and for political reasons, namely, while ROK forces were still in Vietnam.[21] Nonetheless, until early 1968, most discussion of U.S. policy toward Korea occurred on an informal level. The Johnson administration's Asia Policy was dominated by the deteriorating situation in Vietnam.

This changed, however, with the North Korean commando raid on the Blue House and the seizure of the *U.S.S. Pueblo* in late January 1968, two events which put the U.S. presence and role in Korea into stark relief and forced officials at the highest levels of the U.S. government to begin a formal review of U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula. The reaction to these events, in fact, revealed several important, interrelated dynamics inherent in U.S. policy toward Korea.

In general, U.S. policy toward Korea was not a priority for the highest levels of the U.S. government. It consistently was overshadowed by other, more prioritized areas and relationships. Aside from certain mid- and lower-level officials, overall policy toward Korea remained relatively understudied and went without serious high-level review for long stretches of time. Only when a potentially escalatory event occurred, would attention become more focused on Korea, and spur more high-level thinking about U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula. Upon such closer inspection, U.S. officials would invariably become more acutely aware of the contradictions attendant to the local peninsular commitment and realize just how deeply interrelated the local commitment was with wider regional and even global U.S. interests and perceptions. Relatedly, when U.S. officials conceived of plans for concrete changes to the U.S. presence and role in South Korea, they invariably ran up against profound constraints in fully implementing them. These

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid, 61-62.

dynamics had been part of the U.S-South Korea relationship since its inception, and would frustrate repeated U.S. efforts to reassess and alter the U.S. presence.

Despite concerns about the escalatory potential of the Blue House raid and *Pueblo* incident, U.S. policymakers still mostly viewed them against the backdrop of the Vietnam War. Certainly, instability and escalation on the Korean Peninsula posed severe problems, but the deteriorating situation in Vietnam took overwhelming precedence for the Johnson administration. A conflict in Korea was something it simply could not afford as it attempted to extricate itself from the immensely unpopular war in Southeast Asia. In fact, a week after the seizure of the Pueblo, the Tet Offensive began in Vietnam, which led President Johnson to see a possible link between both sets of events, even if no direct evidence existed. Johnson remarked during a news conference at the time: "I do not have evidence that would say that they are definitely, positively, one and the same here because I cannot prove that. Practically every expert I have talked to on Korea and North Vietnam and the Communist operation – all of them, I think without exception, believe these is definite connection."[22] The Tet Offensive also revealed the official line from Washington and Saigon, that the U.S. war effort was progressing was demonstrably untrue. The result, after years of failed efforts, was the exhaustion of Johnson and his presidency. In March, to the surprise of many, he announced he would no longer seek the Democratic nomination for a second term.

Nevertheless, though Vietnam cast a pall over most issues, North Korea's provocations and South Korean President Park Chung Hee's vehement response alerted the administration that it needed to the pay closer attention to the situation in Korea. President Johnson tapped Cyrus Vance as a special Presidential Emissary to Seoul. Vance, previously the Deputy Secretary of Defense (1964-1967), was something of a troubleshooting crisis negotiator. In 1964 he was sent

[22] "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters," *The New York Times*, February 3, 1978.

as part of a peacekeeping team to the Panama Canal Zone following student riots. In 1967 he went to Detroit to mediate after widespread riots there, and, later the same year, to Cyprus to help forestall a war between Greece and Turkey.[23] Consistent with these past roles, Johnson requested Vance visit Seoul to directly consult with President Park in order to assess and hopefully stabilize the situation.

The Vance mission had several objectives. Primarily, Vance was to "prevent any precipitate action in terms of a move to the North by Park and the Republic of Korea's army," and get Park to tamp down public agitation for retaliatory actions.[24] Relatedly, he needed to restrain Park by convincing him the United States stood firmly with South Korea in the current crisis and also to reaffirm the strength of the U.S. commitment in general. Additionally, Vance sought the ROK government's consent for private, bilateral talks between U.S. and North Korean officials over the *Pueblo* in order to gain release of the ship and crew.[25]

Before Vance arrived, President Park and other ROK officials were livid with how events had played out. They were indignant the United States had so strenuously held them back from responding to the Blue House raid, and felt insult added to injury when Washington demonstrated more concern over the *Pueblo* incident than the Blue House raid. Following the raid, when Park told Ambassador Porter that ROK forces could be in Pyongyang in two days' time, Porter responded they "would have to do it alone."[26] U.S. officials in the UNC reinforced the same

[23] Marilyn Berger, "Cyrus R. Vance, a Confidant of Presidents, Is Dead at 84," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2002.
[24] Interview with Cyrus R. Vance, Presidential Emissary, Seoul (1968), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 383; Vance gave this interview within a year of his mission to Seoul, his recollection of events still fresh in mind. His recollection of events is entirely consistent with the internal communications attending his trip.
[25] *FRUS,* 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea, Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v29p1/d181.
[26] Fraser Report, 55.

message in conversations with the ROK military brass. Yet, following the seizure of the *Pueblo*, the U.S. responded with notably more urgency.[27]

Despite the fact that recapturing the ship was now impossible, Washington still flew 350 American warplanes into South Korea without prior approval from the ROK government, positioned the carrier U.S.S. *Enterprise* off the North Korean coast, and President Johnson activated over 14,000 Air Force and Navy reservists as a military measure behind his diplomatic efforts.[28] ROK Minister of Defense Kim Sung Eun was upset the U.S. appeared to show less concern over the near assassination of President Park, but the capture of one boat caused it to "move heaven and earth."[29] In a press statement, Foreign Minister Choi Kyu Ha declared his government was strongly opposed to Washington emphasizing the *Pueblo* incident over the commando raid, would not agree to Pyongyang's suggestion to trade the surviving Blue House infiltrators for the *Pueblo* crew, and would not tolerate the U.S.-initiated bilateral talks with Pyongyang. U.S. and DPRK representatives had met for the first time at Panmunjom on January 24, the day after the *Pueblo's* seizure. Meanwhile, over 100,000 South Koreans held a rally in Seoul, calling for the United States and United Nations to provide aid and prevent future commando raids, while expressing displeasure over the disparate American response.[30] The obvious gap in perception between the two allies caused South Korean officials to begin rethinking the relationship with Washington.[31]

This was the scene greeting Vance upon his arrival in Seoul. As he described in a memorandum to President Johnson, "I found a fragile and serious political situation, pockmarked

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 56.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid; on the rally and first meeting at Panmunjom, see: Peter Grose, "U.S. Again to Put Issue of Pueblo to North Korea," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1968.
[31] Fraser Report, 56-57; see also, Richard Halloran, "Confidence in U.S. Has Ebbed in Seoul: "Self-Reliance' Is Seoul Theme," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1968.

with tension, suspicion, and distrust."[32] In their initial meeting, Park partly blamed the United States for the Blue House raid in that the commando team had infiltrated across a portion of the DMZ manned by U.S. forces, and considered the *Pueblo* seizure evidence of a lack of preparedness insofar as the U.S. and ROK were unable to prevent it.[33] Park also expressed doubt regarding the U.S. commitment, partly due to its overwhelming focus on Southeast Asia and also to alleged delays in the provision of U.S. military equipment and support for modernization of the ROK military. Lastly, direct U.S.-DPRK talks at Panmunjom were, according to Park, an infringement of ROK sovereignty.[34]

Yet, despite the frosty reception, Vance was able to meet the main objectives of his mission. He restrained Park, in part, by telling him that if any aggressive action were taken by the South toward North Korea without full consultation with the United States "the whole relationship between our countries would have to be reevaluated."[35] U.S. concern about an aggressive South Korean response or precipitous ROK activities was not theoretical. Vance warned Park against the South Korean's own forays north of the DMZ that had been ongoing for several months before the Blue House raid. Some speculated the Blue House raid itself may have been retaliation for Seoul's raids.[36] Vance secured Park's commitment for future consultation, observing that, in the near-term

[32] Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson.
[33] Ibid; indeed, Park was correct about the lack of preparedness, as Nam writes: "the *Pueblo* incident revealed a vital weakness in U.S. military readiness in the region. The weakness was so serious that there were no effective US air of naval forces immediately available in South Korea to come to the aid of the endangered *Pueblo*. An aircraft strike force from the Republic, Japan, or Okinawa was unavailable because of either insufficient strategic readiness or the lack of efficient crisis communication," see: Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea,* 85.
[34] Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson; Seoul's concern regarding direct U.S.-North Korean contacts was a longstanding one. There remained a consistent apprehension that Washington (as it and other great powers had in the past) would decide South Korea's fate without its involvement or consultation.
[35] Interview with Cyrus R. Vance, "Korea: Country Reader," 383.
[36] As Vance wrote Johnson: "With one significant exception, we placed the onus on them to raise topics for discussion. The exception concerned South Korean forays across the DMZ into the North. This information was news to most members of the Cabinet since the South Korean infiltration units are under the personal control of Minister of National Defense Kim and their activities are closely held secrets within the ROKG. We emphasized the provocative nature of these attacks, which, over the past several months, have averaged two per month. We suggested that some of the more serious North Korean incursions into the South may have been launched in

at least, "his freedom of action has therefore been somewhat reduced." Consistent with constraining Seoul's freedom of action, Vance reiterated to Johnson that the ROK authorities had made no request to remove their forces in Korea from under the OPCON of General Bonesteel. Also, despite repeated requests, Vance rejected Park and other ROK officials' desire that Washington commit itself to an "agreed retaliation policy," which would involve instant and punitive retaliatory action against any future North Korean provocation. Last, although a very unpopular point among the South Koreans, Vance secured Park's consent to the U.S.-DPRK talks over the *Pueblo*.[37]

Beyond such negative pressures, Vance provided positive inducements to achieve his aims, namely, support for $100 million in supplemental military assistance pending before Congress in order to help with the modernization of the ROK military's counter-insurgency and counter-infiltration capabilities, as well as an agreement (contained in the Joint Communiqué following his visit) to hold annual ministerial meetings between the ROK Minister of Defense and the Department of Defense, called the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). Both increased military assistance and institutionalization of regular defense meetings came at the request of Park and his cabinet members. In reference to these measures and his mission, Vance hailed the "renewed confidence in the solidarity of the alliance."[38] In the short-term, he may well have been correct. Tensions were reduced and frayed trust mitigated.

Nonetheless, fundamental issues remained unaddressed. In fact, the twin crises in early 1968 and the Vance mission served as learning experiences in relation to a longstanding yet

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retaliation for South Korean raids, in particular the November 1967 raid against a North Korean Peoples Army Divisional Headquarters. The Headquarters was apparently blown up and the twelve-man South Korean strike team exfiltrated without sustaining any casualties. We pointed out that there was no evidence that the South Korean forays had had a chastening effect on Kim Il-Sung."; see, Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson.

[37] Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson.

[38] Halloran, "Confidence in U.S. Has Ebbed in Seoul: "Self-Reliance' Is Seoul Theme," *The Washington Post.*

precarious U.S. commitment to South Korea, the ostensible stability of which had left it relatively understudied and unchanged for years. While in the short term, Park may be restrained, "in the longer term," Vance warned in his message to Johnson, "the prospects of the ROKG initiating a unilateral attack against North Korea are troublesome, ominous, and dangerous." Vance lacked confidence that Park had fully imbibed his warnings against precipitous action. Furthermore, whether begun by a South Korean foray into the North or another serious North Korean incursion into the South, in the case of a war "the prospects of American troops becoming immediately involved in combat with North Korean forces are extremely high." U.S. officials might reject ROK requests for an agreed retaliatory policy or revision to the mutual defense treaty to include a clause for an automatic U.S. military response all they wanted. The fact remained that the presence and frontline disposition of U.S. forces made their rapid involvement a near certainty. [39]

Consequently, Vance's first recommendation to President Johnson was for a small study group to be formed, consisting of officials from State, Defense, the CIA, and the White House, in order to undertake an independent assessment of current policy toward South Korea and identify U.S. objectives in the coming years. "I consider it extremely important," Vance wrote, "that this study group should be formed at a level in Government where its recommendations can be reviewed first-hand by our most senior policy-makers."[40] Vance's recommendation, which the Johnson administration began to implement, indicated just how little relative attention had been given to Korea. Indeed, as one of the participants in the study recalled, it was the first high-level review in more than a decade.[41] Moreover, following years of unofficial conversations, the study

[39] Document 181: Memorandum From Cyrus R. Vance to President Johnson.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Interview with Morton I. Abramowitz, Staff Member, Senior Interdepartmental Group, Washington, D.C. (1968-1969), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 385.

would include the first formal recommendations for a gradual phased reduction of all remaining U.S. ground forces from South Korea.[42]

President Johnson asked Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach to take responsibility for the study. Katzenbach designated Joseph Yager, a longtime foreign service officer (FSO) and State Department official and then analyst at the Institute for Defense Intelligence (IDI), as chairman of the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) tasked with directing and supervising it. As part of the SIG, Yager was joined by Morton Abramowitz, a staff member from Defense, James F. Leonard, then Country Director of the Korea Desk at State, and a colonel in the State Department on detail.[43] The SIG compiled and reviewed contributions from State, Defense, the JCS, CIA, AID, and the Bureau of the Budget, and prepared a preliminary paper by mid-June.[44]

The need for reassessment was driven, in part, by the very success of U.S. policy in South Korea. The SIG's June 15th paper underscored that the ROK's economic growth and political development were no longer dependent upon massive U.S. aid and were increasingly incompatible with U.S. involvement in Seoul's internal affairs. Furthermore, the paper noted, Pyongyang's belligerency provided "a new incentive to re-examine our security posture in Korea." However, the U.S. could not just congratulate itself and walk away, for "rapid disengagement…could pull the props from under much of what our blood and treasure have helped to build." A precipitous pullback might undermine domestic political and economic stability within South Korea, and send

[42] Fraser Report, 62.
[43] Interview with James F. Leonard, Country Director, Korea Desk, Washington, D.C. (1968-1969), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 387.
[44] *FRUS,* 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea, Document 201: Paper Prepared by the Policy Planning Council of the Department of State, footnote 1. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v29p1/d181

the wrong signal to the Communists, even more so "if it were coupled with a bad outcome in Vietnam," which "could be disastrous." The trick was to somehow square the circle.[45]

One the one hand, Washington had to find a way to drawdown and make more flexible its commitment, and thus less prone to immediate entrapment in a massive conflict. Moving forward, future administrations needed to retain a degree of discretion and space to determine just how involved the United States would become were a conflict to occur. On the other hand, U.S. officials had to maintain the credibility of the U.S. commitment and in the very same process of restructuring the U.S. presence (in order to gain greater flexibility) avoid touching of instabilities or, worse, a conflict, which its commitment itself was supposed to prevent against. After all, at no point in the internal discussion or review was the abdication of the political commitment to South Korea's defense (i.e. the mutual defense treaty) ever mentioned. Indeed, officials repeatedly stressed its fundamental importance. The U.S. was to remain treaty-bound to a situation over which, due to making their presence and commitment more flexible, it held less relative control. Adjudicating just how much control to cede was the ultimate question.

Consequently, the SIG recognized the United States "must long retain a real though diminishing role in support of the ROK," and that the policy choices available are "really rather narrow." Two general choices existed: 1) continue supporting a gradual increase in ROK defense capabilities with a correspondingly gradual reduction of US force levels over time, or 2) provide more rapid support for ROK defense modernization in order to quickly give South Korea the capability to defend against an all-out North Korean attack with only U.S. logistic support. The latter option, which was favored by SIG, would adjust U.S. policy toward growing ROK self-reliance, and, "More important," the paper noted, "this strategy would in a few years time all but

[45] Document 201: Paper Prepared by the Policy Planning Council of the Department of State.

eliminate the risk that US combat forces would have to be committed to help the ROK repel a new North Korean attack." Although not an official one, the paper set out a rough timeline for how the strategy could be implemented.[46]

For the first two years, the focus would be on return of the two ROK divisions serving in Vietnam and moving past the hurdle of the 1971 presidential elections in South Korea. However, starting in FY1972, in addition to certain changes in the nature of U.S. military assistance, 2ID (the frontline U.S. infantry division) would be withdrawn and the UNC might relinquish OPCON of ROK forces, except in emergencies. In FY1973, 7ID (the reserve infantry division) would be withdrawn, thus removing the last U.S. ground combat forces from the peninsula. This would be followed in FY1974 and FY1975 by the substantial completion of the modernization of the ROK military structure. Certainly, actual execution of the policy would "depend to various degrees, on developments in the interim," but it laid out the broad framework for achieving the central objective, which the final paragraph of the abstract of SIG's paper succinctly summarized:

> No strategy is without its problems including the one advanced here. This strategy nevertheless offers the best hope of reducing our vulnerability to direct involvement in any new Korean war without making such a war any more likely than it is today. We would preserve our major interests in Korea while moving to a new relationship in which the ROK is no longer a dependent client but a full-fledged, self-reliant ally.[47]

Over the next few months, the study went through several rounds of internal discussions and reviews, by SIG, the State Department's East Asian and Pacific Interdepartmental Regional Group, and the JCS.[48] On September 26, based on the issues raised during the process, Katzenbach

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid, footnote 1.

directed SIG to initiate a formal interagency study to more precisely determine the policy options toward Korea.[49]

On December 23, 1968, in his final Korea-related memo to President Johnson, Deputy Secretary Katzenbach acknowledged the progress made in the overall policy review. He wrote: "we should be able to present your successor with incisive, well-grounded policy options and with detailed program recommendations to carry out these options." Again, Katzenbach reiterated the same themes as had SIG. He stressed the current U.S. posture left little choice as to whether and how the U.S. forces would become involved in the event of large-scale hostilities, which required that policymakers "reconsider the question of whether our present posture decided many years ago is still an optimal one for meeting our commitment." Yet, simultaneously, because the United States was "tied to South Korea's defense by treaty commitments and perhaps even more so by history," there "must be no question about the strength and importance" of that commitment. He then went on to summarize some of the uncertainties and issues that would attend any actual shift in the U.S. presence.[50]

Key uncertainties included limited intelligence on the exact extent of the North Korean threat, even greater difficulty determining the psychological effect of a shift in the U.S. military posture on Pyongyang, Beijing and Moscow, and also how the deteriorating situation in Vietnam might affect the overall climate in the region and Korea specifically. Another crucial issue involved the extent to which ROK forces could effectively substitute for the departing U.S. forces, both in terms of deterrence and, if necessary, war-fighting capabilities. This, in turn, raised a series of subsidiary questions, namely: Is the 15-year old U.S. combat presence an irreplaceable element of

[49] *FRUS,* 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea, Document 211: Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State (Katzenbach) to President Johnson, footnote 4. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v29p1/d181
[50] Ibid.

deterrence? If reduced or withdrawn, would it be politically feasible in the United States to then reintroduce U.S. forces in case hostilities broke out? How much of an ROK defense is needed to replace departing U.S. forces and at what cost? If indeed executed, is such a "trade-off" between U.S. and ROK forces actually compatible with U.S. objectives for Korean political stability (i.e., the maintenance of a pro-American, anti-communist ally) and economic development? And, beyond the risk to South Korea's domestic and wider peninsular stability, what "would be the effect of a United States troop withdrawal from Korea on our position in Asia?" The last question demonstrated that the U.S. commitment to Korea was derivative of and embedded within larger interests, a consideration never far from policymakers' minds, especially once they started to closely examine the matter.[51]

Nevertheless, in terms of actual implementation, the study went nowhere under President Johnson. As Abramowitz recalls, the report ran into the election season and "the bureaucracy was certainly not going to do anything about it, particularly since it was the end of the administration."[52] Nevertheless, Abramowitz pointed out that the process itself forced people to look anew at the situation in Korea. The *Pueblo* incident, which could have started a war, and the policy review it generated, provided a fresh perspective on an issue that for a prolonged period of time had "been dormant, frozen, or un-reviewed."[53] Thus, the study was significant in that it got the highest levels of the U.S. government thinking about U.S. policy toward Korea, established the basic rationale for why Washington needed to reassess its presence and role in South Korea, laid out a general framework and timeline for doing so, and also raised salient questions about the tradeoffs and limitations involved in any reassessment. Moreover, as we shall see, the interagency

[51] Ibid.
[52] Interview with Morton I. Abramowitz, "Korea: Country Reader," 385.
[53] Ibid, 386.

work begun late in Johnson's term in office was picked up almost immediately by the incoming Nixon administration.

Still, the study remained essentially provisional. Moving toward actual implementation of not only would require an administration inclined to do so, which the Nixon administration would be, but also adjudication of multiple obstacles and ambiguities that would attend the process. To be fair, the SIG and Katzenbach were aware of this. Katzenbach alerted Johnson to the fact that a considerable amount of highly technical analysis – economic, military and political –remained to be completed. Yet, technical analysis aside, there were complex political issues as well, including the reverberating and contradictory effects of Vietnam and the interaction of multiple actors within the United States and abroad. These different actors were bound to work at cross-purposes and influence the process in multifaceted and conflicting ways. The provisional nature of the late 1968 policy review and the inherent difficulties it touched on would become clearer over time, as future internal policy reviews invariably recited most of the same uncertainties and issues Katzenbach listed in his memo to Johnson in 1968.

In addition to the fact that the 1968 study got the senior level of the U.S. government to take a new look at Korea, the process also involved specific individuals who would later remerge, in particular Cyrus Vance, Morton Abramowitz, and Joseph Yager. Each learned from their involvement and would continue to influence U.S. policy toward Korea in both formal and informal ways. For his part, Yager left government and moved to the Brookings Institute, where he was involved in research and meetings that played an important role in the gestation of Carter's thinking on Korea during the 1976 campaign. Vance and Abramowitz, on the other hand, would more formally affect policy under Carter, the former as his secretary of state, the latter in a mid-level role in the Pentagon bureaucracy. In fact, as will be shown, Abramowitz, alongside

Holbrooke, would prove to be one of the more tireless bureaucratic infighters opposing Carter's policy.

Nixon Enters, Troops Exit

When Richard Nixon entered office, U.S. forces in South Korea consisted of 2ID and 7ID, one air defense artillery brigade, one missile command, and a wing of tactical fighters, roughly 67,000 personnel overall.[54] President Nixon also inherited the policy review begun during President Johnson's final months in office. Importantly, Nixon came into office with a relatively well-formed vision for restructuring U.S. foreign policy in general and in East Asia specifically, within which the policy review and the reduction of U.S. forces from South Korea fit nicely. As a result, Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger quickly moved to make the preexisting study their own and formulate a plan toward its concrete implementation.

On February 22, 1969, Kissinger issued National Security Study Memorandum 27 (NSSM-27), which directed completion of the interagency study on Korea initiated by Katzenbach in late September 1968. NSSM-27 was one of several studies undertaken in accordance with National Security Decision Memorandum 4 (NSDM-4) calling for the preparation of program analyses for various countries and regions.[55] The interagency task force would retain the same organizational structure as before, but would work in close consultation with the NSC, allowing Kissinger to

[54] International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Military Balance 1970-71* (London: IISS, Autumn 1970), 3-5.
[55] The NSDM-4 program analyses followed Katzenbach's earlier recommendation to President Johnson that the interagency task force should help improve "our whole approach to integrated country planning and programming in areas where security, economic, and political considerations so greatly overlap." The Korean Peninsula and the U.S.-South Korea relationship was certainly such an area, see: Document 211: Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State (Katzenbach) to President Johnson.

carefully supervise its progress. The task force was instructed to provide a draft of its study by May 1 for review by the NSC and an eventual presidential decision.[56]

While the internal review was underway, the Nixon administration faced its own escalatory incident on the Korean Peninsula. On April 14, 1969, an EC-121, a U.S. naval intelligence plan operating out of Japan, was shot down over the Sea of Japan while conducting a reconnaissance mission against North Korea, killing all 31 passengers on board. As Van Jackson correctly noted in his research of newly released documents, the attack "was the most aggressive action North Korea had ever taken against the United States outside the Korean War."[57] Although territorial airspace only extends 12 nautical miles and the plane was operating 40 miles away from North Korea's coast, Pyongyang claimed it had violated its airspace and was a provocation on the part of the United States.[58]

The NSC seriously considered two responses, either retaliatory strikes against a target or targets within North Korea, or the continuation of reconnaissance flights with combat escorts alongside. Although Nixon and Kissinger initially favored retaliation, Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird counseled against it, and the president eventually chose the second option. Much like the *Pueblo* incident, the administration feared escalation and the risk of opening a second front, which would have antagonized the Soviets and China and greatly complicated the war in Vietnam.

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[56] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 2: National Security Study Memorandum 27. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d2; for NSDM-4 see, *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume II, Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1969-1972, Document 13: National Secuirty Decision Memorandum 4. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v02/d13.

[57] Van Jackson, "The EC-121 Shoot Down and North Korea's Coercive Theory of Victory," The Wilson Center: Sources and Methods, April 13, 2017, accessed April 15 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-ec-121-shoot-down-and-north-koreas-coercive-theory-victory.

[58] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 15: Record of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d15; see also, Fraser Report, 58; for Nixon's own recollection see, Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1978), 384.

Beyond the threat of escalation, there was concern about lack of readiness. In an April 18 memo to the president, Defense Secretary Laird remarked: "It is not clear we have the capability now to handle a major confrontation in Korea, if the North Koreans should react with a major assault of any duration against South Korea."[59] Indeed, less than a month before the downing of the EC-121, Kissinger issued NSSM-34, which called for detailed examination of contingency planning for Korea in case of the outbreak of hostilities due to limited or full scale attacks by North Korea or unilateral South Korean responses to Pyongyang's provocations, indicating the administration was concerned about preparedness if escalation were to occur.[60] Again, similar to the *Pueblo* seizure, the EC-121 event reinforced the need to reconsider the U.S. role and presence in South Korea.

Although in the immediate term, troop reductions were frowned upon, planning had to progress. In August, just before his summit meeting in San Francisco with Park Chung Hee, Nixon met privately with Ambassador Porter and asked him about the feasibility of removing troops. He "would have to move on the matter," he told Porter, in part, because of Congressional pressure.[61] A week beforehand, Nixon sounded a similar theme in a NSC meeting in San Clemente, noting that while now was not the time to make changes in the number of troops due to the EC-121 incident, "Sino-Soviet tension," and the "south Vietnam problem," Congress would love to see a reduction in the roughly 60,000 troops then South Korea. "We always say "not now." But we must face the fact we aren't going to have 50,000 troops there 5 years from now," he told his assembled advisors.[62] In late November, he told Kissinger, "the time has come to reduce our Korea

[59] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 17: Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d17.
[60] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 4: National Security Study Memorandum 34. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d4.
[61] Fraser Report, 60-61.
[62] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 34: Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d34

presence…I do not want us to continue to temporize with this problem." He wanted to maintain the U.S. air and sea presence at a level necessary to undertake retaliatory strikes if the situation demanded, but cut the number of troops by half, have a plan by the end of the year to implement such a reduction, and be prepared to properly sell it to Seoul.[63]

While the administration's planning on Korea was spurred on by the EC-121 incident, its motivation to reassess the commitment preceded the event. It was embedded within a broader vision Nixon had begun to articulate even before entering office. As he worked his way out of the political wilderness during the 1960s, he travelled the world in order to reestablish contacts with political leaders and develop his thinking on international affairs. During a trip to Indonesia, Nixon had met with then U.S. Ambassador to Jakarta, Marshall Green, and emphasized the need to drawdown U.S. ground troops from the region and to reexamine relations with the People's Republic of China. Since the Korean War, the U.S. containment system in the region had been primarily directed against the latter.

Soon after his trip, Nixon offered a more concrete formulation of his views in an October 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article, the title of which, "Asia After Vietnam," suggested the direction of his thinking. He foresaw several new policy considerations emerging from Vietnam. First, "One of the legacies of Vietnam almost certainly will be a deep reluctance on the part of the United States to become involved once again in a similar intervention on a similar basis." By extension, "the central pattern of the future of U.S.-Asian relations must be American support for Asian initiatives." Second, the United States should consider establishing some type of relationship with

[63] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 45: Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d45

Beijing. Third, the United States should tolerate Asian countries and allies which did not ascribe to our strictly follow Western of American democratic ideals.[64]

Upon election, Nixon appointed Marshall Green as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs. Based on Nixon's article and his own conversations with the president, Green prepared a paper setting out what he believed were Nixon's views.[65] Nixon read and approved it. In testimony before Congress, Green highlighted a particularly important statement within the paper, which Nixon later instructed Kissinger to circulate to all top U.S. officials. It read:

> The United States has vital interests in East Asia as well as specific commitments; the United States will honor its defense commitments, all of which were formally approved by the U.S. Senate. While U.S. interests remain essentially the same and the commitments immutable, there is undeniably a change in mood in the American people. They will be cautious about undertaking new commitments. They are becoming somewhat impatient with carrying what many consider to be a disproportionate share of the burden of military security and economic assistance in areas which, while important to the United States, are nevertheless distant. They are asking more and more frequently what other countries are doing to help themselves and each other to share these burdens. The attitude of the American people and the capacity of the new administration to cooperate further in Asia will thus depend to an important extent upon what the countries in the area are prepared to do for themselves and for each other.[66]

Later, Green included the same themes as well as insights gleaned from his meetings with East Asian leaders in a paper he helped prepare for the president's trip around the world in July 1969, the first stop of which was Guam. It was then, during an impromptu press conference on July 25, that Nixon revealed the essential elements of his perspective on the future of the U.S. role in East

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[64] Richard Nixon, "Asia After Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, 46, no.1 (1967): 113.
[65] Fraser Report, 59.
[66] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations: Hearings Before the Subcommitee on International Organizations*, pt. 4, 95th Cong., 2nd sess, 1978, 21 (hereafter cited as "IKAR Hearings, pt.4")

Asia. The timing and contents of his remarks in Guam were his own and surprised some of his advisors, yet the above record shows his thinking had been developing for some time.[67]

Nixon's statement, soon dubbed the Guam or Nixon Doctrine, contained three central propositions. The United States would honor its existing treaty commitments. Next, it would provide a shield (i.e. the nuclear umbrella) if a nuclear power threatened the freedom of certain nations. Lastly, in case of other types of aggression, the United States would furnish aid and economic assistance when requested and appropriate, but would look to the nations directly threatened to assume primary responsibility for their own defense.[68] In conclusion, Nixon remarked, "we must avoid that kind of policy that will make countries in Asia so dependent on us that we are dragged into conflicts such as the one we have in Vietnam."[69] Indeed, in the near term, the Nixon doctrine allowed the administration to pursue one of its most immediate foreign policy aims, namely, the drawdown and eventual end to the war in Vietnam.

Achieving so-called "peace with honor" in Vietnam was premised on disengagement under the guise of "Vietnamization."[70] The latter was shorthand for a program wherein South Vietnam's troops would replace U.S. forces while the latter were withdrawn and the United States provided further assistance to the government and ARVN. Meanwhile, the doctrine also applied to Korea. Years later, Kissinger stated that the March 1971 removal of the roughly 20,000 troops of 7ID from South Korea was consistent with the Nixon doctrine.[71] Other officials involved, such as Adm. Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. William Westmoreland, Army

[67] Fraser Report, 59.
[68] Ibid; for Marshall Green's own description see, IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 22.
[69] Richard Nixon, "American Policy in the Pacific (Nixon Doctrine): Informal Remarks of President Nixon with Newsmen at Guam, July 25, 1969," in *Korean Unification: Source Materials with An Introduction*, ed. Se-Jin Kim (Seoul, Korea: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1976), 296.
[70] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," The American Presidency Project, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, accessed November 5, 2017, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303
[71] IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 239;

Chief of Staff at the time, affirmed as much, saying the Korean reduction helped to implement the doctrine, relieve congressional pressure to "bring the boys home," and cut down military spending worldwide.[72]

However, of particular importance, reducing U.S. troops in Korea directly helped provide cover for the disengagement from Vietnam by demonstrating the doctrine also applied elsewhere. It provided a counter to the argument that the U.S. was retreating from Vietnam; which, of course, it was. John Dunn, Vice President Agnew's foreign affairs advisor, told Congressional staff members that for the United States to remove itself from Vietnam without appearing to retreat, it had to be able to say the policy applied to the whole region. The foremost reason for the timing of the Korean withdrawal, Dunn said, was the need to legitimize the doctrine. Korea, already the subject of an in-depth policy review carried over from the Johnson years, was the best place to implement it outside of Vietnam. Put simply, Koreanization of ROK defense ran alongside and justified Vietnamization. Indeed, as a concept, Koreanization predated Vietnamion and had the same author in Secretary of Defense Laird. [73]

The doctrine also worked in combination with Nixon's other larger goal, namely, pursuit of a new kind of relationship with the PRC. The two worked in a mutually reinforcing manner. The Nixon Doctrine: "made it easier for a follow-up change in American attitudes towards China. Conversely, the U.S. could use its new relationship with China as a token excuse to justify its retreat from the Asian commitment." The changed estimate of threat from China provided the political justification for the devolution of American power to regional allies by supposing decreased vulnerability of Asian allies to outright Communist aggression or attack.[74] Overall,

[72] Fraser Report, 63.
[73] Ibid, 60.
[74] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea,* 69.

several interlocking processes were behind the altered perception of China and motivated the Nixon Doctrine. These included the dissolution of the early-Cold War conception of a monolithic, undifferentiated Communist threat manifest by an overt and worsening Sino-Soviet split, the realization of the stark limits of U.S. power evinced by the unwinnable and terribly costly war in Vietnam, and, relatedly, increasing awareness amongst policymakers in Washington of the relative decline in American power within a more complex international environment.

Thus, the emerging devolution of U.S. power meant reassessing and reducing its physical commitment, and also transferring the burden of defense to smaller powers. Nonetheless, there were limits to just how far U.S policymakers were willing to adjust. For no matter how pressing the need for an adjustment, the underlying imperative of maintaining U.S. hegemony, what Leffler calls preponderance, had not changed, either on a regional or a direct, bilateral level.[75] Herein lay the fundamentally incongruent dynamic of the Nixon doctrine. On the one hand, the doctrine presumed the United States needed to curtail its direct involvement in Third World conflicts, yet, on the other hand, it still presumed the Third World remained an arena of urgent geopolitical contestation; even more urgent, many argued, as the Soviets had by the early 1970s begun to reach rough parity with the United States and expand their involvement in various Third World countries.[76] U.S. strategists and policymakers had to adjudicate how far they might loosen the U.S. hold and involvement without at the same time forgoing U.S. influence in what was still a crucial area of political, strategic and ideological contestation. The doctrine was ultimately conservative, as Nixon privately told Senator Mike Mansfield, the doctrine "was not a formula for getting

[75] Leffler, *A Preponderance* of Power, 1992.
[76] Sargent highlights the incongruent presumptions underpinning the Nixon Doctrine, see: Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017) 69.; for U.S.-Soviet contestation in the Third World, see: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

America *out* of Asia, but one that provided the only sound basis for America's staying *in*" to assist threatened states."[77] Put differently, the Nixon Administration sought to strike a balance with its allies between doing too much and doing too little.

Doing too much would perpetuate an unsustainable dependence and prevent self-reliance on the part of allies, and leave the United States unnecessarily exposed to massive involvement in Asian wars. On the contrary, doing too little and backing away in an overly hasty fashion would undercut the credibility of the U.S. commitment by undermining allied confidence in the same and in themselves, threatening to set in motion events over which the U.S. would not only have less control but that directly affected vital U.S. interests.[78] In fact, Nixon himself emphasized the important role of perception, stressing that the method by which the U.S. executed the shift was paramount because "such a psychological reorientation of alliance policy is of even greater significance than actual redistribution of the physical burden."[79] The incongruous presumptions inbuilt in the Nixon Doctrine applied to Korea especially, with direct implications for the degree to which the U.S. would alter its presence and role on the peninsula.

The extent to which U.S. officials could reassess the U.S. role in South Korea was complicated by the inherent link between the military and political aspects of the commitment. How could the U.S. pursue a degree of military retrenchment from South Korea, by drawing down and redeploying U.S. forces away from the Korean Peninsula, when that same process of retrenchment undermined the credibility of the political commitment itself? In other words, how

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[77] Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 357.

[78] On the point of neither doing too little nor too much, Nixon's second annual foreign policy report to Congress read: "The Nixon Doctrine recognizes that we cannot abandon friends, and must not transfer burdens too swiftly. We must strike a balance between doing too much and thus preventing self-reliance, and doing too little and thus undermining self-confidence"; see: Richard Nixon: "Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy.," The American Presidency Project, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324.

[79] As quoted in Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea,* 98.

could the U.S. claim to keep its commitments if it drew down and ultimately withdrew the very physical presence that made the commitment credible?[80]

The Nixon Administration attempted to finesse the issue of creating a flexible commitment through the strategic concept of mobile defense. Mobile defense would depend more on U.S. air, naval, and logistical support for South Korea and less on forward deployed, U.S. ground forces (i.e. the tripwire). However, the flexibility afforded by such a strategy did not fundamentally address the incongruent dynamic above. In fact, it sharpened the dilemma. As noted, the Nixon Doctrine asserted all commitments would be upheld under the ultimate deterrent of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, while local conventional defense was passed off to U.S. allies. Thus, playing the logic out: "the spectrum of U.S. intervention in Asian conflicts now seemed to be subject to polarization between a minimum conventional commitment and the threat of nuclear response."[81] In either case, each intervention or the threat of such an intervention undermined its credibility. The first was too weak, the second too unbelievable. A minimum conventional commitment rang of abandonment, whereas a nuclear response was politically too costly, of limited to no military value, and, significantly, it went against the South Korean ally's own desire. Despite their hatred of the regime in Pyongyang, ROK officials had no interest in seeing nuclear weapons unleashed on their fellow Koreans. They preferred the maintenance of a credible U.S. conventional troop presence.[82]

In order to address the above dilemma, U.S. policymakers approached any change in the physical U.S. presence and role with several priorities in mind. In terms of the process, it could

[80] Ibid, 64.
[81] Ibid, 87.
[82] Nam succinctly described the dilemma and Seoul's obvious preference: "In this sense, the American efforts to substitute nuclear weapons for manpower and conventional defense (i.e. the Nixon Doctrine) would only result in an erosion of their commitment to the Republic rather than in the creation of a new defense strategy. For the Republic, a strong US conventional commitment was preferable to uncertain nuclear commitment because it was more practical and morally acceptable than the latter," see, Ibid, 95.

not be done precipitously. It must be executed deliberately with proper planning and consultation with the South Korean government. In terms of the outcome, whatever alteration ultimately occurred, the United States must retain relative control over the peninsular environment and the actions of its smaller ally. Before and after the Nixon Administration publicly announced its intent to reduce U.S. troops from South Korea such considerations were evident in both its public pronouncements and private discussions. One particularly salient issue involved the local U.S. military commander's authority.

In testimony before the Symington Committee in late February 1970, less than a month before the Nixon Administration announced it would reduce U.S. ground force levels in South Korea, Gen. John H. Michaelis emphasized the stabilizing role of U.S. forces. In addition to deterring a North Korean attack, Gen. Michaelis, then the four-star commander in Korea, stressed the importance of holding OPCON over the ROK military. He told the committee, quite frankly: "I should state that my operational control over the Republic of Korea Armed Forces and the effective way in which it is administered has helped to maintain stability in the peninsula. This is a fundamental reason why CINCUNC should retain operational control of the Republic of Korea and other U.N. armed forces." When pressed to elaborate on the matter by Senators Symington and Fulbright, Ambassador Porter, testifying alongside Gen. Michaelis, reiterated the point.[83]

Porter underscored that the arrangement, particularly in moments of crisis or provocation by North Korea, insured a consultative process, preventing "hasty action or excessive action" by Seoul, and that this "is what we want to maintain." Senator Symington pointed out the inconsistency of having a political and military commitment, which the entire command arrangement appeared geared toward ever having to meet, regardless of what provocations might

[83] Symington Hearings, 1589.

occur. Symington remarked that, "We never retaliate, just go and mix ourselves up in a situation in various countries and say don't ever hit them, but we will try to protect you if they hit you." Symington's inquiry and Porter's response hit the nail on the head. U.S. officials, according to Porter, considered the "dangers ever immediate," and were "afraid of where retaliation, if automatic and instantaneous and severe might take us in terms of escalation. We want time to talk it over and see where we are going and not be automatically drawn in." Holding relative control over the situation and enforcing restraint, in essence, allowed the United States to avoid ever having to answer its commitment; or, more aptly, for U.S. officials the best way to circumvent the dilemma attending a conflict (i.e. having to react on either extreme end of the spectrum, conventional or nuclear) would be to prevent such a situation from ever occurring. Maintaining a certain degree of control was thus essential. [84]

The same priority to move deliberately and retain control was evident in the Nixon Administration' planning surrounding how many and which specific troops to remove, as well as how to physically reconfigure and determine the operational role of those that remained. The interagency process begun by NSSM-27 ultimately determined the decision of troop levels in Korea. It was an enormous project and involved the entire NSC decision-making process. Winthrop G. Brown, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, chaired the NSSM-27 Steering Group, which produced and submitted a several-hundred-page study to Kissinger. Kissinger chaired the Senior Review Group tasked with overseeing the entire interagency process. The group consisted of top officers from State, Defense, the JCS, and CIA, who discussed options for troop removals at five or six meetings. Based on these meetings, and with staff assistance from the NSC, a paper was submitted to the president, outlining three options:

[84] Ibid, 1590.

remove both U.S. Army divisions; remove only one division; or leave only several brigades. Nixon, following the advice of Kissinger and the NSC, chose to remove one division, roughly 20,000 men. The choice was designated National Security Decision Memorandum 48 (NSDM-48), the official document by which the troop reduction was to be implemented.[85]

NSDM-48 was issued on March 20, 1970. However, while DOD was tasked with the plan for carrying out the reduction and redeploying the remaining U.S. forces away from the DMZ, it remained unclear which of the two divisions would actually be removed. The original plan called for the removal of 2ID, the frontline division that still occupied a portion of the DMZ.[86] It was to be replaced entirely by South Korean troops. The only remaining frontline U.S. troops would be one company rotated to Panmunjom for security duty from the remaining division. However, President Park and other ROK officials, informed in late March of the U.S. plan to remove a division, were deeply unnerved. Not only were they opposed to troop reductions *per se*, they were alarmed by the plan to remove 2ID, the more forward deployed of the two U.S. divisions. The so-called tripwire presence was the next best thing to an automatic guarantee of U.S. involvement; a guarantee that successive U.S. administrations had never been willing to enshrine in the mutual defense treaty. The ROK Prime Minister Chung Il Kwon went so far as to threaten not to replace the departing American troops, leaving some of the most vulnerable attack routes unprotected. Although Ambassador Porter and other American officials saw the threat as a bluff, it highlighted the sensitive nature of the troop reductions and the perception surrounding them as well as the need to reconsider the initial plan.[87]

[85] Fraser Report, 62; *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 56: National Security Decision Memorandum 48. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d56.
[86] Ibid, 63, footnote 56.
[87] Ibid, 63-64.

Based on their discussion with ROK officials in Seoul, Ambassador Porter and Gen. Michaelis suggested an alternative, namely, "re-aligned" configurations, which might help mitigate the appearance of a large-scale withdrawal and ease President Park's political problems over the U.S. troop reductions. Instead of removing an entire division, the U.S. would retain both divisions, and replace departing U.S. brigades from both 2ID and 7ID with ROK brigades. It would amount to the retention of both divisional commands in Korea, but the actual manpower of both would be a combination of U.S. and ROK forces. A drawback of this option was that it would leave the divisions ultimately under strength. Another proposal offered by the ROK government involved retaining 2ID fully intact, with most of the removals coming from 7ID. However, the latter's divisional command and flag would stay, even if the division itself, due to the reductions, would be in a mostly cadre status, again with ROK forces filling out the spots vacated by the departing U.S. troops.[88]

In a memo to Kissinger about the alternative configurations, John Holdridge, a senior staff assistant on the NSC, noted that theoretically speaking there was no reason that such re-aligned configurations could not be implemented. There was a long history of Koreans serving with American units under U.S. command, dating back to the Korean War. Moreover, "it would meet President Park's political desiderata of retaining what could be described as two divisions." However, there were some important complications. First, the alternative plan brought into focus the crucial issue of control. Defense would likely "balk at having U.S. forces in such a minority position."[89] Soon thereafter, in a conversation with Congressman Cornelius Gallagher about the proposed alternative configurations, Kissinger stated flatly that one or two cadre divisions filled

[88] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 65: Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d65.
[89] Ibid.

out by mostly ROK forces "would of course raise problems as to how to control their initiatives."[90] Second, the whole objective of the troop reduction, which is to say enhancing the flexibility of the U.S. commitment based on the concept of Koreanization, would be undercut by the alternative configurations under consideration. By leaving a U.S. division (if mostly in cadre status) along the DMZ, "the advantages of a U.S. pull-back would then no longer obtain, i.e. lowering the chances of a direct U.S.-North Korean confrontation from the very outset of a significant North Korean military move across the DMZ."[91] U.S. officials were struggling to strike a balance between doing too much or too little.

Despite the complications presented by the alternative proposals above, sticking with the original plan to remove 2ID presented its own set of problems. As alluded to, it potentially undermined the credibility of the U.S. commitment. Like Nixon, Kissinger recognized the psychological effect, telling Congressman Gallagher that the real "shock of the proposed reduction is its symbolism."[92] For the South Koreans, it gave the appearance of creeping abandonment. If the U.S. refused to provide a treaty-based guarantee of automatic involvement in a Korean conflict, and also intended to remove that part of the physical presence which most immediately signaled its commitment, how else could Seoul interpret it? Additionally, it weakened U.S. and alliance defense capabilities, which could be brought to bear in the early stages of a conflict. In turn, decreased capabilities (or the perception thereof) potentially unsettled the psychological dynamics that underpinned the deterrent structure; deterrence of North Korean aggression and adventurism but also of a precipitous ROK reaction to Pyongyang's provocations. Consequently, the Nixon

[90] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 66: Memorandum of Conversation. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d66.
[91] Document 65: Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger).
[92] Document 66: Memorandum of Conversation.

Administration eventually settled on a kind of middle-of-the-road option, which, while it did not evade the issues, addressed them in the least sub-optimal manner.

As the troop reduction was actually implemented, 7ID, the more reserve of the two U.S. divisions, was removed and disbanded. Meanwhile, 2ID remained but was pulled back from the DMZ and placed in a more reserve position, along the forward edge of battle area (or FEBA line). The United States kept one rotating company in place at Panmunjom, in order to carry out armistice keeping duties consonant with the UNC structure. Three months after the March 1971 removal of 7ID, Defense Secretary Laird, a firm proponent of troop reductions and one of the architects of Koreanization (and Vietnamization) told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that the new configuration would "increase the likelihood of being able to keep conflict at the lowest possible level of intensity without involving the U.S. in such a conflict."[93] The reduction and pull back contributed to a slightly more flexible U.S. commitment and was firmly in line with the Koreanization of South Korea's defense, as ROK units took up the first line of defense. Simultaneously, though, it left a robust enough U.S. ground presence to signal a sustained U.S. commitment. It met crucial defense needs by allowing for U.S. reserve units to be mobilized and fill key invasions corridors were a conflict to occur. It also permitted a degree of relative control or influence over escalatory situations insofar as U.S. officials would still take the lead in crisis negotiations at Panmunjom, as they had during the *Pueblo* incident.

It bears repeating that no matter how imperative the need to implement the Nixon Doctrine at the local level in Korea, U.S. officials still intended to maintain their basic commitment and were thus resolved to hold sway over the environment. Ultimately, U.S. policymakers did not trust others could get the job done. In his later recollection of the changes, Kissinger wrote that that "the

[93] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 83.

reason for America's continued commitment was simple and the same in South Korea and Europe: we doubted the ability of our allies to assume their own defense completely and we feared that the removal of our shield might tempt aggression."[94] Aside from the issues of OPCON and crisis negotiation, the same impulse to maintain relative control was evident in the increasing institutionalization of the alliance architecture.

Amidst Nixon's troop reductions, U.S. officials and their ROK counterparts continued a process of institutional deepening within the U.S.-ROK alliance. The combined operational planning staff established in 1968 was changed in 1971 into an integrated field army headquarters. Consequently, U.S. and South Korean military officers began to cooperate more tightly on planning and operational issues. In the process, the ROK took on an increased share of the division of labor and the alliance became more sophisticated. Yet, however much Seoul's role increased, its military forces were still conceived of and integrated within a U.S.-led structure. This local re-conceptualization, "the localization of allied defense," extended beyond the peninsula to overall force planning and strategy; evinced in the DOD's shift from General Force Planning to Total Force Planning.[95] Whereas the former called solely on U.S. forces and resources, the latter strategy envisioned the utilization of U.S. allies' military resources to meet the requirements of a reduced American role abroad. Total Force Planning was designed to integrate all available resources, including South Korea's, to address the extensive requirements of U.S. preponderance abroad.[96] The international environment might be more complex, and the America-burden relatively reduced, but the overall U.S. strategic vision endured.

[94] Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years: Vol II: Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 308.
[95] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 98.
[96] Ibid*,* 99.

Importantly, despite adopting a greater role, Seoul remained dependent on the United States on multiple levels. Notwithstanding the ROK's sole responsibility for frontline defense, remaining U.S. ground combat forces were important both for deterrence and as a potent local reserve offering supplemental firepower the South Korean military did not yet possess. As a tripwire (if a slightly loosened one), the remaining U.S. division represented the tip of a far larger U.S. military force. U.S. forces also provided essential intelligence, logistics and air support capabilities. Such capabilities were important for early warning before a conflict, and crucial for resupply and air superiority during one. Although the ROK manned the frontline in a possible Communist onslaught, it would almost immediately require replacements of weaponry, ammunition, and spare parts. Only the U.S. could resupply the ROK on the necessary scale and with the necessary speed.

Throughout the contentious U.S.-ROK discussions surrounding the 1971 troop reductions, various U.S. officials expressed concern the South Koreans would leverage their dependence in order to prevent future drawdowns and avoid having to foot a larger defense bill. Vice-President Agnew expressed as much in a message to Nixon, following his August 1970 visit to Seoul. Agnew contrasted U.S. and ROK draft texts of a public statement addressing the troop reductions and force modernization program. Agnew's version affirmed that the presence of U.S. forces was required until the modernization process was completed and further withdrawals would only occur as ROK defensive capabilities grew, which would be determined by full consultation between allies. Yet, Agnew's draft asserted, the U.S. reserved "final control of its armed forces," meaning ultimately it would decide when and how to remove more troops. On the other hand, Park's draft text, which Agnew stated he "could not in good conscience recommend" to Nixon, indicated the

South Korean President's determination to tie remaining U.S. forces to an open-ended and "undetermined level of modernization program."[97]

Defense Secretary Laird voiced a similar concern in a message to Nixon following his July 1971 visit to Seoul: "The ROKs are clearly counting, both explicitly and implicitly, on the United States to provide many of the fundamental resources, especially hardware and operations and maintenance funds (but not to exclude US manpower), requisite to preservation of an adequate deterrent." More colorfully, Laird wrote: "The basic ROK approach is not unlike that of Samuel Gompers' labor movement in the late 1800's. They simply want "more," no matter what the category and no matter how inconsistent the context."[98] Ambassador Porter summed up the Seoul's approach. Once Park realized the removal of 7ID was inevitable, Porter characterized the ROK government's long-range objective as one of minimum withdrawal, maximum compensation.[99]

Despite or indeed because of these considerations, U.S. officials felt compelled to move forward with planning for future reductions. Domestic political pressure and the requirements of a more flexible foreign policy drove the process, but so too did the need to keep pressure on Seoul for greater self-sufficiency. In fact, the fourth major point in NSDM-48 called for, among other things, a five-year plan for the U.S. force structure, in which "the feasibility and timing of further reductions in the U.S. military presence in Korea should be thoroughly evaluated."[100] Defense Secretary Laird wasted little time. In July 1971, soon after 7ID was removed, he recommended that as the ROK modernization program progressed at least 14,000 more troops be reduced in FY

[97] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 71: Backchannel Telegram From the Ambassador to Korea (Porter) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d71.
[98] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 101: Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d101.
[99] Fraser Report, 65.
[100] Document 56: National Security Decision Memorandum 48.

1973.[101] The next month, Laird issued a Program Decision Memorandum to the Secretary of the Army, which provided for retention of 2ID in Korea through the end of FY1973, with its reduction to just one brigade by end of FY 1974. In August 1972, the retention of 2ID was pushed back to the end of FY 1974 with its reduction to a final brigade to the end of FY 1975, but the overall program guidance remained the same.[102]

However, these internal recommendations and the program guidance aside, in 1971 the consensus among most officials in the Nixon Administration was to put on hold any further changes in the immediate future. Negotiations with the ROK over the 1971 reduction and redeployment had been immensely tense and disagreeable. Most felt it prudent to let the dust settle, both for the modernization program to take hold and to support Park's domestic political position. Possibly more important, though, was the degree to which U.S. policy in Korea was inextricably bound up with wider interests. Secretary of State Rogers, citing the "stresses and strain" surrounding 7ID's removal, counseled restraint in the near term and prudence moving forward so as not to "give the wrong signal either to the other side or to our friends in the area." He continued:

> My concern in this regard is not only with respect to Korea, but perhaps even more importantly with respect to Japan. You well know what a volatile people the Japanese are. I have already noted concern on the part of some of them that we are perhaps moving too far and too fast in reducing our presence in the area. While some concern on the part of the Japanese is healthy, I feel that we should be careful not to cross over the line that would cause the Japanese to have such doubts about our deterrent capabilities and intentions with respect to Japan and the rest of the area [1½ lines not declassified]. Unless we handle ourselves properly, this could quickly become a very real danger.[103]

[101] Document 101: Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon.
[102] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Service, *Review of the Policy Decision to Withdraw United States Ground Forces from Korea: Hearings before the Investigations Subcommittee and Committee on Armed Services*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977, 89 (hereafter cited as the. "Stratton Subcommitee Hearings").
[103] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 72: Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d72.

Rogers' view was a widely shared and oft-repeated one, and also part of the JCS's original criticism of the 1971 reduction. At the time, the JCS felt the withdrawal was "untimely" and expressed concern about removing an entire division. From the JCS perspective, one and one-third divisions offered the minimum posture necessary to maintain deterrence and stability.[104]

More importantly, though, the JCS felt that wider regional political and psychological ripple effects had to be considered alongside any changes in the local military balance. In a February 1970 message to Kissinger, the JCS representative on the NSC's Review Group for Korea policy, wrote: "US forces in Korea are a symbol of the US commitments to the defense of the Republic of Korea, and in fact to all of Northeast Asia. Any significant or rapid reduction in the US presence could cause anxiety to the Koreans and be regarded (by both allies and enemies) as evidence that the United States had lost interest in meeting its defense commitments in Korea"[105] The symbolism of the U.S. commitment, and its relationship to the imprecise and unmeasurable yet critical issue of U.S. credibility, had been deeply embedded within U.S. policy toward Korea since its inception in the late 1940s. It came into sharp focus during periods of change or potential change, and would remain relevant as the 1970s progressed.

As it happened, U.S. Korea policy soon was drowned out by other concerns. Never a top priority to begin with, U.S. policymakers turned their focus from Seoul to other, more important areas. Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, followed by Nixon's surprise announcement of his own pending visit, signaled a turn toward Sino-U.S. *Rapprochement* and the tri-polarization of the formerly hardened bipolar order. *Détente* between the Washington and Moscow and SALT negotiations were Nixon and Kissinger's other strategic imperative. The 1973 Yom Kippur War

[104] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 52: Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff Representative to the National Security Council Review Group (Unger) to the Chairman of the Review Group (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d52.
[105] Ibid.

and related oil crisis also demanded the administration's attention. Finally, and of particular salience, were ongoing negotiations between Washington and Hanoi and the U.S effort to end the war in Vietnam. These various priorities, coupled with the growing controversy over Watergate, meant that Korea no longer held the high-level attention of the U.S. government. Although several NSC memorandum attempted to kick-start previous studies and planning on Korea, events and the scandal-ridden end of Nixon's presidency obstructed any substantive change. Not until the final year of the Ford Administration would more serious internal discussion once again begin.

The View From Seoul

The Nixon Administration's reassessment of U.S. policy toward Korea, and the attendant reduction and redeployment of U.S. forces, was propelled by the premises inherent in the Nixon Doctrine. Moreover, the doctrine itself was part of Nixon and Kissinger's wider geopolitical strategy to uphold the postwar Pax Americana by striking a more realistic balance between U.S. resources and commitments abroad. Adjusting U.S. forces in Korea was merely one small part of a larger effort. Nevertheless, while ultimately driven by American-centric imperatives, the doctrine and its application to Korea could not occur without the involvement and cooperation of the Park government in Seoul.

The removal of 7ID and redeployment of remaining U.S. forces may have been embedded within a more an extensive U.S. strategic tapestry, but for Park Chung Hee and his closest advisors it had direct and significant implications for ROK national security as well as domestic regime stability. Consequently, while the U.S. policy decision on troop levels was decided in Washington and unilaterally thrust upon Seoul, Park and other ROK officials reacted with frantic determination to mitigate what they perceived to be its negative effects.

To be sure, even before the Nixon Doctrine was pronounced and troop reductions became official U.S. policy, South Korean officials had worked to bolster the U.S. view of Seoul as a reliable ally. Early in Nixon's term, ROK Prime Minister Chung Il Kwon, surely aware of the president's thinking as revealed in his pre-presidential writings and speeches, proposed ways the ROK might contribute to wider U.S. policy. During their first meeting on April 1, 1969, Chung emphasized that Washington must avoid repeating Dean Acheson's earlier mistake of excluding Korea from the forward defense perimeter in Asia and "should maintain two divisions and more after the Vietnamese war is over," because their presence "was important both militarily and psychologically." Eager to stress the supplemental role the ROK might play within larger U.S. strategy, Chung floated the idea of forming a combined U.S.-Korea mobile combat force to help fight in Asia, which "would relieve some of the American burden in Asia."[106] Ironically, although no combined U.S.-ROK expeditionary force was created, the concept of integrating U.S. and ROK capabilities was, in fact, consonant with Defense Secretary Laird's own thinking and later inclusion of ROK armed forces in the concept of U.S. Total Force Planning. Chung's proposal was neither the first nor last time a high-level ROK official would suggest ways South Korea might contribute to larger U.S. aims. ROK officials were ever-sensitive to perceived shifts in the U.S. commitment. Chung's suggestion was merely the latest iteration of a tendency to highlight South Korea's value as an ally and so maintain a strong commitment from Washington.

Once the Nixon Doctrine was actually announced in July 1969, the Park government's initial reaction was one of tentative acceptance. Park's own language about self-sufficiency fit with the call for increased allied responsibility. Moreover, as noted, Nixon made his initial announcement in Guam without any prior warning (surprising not only the South Koreans but also

[106] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 5: Memorandum of Conversation. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d5.

his own advisors). In other words, the ROK government made the best of a doctrine one-sidedly pronounced. Still, ROK officials were quick to voice their concerns to Secretary of State Rogers and Marshall Green, both visiting Seoul several days after Nixon's impromptu comments. According to Green, they had five main concerns, the predominant one being whether or not the United States would remain a strong ally. They also worried about the implications of the doctrine for military aid, the strength of the U.S. stand in Vietnam (where two ROK combat divisions were fighting), and the U.S. stance on North Korea in general, and its infiltrations in particular.[107]

In response to these concerns and President Park's desire to meet, Nixon invited the South Korean president to San Francisco for a state visit on August 21-23. Though internal discussions regarding troop reductions from Korea were already underway, Nixon remained mum about them during his meeting with Park. Instead, he praised the ROK's ability to take on the main responsibility for the defense against North Korean aggression and the fact that it supplied more troops in Vietnam than any other U.S. ally. For his part, Park endorsed the Guam doctrine's encouragement of "Asia for Asians" and ROK self-sufficiency. Still, Secretary of State Rogers recalled that while Park may have applauded the Nixon Doctrine, he added: "Don't do it to me."[108] While the state visit was a welcome event, ROK officials apprehensively noted the rather vague expression in the joint communiqué issued after the Nixon-Park meeting that the "American forces in Korea must remain strong and alert." Nevertheless, due to its significant troop contributions to Vietnam and historical ties with the United States, the ROK government felt it had a special relationship exempting it from any substantial application of the Nixon Doctrine. Indeed, at the

[107] Fraser Report, 59-60.
[108] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 55: Draft Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d55.

time of the Nixon-Park meeting, ROK officials did not think the new policy was menacing to their own security or a portent of coming U.S. troop reductions. [109]

Consequently, in March 1970, when the Nixon Administration officially announced its intent to withdraw forces the reaction from Seoul was one of shock, dismay, and intransigence. Donald Ranard, the State Department's Director of Korean Affairs at the time, recalled that among other concerns, Park and "his kitchen cabinet saw the troop reductions as an issue which would weaken him at the polls, and Park had one thing in mind, and that is that he must win the 1971 election."[110] Korean officials felt any actual implementation of the withdrawal by delayed until after the elections took place.[111] When Ambassador Porter met with Park in late March to begin the conversation about troop withdrawals, the latter asserted, "that we would not be allowed to take our troops out, that we had no right to do that."[112] Rogers, taken aback, replied that the United States had no intention of giving Seoul control over U.S. troops, no matter how close of friends they were. Soon thereafter, Seoul's concern was further heightened when Chou En Lai visited Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang, settling some simmering differences between the PRC and DPRK, thus reigniting fears of PRC-DPRK collaboration.

In addition to their opposition to troop reductions in general, Park and his closest advisors were, as noted, upset by the U.S. plan to remove an entire division and divisional command and redeploy forces away from the DMZ. Prime Minister Chung's aforementioned threat not to replace the departing U.S. troops along vulnerable invasion corridors was just one example of the agitated ROK reaction. Seoul officials also felt the compensatory assistance offered by Washington was insufficient to replace the departing forces. Whereas Seoul requested upwards of a $4 billion,

[109] Fraser Report, 60.
[110] IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 74.
[111] Fraser Report, 63.
[112] IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 41.

Nixon officials promised $1 billion in assistance for the military modernization program (later increased to $1.5 billion). Seoul felt the sum meager and, as examined below, doubted Congressional follow-through on the necessary legislation. Although by June of 1970, Park and his advisors had come to realize some withdrawal was inevitable, they remained determined to water down the plan as much as possible.

In a June 18 cable, Ambassador Porter noted the ROK government had created and exploited public dismay over the possibility of a troop reduction and was "prepared to pull out all stops" to convey the depth of its feeling to the United States.[113] The Korean Press devoted wide attention to an interview Kim Dong Jo, the ROK Ambassador to the United States, gave to the Korea press corps in Washington D.C. He said a quick U.S. withdrawal from Korea might require the ROK to reconsider its own troop presence in Vietnam; the ROK had never been informed or consulted formally or informally about the reduction of forces and did not think any such reduction would occur while the ROK fought alongside the American forces in Vietnam; and for most Korean people "withdrawal of US troops would be a sellout." Much like Prime Minister Chung's threat not to replace departing U.S. forces on the DMZ, U.S. officials did not take seriously Kim's threat to pull ROK troop from Vietnam. However, according to Porter, until that point ROK officials had been careful to keep the debate on U.S. forces in South Korea separate from the question of ROK troops in Vietnam.[114]

Tensions between the allies continued to grow in the lead up to the July U.S.-ROK SCM. Porter and Ranard felt it was time to get serious and publicly announced a firm 1971 deadline for

[113] Fraser Report, 65; it was during this period that ROK officials eagerly pushed the alterative troop configurations explored above, wherein the United States would keep both divisional commands intact and not redeploy its forces further south. Instead, several brigades of U.S. forces would be removed from each division and replaced by ROK units.
[114] IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 504.

the withdrawal. In response, Prime Minister Chung threatened to resign with his entire cabinet if the plan were carried out. He further stated publicly: "We are not against the Nixon Doctrine in principle, but if North Korea Premier Kim Il Sung miscalculates, the South Korean people will wonder if America will abandon its security treaty or come to our defense."[115] Chung's statement indicated the extent to which apprehension among ROK officials went beyond the immediate troop reductions and what they saw as insufficient compensatory assistance to more important questions about the strength of the overall U.S. commitment.

A senior information officer at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul reported that Korean officials approached the upcoming SCM "virtually united by the binds of apprehension and dread." He described their concern:

> At the innermost ring of their concern is the fear that the announced American plan to reduce some troops from the ROK will lead to a total withdrawal, despite U.S. reassurances that a strong force will remain; that, although the Nixon Administration wished to implement a long-term and massive program of modernization for their armed forces, the American Congress will trim this program so drastically as to render it meaningless; and that these early moves at troop reduction by the United States procure an eventual American desire to retreat from the terms of the defense security pact between the two countries on which the Koreans have based nearly everything.[116]

According to Ranard, the defense meeting in Honolulu, July 21-23, was one of the most difficult meetings he had ever attended. Deputy Defense Secretary Packard, leading the U.S. side, recollected ROK Defense Minister Jung Nae Hyuk saying he had been sent to the SCM to prevent the troop reduction.[117]

During the SCM, the ROK delegation tried to "paper over" the entire issue, but the American side refused and forced the discussion. Once again, ROK officials threatened to replace

[115] Fraser Report, 65.
[116] IKAR Hearings, pt.4, 505.
[117] Fraser Report, 66.

the U.S. division with ROK forces from Vietnam and made drafting the joint communiqué following the SCM a painstaking process. Despite the American delegation's belief that it had reached a formal agreement and completed the arduous consultations, the ROK projected a much different impression. According to the South Korean press, particularly the government-owned *Seoul Sinmun* and pro-government *Kyonghyang Sinmun,* the troop reduction issue was not settled at the conference, but would be subject to further consultations. Furthermore, the papers claimed, the SCM failed to produce concrete U.S. guarantees of military modernization prior to the reductions. Due to continued ROK obduracy and the U.S. desire to start the reductions, Nixon dispatched Vice President Spiro Agnew to Seoul for direct talks with Park.[118]

Agnew's visit was meant to settle Park's nerves after the SCM. Kissinger stated in on August 22 memo that Agnew's presence would: "be a great asset in helping President Park, as well as the Korean people, appreciate the depth of our continued friendship and backing under the Nixon Doctrine. The 'face' Park will gain from your visit will make it easier for him to go along with our reductions and support them publicly, which we want him to do."[119] During their meeting, the Vice President repeatedly emphasized the nature of the American system of government, which required concurrent action by both the executive and legislative branches. President Nixon might make foreign policy, but the Congress had influence over its implementation and decided on appropriations (i.e. the military modernization package). Nevertheless, Park repeatedly instructed Agnew to "tell the president" this or that. One of Agnew's aides later described the meeting as "extraordinary," and that Park's behavior was "absolutely offensive," unlike any other head of state he had ever seen. Planed for an hour, the meeting lasted

[118] Ibid.
[119] Document 71: Backchannel Telegram From the Ambassador to Korea (Porter) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger).

six, with no breaks allowed. Two key outcomes of the testy meeting were that Nixon officials decided to slow the pace of troop reductions, and the ROK took advantage of the pause to take its case directly to sympathetic members of Congress.[120]

Immediately after the Agnew visit, Seoul found new reasons for concern. At a press conference just before departing, Agnew blithely remarked that he had no problem with removing 2ID because all U.S. forces were to be withdrawn within five years anyway. His statement was both unexpected and ran contrary to officially stated U.S. policy. It caused significant consternation among ROK officials. Then, on August 29, just after Agnew's departure, the Korean press reported that U.S. troops had already been reduced, based on a Pentagon announcement stating that U.S. forces were 10,000 below the 63,000 ceiling. The report spurred ROK Defense Minister Jung to write a brusque letter on August 31 to Gen. Michaelis asking if the reduction had in fact occurred, notwithstanding the latter's statements to the contrary. Gen. Michaelis, who did not respond until September 28, explained the 10,000 missing troops were due to attrition rates, reassignments, and distinctions between temporary and permanent personnel.[121] While awaiting Michaelis' reply, on September 25 Defense Minister Jung took bought an advertisement against the U.S. troop withdrawal in the *Washington Post*.

By the end of 1970 and early 1971, the most stringent ROK opposition to the troop reduction had lessened. In part, this was the result of congressional approval in December of large loan for the construction of an M-16 rifle factory in South Korea.[122] It was also due a final agreement being reached between the allies on the conditions for the reduction and redeployment of U.S. forces and the attendant modernization of the ROK military. By this time the Nixon

[120] Fraser Report, 66-67.
[121] Ibid, 67.
[122] Ibid, 74-81.

Administration had increased the initial $1 billion figure upwards to $1.5 billion, and also decided to withdraw 7ID (the reserve division) rather than 2ID. The full reduction of 20,000 troops was completed on March 27, 1971, when USFK held a ceremony in which the 7ID colors were retired.

Still, the negotiations proved cantankerous up until the very last moment in early February. The U.S. side firmly stated it would move forward with the final reduction of 7ID and southernly redeployment of 2ID, with or without the publication of a joint U.S.-ROK statement or signature of military documents. Park and the ROKG insisted no action could be taken until such documents were signed and a joint statement released. In essence, Park's stance was a political one, meant "to present the matter as ROK success in holding U.S. troops in position until modernization program satisfactory to ROK was achieved."[123] Furthermore, the ROK was also holding out for a U.S. commitment that any future U.S. troop withdrawal would be subject to its veto, which, of course, Washington was not willing to grant. Ironically, Ambassador Porter noted that President Park "unwittingly" helped Washington achieve its aims by adopting an "absolutely intransigent attitude" and placing responsibility for achieving an agreement on his ministers, whose demands "steadily eroded in favor of accepting almost anything" the Americans offered.[124]

From the initial conversations in late March 1970 until early February 1971, Park was tenacious in his opposition to an early announcement or implementation of the troop reduction. He was determined to demonstrate Washington had not (or could not) unilaterally force the policy change upon Seoul and that he could stand up to Washington in order to secure significant concessions in the process. Not only would a large military modernization package mitigate

[123] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972,Document 86: Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d86.
[124] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 88: Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d88.

concerns about the effect of troop reductions on national security, his determined stance would bolster his domestic legitimacy at a time of growing uncertainty and political opposition. For its part, the Nixon Administration was willing, up to a point, to tolerate Park's stubborn opposition. Indeed, the first instruction in NSDM-48 was for U.S. officials to explore with Park the timing and conditions of troop reductions, and that the reduction needed to come at President Park's own "initiative."[125] An implicit working assumption of the Nixon Doctrine was that key allies needed to maintain domestic stability. The consultation and negotiation process with the ROKG may have been drawn-out and arduous, but it was a price worth paying if ultimately it resulted in a more flexible U.S. commitment, greater ROK self-sufficiency, and also contributed to a politically stable government in Seoul.

Multiple Consequences of the 1971 Withdrawal: Setting the Scene for Carter

Nonetheless, arguably the more important results went beyond the 1971 reduction itself. As noted, the difficult negotiations led officials within the Nixon Administration to put the brakes on any further alteration of U.S. troop levels for the time being; the modernization program needed time to take hold, alliance tensions time to subside, and the wider effects of the Nixon Doctrine time to be digested throughout the region by allies and adversaries alike. Meanwhile, for Park and his closest advisors, the shock of the troop reduction and the uncertainty it engendered, coupled with mixed signals sent by U.S. officials during the negotiating process, set in motion several significant processes.

First, Seoul began to orchestrate a concerted effort to garner influence in the U.S. Congress so as to secure passage of appropriations for the military modernization program as well as

[125] Document 56: National Security Decisions Memorandum 48.

reinforce the overall U.S. commitment to South Korea's security. The Park government was spurred into action for various reasons. At the time, due to the ongoing quagmire in Vietnam there was a growing skepticism within Congress about the nature and extent of U.S. foreign commitments in general and in Korea specifically. Certain legislators started to more openly question the U.S. commitment to Seoul, and call for disengagement and troop reductions. Indeed, as Nixon Administration officials themselves acknowledged, they had repeatedly stressed, and may even have over-emphasized, the importance of congress during their negotiations with Seoul over the removal of 7ID and redeployment of remaining forces. In doing so, they encouraged the ROK, often explicitly, to direct their concerns to the relevant congressional lawmakers. Consequently, in the early 1970s, Park and his closest advisors initiated a deliberate plan to curry favor on Capitol Hill.

Second, the intense uncertainty regarding national security and even domestic legitimacy caused by the removal of 7ID contributed, in part, to Park's move towards full-on authoritarian rule. Of course, the troop removal occurred alongside additional signs of a worsening security situation, both internally and externally. Internally, North Korean guerrilla attacks had spiked during the late 1960s, culminating with the 1968 Blue House raid. Externally, the Nixon administration changed longstanding policy in Asia in other ways, illustrated by the Shanghai Communique and Sino-US rapprochement, the return of Okinawa, and the gradual withdrawal from Vietnam. However, the Nixon Doctrine and U.S. troop reduction was just one factor driving the shift to Park's *Yushin* system. Another involved Park's personal desire to retain power. Despite his success amending the ROK constitution to allow for a third term in office, Park's narrow

electoral victory over political opposition candidate Kim Dae Jung in May of 1971 indicated his hold on power was not as firm as he previously thought.[126]

In conjunction with his desire to quash Kim's or any other future political challenge, Park was intent to further centralize power to facilitate negotiations with Pyongyang. Park held that the North-South talks, which began in 1971 and lead to the historic July 4, 1972 Joint Statement, required consolidated rule and minimal dissent. The *Yushin* constitution, which was passed under martial law in November 1972, was justified by Park's spokesman, Kim Seong Jin, because the ROK must "have unity in order to have a dialogue with the North," since South Korea "cannot afford to risk political unity when North Korans have complete control over everything their people say and do."[127] On January 12, 1973, Park himself said such "great changes" as Sino-U.S. rapprochement, normalization of relations between Beijing and Tokyo, the severing of Japan's diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the situation in Vietnam, and North-South dialogue all required revision of the constitution.[128] Only with a unified approach backed by centralized executive authority, Park argued, could the ROK competently deal with the even more repressive totalitarian Kim regime in Pyongyang amidst such uncertain external shifts.

Above all, though, Park was intent to commence his heavy and chemical industrialization drive (HCI), a longstanding plan for the forced-pace modernization and industrial deepening of the ROK economy. To be sure, the establishment of South Korea's own defense industry was an integral part of the HCI drive, and growing doubt vis-à-vis the U.S. commitment certainly reinforced the impulse to achieve greater military self-sufficiency. However, Park's vision for an

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[126] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea: A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate by Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and John Glenn*, 95th Cong., 2d sess., 1978, Senate, 57-58. (Hereafter cited as Humphrey & Glenn Report I).
[127] Richard Halloran, "Park Said to Plan Changes to Extend Tenure in Seoul," *The New York Times*, October 20, 1972.
[128] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 65.

industrialized South Korea predated the Nixon Doctrine by decades, was rooted in his earlier experience as a lieutenant in the Japanese Imperial forces in Manchukuo, and was tied to his deep-seated nationalism and desire to establish a fully modernized and independent South Korea. For Park and his economic advisors, the centralization of political power was essential in order to achieve such a drastic transformation, which went against conventional economic orthodoxy and would (of necessity) require the massive mobilization and manipulation of resources, manpower, and capital. Attendant to such centrally driven mobilization was a notable and worrisome increase in political repression and human rights abuses within South Korea.

Third, and related, the more complex and shifting international environment incentivized Seoul to take on greater self-sufficiency but also a more independent national security policy vis-à-vis its American ally. To a large extent, Washington facilitated and even encouraged the process. It promised and eventually came through with a massive modernization package, helped establish the first elements of South Korea's defense industry through various kinds of technology transfer and co-production and co-licensing agreements, and constantly prodded Seoul to do more for its own defense. Nevertheless, because of the uncertainty borne of the U.S. troop reductions and the possibility of another reduction in the future or even full withdrawal, Park and his advisors faced fundamental questions about South Korea's national security. As a result, they began to develop the ultimate insurance policy in the form of an independent and secretive nuclear weapons program.

In November 1971, over six months after the removal of 7ID and a year before promulgating the *Yushin* constitution, Park made a special request of O Won-chol, then a newly appointed member of the Blue House senior staff in charge of developing defense-related heavy and chemical industries. Park said: "Our national security is vulnerable because of the uncertainty

surrounding continued U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. To become secure and independent, we need to free ourselves from dependence on U.S. military protection…Can we develop nuclear weapons?"[129] As Hong notes, Park was not actually asking a question, he was instructing O Won-chol to draw up concrete plans.[130] Indeed, as secret U.S. intelligence reports would later reveal, Park had instructed South Korean scientists to build nuclear weapons by 1977.[131]

These several developments (i.e. influence peddling in Congress, internal authoritarian crackdown, and the start of a secretive nuclear weapons program), catalyzed by the 1971 reductions, took on greater significance in coming years. Each of them influenced public and congressional opinion and executive branch perception of South Korea and the U.S. commitment in complicated and contradictory ways.

Seoul's influence buying effort showed some signs of effectiveness, mostly in the form of more informed and pointed questions from certain members of congress when questioning executive branch officials about the need for more military assistance and in favor of a continued U.S. military presence in the ROK.[132] However, it is exceedingly doubtful that the ROK's efforts were the deciding factor in such support, as pro-Seoul members of congress likely would have voted in favor of future assistance even without prodding from official and unofficial ROK agents.

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[129] As quoted in: Sung Gul Hong, "The Search for Deterrence: Park's Nuclear Option," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 483.

[130] Ibid

[131] "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I," *National Security Archive: 30+ Years of Freedom of Information*, published March 22, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2017-03-22/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-i

[132] "Former Defense Secretary Laird recalled that the Koreans "were opposing my troop reduction decision" before Congress. He had detected the effects of Korean lobbying in talks with Members of Congress by the nature of their questions and comments about Korea. He also read executive branch reports about the lobbying. It was clear to Laird that the Koreans were pushing their assessment of the DPRK threat to justify both a greater amount of money for modernization and a U.S. troop presence at the original level. Laird said they were also promoting visits to Korea by Members of Congress where they could show them the threat from the North.," quoted in Fraser Report, 68.

Additionally, as already noted, the Nixon Administration itself was intent to secure passage and limit more troop reductions for a series of wider strategic and political reasons. Instead, the main outcome of the influence peddling scheme was the enrichment of several individuals involved and, following public revelations of the scheme by the U.S. press, initiation of several congressional and executive branch investigations. Amidst a scandal-hungry press in the post-Watergate atmosphere, the revelations and resultant investigations became a source of distinct tension between the allies and criticism of the Park government in Seoul.[133]

Even before the influence-buying scandal was revealed, the *Yushin* system within South Korea started to bring added condemnation of Park. Under his military-authoritarian system, Park ruled by emergency decree, outlawed a free and independent press, and established a rubber stamp National Assembly and pliable court system. It was known for its systematic and violent repression of all political dissent, including the jailing, abuse, torture and even execution of opposition elements within the ROK. Unfortunately for Park, his authoritarian turn happened to coincide with the emergence of an international human rights movement in the 1970s.

Organizations such as Amnesty International documented rampant human rights abuses under Park. At the same time, human rights-oriented lawmakers in Congress worked with such organizations and not only criticized U.S. abuses but those of U.S. allies, increasingly holding hearings and conducting studies to examine such issues. The effort led to pronounced questions about whether or not the United States should provide economic and military assistance to authoritarian allies. Thus, added to concern about the vulnerability of the U.S. tripwire presence

[133] For a thorough secondary account of the South Korean influence-buying effort, including the key individuals involved, rationales behind it, and eventual fallout and scandal, see: Robert B. Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit: Sun Myung Moon, Tongsun Park, and the Korean Scandal* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).

in Korea, was a newfound unease about being militarily exposed in support of so disreputable an ally.

The Koreagate scandal and human rights criticisms of the Park government spurred further debate about the U.S. commitment to Korea and louder calls for disengagement. Such developments contributed to Carter's own thinking and fledgling policy toward South Korea, as well as his belief that he had the space and necessary public and congressional support to carry it out. Yet, as shown below, both issues would actually become impediments to Carter's policy by obstructing the key legislation needed to carry it out.

Whereas the Koreagate scandal and human rights abuses under Park provided new reasons to look askance at the U.S. ally in Seoul, the Park government's effort to develop an independent nuclear weapons program had the opposite effect. Although it certainly was a source of tension and distrust between the allies, Seoul's nuclear ambitions presented critical questions about the costs or risks of further U.S disengagement from the Korean Peninsula. Throughout the early to mid 1970s, U.S. intelligence and national security officials observed and increasingly began to challenge Seoul's effort to acquire nuclear reprocessing and fuel fabrication technologies and facilities from France and Belguim, as well as a Canadian heavy-water reactor. Even though commercial considerations figured into U.S. thinking (as U.S. officials feared the growing ROK market for nuclear technology would be lost to U.S. suppliers) the central concern was both strategic and political.[134]

Officials in the Ford Administration grappled with the fact that enhanced ROK uncertainty regarding the credibility and staying power of the U.S. security commitment had spiked in the wake of the 1971 troop reduction. It was this uncertainty that led to Park's pursuit of an

[134] Hong, "The Search for Deterrence," 485-486.

independent nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, they contemplated how further withdrawals (about which internal discussions and planning continued) would only exacerbate the issue. The development put into sharp focus the outer limits of U.S. disengagement. For Ford officials, the United States simply could not allow itself to step back too far, lest in doing so it catalyzed the undoing of the nonproliferation regime and spurred a whole new level of arms race and regional instability. In short, as was evident in the earlier studies and discussions begun under President Johnson, successive administrations could not escape a simple but compelling fact, namely: in pursuit of a more flexible U.S. commitment to South Korea, the United States risked loosening its ultimate control over its smaller ally and the local peninsular environment, and, by extension, over the wider region.

The Ford Administration made a persistent and ultimately successful effort through strong bilateral pressure and collaboration with the Canadian and French governments to force Park to abandon his nuclear program. Yet, the experience reinforced the underlying point above. Washington was only able to successfully stop the ROK nuclear program because of the leverage it maintained over Seoul as the ultimate guarantor of its security.[135] If the United States were to further reduce its remaining military presence, not only would it forgo such leverage but also simultaneously hasten Seoul's adoption of certain policies, which such leverage had historically protected against. Ironically, in the mid-1970s, just as the Ford Administration was securing the Park government's agreement to end its nuclear program, Candidate Carter began to publicly discuss his intent, if elected, to fully withdraw all the remaining ground combat forces from South

[135] Hong, "The Search for Deterrence," 485; for the recently released documentary history of the Ford administration's successful effort to halt the ROK nuclear program, see, George Washington University's National Security Archive: "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I," *National Security Archive: 30+ Years of Freedom of Information*, published March 22, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2017-03-22/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-i; "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II," *National Security Archive: 30+ Years of Freedom of Information*, published April 12, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2017-04-12/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-ii.

Korea. Once Carter went from being a relatively unknown candidate in the 1976 Democratic primary to president-elect, it did not take long for ROK officials to openly intimate that the ROK nuclear option was, if need be, still on the table.

The background above demonstrates that officials in successive U.S. administrations studied, debated, planned, and executed notable changes in the U.S. presence and role in South Korea long before Carter arrived. As will be shown in greater detail below, the rationales these officials employed in making such changes and the various processes they set in motion helped to shape Carter's own thinking and fledgling policy ideas on Korea. Possibly more important, though, these same earlier efforts also revealed the complexities and emergent obstacles that would ultimately lead to Carter's failure to implement his policy.

The Congressional Factor

The same breakdown in the postwar consensus that had fractured the executive branch also occurred on Capitol Hill. During the early postwar period, due to a widely shared and oversimplified anti-communist ideology, Congress "had sacrificed potent foreign-policy tools in deference to executive authority." Within the Cold War institutional structure of Congress, both major parties effectively permitted the White House and executive branch wide latitude in the conduct of U.S. foreign and national security policy.[136] Yet, as the enormous costs, contradictions, and growing limits of U.S. power were laid bare in Vietnam, Congress re-asserted itself against the formerly unquestioned prerogatives of the executive branch.

The shift was characterized by several key developments, which both evinced but also drove of the breakdown in consensus. First, there was a widespread turn away from early Cold

[136] Robert David Johnson, "The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform: The Clark and Tunney Amendments and U.S. Policy toward Angola," *Diplomatic History*, 27, no. 2 (2003): 215.

War certainties about a monolithic Communist threat. Second, and related, many legislators began to voice greater skepticism about the extent and nature of U.S. commitments abroad originally meant to contain and confront the threat. Third, as an institution Congress effected important organizational changes. In particular, it developed an expansive, specialized, and well-staffed committee and subcommittee structure devoted to closer review of all aspects of U.S. foreign and national security policy. Fourth, within Congress different groups and caucuses began to emerge, which represented disparate, often clashing responses to the breakdown in the Cold War consensus. In regard to public policy in general and foreign and national security policy in particular, these legislators began to exert their preferences and influence within the evolved committee structure, and challenge the executive branch in the process.

Congress asserted itself in multiple ways. Rather than simply sign off on and implement decisions already made, legislators became more aggressive in the oversight and actual formation of U.S. foreign policy. In addition to becoming more of a partner in the policymaking process, legislators actively worked to limit and even obstruct executive branch authority. Lastly, as the 1970s progressed, alongside their growing involvement in traditional areas of U.S. foreign policy, the newly emergent congressional caucuses introduced more non-traditional considerations into U.S. foreign policy, including human rights.

In fact, a less pliant Congress had begun to develop under President Johnson. Starting in 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, J. William Fulbright (D-AR), became increasingly skeptical toward the Johnson Administration's official prognostications regarding the Vietnam war. Fulbright had received information that the situation in Vietnam was far worse than reported, and after overly optimistic testimony from Johnson's Secretary of State Dean Rusk in a closed hearing on January 24, decided the administration was blinded by its "anticommunist

assumptions."[137] Fulbright felt that he and the American public were being misled. Following the administration's resumption of bombing (after a pause in late 1965), Fulbright went on national television, declared the war in Vietnam morally wrong, contrary to the country's best interests, and said he deeply regretted having helped get the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through Congress. In February, he held a series of widely televised public hearings, meant to serve a larger "educational" purpose.[138]

Witnesses included a list of retired generals and respected foreign policy notables, such as George Kennan, who cautioned against deeper involvement and even called for gradual withdrawal from Vietnam. Fulbright also grilled administration witnesses like Secretary Rusk and General Maxwell Taylor, and strongly questioned the Johnson administration's official line. Fulbright's effort and the critical testimony of establishment figures such as Kennan, made it acceptable, if not respectable, to question the war, and by extension presidential authority in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.[139] This trend continued and, indeed. ramped up under Nixon. By the time Nixon entered office, the situation in Vietnam had deteriorated further. Unlike in 1966, public and congressional opinion had turned decidedly against the war. More broadly, there was widespread sentiment within Congress and among the public that it was time to reassess the extent, nature, and costs of the U.S. military presence and commitments abroad, above all to avoid another Vietnam-type quagmire. In this context, Fulbright moved to further institutionalize Senate oversight of U.S. foreign policy.

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[137] "Vietnam Hearings," United States Senate, accessed January 5, 2017, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Vietnam_Hearings.htm

[138] Randall Bennett Woods, *J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Search for a Cold War Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 114-115; for "educational hearings" quote, see "Vietnam Hearings"

[139] "Vietnam Hearings"

On February 3, 1969, he established the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. As the subcommittee chair, Fulbright chose Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO). He was joined by Senators Fulbright, John Sparkman (D-AL), Mike Mansfield (D-MT), George Aiken (R-VT), John Sherman Cooper (R-KY), and Jacob Javits (R-NY). It was a formidable subcommittee, and, with the exception of Sen. Sparkman, all of its members had become critics of the war in Vietnam. Indeed, while Vietnam was itself excluded for the subcommittee's purview, its creation "had its roots in the Vietnam War, and the shadow of Vietnam hung over most of its deliberations." In fact, Senator Symington himself was a particularly potent example of the larger shift of which he was a part.[140]

Symington enthusiastically accepted the subcommittee assignment. The Senator "frequently had expressed concern over the extent of American military and economic commitments around the world," and "fear of over-commitment had played a role in his call for a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam."[141] Symington and his fellow subcommittee members were eager to review the full extent of U.S. military and political commitments abroad, and explore areas for potential reform or disengagement. As noted, Nixon held the same goals. Indeed, when the Nixon administration entered office it inherited an in-depth, 1,200-page study, initiated ten months earlier under President Johnson, which mapped U.S. foreign military commitments and bases and explored alternative arrangements.[142] Nixon's NSC reviewed the study and initiated its own review, one which Secretary of Defense Laird said would result in a "very sobering" recommendation that the United States cut back its "various, vast commitments" abroad.[143]

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[140] James C. Olson, *Stuart Symington: A Life* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2003), 393; see also: Ward Just, "Stu Symington: The Path of a High-Level "Defector," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1969.
[141] Olson, *Stuart* Symington, 393.
[142] Benjamin Wellness, "U.S Bases Abroad Stir a New Debate," *The New York Times*, April 9, 1969.
[143] Richard Homan, "Laird Sees Cut in U.S. Commitments," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1969.

In early 1969, Symington and his subcommittee members requested access to the earlier review, but State and Defense balked. Despite castigating the Johnson administration for its secrecy, the Nixon White House only permitted the subcommittee's staff members to read it in the Pentagon and take notes. It feared leaking sensitive information and potentially disrupting ongoing negotiations with North Vietnam. Although the subcommittee and White House might have shared the same general goal, the latter intended to defend executive branch prerogatives, whereas the former insisted on more robust Congressional oversight and even direction of policy.[144]

It was in this context that the subcommittee began several months of hearings focused on the U.S. presence in and commitment to various countries: the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Taiwan, Japan-Okinawa, South Korea, Ethiopia, NATO, Spain and Portugal. The hearings provided a close look at many elements of these relationships, such as the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons and extensive intelligence activities within these countries, as well as all the political aspects of the military commitments. One overarching criticism offered by the subcommittee was the secrecy surrounding these relationships and the degree to which it blurred the extent of U.S. defense commitments. Aside from concerns about over-commitment, what really drove the subcommittee's effort was the desire to simply know "how we were committed." In this sense, the hearings succeeded in shedding light a large amount of information that was previously unknown to much of the Congress and American public.[145]

During the hearings on Korea, Symington and Fulbright asked wide-ranging questions. They inquired about: the purpose and posture of U.S. forces and the potential for drawing them down; the North-South military balance; the agreements that underpinned the significant military

[144] Olson, *Stuart* Symington, 394.
[145] "Subcommittee Completes Foreign Commitments Probe," Congressional Quarterly Press: CQ Almanac 1970, accessed January 10, 2017, http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal70-1292276

and economic assistance which the U.S. provided to the ROK in exchange for its contribution to Vietnam; North and South Korean infiltrations and para-military activities; the exact nature of the U.S. commitment as embodied in the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty and the issue of OPCON and its role in restraining South Korea actions. Symington and Fulbright strongly questioned the wisdom of creating and maintaining "split" countries, and wondered why Seoul, with a larger population, GNP, and military could not defend itself without the presence of U.S. forces. Why, Symington queried, can the U.S. not just "give them the stuff and let them do the job?"[146] Although Ambassador Porter said the hearings went well overall, his conversation with Kissinger about them indicated Congress could be a problematic factor moving forward.[147]

From the Senate floor the following month, Senator Joseph Tydings voiced similar skepticism about the U.S. commitment. His remarks caused considerable consternation in Seoul, and demonstrated how congressional assertiveness could play a direct and, from the White House's perspective, disruptive role in the adjustment of the U.S.-ROK relationship. Under a speech titled, "U.S. Troops Not Needed for ROK Defense," Tydings stated that: "South Korea today, without the assistance of any U.S. ground forces, possesses the military manpower and resources to handle any invasion threat North Korea could pose in the foreseeable future, providing U.S. air support is continued." Tydings further argued that the "tripwire" position of U.S. forces violated the provision in the U.S. Constitution holding that only Congress could declare war. If the North Koreans were to invade across the DMZ "our frontline division would automatically trigger U.S. participation in a ground war." Although he acknowledged the deterrent value of U.S. forces,

[146] "Highlights of Symington Subcommittee Session on Korea (2), February 25, 1970," Central Intelligence Agency: Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, accessed January 15, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp72-00337r000200020002-3

[147] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 54: Memorandum of Conversation. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d54.

Senator Tydings wondered why 30,000 troops could not do the work now done by roughly 60,000.[148]

According to Ambassador Porter, South Korean officials in Seoul were "taken aback" by Senator Tydings statement, and Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson went to great lengths to calm ROK Ambassador Kim Dong Jo's nerves in Washington. Although they stressed that Tyding's views were not widespread, the effect of his statement coupled with the recent Symington hearings, made U.S. officials concerned that such developments "may affect the Koreans' hitherto relatively favorable response to our suggestion that they take the initiative in calling for a reduction in U.S. personnel." At this point, the U.S. had informed the ROKG of their intent to remove and redeploy roughly 20,000 U.S. troops, but planning had only just begun and public discussion was mostly limited. The congressional factor was proving troublesome and possibly disruptive of executive branch initiative.[149]

As noted, in their discussions with Park and his closest advisors Nixon officials had repeatedly stressed the importance of Congress. They had done so, in part, to get the administration, the State Department, and Ambassador Porter "off the hook" for being unable to guarantee the modernization program, but also because Congress did indeed hold the purse-strings and its involvement and approval were required. However, Nixon and his advisors were concerned that Congress might seize the initiative. Surely the traditional push and pull between executive and legislative branches of government figured into their concern. However, beyond such turf battles, the White House was apprehensive Congress lacked the same nuanced appreciation for the diplomatic and strategic subtleties involved in the policy shift, and in its inclination to assert itself

[148] Fraser Report, 64.
[149] *FRUS, 1969–1976,* Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972, Document 57: Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1/d57.

might move too precipitously to disengage. Therefore, the administration's desire to move forward with troop reductions and redeployments at that time was, in part, to preempt any such congressional rush to the exits.[150]

Nixon was explicit about these concerns and the need to maintain executive initiative. During the NSC meeting in early March 1970 that would lead to the issuance of NSDM-48 and the start of the troop reduction process, Nixon summarized several key factors. There must be some withdrawal, and it needed to be worked out carefully and related intimately to the ongoing withdrawals from Vietnam. Yet, the executive branch "must control the debate on the Hill with respect to our involvement," and "avoid the impression that we are withdrawing from our responsibilities" overall. After all, while the objective was undoubtedly to drawdown and make more flexible and less costly the U.S. presence (a sentiment shared by Congress) the ultimate outcome remained a conservative one: to retain the fundamental underpinnings of U.S. preponderance and the foreign commitments attendant to it.[151]

Nixon agreed with Vice President Agnew's that "what we draw down will never go back." Again, a reduction was necessary, but the process must be tempered by the larger goal. He stated that: "this is the first five-year perceptive study. We have had 64,000 troops in Korea since 1953 and someone should have looked at it long before now. We must stop temporizing with these issues and must view the problem from the long range. In essence, what we are looking for is not a way to get out of Korea but a way to be able to stay in by means of a long-range, viable posture." The White House faced "increasing emphasis on domestic spending here at home," not to mention growing skepticism about foreign commitments abroad. If they did not "find a way to continue

[150] Fraser Report, 67
[151] Document 55: Draft Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting.

playing a role by drawing down our strength somewhat…the Congress will refuse to support anything." In short, we must act, or Congress will.[152]

In the near term, the Nixon administration was able mostly to dictate the process of adjustment in Korea. However, the trend in Congressional assertiveness presaged by the Symington hearings continued to gather steam. The Symington subcommittee's final, 2,500-page report held that the "lasting impact" of the hearings should go beyond what it "says in terms of current foreign policy." Rather, it would involve the continued oversight of all military and political aspects of U.S. foreign policy by the proper committees, and perhaps most important "the Congress should take a look at the authority of the President to station troops abroad and establish bases in foreign countries."[153] As events transpired, the report was a portent of things to come.

The growing anti-war movement and yawning credibility gap and distrust felt by ordinary citizen towards the government advanced the process. The release of the Pentagon Papers, the Nixon White House's own evident deceit about bombing both Laos and Cambodia, and, of course, the burgeoning Watergate scandal all led to a pervasive reformist desire to push back against the so-called imperial presidency. In 1972-1973, Congress forced Nixon and Kissinger to find a negotiated settlement and end the war in Vietnam by threatening to cut off further funding. Soon thereafter, it passed the War Powers Resolution, limiting the president's authority to deploy military forces aboard. Further reformist measures included imposing restrictions on the Central Intelligence Agency; passage of the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, which created committees in the House and Senate that gave them more control over the budget and appropriations process; amendments to the Freedom of Information Act to allow Americans

[152] Ibid.
[153] "Subcommittee Completes Foreign Commitments Probe"

greater access to government documents; and the 1975 Angola Resolution, imposing further limits on the President's authority to make commitments to local conflict abroad.[154]

In addition to greater oversight and limitations on executive authority, legislators began to introduce new considerations into U.S. foreign policy, including the issue of human rights. The shift included newfound and vocal criticism of Washington's rightwing U.S. allies, whose anti-communist credentials were no longer the sole litmus test for their legitimacy in the eyes of many members of Congress. For Nixon and Kissinger, and later the Ford Administration, such as an approach was anathema. As noted, the Nixon Doctrine was essentially a conservative one; through the adoption of more flexible, realpolitik means the administration meant to secure the same longstanding ends of U.S. preponderance. The stability of anti-communist U.S. allies remained an explicit assumption of the doctrine. If U.S. allies could adopt democratic practices and respect for human rights while maintaining stability, such might be acceptable. However, if ever the former threatened to undermine the latter, the choice was clear. Indeed, for Nixon and Kissinger, as for many policymakers who preceded them, democracy itself was often associated with instability, based on the view that people in the developing world were yet too politically immature and lacked the institutions and political culture necessary to handle the demands of representative government. Consequently, Nixon and Kissinger not only preferred autocratic, anti-communist allies and turned a willing blind eye to their internal abuses, but they also deliberately work to undermine those who dared pursue a different path.

However, as Sargent correctly observes, it was "Nixon's misfortune to be a realistic president at a time when new forces in world politics were elevating the importance that domestic audiences attached to the internal character of countries with which the United States did

[154] Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 11; see also; *Superpower Transformed*, 201.

business."[155] The new force in question was an international human rights movement that grew during the 1970s. The movement was situated at the intersection of domestic and transnational politics, wherein lawmakers and NGOs collaborated in novel ways and introduced non-traditional issues into formerly unquestioned areas of foreign and national security policy and alliance diplomacy.[156] In Congress this movement was manifest in a cohort of "new internationalist" lawmakers. The new internationalists railed against the abuses of the Pax Americana, including a blindly anti-communist ideology, which had obscured important complexities and the fact that not every development in the world was the result of some Soviet or Communist-backed conspiracy. It was such all-consuming thought, they argued, that led to the nightmarish and interminable war in Vietnam.

Importantly, the new internationalists were not isolationists or driven simply by the negation of past policies. Rather, "they proposed an internationalism of their own," including such signature issues as revitalizing the International Court of Justice, promoting international cooperation on transnational issues, increasing U.S. support for the United Nations, and promoting human rights. They formed their own caucus, Members of Congress for Peace through Law (MCPL), which by the end of the 94th Congress in 1976 consisted of 175 members, nearly one-third of the legislature.[157] When it came to the promotion of human rights, they were led by Congressmen such as Rep. Donald Fraser, Chair of the House Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements, who held the first ever hearings to consider human rights as a general issue in U.S. foreign policy. The hearings and the subcommittee's final report in March

[155] Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 69.
[156] Ibid, 201.
[157] Ibid.

1974 called for human rights to be "a regular part of U.S. foreign policymaking," by, among other measures, creating an office focused on human rights within the State Department.[158]

Fraser was intent on reordering U.S. foreign policy priorities and elevating the promotion of human rights above the pursuit of geopolitical interests. He envisioned the use of military assistance and economic aid as tools for coercive human rights diplomacy. Other congressman, including some on his own subcommittee, found his aims too controversial and problematic. To them, excessive promotion of human rights went against established international norms of sovereign self-determination and noninterference, and could potentially undermine those same geopolitical and strategic interests. However, Fraser was not the only one questioning U.S. policies and pushing a more assertive congressional role. In early 1974, State Department officials were describing "increasing criticism on the Hill" and that Fraser was not a "lone Indian."[159]

Fraser and others persisted. His subcommittee held a series of hearings on individual countries, including South Korea, which featured witnesses from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and produced in-depth reports on the abuses committed by many U.S.-allied rightwing regimes.[160] As conditions worsened under Pinochet in Chile and Park's *Yushin* system in South Korea, and evidence emerged of a government crackdown in Greece, there were also efforts to target specific countries with punitive legislation. For example, in 1974, Congress imposed a $25 million ceiling on aid to Santiago as well as a ban on military assistance. State Department officials expressed consternation: "The ability of the U.S. government to normalize its trade relations with the Soviet Union, or to provide military and economic aid to South Vietnam

[158] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Human Rights in the World Community: A Call For U.S. Leadership: Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements*, 93rd Cong., 2nd sess, 1974.
[159] As quoted in Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 202.
[160] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Human Rights in South Korea: Implications for U.S. Policy: Hearings Before the Subcommitees on Asian and Pacific Affairs and on International Organizations and Movements*, 93rd Cong., 2nd sess, 1974.

or South Korea has been seriously affected by the critical views in Congress of official US policy toward human rights in these countries."[161] As these remarks indicate, U.S. allies and adversaries alike were caught in the congressional cross hairs, with no political logic behind the legislative insurgency other than the elevation of human rights *per se*.[162] To be fair, Fraser's criticism extended as much to Moscow as it did U.S. allies. Indeed, it was détente itself that bolstered his case. If Washington could deal with Communists in Moscow and Beijing, Fraser and others wondered, why support the rapacious Pinochet and his violent coup d'etat against Allende in Chile?[163]

Beyond country-specific measures, congressional critics attempted to pass legislation which would require the executive branch to institutionalize human rights considerations on a more general level. In 1974, human rights proponents entered Section 502B into that year's Foreign Assistance Act, encouraging the White House to cancel assistance to abusive regimes. However, the measure was only a recommendation and thus nonbinding. Yet the effort soon bore fruit, with passage of the 1975 Harkin Amendment. Tom Harkin, a young Democrat from Iowa, moved to amend the International Development and Food Assistance Act in late 1975, in order to ensure no assistance would be provided to any country that consistently violated internationally recognized human rights standards. Although it focused on development aid rather than military assistance, it was the first statute to formally bind foreign policy to human rights.[164]

Also, in line with the 1969 Symington Hearing's criticism of extensive and secretive U.S. intelligence activities abroad and in light of more recent revelations in the ensuing years, Senator Frank Church of Idaho strove to uncover the CIA's involvement in foreign interventions and

[161] As quoted in Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 203.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid, 204

assassinations. From 1975 to 1976, the Church Committee conducted in-depth hearings and released reports documenting how former presidents, including Kennedy and Nixon, had issued orders to overthrow or murder various foreign leaders, such as Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, Cuban President Fidel Castro, and Chilean President Salvador Allende. The Church Committee also shed further light on the extent to which successive U.S. administrations supported terribly repressive rightwing regimes. In 1976, the committee's reports ultimately impelled President Ford to issue an order barring the United States from assassinating foreign leaders.[165]

The combination of the Church Committee's revelations, vigorous investigative efforts and legislative activism, and related international developments, such as signing of the Helsinki Accords, Fraser and his cohort were able to successfully upgrade Section 502B from a recommendation to a formal requirement in the 1976 Security Assistance Act. However, it contained an exception for executive branch discretion in "extraordinary circumstances" when the "national interest of the United States" required provision of military aid.[166] In addition to limiting military assistance, the legislation also required the State Department to submit regular reports on the human rights conditions of countries receiving U.S. aid, which spurred the department to create a new position to monitor the process, the Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

Unsurprisingly, Ford and Kissinger did not prioritize the latter and slow-walked its implementation. Nevertheless, Fraser himself considered it the "best thing we have done."[167] Despite the certain legislative loopholes and extant resistance, the new internationalists "made human rights a permanent element of the nation's foreign policy discourse," and the "legislative

[165] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 10.
[166] As quoted in Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 204.
[167] As quoted in Ibid.

breakthroughs of 1973-1976 enshrined human rights promotion as a foreign-policy objective."[168] The effort led to pronounced questions about whether or not the United States should continue to provide economic and military assistance to rightwing authoritarian allies. With Vietnam as a guiding example, they decried the failures of anti-communist rigidity in U.S. foreign policy, arguing that it led to costly, counterproductive, and immoral involvement in intractable foreign conflicts.

Fraser's efforts added a whole new set of concerns regarding the U.S-ROK alliance. As noted, he conducted thorough hearings on human rights abuses in South Korea in 1974 and 1975.[169] Later, in 1976, he spearheaded hearings focusing on the Korean Central Intelligence Agency's illegal activities within the United States. Based on these various hearings and due to the emergent Koreagate scandal in late 1976, Fraser began what would turn out to be the most in-depth congressional investigation to date of overall U.S.-Korean relations.[170] Added to longstanding concerns about the vulnerability of the U.S. tripwire presence in Korea, Fraser and other new internationalists, often working with Amnesty and other human rights NGOs, added a newfound and growing unease about being so closely tied to a disreputable and abusive regime.

Importantly, the new internationalists were not the only group the breakdown of the Cold War consensus. The neoconservatives presented an opposing yet equally forceful response to changes at home and abroad. Whereas the new internationalists were resolved to refocus foreign policy toward human rights and democracy promotion, and to rethink an unswerving anti-communist stance, the neoconservatives took from Vietnam the opposite lessons. For them, the

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[168] Ibid.
[169] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in South Korea and The Philippines :Implications for U.S. Policy: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 94th Cong., 1st sess, 1975.
[170] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Activities of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, pt.1 & 2, 94th Cong., 2nd sess, 1976.

Vietnam War and the new internationalist reaction to it had enfeebled the United States. Détente with the Soviets, particularly at a time of greater parity between Washington and Moscow, had weakened it yet further. Instead, they argued the United States needed to increase defense spending and maintain, if not strengthen, the anti-communist orientation of U.S. foreign policy and confrontational approach to the Soviet Union. Although they shared the new internationalists human rights criticism of Moscow's draconian domestic rule and an inclination to inject Congress into formerly unchallenged areas of executive prerogative, the similarities ended there.[171]

In 1976, neoconservatives critical of détente and concerned about what they saw as a liberal isolationist trend in U.S. foreign policy, formed the Committee on Present Danger (CPD). CPD counted among its members influential people from both political parties. These included: Paul Nitze, the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff under Truman; Walt Rostow, President Johnson's National Security Advisor; and James Schlesinger, Nixon's former Secretary of Defense. They considered détente "one-sided disarmament," cited Moscow's adventurism throughout the Middle East and Africa as evidence it could not be trusted, and bemoaned the trend toward abandoning U.S. anti-communist allies.[172]

The same strain of thought was emergent on Capitol Hill years before CPD was established. Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), though a liberal on most domestic policy, was a representative neoconservative when it came to foreign policy. Jackson was considered a defense expert, and was a firm proponent of a strong national security policy and supporter of Cold War allies. Along with others Democrats, such as Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA), both of whom sat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Jackson founded the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. The group called

[171] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 8.
[172] Ibid; for "one-sided disarmament," see, Dale Carter, "The Crooked Path: Continuity and Change in American Foreign Policy, 1968-1981," in *The Lost Decade: America in the Seventies*, ed. Elsebeth Hurup (Oakville, Conn.: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 112.

for a more robust U.S. military to counter what they saw as an assurgent Soviet Union. Jackson strongly opposed the 1972 SALT agreement, and as a price for his support forced Nixon and Kissinger to accept an amendment to the treaty stating any future arms limitation agreement must guarantee both superpowers the same number of ICBMs and SLBMs. Then, in 1974, Jackson cosponsored, along with Representative Charles Vanik (R-OH), the Jackson-Vanik amendment. The amendment imposed economic sanctions on Moscow for the Kremlin's refusal to allow Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Jackson succeeded in using the amendment to block the White House's attempt to grant Moscow MFN trade status.[173]

The neoconservative and new internationalist backlash clearly represented the dissolution of a consensus view among legislators as well as the passing away of a quiescent Congress vis-a-vis the formation and implementation of the nation's foreign policy. Moreover, though it would appear the new internationalist worldview was ascendant during the early to mid-1970s in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, the neoconservative view was quickly gaining ground by mid-decade. Indeed, as one study remarks, this was one of the unintended consequences of an assertiveness and reform-minded Congress. While the early changes "represented a short-term victory for congressional liberals, subsequent developments defied expectations, based on the events of the 1960s and 1970s, that empowering Congress would lead to the adoption of an anti-interventionist, pro-human rights foreign policy. Instead, conservatives proved as successful as their ideological foes in utilizing the revitalized congressional power."[174] However, it is important not to place too overemphasize the dichotomy between the neoconservatives and new internationalists insofar as different Senators and Representatives often moved from one camp to the other depending on the issue and perceived political cost of doing so. Furthermore, as indicated, there was no clear partisan

[173] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 8; Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 212-214.
[174] Johnson, "The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform," 216.

breakdown across the groups. Indeed, although the Democrats held majorities in both chambers for much of the decade, there were serious divisions among them regarding their preferred foreign and defense policy. These divisions were one of several important factors obstructing Carter's policy on Korea.[175]

As it turned out, Jimmy Carter would campaign on and ride the reformist, new internationalist wave into office. Yet it was the crest of the wave. The neoconservative reaction and emergent New Right had already begun a steady and forceful ascendance. As events would transpire, the neoconservatives would exploit the very same breakdown in consensus and new institutional mechanisms to assert their preferences and policies, alongside a deep-seated opposition to Carter's own.

To sum, before Carter's arrival there were, in fact, various broad developments that had influenced the view of Korea within the White House and wider foreign policy establishment. This sparked a reassessment of U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula, and ongoing discussions and even planning within the executive branch regarding the reduction, if not withdrawal, of remaining U.S. military forces. The same broad international trends also altered congressional attitudes and led to the formation of new coalitions. These several trends both informed Carter's own approach to Korea, but would also later constrain and undermine it. In this sense, then, Carter's Korea withdrawal policy was not so much a break from the past as a reflection of extant forces, yet one that would more explicitly demonstrated the limits and contradictions therein.

[175] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 11.

Chapter II: Campaign & Early Inception

"I believe it will be possible to withdraw our ground forces from South Korea on a phased basis over a time span to be determined after consultation with both South Korea and Japan. At the same time, it should be made clear to the South Korean government that its internal repression is repugnant to our people, and undermines the basic support for our commitment there."

-Candidate Jimmy Carter, Foreign Policy Association, New York City, June 23, 1976

"We cannot lay down our arms in the simple hope that others will follow our lead…the voices of retreat talk about phased withdrawal. They talk as if our defenses won't be weakened if we only dismantle them one brick at a time. They are wrong…The world is still a dangerous place…we cannot retreat from the frontlines of freedom if we are to preserve our freedom here at home."

-President Gerald Ford, National Guard Association's annual conference, September 1, 1976

The emergence of Jimmy Carter's candidacy and incipient policy ideas on Korea ran parallel and in direct contrast to the Ford Administration's ongoing reassessment of official U.S. policy toward Korea. Both candidate Carter and President Ford were reacting to similar events, from which they drew disparate lessons. The sudden yet unsurprising fall of South Vietnam and final ignominious U.S. withdrawal from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in late April 1975 was a particularly important juncture. It reaffirmed each side's preexisting biases and demanded some sort of response.

Carter and the new internationalists saw the event as a stark reminder of the limits of American power and clear dangers of overreach driven by the ideological certainty of hardline anticommunism. Vietnam demonstrated the steep costs and even immorality of such an approach, as well as its ultimately counter-productive results. The world was simply too complex and

resources too limited to repeat the same mistakes. However, more traditionalist foreign policy types like Ford and the burgeoning neoconservative movement, while cognizant of the disaster Vietnam had become, drew a contrary but no less imperative lesson. For them, the main takeaway was the need to stand firm against further withdrawals elsewhere, lest the Vietnam departure turn into wholesale retreat. American credibility and resolve were bound up with the maintenance of a robust physical military presence abroad. For both sides, the images of the final rooftop retreat from Saigon had direct relevance to South Korea.

A 1976 Brookings Institution report, which focused on the role of U.S. forces in Korea, succinctly laid out these divergent views. Joe Yager, the FSO who led the earlier Korea policy review during the late Johnson years, had since joined Brookings and contributed to the report, so too had Morton Abramowitz and Michael Armacost. The introduction noted: "For some, the failure of U.S. policy in Vietnam strengthens the argument for early withdrawal of a part or all of the U.S. forces in South Korea; for others, it strengthens the arguments for not disturbing this symbol of U.S. determination to maintain a strong position in the Western Pacific." In either case, the report continued, "new circumstances clearly call for a reexamination of the rationale for continuing to keep U.S. forces in this forward position in Northeast Asia."[1] From mid-1974 until the 1976 presidential election, both President Ford and Candidate Carter pursued their own reexamination of U.S. Korea policy. Yet they operated under different assumptions and reached diametrically opposed conclusions.

This chapter first charts the Ford Administration's attempt to restart what was essentially an on-again, off-again reassessment of U.S. policy toward Korea. Indeed, the process traced back to the late Johnson years. Unlike candidate Carter, Ford officials were confronted by the time

[1] Ralph Clough, *Deterrence and Defense in Korea: The Role of U.S. Forces* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976), 2.

pressures and demands of actual policymaking, which invariably forced them to prioritize some issues above others and accept satisficing solutions to complex problems. Furthermore, they were privy to information and intelligence on South Korea, which gave them a more acute sense of the constraints facing any administration aiming to further alter or drawdown the U.S. commitment to Seoul.

Next, the chapter turns to Carter himself. It establishes the origins of his troop withdrawal policy. Starting with the initial stages of his campaign, the account reconstructs the main factors influencing Carter's thinking toward Korea, and the key individuals and meetings that helped him formulate his policy. It also traces his public and private statements on Korea, outlining the subtle yet significant ways in which his policy evolved over the nearly two-year campaign. These early statements and evolutions are important not only because they show the rationales guiding Carter's approach, but highlight several factors that would later serve as both real and rhetorical obstacles to the implementation of his campaign promise to remove all U.S. ground combat forces.

The final section covers the reaction among officials in Seoul as well as various key legislators in Washington. For its part, the Park government witnessed the same images of U.S. officials scurrying off of the embassy rooftop in Saigon. Shortly thereafter, Park adopted measures to bolster internal order and external security. Domestically, Park issued Emergency Measure-9 (EM-9), signaling the apogee of his military authoritarian *Yushin* system and rule-by-decree. Saigon's collapse also exacerbated extant concern regarding the U.S. commitment to South Korea, and led the Park government to re-double its effort to develop its own nuclear deterrent and more offensive military capabilities. At the same time, it did not help Seoul's confidence that previous promised U.S. military assistance was facing delays and obstruction in Congress, inter-Korean

talks had broken down, and North Korea appeared aggressive and eager to capitalize on a shifting and uncertain international environment.

Congressional obstruction was driven by a budget conscious and less interventionist batch of legislators, as well as an increasingly critical attitude toward the U.S. commitment to South Korea. Saigon's collapse led to resurgent concern about U.S. forces being entrapped in another Vietnam-style quagmire on the Asian mainland, and the Angola resolutions later that year represented the latest Congressional effort to oversee U.S. covert operations and obstruct defense spending as a means to legislate U.S. foreign policy. Added to this, legislators offered vocal criticism of Park's authoritarian political rule. Behind closed doors and through congressional hearings, reports, and public letters various Representatives and Senators cast doubt on the utility, cost, risk, and morality of the U.S. commitment.

Ford as Nixon Redux

After Nixon's withdrawal of 7ID, American officials were in no particular rush to remove more U.S. troops from the peninsula. The tension-ridden process surrounding the 1971 reduction and redeployment had kicked up dust between the allies that needed time to settle. Likewise, the initiation of inter-Korean dialogue in 1971, the first serious discussions of their kind since the Korean War, opened the possibility of a more stable diplomatic settlement. Thus, in the meantime, serious changes in the U.S. peninsular force structure appeared ill-advised.

On a more pragmatic level, time was also needed for South Korea's force improvement program (FIP) to take hold, which, coupled with Seoul's own efforts, required continued provision of the 5-year, $1.5 billion U.S. assistance package in addition to regular U.S. economic and military assistance. Operationally, too, the ROK military needed to acclimate to its new frontline

configuration and defense missions, and the alliance itself adapt to a shifting division of labor. On paper such transitions were neatly spelled out. On the ground they entailed long lead times and extensive training. Moreover, Secretary of Defense Laird, one of the strongest high-level proponents of Korean troop reductions, left his post in January 1973 to become Nixon's domestic policy advisor, and was no longer able to press the matter.

International factors also worked against further reductions. For the Nixon White House, Sino-U.S. rapprochement, arms negotiations between Moscow and Washington, war in the Middle East and an energy crisis, and, of course, the conclusion of the Paris Peace Talks between Hanoi and Washington in early 1973 all pushed U.S. Korea policy down the list of priorities. The official end of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and final withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from South Vietnam and Southeast Asia broadly mitigated against withdrawal elsewhere. Although these international and bilateral factors had led to a degree of caution and even neglect of high-level U.S. focus toward Korea, specifically regarding U.S. force levels, several issues related to the UNC began to garner closer attention.

From the Korean War until the 1970s, the U.S.-led UNC had been solely responsible for supervision of the armistice agreement and defense of South Korea. Under this arrangement, the U.S. four-star CINCUNC essentially held unilateral OPCON over South Korean forces, based on the agreed minute to the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty. However, beginning in the early 1970s several trends cast doubt on the legal status and military utility of such an arrangement.

In October 1971, the PRC replaced Taiwan as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Consequently, Beijing repeatedly called for the UN to leave Korea as well as abrogate the February 1951 UN General Assembly resolution, which had branded Communist China an aggressor against the UN forces during the Korean War. At the same time, the UNC came under

fire from scores of newly independent nation-states as a symbol of American neocolonial intervention in a sovereign third world country. These countries had transformed the formerly quiescent, pro-American UN General Assembly (UNGA) into a battle ground for assertive third world nationalism, often adopting decidedly non-aligned, if not outright anti-American, positions.[2]

Despite the excitement surrounding the historic July 4, 1972 South-North Joint Communique, by August 1973 the fledgling inter-Korean dialogue had come to a nominal end. This led North Korea to ramp up its effort to garner support from the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in order to diplomatically isolate Seoul and undermine the UNC and armistice agreement at the United Nations.[3]

Furthermore, in June 1972 the 23rd Royal Thai Company departed from South Korea, leaving U.S. forces as the only remaining representative of the 16-member UNC. As the United States gradually shared and even transferred aspects of the defense burden to Seoul, it appeared more and more anachronistic for the hierarchical UNC to retain sole responsibility for South Korea's defense. There was a distinct push to develop an alternative military command structure better suited to the actual distribution of forces and labor, and which incorporated Seoul's steadily enhancing defense and war-fighting capabilities. In this context, the Nixon administration moved to adjust the armistice and command arrangements in Korea.[4]

In September 1973, following Secretary Roger's resignation, Kissinger was named Secretary of State, while maintaining his role as Nixon's National Security Advisor. Thus, he solidified his already predominant hold over the direction and implementation of U.S. foreign

[2] Kwang Kwak, "The United States-ROK Alliance, 1953-2004: Alliance Institutionalization," (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 2006), 161-163.
[3] Jong-Dae Shin, "DPRK Perspectives on Korean Reunification after the July 4th Joint Communique," The Wilson Center: North Korea International Documentation Project, June 30, 2012, accessed April 5 2016, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/dprk-perspectives-korean-reunification-after-the-july-4th-joint-communique
[4] Kwak, "The United States-ROK Alliance, 1953-2004," 161-163.

policy. In fact, with Nixon embattled by the growing Watergate scandal and impeachment efforts, Kissinger essentially took the helm of the foreign policy bureaucracy, and moved many of his own NSC staff over to important positions in the State Department.[5] He was immediately confronted with the outbreak of the October 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Yet, on December 31, 1973, Kissinger issued National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 190: "Diplomatic Initiatives in Korea," which directed a study be made of potential changes in the security arrangements on the Korean Peninsula. Specifically, the study was to review the prospects for continuation of the UNC in its present form as well as alternative armistice and command arrangements and the diplomatic strategy necessary to execute them. The diplomatic effort had to include improved inter-Korean relations and dialogue, UN backing for new political and military arrangements, and the participation of the four major powers (i.e. the United States, Soviet Union, PRC, and Japan). It also had to address the future command relationship between the U.S. and ROK military and related basing rights in Japan, with implications for the UN Status of Forces Agreement with Japan. Numerous bases and staging areas in Japan were an integral part of UNC contingency planning involving redeployment of UN forces to the Korean Peninsula, so any alternative command and armistice arrangements immediately involved negotiations beyond the peninsula. Nevertheless, while developing the study, Kissinger directed, "it should be assumed that there will be no substantial changes in the US military presence or levels of aid to South Korea." The study was to be prepared on a priority by an ad-hoc group chaired by a representative

[5] "A Short History of the State Department: Superpowers Collide, 1961-1981: Kissinger Becomes Secretary of State," Office of the Historian, accessed January 30, 2016, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/kissinger

of Kissinger, and presented for consideration to the Senior Review Group (SRG), chaired by Kissinger, no later than January 11, 1974. [6]

Following the inter-agency review process and review by the president, the study resulted in National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 251: "Termination of the U.N. Command in Korea." Regarding the armistice, the aim was to substitute U.S. and ROK military commanders for the U.S. four-star CINCUNC as "our side's signatory to the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement." ROK and DPRK representatives should then become the principle members of the Military Armistice Commission, alongside a non-aggression pact between the two Koreas and United Nations Security Council endorsement of the substitute armistice arrangements. In short, the shift would formally bring Seoul into the Armistice Agreement, to which it had not been a signatory, and make the armistice keeping mechanism a more inter-Korean oriented arrangement.[7]

Interestingly, the memo sought: "Tacit acceptance by the other side of a continued U.S. force presence in South Korea for at least the short term, in return for a Shanghai-type communique committing ourselves to reduce and ultimately withdraw U.S. forces as the security situation on the Peninsula is stabilized." However, other changes to the Armistice Agreement were to be avoided, and there would be "no substantial changes in the level or missions of our forces in the ROK during the period of transition to new security arrangements following termination of the UNC." Washington would pursue a two-track negotiating strategy to achieve the alternative arrangement, with the Seoul-Pyongyang track being primary, and U.S. approaches to the other major powers secondary. Before making any proposals to the other major powers, Washington

[6] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 248: National Security Study Memorandum 190. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d248

[7] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 253: National Security Decision Memorandum 251: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d253.

would consult with Seoul. It had learned the hard way from the tension produced by Nixon's earlier shocks.[8]

In regard to the military command structures, the plan was to "seek ROK agreement to transfer operational control of ROK forces from CINCUNC, upon its termination, to a new U.S-ROK combined command under a senior U.S. military officer." Although the result would be a bilateral command arrangement, throughout the process the Soviets, PRC, UNC Liaison Group, as well as allies which contributed forces to the UNC had to kept informed. Tokyo, in particular, had to be kept "continuously informed" insofar as the use of U.S. facilities and bases in Japan as well as Japanese facilities would still be integral in case of any contingency resulting from a breach in the armistice. Indeed, Washington would "seek an explicit agreement from the Japanese government which would extend the secret 1961 Kishi Minute to the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty following termination of the UNC." The Minute had permitted the U.S.-led UNC to use bases in Japan in case of an emergency without prior consultation. The new arrangement would retain the same privileges, if now under more direct U.S.-Japanese (rather than UN) auspices. The previous arrangement and the need to maintain it plainly demonstrated the importance of Japan to South Korea's ultimate defense.[9]

In sum, NSDM-251 endeavored to terminate the UNC and, by extension, remove the United Nations altogether from armistice keeping responsibilities as well as the military defense of South Korea. Instead, it would shift the armistice arrangement toward a more bilateral, inter-Korean settlement, backed by multilateral agreement among the major powers most immediately involved. Meanwhile, the creation of an alternative bilateral, U.S.-ROK combined command would shift the responsibility for Seoul's defense squarely onto the alliance itself. It would better

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

reflect the actual distribution of forces and the ROK military's enhanced capabilities, while still maintaining ultimate American control.

Moreover, even were the overall plan not realized, at the very least the "minimum objective of the United States in this negotiating approach is to place ourselves by early summer in a defensible position for possible debate of the Korean issue in the U.N. General Assembly this coming fall." Although the plan embodied in NSDM-251 was ambitious and required the cooperation of multiple actors, it should not be seen merely as a cynical ploy by Washington to bolster its diplomatic position in the face of ongoing criticism in the UNGA. Yes, Kissinger and others understood the stark difficulties they faced and likely doubted the near-term efficacy of the plan. However, it also reflected an awareness that longstanding institutional arrangements in Korea could not remain fixed in place forever; alternatives had to be devised.[10] As it happened, though, there was little progress for the U.S.-ROK side at the United Nations. If anything, matters trended in the opposite direction.

Throughout the 1960s, discussions of the Korean Question at the United Nations were mostly *pro forma*. Each year a pro-ROK resolution was adopted and a pro-DRPK resolution to invite a North Korean delegation to the international body was rejected. Without any progress on the matter, a resolution was adopted in 1971 to comprehensively postpone any further discussion of the Korean Question. Then, in June 1973, Park Chung Hee, as part of his seven-point foreign policy for peace and unification, proposed joint admission of North and South Korea to the United Nations and in October suggested dissolving the UNC could be considered provided an alternative mechanism were established to oversee the Armistice Agreement.[11]

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[10] Document 253: National Security Decision Memorandum 251: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d253

[11] Narushige Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008* (New York: Routledge, 2010), Ch. 5.

Pyongyang strongly rejected the idea of joint entry. Nevertheless, it did establish an office at the United Nations in July. During the 28th UNGA that year, Pyongyang was successful in garnering sufficient support from non-aligned nations to secure the adoption of a consensus statement calling for dissolution of the UNCURK, which was disbanded in November.[12] At the 29th UNGA in 1974, Pyongyang continued to gain support. Although the pro-ROK resolution was adopted (61 votes for and 43 against) and the pro-DPRK resolution rejected (48 votes both for and against), the support gap was narrowing.[13]

Ford & The Limits of the Nixon Doctrine

Nevertheless, near-term progress in altering the armistice or military command arrangements was hindered for other, more notable reasons. Despite Kissinger's hold over foreign policy, the metastasizing Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation could not help but distract administration officials. While Ford inherited Nixon's same advisors, the presidential transition disrupted the policymaking process. More important, though, were the newly emergent uncertainties Ford faced upon entering the Oval Office. In the aftermath of Vietnam and amidst reduced superpower tensions and ongoing détente, Washington was wary of open-ended commitments. Naturally, high-level U.S. officials had begun to examine the broader implications of withdrawal from Vietnam and end of active U.S. combat involvement in Southeast Asia for U.S. commitments elsewhere. In other words, Ford was intent to bring forward the Nixon Doctrine. Nevertheless, he was faced with adjudicating the limits of its application to a degree Nixon had not been.

[12] "Press Release, "UNCURK Annual Report Recommends Dissolution of Commission"," September 06, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, "International incidents and disputes - Korea - correspondence general (603.1)," https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117559
[13] Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, Ch.5.

Existing historiography of Ford's foreign policy frames it as a mere extension of the Nixon-Kissinger years. The main consideration remained superpower competition and rationalizing the ends-means balance between U.S. foreign policy objectives and the methods used to attain them; an essential element of the Nixon Doctrine. As an earlier scholar of the Ford years observed, Ford and Kissinger, "administered foreign policy around the goals and strategies that had been developed by Nixon (with Kissinger's assistance)."[14] Another more recent assessment concurred, noting that Ford "invoked no new diplomatic doctrines or grand visions, even as many cold war verities collapsed around him."[15] Nixon and Kissinger had moved away from the earlier consensus about a monolithic communist threat toward a more complex multipolar and realpolitik conception of world politics. However, theirs was a vision still wedded to superpower competition, if in triangulated form. Bilateral and regional relationships remained subsumed by the Washington-Moscow-Beijing framework. Ford did not abjure superpower competition and balance of power politics as a guiding reference point for foreign policy. However, his administration did begin to consider, or was forced to consider, bilateral and regional issues on their own terms.

In part, this was the result of the inevitable maturation of Washington's relationship with various allies and the allies' increased strength; itself an explicit condition and outcome of the Nixon doctrine. However, it also resulted from the emergence of "challenges to which there was no direct analogy in the Nixon administration and which cannot be understood simply through the lens of superpower competition."[16] On an overall strategic level, the central policy objective still was to maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific in the face of increasing Soviet influence therein. Yet

[14] A. James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change: the Nixon and Ford Administrations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution: 1981), 357.
[15] Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 275.
[16] Andrew J. Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific after the Fall of Saigon," *The Historical Journal* 52, no.3 (Sep. 2009): 698.

the actual end of American combat involvement in Vietnam and later collapse of Saigon, coupled with more autonomous and potentially destabilizing actions by allies, indicated that maintaining U.S. influence and power projection capabilities in the region "meant paying attention to specific countries and conflicts on their own terms and through the adoption of a regional perspective as well as in terms of superpower conflict."[17] For Ford, the question remained: where and how to maintain the spirit of the earlier Nixon Doctrine while simultaneously grappling far more acutely than Nixon had with the question of where to backstop it. Korea was a key location where these contradictory impulses intersected.

Despite the inclination to reassess the U.S. commitment to Seoul, indeed, to carry forward what had been started under Nixon, on balance the consensus among officials was to uphold rather than significantly restructure the commitment. For, in conjunction with greater pressure at the United Nations, Pyongyang once again had adopted an aggressive and more militarized stance toward Seoul. Moreover, evidence was emerging that the latter, while still nursing severe doubts about Washington's commitment, had begun to pursue worrisome independent defense measures. These various developments were explicitly at work or just beneath the surface in the lead up to Ford's November 1974 visit to Seoul, only three months into his presidency.

As mentioned, inter-Korean talks had broken down within a year of the historic July 4, 1972 South-North Joint Communique. Pyongyang had accused Seoul of seeking to "enshrine the division of Korea" through Park's June 23, 1973 proposal for simultaneous entry of both Koreas into the United Nations.[18] Instead, two days later, Kim Il Sung responded to Park Chung Hee's Seven-Point Foreign Policy for Peace and Unification with his own Five-Point Policy for National

[17] Ibid.
[18] "Telegram from Pyongyang, No.061.253, Urgent, SECRET," June 29, 1973, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114069.

Reunification, which called for creation of the "Confederated Republic of Goryeo" and entry of both Koreas into the United Nations "as a sole state."[19] Contrary to Seoul's step-by-step trust-building approach, Pyongyang insisted on a comprehensive settlement and immediate resolution of all outstanding political and military issues. Pyongyang, realizing it could neither achieve its plan for reunification through direct North-South negotiations nor sow the necessary opposition within South Korea to achieve the overthrow of the Park regime (which had been one of its goals of its bold approach), adopted a more intransigent stance. Around the termination of UNCURK in November 1973, Pyongyang began to insist on direct U.S.-North Korea talks (and exclusion of South Korea from the process) as well as reassert claims over South Korean islands near the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the Yellow Sea, creating further friction between both sides. In March 1974, Pyongyang replaced its previous North-South Korean peace proposal with a proposal to conclude a peace treaty directly with Washington.[20]

In addition to the breakdown in North-South talks and Pyongyang's more intransigent attitude, both North Korea and South Korea continued to build up their military capabilities. As Oberdorfer remarked: "the struggle for military supremacy did not stop or even slow because of the North-South contacts of 1971-1972; on the contrary, the fluidity and uncertainty that gave rise to the dialogue also gave rise to an intensified arms race on the divided peninsula."[21] Indeed, a retrospective U.S. military analysis identified 1972-77 as a period of "remarkable North Korean Army growth."[22] Yet even by mid-1973, though the full extent of North Korea's efforts remained unclear and intelligence on the country notoriously difficult to come by, U.S. officials were

[19] "Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Note, No. 01/010124/73, Secret," August, 1973, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114071.
[20] Jong-Dae Shin, "DPRK Perspective on Korean Reunification after the July 4th Communique," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/dprk-perspectives-korean-reunification-after-the-july-4th-joint-communique
[21] Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), 59.
[22] As quoted in ibid, 59.

becoming concerned about such developments. In 1974, the U.S. Command's intelligence estimate held that the North Korean army had grown to 408,000 troops (making it the fourth largest communist army in the world); was "an efficient, well-trained, highly disciplined force which is undergoing continual modernization"; deployed more than half of its twenty-three divisions close to the DMZ; and the DPRK was developing an impressive air force of Chinese and Soviet planes and a small but mobile navy.[23]

Concerned about these trends, in mid-1973 the U.S. Army assigned James F. Hollingsworth to command the ROK/U.S. I Corps, tasked with defense of Seoul. Hollingsworth, who had significant combat experience in WWII and Vietnam, was outspoken in his intent to confront North Korea's apparent buildup and transform the existing war plan, which was defensive nature, into a far more aggressive, forward defense strategy. By 1974, having told his ROK counterparts, "I'm going to turn you into an offensive army," he had moved most his artillery as far forward as possible to the southern edge of the DMZ.[24] Also, in case of a North Korean attack, two brigades of 2ID were charged with seizing Kaesong, a key city in southern North Korea. Lastly, his forward defense concept would utilize massive amounts of U.S. and ROK firepower, including constant B-52 airstrikes, to check a North Korean advance north of Seoul and win the war within two weeks.

Although Hollingsworth's aggressive rhetoric about killing "every son of a bitch north of the forward edge of battle area" was meant to reassure Seoul as much as deter Pyongyang, it was, by his own private admission, a bit of bravado. Nevertheless, even if it achieved such aims, it could

[23] As quoted in ibid, 61
[24] As quoted in ibid, 62; Paul Cleveland recalled Hollingsworth forward defense strategy and departure from established war-fighting concepts, see: Interview with Paul M. Cleveland, Political/Military Officer, Seoul (1973-1977), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 602.

not but add to a growing sense of tension. In fact, his public announcement of the "violent, short war concept" was made before the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given their approval. Moreover, behind closed doors NSC staff at the White House objected to the plan since it involved "almost immediate U.S. air interdiction, and possible use of nuclear weapons" for which there existed no prior authorization.[25] Nonetheless, Hollingsworth "got away with it because of the strong backing of the South Koreans and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger."[26] Later, Secretary Schlesinger would be the first American official to publicly acknowledge the existence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Korea and also express a willingness to use them. To the point, though, all of this merely added to the already deeply institutionalized security dilemma on the Korean Peninsula; one side's defensive measures were seen by the other side as offensive in nature, thus, in turn, spurring their own defensive measures in response.[27]

The deepening arms race and North Korea's intransigence in peace talks where not the only issues of concern. Pyongyang's more aggressive rhetorical and military posture was matched by concrete actions. On August 15, 1974, one week after Nixon's resignation, a Japanese-born Korean man named Mun Se Kwang, attempted to assassinate Park Chung Hee during his annual

[25] As quoted in Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 62; Donald Gregg, stationed in the CIA outfit in Seoul, offered similar thoughts about Hollingsworth's bravado in a later interview, see: Interview with Donald Gregg, CIA Station Chief, Seoul (1973-1975), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 546; see also: Interview with Paul M. Cleveland, 602, 623.

[26] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 62; members of Ford's NSC staff were clearly concerned about the plan and the extent to which Schlesinger may have gotten out in front of official administration policy in supporting it during his talks with Park in Seoul, see: *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 273: Memorandum From Thomas J. Barnes of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft), Washington, September 29, 1975. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d273.

[27] Oberdorfer neatly sums up the Korean version of the dilemma, which could easily stand in as the ideal-type case of the security dilemma for international relations scholars, when he writes: "North Korea responded in kind to the augmentation and repositioning of U.S. and ROK forces and Hollingsworth's aggressive plans to use them in case of war. Just as the growth spurt in North Korean forces stimulated the United States and South Korea to increased efforts, so the changes in firepower and strategy south of the DMZ helped stimulate large increases in North Korean forces and their repositioning closer to the dividing line with the South." See: Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 62-63.

Independence Day address. Although Park survived the attempt unscathed, his wife and first lady, Yook Young Soo, was shot in the head and died shortly thereafter. The 22-year-old Mun had been assisted in the act by an official from the pro-North Korean residents' association in Japan, Chosen Soren, which spurred a severe diplomatic row between Seoul and Tokyo. Moreover, the brazen assassination attempt demonstrated, once again, that Pyongyang was still intent on bringing down the Park regime, whether by subterfuge and propaganda or direct physical attack on Park himself.

The attack occurred in a context not only of growing tensions between Pyongyang and Seoul following the breakdown of inter-Korean talks, but also one of enhanced domestic repression within South Korea. In early 1974, Park had issued emergency decrees criminalizing criticism of his *Yushin* constitution and outlawed various opposition groups. Consequently, hundreds of political opponents were either jailed or sentenced to death, including the country's most popular dissident poet, a well-known Roman Catholic bishop, and South Korea's only living former president, Yun Po Sun. Even before the assassination attempt, the "struggle within the South, added to the permanent conflict with the North, made the city as tense as a war zone."[28] Following the event, there was even greater concern about how the Park government might crack down, especially considering the restraining influence his wife had had on him. U.S. and other officials began to observe an increasingly withdrawn and isolated leader in Park.

Then, on November 15, three months after the attempt on Park's life and days before President Ford's arrival in Seoul, ROK border guards accidentally discovered a North Korean-dug tunnel, running underneath the DMZ several hundred kilometers into South Korean territory. While making the discovery, the guards came under fire from the North Korean side and responded in kind. It was the first such exchange of fire in almost two years. ROK authorities were already

[28] Ibid, 51.

aware of the possible existence of such tunnels; in 1973 a high-level North Korean defector had admitted as much. Yet the accidental discovery in November provided confirmation. The defector had told his South Korean interrogators that Kim Il Sung ordered tunnel construction in 1971-72, at the same time both Koreas were beginning inter-Korean talks. They would provide covert entry for North Korean reconnaissance agents and help ferry men and material behind South Korean lines in time of war. Always on high alert, South Korean suspicions regarding Pyongyang's malign intent were only exacerbated. A second discovery was made in February 1975, revealing a far larger tunnel, which would permit thousands of North Korean personnel and even heavy machinery to pass deeper into ROK territory.

Nevertheless, American concerns extended beyond the tremors caused by Pyongyang's worrisome behavior. In the months leading up to Ford's trip, it became ever more apparent that the ROK was pursuing certain policies, which if carried out would prove highly detrimental to American influence and interests on the peninsula and beyond. In a July 1974 telegram to the Department of State, outgoing U.S. Ambassador Phil Habib reported a "visceral feeling" at the embassy that "based only on growing independence of Korean attitude toward defense matters and increasing doubts about the durability of U.S. commitments, that most senior ROK defense planners desire to obtain capability eventually to produce nuclear weapons," and that certain sections of the ROKG, such as the KCIA and Ministry of National Defense, opposed ratification of the NPT.[29] India's successful nuclear bomb test on May 18 had shocked the international community and American officials specifically, sparking awareness of the threat of nuclear

[29] "U.S Embassy in Republic of Korea telegram 4957 to Department of State, "Korean Accession to NPT," 30 July 1974, Confidential," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3513489-Document-01-U-S-Embassy-in-Republic-of-Korea.

proliferation among developing world countries.[30] Seoul's emergent effort, if real, indicated the threat was genuine.

The visceral feeling led the U.S. Embassy's CIA station to further investigate the matter, an effort spearheaded by Richard Lawless, then a junior officer working under Station Chief Donald Gregg. The CIA effort resulted in an alert report sent by Winston Lord, director of the Policy Planning Staff at State and one of Kissinger's chief aides, to the latter as he and Ford travelled to Japan, South Korea, and later on to the Vladivostok Summit with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. It is unclear whether or not it was the first report on the issue Kissinger had seen, or if it made its way into the President's Daily Brief (PDB) before his trip. However, it clearly spelled out existing trends and the risks therein.[31]

The alert report system, of which Lord's telegram was a model example, was meant to flag topics which officials believed would become more pressing in the following six to nine months. According to the report, President Park had told Korean journalists that he had directed ROK scientists to build atomic bombs by 1977; had informed participants at an industrial conference he desired long-range missiles for retaliation against North Korean provocations; and that Seoul was negotiating with the French to acquire a chemical separation plant (i.e. a reprocessing facility) in order to produce plutonium from spent reactor fuel. Furthermore, the report noted, in addition to the risk of escalation on the peninsula, if Seoul did not sign on to the NPT or violated international safeguards, it could produce nuclear weapons by 1980. Such an outcome would "have a deeply unsettling impact on regional stability" and on nonproliferation in general. To prevent Seoul's

[30] Robert Gillette, "U.S. Squelched Apparent S. Korea A-Bomb Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1978.
[31] William Burr, "The United States and South Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program, 1974-1976, Part I," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2017-03-22/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-i.

progress would necessitate "early cooperation" with allies and use of U.S. "political leverage."[32] As it happened, this required a combination of carrots and sticks; both promises of enhanced assistance and security guarantees alongside threats of alliance fracture. Nevertheless, South Korea's nascent nuclear program was not a topic of discussion between Park and Ford during latter's November 22-23 visit. Rather, Ford aimed to reassure Park of American constancy in the face of a more aggressive North and amidst internal U.S. concern about the longer-term costs of Seoul's skepticism.

During their summit, Ford and Park reiterated the hope that the UNGA would base its consideration of the Korean Question "on a recognition of the importance of the security arrangements which have preserved peace" for two decades.[33] The message was reinforced in the pro-ROK UN resolution adopted the next month, which stressed the importance of maintaining the UNC until appropriate alternative arrangements could maintain the Armistice Agreement. The U.S. was not prepared to consider any dissolution of the UNC until inter-Korean talks and general agreement among the other "parties directly concerned" had settled on a stable replacement.[34] Put differently, and in the context of Seoul's abiding concern: there would be no direct Pyongyang-Washington talks like those between Hanoi and Washington, which had sidestepped a U.S. ally in South Vietnam, abjured a multilateral settlement, and justified a U.S. withdrawal. In the face of the continued threat to peace and security posed by Pyongyang's "hostile acts," Ford and Park

[32] "Winston Lord, director Policy Planning Staff, and Martin Packman, deputy director, Office of Intelligence and Research, "Second Alert Report," 20 November 1974, Secret, enclosing "Alert Report for the Secretary," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3513493-Document-04-Winston-Lord-director-Policy.
[33] "Joint Communique between His Excellency Park Chung Hee, President of the Republic of Korea, and His Excellency Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States of America, November 23, 1974," in *Korean Unification: Source Materials with an Introduction*, ed. Se-Jin Kim (Seoul: Research Center For Peace and Unification, 1976), 374.
[34] "Resolution on the Korean Question adopted by the U.N. General Assembly, December 17, 1974," in *Korean Unification: Source Materials with an Introduction*, ed. Se-Jin Kim (Seoul: Research Center For Peace and Unification, 1976), 375-376.

stressed that U.S. and ROK forces needed to maintain their strength and readiness to deter aggression. In this vein, Ford reaffirmed U.S. determination "to render prompt and effective assistance to repel armed attack" in accordance with the Mutual Defense Treaty, and told Park "the United States has no plan to reduce the present level of United States forces in Korea." Both leaders also agreed the ROK's Force Modernization Program was of central importance.[35]

Nevertheless, although not stated publicly, members of Ford's NSC staff viewed the president's remarks as applying to a full withdrawal rather than a partial one. After all, former Defense Secretary Laird's earlier Program Decision Memorandum calling for partial reduction of 2ID by the end of 1975 was still in the system, even if it was not being effectuated at the time. Indeed, South Korea's own modernization was a key condition facilitating Laird's plan for further reductions. Also, the concept of mobile defense was still operative, which is to say moving away from stationary U.S. force deployments toward more flexible, mobile reserves. Even Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, himself inclined to stress the importance of a strong Korean defense and military balance to ensure deterrence, made clear in February 1974 that Washington was "looking at conversion of its army units in Korea into a mobile reserve rather than station them permanently and firmly."[36] Ford might state U.S. force levels would stay constant, but Park and his advisors knew about these ongoing discussions.

If in the short-term Ford's visit was meant to steady Seoul's nerves and maintain alliance comity during a transitional period, it did not stick. Again, Ford officials had to face a new set of issues and international and domestic conditions simply not present during the Nixon years: a burgeoning threat from North Korea and Pyongyang's activist diplomacy; Congressional

[35] "Joint Communique between Park and Ford," 374-375.
[36] "Testimony by Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger before the House Appropriations Committee, February 28, 1974," in *Documents on Korean-American Relations 1943-1976* (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1976), 449.

invasiveness in foreign policy in general and heightened skepticism regarding the Korean commitment in particular; and, above all, the wider reverberations of anti-communist collapse in Indochina. Ironically, whereas the over-commitment to an unwinnable war in Vietnam had contributed to the undoing of the Cold War consensus and motivated Nixon's doctrine, Saigon's final collapse forced acute consideration of the doctrine's limits. The Nixon Doctrine was a grand strategic re-imagining, which while predicated on U.S. allies taking on a greater role, mostly lost sight of the details and contradictions that the broader strategic shift brought about at the local level. The Ford Administration, on the contrary, had to grapple with these local effects and do so amidst the fallout from the April 1975 fall of Saigon.

To be sure, Seoul's concern about the implications of Vietnam for the U.S. commitment to South Korea did not begin in the spring of 1975. As examined in the previous chapter, Nixon's policy of Vietnamization and related 1971 withdrawal of 7ID had, among other factors, pushed Park to institute his *Yushin* system internally, pursue what to many was an economically irrational Heavy and Chemical Industrialization, and doggedly pursue a more self-reliant defense policy. If Nixon "was declaring his independence of America's Cold War commitments in the region, Park would declare Korean independence in politics, economics – and national security."[37] Park saw U.S. policy as unilaterally implemented and thus dismissive of South Korea's interests, and, even worse, instrumentally exploiting the ROK to help provide cover for the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

While Washington withdrew large numbers of its own forces from South Vietnam in 1971 and 1972, it pressured the ROK to maintain its two division in the country. In fact, by 1972, the ROK had more troops in South Vietnam than the United States, was experiencing a greater number

[37] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 364.

of combat casualties, and was pushed by Washington to deploy its White Horse division to engage the enemy more aggressively, partly to cover ongoing U.S. withdrawals. As internal NSC memorandum show, Washington contemplated leaving certain U.S. forces in country specially to handle the logistical needs of the remaining ROK forces, and even considered strategies to convince Seoul to leave a division in country until 1974 because it doubted the South Vietnamese forces' ability to secure the same areas. U.S. policy "clearly signaled to the ROK government that its troops had become a pawn in US foreign policy," and that the "impact of decisions on Korea was at best a secondary concern in the minds of US policymakers."[38] In mid-December 1972, having secured domestic political control through a successful referendum on the *Yushin* constitution, Park informed U.S. officials the ROK would begin withdrawing its troops in January 1973 with the process to be completed by June of that year.

Park's consternation, though, extended beyond the unilateral thrust of U.S. policy in the withdrawal of 7ID and the back-and-forth over ROK troops in Vietnam. He was profoundly disconcerted about the larger U.S. failure in Vietnam and the manner by which Washington wound down its commitment to Saigon. As Oberdorfer observed, "The prospects and plight of South Vietnam, the U.S.-backed anticommunist half of another divided country, bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the situation in South Korea." The U.S. retreat from the country and the way it sidestepped and essentially abandoned its South Vietnamese ally at the Paris Peace Talks "raised agonizing doubts about the reliability of the United States in his own case."[39] Might Washington, already having pulled out one of its two divisions and known to be considering further withdrawals, consider a direct appeal to Pyongyang as a way to finally end its commitment to Seoul? One

[38] Benjamin A. Engel, "Viewing Seoul from Saigon: Withdrawal from the Vietnam War and the Yushin Regime," *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* 13, no.1 (Summer 2016): 99-100.
[39] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 64.

evening in mid-1973, Park showed up at Hollingworth's ROK/U.S. Corp I command post and bluntly asked, "Are you going to do the same thing here you did in Vietnam?"[40] Writing in his personal diary around the same time, Park noted: "by our own eyes, we witnessed that the people who believed that the other countries will save them and did not prepare to keep their own nation lost their country."[41]

Thus, as conditions deteriorated in Indochina under a general communist onslaught in the Spring of 1975, Park's extant fears were exacerbated. He connected events in Cambodia (where the revolutionary Khmer Rouge was taking power) and South Vietnam (under a sustained attack from North Vietnamese forces) with the threat from Pyongyang. During an address at the ROK military academy's graduation ceremony, Park remarked "We should not look on today's South Vietnam and Khmer situation with indifference. As you well know, it was revealed that North Koreans secretly dug tunnels in the many sites of the DMZ for their invasion south after commencing talks with us."[42] Seoul's concern deepened as Kim Il Sung set out on an extensive foreign trip, with Beijing his first stop, which the ROK saw as an effort on Kim's part to garner support for North Korea's aggressive policy toward the South. On April 22, days after Phnom Penh fell to Khmer forces and Kim arrived in Beijing, Park received a report from the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that while there Kim had reaffirmed his hostility toward Seoul and the United States.[43] Oberdorfer's own interviews with PRC officials and recently released East German documents confirm that Kim indeed expressed his intent to capture Seoul under the banner of the Red Army, much like his comrades in North Vietnam had done in Vietnam. That the Chinese

[40] Ibid, 61
[41] As quoted in, Lyong Choi, "The first nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula, 1975-76," *Cold War History* 14, no. 1 (2014): 74, footnote 10.
[42] President Park Chung Hee electronic library, "The Presidential Instruction at the Commencement of Military Academy 1975, 28 March 1975," http://www.parkchunghee.or.kr/search.html.
[43] As cited in Choi, "The first nuclear crisis," 76.

leadership rebuffed Kim's militant proposals and called for continued inter-Korean dialogue did not change the perception his trip engendered.[44]

Park also connected events in Cambodia and Vietnam with his persistent doubts about the U.S. commitment, as both suggested a failure in American resolve. One contemporary observer noted how the image broadcast worldwide of the final American helicopter leaving the U.S. Embassy in Saigon: "seemed disastrous to a jittery Seoul, which could well imagine the same thing happening to it. The spectacle of Americans scrambling off the roof of their embassy in Saigon (leaving the entire South Korean Embassy staff behind) induced a mood of pessimism unparalleled since the Korean War." [45] On the same day Park received the report of Kim Il Sung's speech in Beijing, Richard L. Sneider, Habib's replacement as U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, sent a telegram to State highlighting Park's resentment towards Washington and increasing anxiety over Saigon's fate. Although Sneider noted the situation in Seoul had not yet risen to a crisis, he advised that the U.S. work to boost Park's confidence, including with increased U.S. military and economic aid. In the near-term, Sneider worried about a possible North Korean provocation aimed at testing U.S. resolve and Seoul's capabilities. In the long-term, Sneider voiced concern Washington might gradually lose its control over Seoul. He observed that while South Korea still depended on the U.S., it was no longer a client state. With this in mind, he recommended Washington begin a major review of U.S. Korea policy.[46]

Of course, after the fall of Saigon the Ford administration faced fundamental questions about U.S. policy, not just in Korea, but in the entire Asia-Pacific as it reacted "to a perceived

[44] Choi, "The first nuclear crisis," 74; for East German documents and summary of their contents, see Ria Chae, "East German Documents on Kim Il Sung's April 1975 Trip to Beijing," The Wilson Center: North Korea International Documentation Project, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/east-german-documents-kim-il-sungs-april-1975-trip-to-beijing.
[45] Russell Spurr, "Korea: fingers on the trigger," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 89, no.27 (July 1975): 26.
[46] As cited in Choi, "The first nuclear crisis," 77.

threat of being drummed out of the region." [47] Much like Nixon and Kissinger before, Ford faced the same contradictory dilemma inherent to the Nixon Doctrine, namely, adjudicating the perception of whether the doctrine was a readjusted means for the same longstanding end of American preponderance or, on the contrary, a cover for U.S. abandonment of its commitments worldwide.[48] However, Saigon's collapse put the dilemma in starker relief than before. Put simply, Washington had reached the outer limits of the dilemma, and any policy reassessment had to squarely face that fact. Surely, Ford, similar to his predecessors, prized the maintenance of American preponderance, but under the conditions at the time maintaining it took on the appearance of a holding pattern. Rather than a positive program, it was based more on negating a precipitous shift in the status quo. In effect, it involved recognition, on the one hand, that changed international conditions and domestic political realities required inevitable adjustments had to be made, but, on the other hand, they be effectuated in a very deliberate, even begrudging manner.

On May 9, shortly after the fall of Saigon, a memo ("The Lessons of Viet-Nam") was sent to Brent Scowcroft, Kissinger's former deputy and replacement as Ford's National Security Advisor, assessing the probable impact of the recent events in Indochina on the U.S. position in the region and offering some options for managing their fallout. It highlighted the United States "had been badly burned in Viet-nam" and, consequently, the American people were more resistant to foreign intervention and had embraced a more limited role for the United States abroad. "The danger may therefore be not that we will ignore the lessons of Viet-nam, but that we will be tempted to apply them too broadly, in East Asia and around the world."[49] Put differently, from

[47] Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific," 700.
[48] Ibid.
[49] "State Department Paper on the Lessons of Vietnam, May 9, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library: Selected Documents on the Vietnam War, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/vietnam/032400090-001.pdf.

Washington's perspective the danger was not so much the risk of another Vietnam-style engagement, though that was a salient concern, but the overreaction and rapid trimming down of commitments that might come in Vietnam's wake. Although a certain adjustment was unavoidable and even necessary, in the short-term U.S. resolve would need to be reasserted. Kissinger reiterated the point in a May 12 memo to Ford, which was based on the same analysis and drawn up on his behalf. Following South Vietnam's demise, "I fear we will only now realize how much we need to shore up our position elsewhere once our position in Vietnam is lost. We may be compelled to support other situations much more strongly in order to repair the damage and to take tougher stands in order to make others believe in us again."[50] Korea was the "elsewhere," where a tougher stance would be taken.

The anti-communist crusade was over. The Vietnam War as well as Sino-Soviet split had fostered the dissolution of Cold War certainties, which helped motivate the Nixon Doctrine, disengagement from Indochina, and rapprochement with Beijing. Yet the same dynamic had spread to U.S. allies. Kissinger's aide, W.R. Smyser, reported that the nations of Asia had adjusted well to the doctrine and a different American presence, and that it "is a remarkable testimonial that this remains true, though not as much as before, even after the recent event in Indochina."[51] Yet this very fact, coupled with the final failure in Saigon, required that Washington rethink its policy in the region. Just as Washinton had adjusted its relationship with the communist powers, so too had its allies. This, in turn, required adjustment of Washington's relationship with the latter. Moreover, the ongoing competition between communist powers itself provided the opportunity to

[50] "National Security Council Paper on the Lessons of Vietnam, May 12, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library: Selected Documents on the Vietnam War, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/vietnam/032400091-002.pdf.
[51] "The Situation in Asia, July 15, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library: Selected Documents on the Vietnam War, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/vietnam/032400018-001.pdf.

do so, but, importantly, it also pointed to the inherent risks if the U.S. failed to maintain its presence and strength in the region.

The first comprehensive review of U.S. Asia policy after Vietnam, spearheaded by former ambassador to Thailand, William R. Kintner, laid out these various factors. He observed the need for a deliberate recalibration from Washington: "The collapse of our efforts to prevent communist domination of Indochina unmasked our inability to guide our actions with a set of purposes the American people would support. Vietnam is over; the need to clearly understand our changing status and redefine a creative and credible policy for Asia remains."[52] However, the primary goal of U.S. policy remained constant, namely, to "prevent the domination of that region by a single power hostile to the United States"; in other words, strategic denial. Despite the fact that such domination or ascendancy by either the Soviets or PRC appeared impossible to achieve, U.S. officials had to be alert to the fact that one or both might try to exploit "the current period of confusion and instability" to achieve it. Indeed, according the Kintner, the very process of intense competition between them could be nearly as detrimental to U.S. security, political, and economic interests as domination itself.[53]

So, a close secondary goal of U.S. policy, Kintner wrote, would be to try "to limit the opportunities for or mitigate the consequences of intense competition for ascendancy" by these powers. Such competition could potentially undermine the stability and continued political independence of non-communist countries in the region. Thus, the U.S. had to hold the line on further withdrawals or, at the very least, move with all prudent and deliberate speed as a "precipitous US military and political withdrawal from one of the regions of the East Asia-Pacific

[52] William R. Kintner, "'Ambassador Kintner's Study of U.S. Policy Interest in the Asian-Pacific Area' of the Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library," Gerald Ford Presidential Library & Museum, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0324/1553587.pdf.
[53] Ibid.

area could catalyze such excessive Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese competition." The overriding security task in the region, then, was to assure that the United States both "(a) retains the capability to exercise political influence and to project military power where and when needed in the area, and (2) conveys the credibility and the will to employ it selectively." U.S. officials had to maintain a strong forward basing posture "as long as possible" and operational access to facilities into the indefinite future, while anticipating that political pressures would inevitably lead to the denial of certain facilities and even withdrawal from most of mainland Asia.[54]

Thailand and the Philippines were two countries where the need to negotiate and adjust the U.S. force presence was most pressing. In both instances, Ford officials aimed to strike a balance between unwinding the U.S. presence without also causing unnecessary instability or sending the wrong signal. In Thailand the pressure was greatest. Aside from South Vietnam, Thailand had been the closest American ally in the region during the war, yet as early as 1973 Bangkok had begun to move away from its exclusive relationship with Washington and pursue ties with Communist countries. In 1975, the new Thai government established full ties with Beijing in July (and, later, North Vietnam in August 1976) and also announced its intention to seek withdrawal of the roughly 27,000 remaining U.S. forces within a year. The Thai government's stance appealed to the politicians and intellectuals upon whom it depended for support.[55]

Smyser, in a July 15 memo to Kissinger, summed up the U.S. view: "I think we can and should ride with the storm and cut our forces, if necessary completely, so as to avoid providing cheap issues. The problem is to do it in a way that does not discourage our friends and to accompany our military departure with an increase in other forms of collaboration as well as aid."[56]

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[54] Ibid
[55] Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific," 703.
[56] "The Situation in Asia, July 15, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library.

In a May 7 conversation with the prime minister of New Zealand, W.E. Rowling, Ford remarked that the "more we delay and phase it out, the better for the area as a whole," while Kissinger said that he wanted to leave "grudgingly."[57] Kissinger stated in a telegram to the US *charge d'affaires* in Thailand, Edward Masters, that a sudden largescale withdrawal would send "completely the wrong signal to Hanoi and other Communist capitals."[58] In the short-term, 7,500 troops were to be withdrawn, but, due to the failure of further negotiations, no settlement could be reached for a continued U.S. force presence, and the remaining personnel left in July 1976. Before the final departure, Washington announced it would "not hinder the Thai in their efforts to adjust to new relationships with their communist and non-Communist neighbors, and with us," thus indicating, the end of the U.S.-Thai special relationship that had endured since the early 1950s.[59]

In the Philippines the pressure for change was less intense and anti-American sentiment more dormant, yet Manila desired an adjustment. Rather than expulsion of U.S. forces, the Filipino government wanted to renegotiate the terms of the U.S. military basing agreement. Reportedly "shocked" by U.S. inaction in the face of Saigon's collapse, Filipino foreign secretary Carlos Romulo claimed that everything was due for renegotiation in the post-Vietnam era.[60] Ferdinand Marcos, the U.S.-backed Filipino president and dictator, presented a series of contradictory demands. He wanted a more explicit security commitment from Washington, yet expressed concern that U.S. bases might be used for missions against communist Indochinese regimes, thus undermining Manila's own efforts to develop more normal diplomatic relations with them. He wanted to assert greater sovereignty over the bases, in order to limit such extra-Filipino military missions as well as bolster his own nationalist credentials. Moreover, unsurprisingly, he demanded

[57] As cited in Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific," 703.
[58] As cited in, Ibid, 703-704.
[59] Ibid, 704.
[60] As cited in, Ibid, 704.

much higher rents for continued U.S. basing in the country. The negotiations were filled with recriminations and ultimately inconclusive.[61] They would carry over to the Carter administration.

In both the Thai and Filipino case, it was clear that a continued U.S. presence in the region could not be taken for granted. In the former, Washington was essentially forced out. In the latter, while not forced out, the cost of maintaining the U.S. presence was becoming prohibitive, with no guarantee that it would not get worse in the future. In the face of such expulsions and lingering doubts, the Defense Department began to investigate other locations, including the potential for new bases in the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The key takeaway, though, was that the Ford administration's "recalcitrance" in negotiations and "its tenacity in considering alternative options for bases indicated that it was in no hurry to liquidate the US presence in the Asia-Pacific." Put simply, although the monolithic communist conspiracy was no more and Vietnam had come to an end, "it was time to retrench and protect the status quo." Ford officials fashioned a "a holding action, not a retreat."[62]

The renegotiations of the U.S. force presence in Thailand and the Philippines represented the Ford administration's effort to uphold the perception of U.S. resolve by retaining the military basing infrastructure and capability necessary to project military force throughout the region. Other questions revolved around the U.S. willingness to actually use force were the occasion to arise. Indeed, even before base negotiations progressed, Washington faced what Donald Rumsfeld, then Ford's Chief of Staff and later his Secretary of Defense, and others have characterized as the last battle of the Vietnam War.[63] On May 12, the same day Kissinger sent his memo to Ford stating

[61] Ibid, 704-705.
[62] Ibid, 706.
[63] Donald Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held: Gerald Ford and The Rescue of the American Presidency* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2018); Ralph Wetterhahn, *The Last Battle: The Mayaguez Incident and the End of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 2002)

that they could be compelled to support other situations more strongly and take tougher stands in order to make others believe in the United States again, Khmer Rouge gunboats seized the ship and crew of the of *SS Mayaguez* in international waters and steered it to the nearby Cambodian island of Koh Tang. During the *Mayaguez* incident, Ford officials were concerned the crew, similar to the 1968 *Pueblo* seizure, would be taken to the Cambodian mainland. Thus, Ford and Kissinger ordered a three-part response: an airborne assault on the island of Koh Tang, the seizure of the *SS Mayaguez*, and airstrikes against the Cambodian mainland.[64] Although some accounts hold that Ford officials misperceived the event "as a deliberate provocation of Washington by the communist world and their new Indochinese allies," the more notable aspect of the incident was how they viewed it from the regional perspective.[65] In fact, evidence indicates they did not hold the larger communist powers responsible.

Both the response itself as well as internal discussion during the crisis reveal the extent to which the incident was seen primarily through the lens of its larger regional effect and the signal it sent regarding U.S. resolve. For Kissinger, the lack of clarity as to whether the seizure had been directed by Phnom Penh or was the action of a local commander, was irrelevant, for "the impact on us was the same."[66] At several NSC meetings held during the crisis, Kissinger argued what mattered was not the motive for the Cambodian action, but how Washington chose to respond. Ford as well remarked that the question of motive was "interesting, but it does not solve our problem."[67] Kissinger was most concerned with demonstrating that such attacks would not remain "localized" and Washington would not sit back and "confine ourselves to the areas in which they

[64] Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific," 707.
[65] Cecile Menetray-Monchau, "The *Mayaguez* incident as an epilogue to the Vietnam War and its Reflection on the Post-Vietnam Political Equilibrium in Southeast Asia," *Cold War History* 5, no.3 (2005): 348.
[66] As cited in Gawthorpe, "The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia Pacific," 708.
[67] "May 12, 1975, 12:05 p.m. to 12:50 p.m., Cabinet Room. The White House Subject: Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian Authorities," Gerald Ford Museum: Mayaguez Incident: https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750512.pdf.

challenge us."[68] Kissinger warned: "If we only respond at the same place at which we are challenged, nobody can lose by challenging us. They can only win. This means, I think, that we have to do more." It was not only with the Khmer regime and in Indochina that the response mattered. Kissinger stressed, "I am thinking not of Cambodia, but of Korea and of the Soviet Union and of others." Washington had to respond in a manner that "will impress the Koreans and Chinese."[69] At the time of the *Mayaguez* incident, Ford officials were grappling with adjustments to and recognizing the limits of U.S. power in the region. However, their crisis response demonstrated they were also attempting to draw a line beyond which such adjustments must not go.

One of the "Lessons of Viet-nam" mentioned in the May 9 memo to NSA Scowcroft was the nature of U.S. commitments and the need to recognize that constancy in keeping them was important, but that they needed to "avoid confusing constancy with inertia." In other words: "When circumstances change dramatically, or a commitment clearly becomes unsustainable, we should draw the right conclusions and change our policy accordingly." In the case of Thailand and the Philippines, Washington was indeed pursing policy adjustments toward greater allied self-reliance, more diversified diplomatic strategies, and stronger regional efforts, "initially stimulated by the Nixon doctrine," but that had "been given an emphatic new emphasis" with the fall of Saigon. On the face of things, similar trends existed in the case of the U.S. commitment to South Korea, which like the other two cases, was closely associated with Washington and had "been most affected by

[68] "May 14, 1975, 3:52 p.m-5:42 p.m., Place: Cabinet Room. The White House Subject: Seizure of American Ship by Cambodia Authorities," Gerald Ford Museum: Mayaguez Incident: https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750514.pdf.
[69] "May 13, 1975, 10:40 p.m. to 12:25 a.m., Place: Cabinet Room. The White House Subject: Seizure of American Ship by Cambodia Authorities, Gerald Ford Museum: Mayaguez Incident: https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/7505132.pdf.

events in Indochina." When U.S. officials looked at Korea, they saw certain similar pressures for adjustment if not disengagement. [70]

Ford officials faced a Congress and a U.S. public already deeply opposed to further intervention abroad in the post-Vietnam era. Korea was no exception. In an April 1975 Harris Poll, only 14 percent of respondents were in favor of U.S. involvement if North Korea attacked the South, while 65 percent were opposed. Even more, all of the foreign policy-oriented subcommittees within the House of Representatives, save the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, favored partial or, in the case of certain members, total withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the Korean Peninsula.[71] Public and congressional skepticism was due partly to fear of another military venture in Asia, and partly to the increasingly repressive nature of the Park regime. Administration officials, too, registered Park's repressive rule. Part of the concern was the critical reaction it garnered in Congress, but it also was worrisome on its own terms.

The concern in the White House and State Department related to another lesson of Vietnam, namely, the nature of U.S. allies. Moving forward, certain criteria had to be kept in mind. Allies must possess the indigenous strength, will and ability to help themselves and effectively mobilize the support of their people. The U.S. desire to secure and defend their ally could not be greater than the ally's desire to defend themselves. Further, Washington should avoide being too tightly bound to governments which depended to a significant degree on the support of the military, and which are subject to "inflexibility and narrowness of judgment of an increasingly isolated leadership." [72] Nevertheless, South Korea and South Vietnam were hardly a one-to one comparison. President Park had maintained mostly stable rule since 1961 and, relatively speaking,

[70] "State Department Paper on the Lessons of Vietnam, May 9, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library.
[71] Hayes, "Pacific Powderkeg, 138.
[72] "State Department Paper on the Lessons of Vietnam, May 9, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library.

enjoyed the support or quiet acquiescence of the majority of South Korea's citizenry. The remarkable and steady economic growth his government had achieved also bolstered its strength and legitimacy.

However, Park's invocation of martial law and internal coup in 1972 and growing use of extra-constitutional measures under the *Yushin* system to crackdown on any and all opposition had led to greater dissent and political protest. Park, of course, used this as justification for further strictures, thus setting in motion a potentially unstable and dangerous cycle. Furthermore, on an individual level, U.S. officials observed an increasingly isolated, paranoid and brooding Park, particularly following the death of his wife.[73] The U.S. position toward ROK's internal political developments, was one of several salient issues within a larger policy review initiated in late May. The question remained, how should Washington respond to Park's efforts to adopt increasingly oppressive internal measures?

Internationally, support for the traditional U.S. position on Korea at the UN had also continued to erode. In June 1975, following the trends mentioned above, for the first time two resolutions on the Korean questions, one pro-ROK, the other pro-DPRK, were simultaneously passed in the UNGA. The pro-ROK, U.S.-backed resolution called for dissolution of the UNC, provided an adequate alternative could be created for maintaining the armistice. The pro-DPRK resolution linked the presence of U.S. forces to the UNC and called for the latter's dissolution. Although both non-binding, this development, a later Defense Department study noted, was "indicative of the growing pressure on us, even from our allies, to unilaterally abolish the UNC."[74]

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[73] "Ambassador Richard Sneider to Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip Habit, 29 November 1974, Secret, enclosing telegram and memorandum of conversation about golf outing with President Park, 24 November 1974," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3535257-Document-01.

[74] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 274: Study Prepared by the Office of International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense, Washington, undated. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d274

In a briefing memo to Kissinger, State's Winston Lord summarized a paper written by his subordinate at Policy Planning, Michael Armacost, which covered U.S. strategy in the region. In it, Lord correctly remarked that these "serious policy dilemmas" Washington faced in Korea were "inherent in the situation itself," rather than "a derivative consequence of the setback in Indochina."[75] Nonetheless, Saigon's collapse undoubtedly exacerbated them. Furthermore, while the effect was to heighten certain trends cautioning against inertia and towards readjustment, there were other, more powerful reasons for constancy.

Unlike in Thailand and the Philippines, the external threat to Seoul was more immediate and severe, and appeared increasingly so. Seoul may have adopted a more flexible approach toward the communist world and pursued inter-Korean talks, but it had no illusions about the nature of the North Korean regime and its revolutionary intent toward the South. As Smyser noted in a memo to Kissinger, until Pyongyang changed course or Beijing and Moscow broke loose from Pyongyang, there would be "little beyond stalemate."[76] Furthermore, there was no discernible anti-American sentiment in Seoul or clamoring among ROK officials for U.S. forces to withdrawal or renegotiate the troop presence. President Park was highly nationalistic and certainly bristled at American attempts to dictate or obstruct his policy choices. However, after the fall of Saigon he was, if anything, looking for a more overt and stable American commitment not its dissolution.

Then there was South Korea's position within the larger regional strategic architecture. Ambassador Kintner's study highlighted the crucial role of Japan in achieving the primary goals of U.S. policy in the region (i.e., strategic denial and stability) and directly linked it with South Korea's continued security. The U.S.-Japan alliance was: "the lynchpin of our security system for

[75] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 21: Memorandum from the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Lord) to Secretary of State Kissinger, Washington, October 16, 1975. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d21
[76] "The Situation in Asia, July 15, 1975," Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library.

the Asia-Pacific region. An independent South Korea is essential to this goal."[77] This was hardly a new argument, but recent events bolstered the claim. After U.S. troops departed Thailand in July 1976, the USFK was the sole remaining U.S. force deployment on the Asian mainland. Although this was a cause for Congressional concern as a vulnerable and potentially combustible forward deployment, defense officials saw it differently.

For them, the importance of Japan was indeed key; so, too, was the broader strategic and political-psychological perception of the U.S. presence. A classified June 1975 report to the U.S. Army affirmed:

> Korea is now even more than the radical turn of events in Southeast Asia the critically important anchor of the U.S. posture in Asia. Any move by the United States to cast doubt on the U.S. will to hold to that anchor will reinforce the Soviet perception that global trends continue to work to their benefit. A partial withdrawal of U.S. forces would raise new doubts about American national purpose, and a total withdrawal at this time would seem to make it certain that retrenchment rather than resolve characterize U.S. national strategy.

Although the report acknowledged the military value of U.S. forces in Korea, particularly as a local deterrent and supplement to ROK military forces in time of war, it stressed that the "primary role of U.S. forces in Korea is therefore political and strategic rather than military." With its presence on the peninsula, the United States possessed "the key to Northeast Asian stability" with a peninsular "military posture which has kept the peace for more than two decades."[78] Put simply, the peninsular presence served an important purpose, and it was hardly just about South Korean security.

[77] William R. Kintner, "Ambassador Kintner's Study of U.S. Policy Interest in the Asian-Pacific Area."
[78] William Carpenter, "Executive Summary: The Maintenance of U.S. Forces in Korea," Prepared for the Office, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, Department of the Army (Arlington, VA: SRI International, 1975), 17.

Kintner, too, in addition to highlighting the significance of South Korea to Japan, stressed the importance of the "appearance" of the U.S. commitment to Korea in the larger psychological and strategic sense. Indeed, he directly linked the perception of the U.S. commitment to Seoul and Washington's willingness stand up to Pyongyang's provocations with America's superpower status. Resolve at the local level, even rhetorical resolve, was threaded all the way up to the level of superpower competition. While Kintner welcomed negotiations and less confrontation between the superpowers, U.S. officials had to "understand correctly that détente below the nuclear level is only a tactical relaxation of tensions," and that "unless we are prepared to meet significant adversary challenges as forthrightly as the Soviets and Chinese, we cannot continue in our role as a superpower." He continued: "In this context, the public position taken by the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to deter any possible North Korean aggression against South Korea deserve the fullest support of Congress and the American people. We must avoid at all costs giving the appearance of indecision and weakness."[79] Whether Congress and the American people were prepared to provide their full support was obviously questionable, but the message was reasonably well-received within the Ford White House and foreign policy bureaucracy. In fact, the reticence of Congress and the American public was all the more reason to uphold the apparent strength of the U.S. commitment.

There were other more immediate reasons for constancy, namely, Seoul's ongoing effort for a more independent defense capability and secretive nuclear weapons program. As noted, Park's efforts and U.S. awareness thereof preceded Saigon's fall. However, the final U.S. exit from Indochina is known to have exacerbated Park's insecurity. South Korea's drive for a secretive nuclear weapons program was conceived along essentially two main lines: as the ultimate deterrent

[79] William R. Kintner, "Ambassador Kintner's Study of U.S. Policy Interest in the Asian-Pacific Area."

in case it were ever actually abandoned by Washington, and, meanwhile, as the ultimate trump card within the U.S.-ROK alliance. Park and his advisors understood American concern and opposition to the South Korean program ran deep, which would lead to pressure from Washington yet also likely garner reaffirmation of the American commitment lest the absence thereof push Seoul further.

Following Lord's November 1974 action report. The U.S. Embassy in Seoul produced more thorough reporting on Seoul's nuclear program and with the bureaucracy in Washington worked to coordinate a diplomatic strategy to stop it. In December 1974, the embassy assembled what sensitive information it had and sent it in a highly classified (and still much redacted) telegram, reporting to State that the evidence indicated a "strong presumption that the Korean government had decided to proceed with the initial stages of a nuclear weapons development program."[80] In early March, Ambassador Sneider, in a telegram apparently drafted by Richard Lawless, the junior officer in the CIA station in Seoul, communicated to State's Intelligence and Research department (INR) that based on "special intelligence" something was "clearly afoot." Sneider also reported the impression of several General Electric (GE) officials, who had met with ROK officials the previous month, that for Seoul "reprocessing was out of the idea stage and now a definite plan."[81] Sneider's warning garnered a quick response from State.

State replied that it shared Sneider's concern and that an interagency intelligence study had determined Seoul could have a nuclear and missile delivery capability within 10 years. As such a

[80] "U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 8023 to Department of State, "ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles," 2 December 1974, Secret, excised copy attached to W. R. Smyser and David Elliott to Secretary Kissinger, "Development of U.S. Policy Toward South Korean Development of Nuclear Weapons," 28 February 1975, Secret," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3513496-Document-06-U-S-Embassy-Seoul-telegram-8023-to.
[81] "Draft Telegram to State Department Intelligence and Research [RCI], 3 March 1975, Secret," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II, accessed June 25, 2017, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3535259-Document-02B-Draft-Telegram-to-State-Department.

capability would have a destabilizing effect in the region, "our basic objective" was to stop the program in its tracks through multilateral diplomacy with allies and potential nuclear suppliers, pressure on Seoul to join the NPT, and increased efforts to surveil Seoul's nuclear energy program.[82] In a March 12 response, Sneider mostly agreed, yet due to Seoul's apparent determination and the "depth" of Washington's concerns, he counselled a more robust course of action. Washington should avoid "pussy-footing" and adopt a more "explicit" and "direct, early, and firm" approach.[83] Although the ROK joined the NPT in April, uneasiness about Korean developments persisted. Ambassador Sneider sounded the most persistent alarm.

Sneider met with President Park the day Saigon fell. During the meeting, Park, worried about the eventual withdrawal of America troops, told Sneider of his plans to develop ROK missile production capabilities in order to have the means to strike North Korean air bases and urban centers in case a war touched off. Park reviewed overall ROK defense objectives, saying they had "no plans to develop nuclear weapons," but did want to acquire the missile forces ahead of any U.S. force departures. Sneider reiterated to Park that Washington held control over missile technology so as to preserve "strong competitive advantage," but that certain upgrades might be considered on a case-by-case basis. Left unsaid, of course, was the abiding U.S. desire to reign in Seoul, to prevent it from acquiring its own escalatory capabilities. In his report to State, Sneider once again stressed the need to give Seoul "a sense of security," while also "avoiding risks of NK-

[82] "State Department telegram 048673 to U.S. Embassy Seoul, "ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles," 4 March 1975, Secret," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3513500-Document-09-State-Department-telegram-048673-to.
[83] "U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 1637 to Department of State, "ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles," 12 March 1975, Secret, excised copy," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3513501-Document-10-U-S-Embassy-Seoul-telegram-1637-to.

SK escalation in missiles and other areas of high technology."[84] Sneider, closer to the action than those in Washington, keenly observed the pressures of immediate developments yet also larger, worrisome trends in the relationship.

Sneider repeatedly returned to a similar theme: U.S. Korea policy had devolved, through a combination of inertia and neglect, into a series of rolling stopgap measures, buffeted by uncertainty, and without a clear path ahead. Indeed, many of the very near-term policy dilemmas with which he and officials back in Washington grappled were, if not borne of, certainly exacerbated by this inertia and lack of prioritization. On June 12, he laid out his views more fully in an extensive and, as Oberdorfer correctly described it, "remarkable" twelve-page secret cable:

> Our present policy toward Korea is ill-defined and based on an outdated view of Korea as a client state. It does not provide a long-term conceptual approach to Korea, geared to its prospective middle power status. It leaves the ROKG uncertain what to expect from us and forces us to react to ROKG on an ad hoc basis. We have not for example made clear to the Koreans what the prospects are for a continued, long-term U.S. military presence. Nor have we clarified what the ROKG can expect from us in the way of military technology, although we discourage President Park's efforts to develop his own sophisticated weapons. These uncertainties lead President Park into preparations for what he sees as our eventual withdrawal, preparations which include internal repression and plans for the development of nuclear weapons. They also induce optimism on the part of North Korea about our withdrawal and doubts in Japan about our credibility and about the future of Korea.[85]

Consequently, Sneider saw one of two options moving forward: disengagement or the establishment of a more "durable partnership" between Seoul and Washington. As for the former, "gradual or otherwise," disengagement posed too much a risk so long as Pyongyang maintained its hostile posture. Disengagement increased the possibility for conflict and would undermine

[84] "U.S. Embassy Seoul Telegram 3090 to State Department, "Meeting with President Park: Missile Strategy," 1 May 1975, Secret," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3535261-Document-04-U-S-Embassy-Seoul-Telegram-3090-to.

[85] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 65.

Tokyo's confidence in U.S. treaty commitments. Therefore, Sneider favored the latter option, durable partnership, which involved upgrading the U.S.-ROK alliance, making it similar to those with NATO and Japan, and providing more stable, longer term guarantees.[86]

Furthermore, a choice had to be made. Sneider observed, "The longer we stave off the inevitable decision as to whether our relationship, including our military presence, is temporary or durable, the more President Park and Kim Il Sung will pursue their premises that it is in fact temporary, adding further instability on the Korean peninsula." Washington should upgrade the partnership along several lines, including: greater and more relatively equal alliance consultation (i.e. moving away from the previous tendency of informing Seoul of decisions already made in Washington); a transition from economic aid to more private investment (a process by then underway); and an effort to prioritize Korea on the U.S. negotiating agenda vis-à-vis the Soviets and Chinese. Above all, though, was the need to openly affirm "a significant U.S. force presence with indefinite tenure…publicly projected with major reductions linked to changes in the security situation in Northeast Asia and arrangements between North and South reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula."[87] In essence, Sneider's recommendation that Washington affirm an indefinite presence in Korea, while setting out the clear conditions necessary for any future changes, was a call to definitively end the rolling, inconclusive policy reassessment, which had been proceeding, in fits and starts, since the late Johnson years.

Were Washington to follow Snieder's recommendation, it would have simultaneously served several important purposes. With a definitive commitment, the United States could settle the near-term issues surrounding Seoul's nuclear weapons program and other independent and potentially escalatory defense measures. At the same time, Washington might help put to rest the

[86] Ibid, 65-66.
[87] Ibid, 66.

insecurities, which had spawned such issues to begin with. Moreover, Sneider's durable partnership more explicitly embraced South Korea's strategic, political and symbolic importance (which, again, was a working assumption for most U.S. officials), yet do so in a manner that better reflected Seoul's own innate and growing importance rather than merely its derivative relationship to higher priorities. Although still only a prospective middle power, Seoul's economic growth trends and defense modernization, alongside an incipient nationalism, suggested an adjustment was coming whether or not Washington itself adjusted its policy. Thus, Sneider urged, it was best to think it through.

Sneider's comprehensive June 12 telegram was really an agglomeration of points he had been making over the previous months, which together contributed to initiation of NSSM-226: Review of U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula, in late May. It would include many of the same objectives and policy issues Sneider himself emphasized. While the study assumed continuation of the U.S-ROK alliance, it would have included discussion of possible adjustments in U.S. force levels. As always, future reductions remained a working assumption among officials on the NSC staff and at State.[88] However, the study was later delayed pending a broader review of U.S. interests and security objectives in the entire Asia-Pacific. As it happened, then, U.S. policy toward Seoul remained the same. It focused on rhetorical reaffirmations of the U.S. commitment, if more pronounced than usual, and quiet diplomatic efforts to hem-in South Korea's nuclear weapons program. In short, Ford officials would maintain the status quo, yet one beset by contradictions, persistent questions and halting policy reviews.

[88] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 268: National Security Study Memorandum 226. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d268.

Such complications were evident in Secretary of Defense Schlesinger's June comments and August visit to Seoul. At a June 20 news conference, Schlesinger admitted to the existence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, which until then was an open-secret that officials had refused to confirm or deny. He appeared eager to send a forceful message. When asked by reporters to extend to Korea the refusal to rule out the first use of tactical nuclear weapons against communist attack, which had long been NATO policy, Schlesinger said, "We cannot foreclose any option. We have deployed in Korea the tactical nuclear weapons, as is, I believe, well known. If circumstances were to require (their) use…I think that would be carefully considered." Although the conventional balance in Korea was "not unsatisfactory," he continued, "the volatility…the unpredictability of American reactions" would help deter Pyongyang from aggressive provocations or attack. Schlesinger made his remarks in a context of recent Soviet deployments of more advanced ICBMs and Pentagon efforts to secure congressional approval for a new-generation of U.S. warheads, yet other officials remained concerned about the degree to which he might be over-shooting the mark in Korea.[89]

Schlesigner's August 27 meeting with President Park in Seoul laid bare their concerns. In terms of clearly manifesting the U.S. commitment to South Korea, the meeting was "highly successful."[90] Moreover, though Schlesinger avoided a direct confrontation with Park over the latter's nuclear weapons program, he strongly emphasized the importance of adhering to the NPT, saying "the only thing that could undermine the political relationship between the U.S. and the ROK would be the Korean effort to acquire its own nuclear weapons."[91] However, the NSC

[89] Oswald Johnson, "Russians Deploying 3 New ICBMs, Schlesinger Says: He Also Confirms That U.S. Nuclear Weapons Are Based in S. Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1975.
[90] Document 273: Memorandum From Thomas J. Barnes of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft).
[91] *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Chapter VI: Korean Peninsula, Document 272: Memorandum of Conversation, Seoul, August 27, 1975. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d272.

staff felt that on several points, Schlesinger made comments overstepping his instructions and official U.S. policy, and which appeared "to preempt several basic policy issues being considered in the Korean NSSM (i.e. NSSM 226)." [92] In particular, Schlesinger apparently made a commitment to automatic involvement by U.S. forces in the event of a North Korean attack, going beyond any previous comment by a high-level U.S. official of which the NSC staff was aware. Schlesinger also departed from his notes regarding a commitment to U.S. involvement in the defense of the Northwest Islands, a constant source of inter-Korean naval confrontation and firefights. Related and more worrisome, according to Thomas J. Barnes and Colonel Granger of the NSC staff and NSA Scowcroft, was the degree to which Schlesinger had shown support for General Stilwell, who had "bored ahead without formal Washington approval with his 'short-war strategy' for the defense of the ROK." The plan had serious implications, including "no planning for evacuation to the south, almost immediate air intervention, and possible use of tactical nuclear weapons." They felt further clarification was necessary on the status of the "short-war" strategy and its implications for the nature of the U.S. role in the event of hostilities.[93]

Schlesinger also went beyond administration policy when he informed Park that U.S. force levels in Korea would remain unchanged for the next five years. He stressed that President Ford was "unequivocal in his support for Korea," a view he claimed was rooted in the president's anger over the earlier 1950 withdrawal of U.S. forces. He also emphasized that congressional pressure to reduce overseas deployments had eased, which was not entirely true. Schlesinger said he did not expect any legislative push in 1976, maybe one in 1977, but either way he was not concerned about such efforts. Furthermore, he expected Ford to be re-elected, "but if not," he said, "the

[92] Document 273: Memorandum From Thomas J. Barnes of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft).
[93] Ibid.

Democrats are not likely to eliminate U.S. support for South Korea."[94] As Oberdorfer observed, Schlesinger either was unaware or simply did not care that a little-known candidate, Jimmy Carter, was beginning to sing a different tune as part of his upstart campaign to head the Democratic ticket in the 1976 election.[95] Overall, Schlesinger's conversation with Park coupled with the response it elicited in Washington, demonstrated the Ford administration was struggling toeing the line between the status quo on one side and its internal reservations about the nature of the U.S. commitment and ongoing intent to make changes on the other.

Meanwhile, regional stability, underpinned by American strength, remained the first priority. President Ford stressed as much in his own Ford or Pacific Doctrine, issued in early December. Similar to Schlesinger's comments, Ford's doctrine was very much in line with Kintner's recommendations regarding the importance of recognizing changed conditions yet continuing publicly to espouse America's military power. The new doctrine consisted of a series of basic premises, the first "that American strength is basic to any stable balance of power in the Pacific." The perseveration of the sovereignty and independence of U.S. allies remained "a paramount objective" of U.S. policy, and thus Washington owed it to "ourselves and to those whose independence depends on our continued support to preserve a flexible and balanced position of strength throughout the Pacific." Unsurprisingly, the U.S. partnership with Japan was the second basic premise and was "a pillar of our strategy." In nearby Korea, directly tied to Japan's own security, efforts must be made to ease tensions and resolve the outstanding conflict. However, "tension persists" and the U.S. remained committed to South Korea's security "as the presence of

[94] Document 272: Memorandum of Conversation, Seoul, August 27, 1975.
[95] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 67.

our forces there attests." Washington would seek creative ways to settle outstanding disputes, but resist Pyongyang's attempts to exclude Seoul from future discussions.[96]

Ford's Doctrine was, in essence, "ritualistic rhetoric," which in its invocation of American strength as central to regional stability "seemed to represent, *prima facie*, a return to the pre-Vietnam American conception of containment."[97] However, it did not create any new commitments in the process. Ford's rhetoric regarding American strength was, in part, a response to the budding challenge from the Republican Party's conservative rightwing, led by the former Governor of California, Ronald Reagan. Nevertheless, it was consistent with the language seen in the various internal discussions and policy reviews of U.S. policy in a post-Vietnam Asia. Put simply, Vietnam was over and Saigon had collapsed but the Americans were not going anywhere. Washington would hold the line.

Nevertheless, regarding Korea, the inherent problem with this holding pattern was that events continued to develop. U.S. policy remained ill-defined and contradictory, while the Seoul-Washington relationship evolved under policymakers' noses. Again, the Ford administration's dilemma was simply an outgrowth of the nature of the U.S. approach to Korea. Although the emergent nuclear issue added a new, more worrisome element, the pattern was an enduring one. From Washington's perspective, Korea was far down the list of priorities. It only became a priority on an ad hoc basis, for example, in instances of North Korean provocation and potential crisis escalation or when forces where removed as a function of a larger regional strategy. Yet these same crisis moments or redeployments that punctuated the relationship would often times set in motion certain processes, such as: greater insecurity in Seoul; South Korea's enhanced efforts

[96] Gerald R. Ford, "Address at the University of Hawaii," The American Presidency Project: Documents: Gerald R. Ford, 38th President of the United States, 1974-1977, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-university-hawaii

[97] Nam, *America's Commitment to South* Korea, 141.

toward a more independent self-defense, efforts which Washington often publicly promoted and facilitated; and subtle restructuring of the command relationship and responsibilities. Together, over time, these processes altered the relationship between the two allies, yet without Washington fundamentally reassessing its overall policy to better reflect the changed balance and conditions.

The irony, which was apparent during the post-Vietnam Ford-interlude, was that the neglect of a deeper policy review exacerbated Seoul's secretive nuclear efforts. In delaying a definitive policy, one that might have looked like Sneider's durable partnership, and essentially stop-gapping the relationship, the Ford administration like its predecessors was perpetuating the same inertia masked as constancy. It may have provided a certain short-term stability, but the situation did not stop evolving. Congress and the informed public only increased calls for disengaging from Korea, particularly as Park's *Yushin* system reached its apogee of internal repression. Moreover, a still little-known candidate in the 1976 Democratic Primary was starting to hone a similar message and single out South Korea, among others, as a place to implement his new internationalist-inspired foreign policy. It is to Jimmy Carter's fledgling campaign that we now turn.

Jimmy Who? Carter Develops His Thinking on Korea

There is no definitive account of the origins of Carter's Korea policy. Indeed, Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who would help the president adjudicate several obstacles to his policy at key points in time and was thought of by some, incorrectly, as one of its authors, said that Carter's withdrawal policy was "a mystery not yet unraveled."[98] In a sense, it is unsurprising no individual claimed authorship of a policy so strongly opposed and widely thought

[98] As quoted in, Joe Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President: Jimmy Carter and American Troops in Korea," 97.

to be ill-conceived. However, like most such policies, there is no single author or cause. There is a diverse array of them, and, contrary to Brzezinski's remark, they are not a mystery. The documentary record and the recollections of various actors involved paint a rather clear if multifaceted picture regarding the origins of Carter's policy. It was partly borne of earlier troop withdrawals and the rationales underpinning them, which were reinforced by the immediate post-Vietnam context. It was also partly a function of Carter's individual beliefs and opinions. Moreover, it was an instrumental policy, part of a larger campaign strategy; a strategy aligned with currents within the Democratic Party and popular among ordinary Americans. It was meant to signal a break from the past.

In more concrete terms, Carter's policy was a direct outgrowth of a handful of salient factors. First, Carter is reported to have told one of his aides that Nixon's earlier withdrawal of 7ID had been a factor in his thinking. In other words, the idea of withdrawing U.S. forces simply was not a novel idea. Again, official U.S. policy had always been premised on the idea that the local presence was temporary, not permanent, and that as Seoul developed its own defense capabilities the U.S. forces would eventually be withdrawn. Nixon's withdrawal (and the continued internal discussions about further removals) was a clear manifestation of this. This was widely known throughout the policy-making community. Stuart Eizenstat, who was Carter's political advisor since his successful 1972 Georgia gubernatorial run, helped run his 1976 presidential campaign, and would serve as Carter's Domestic Policy Advisor, said: "this was not just some sort of wild idea. Nixon himself had withdrawn troops."[99] Withdrawals also fit Carter's own views on stationing forces abroad. When asked about the origins of his Korea withdrawal policy, Carter responded through Jody Powell, his press secretary and close political aide, that the

[99] Stuart Eizenstat, interview by the author, September 30, 2017.

policy reflected his "basic inclination to question the stationing of American troops overseas." Keeping troops abroad, he continued, "is something you need a good reason to do," and that he "has yet to see a convincing argument keeping those troops in Korea in perpetuity."[100] Nixon's removals matched Carter's predisposed thinking.

A second salient factor was the rationale behind Nixon's withdrawals. As examined above, Nixon's 1971 removals and redeployments were meant to permit remaining U.S. forces a more mobile and flexible response in the case of a conflict. Forces deployed in a forward, static position did not provide flexibility. Some close to Carter believed that his own earlier Annapolis Academy schooling and career as a Naval officer bolstered such thinking insofar as the stationing of ground forces in exposed static positions runs counter to traditional naval thinking. Rather, air and sea power operating offshore, supplemented by mobile landing forces, better fit naval doctrine.[101] Eizenstat said he would not put such an emphasis on Carter's naval career and never sensed a pro-Navy, anti-ground troop bias. Nevertheless, whether or not Carter's naval experience thinking influenced his thinking, the desire for greater flexibility certainly did, which aligned with Nixon's thinking as well. In this sense, Eizenstat noted, the "naval analogy is right." Once the ground troops were removed, and if a conflict occurred, we could use "our superior naval force" and "superior air force off the North Korean coast." Why bog down 20,000 troops that could be used elsewhere, he wondered.[102]

Related to the drawbacks of static, forward deployed forces vis-à-vis mobility, was a third factor that was of distinct relevance in the Korean theater, namely, the "tripwire" effect. Although the redeployment under Nixon had drawn remaining U.S. forces slightly back from their previous

[100] For Powell's quote, see: Don Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1977.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Eizenstat, interview.

frontline position, they still remained precariously perched between the DMZ and Seoul, deployed astride the main invasion corridors in the Western zone. Thus, any true escalation brought on by a failure of deterrence would, of necessity, almost immediately involve these forces. Thus, U.S. involvement automatically would be "tripped," leading, as foreseen in the existing war plans, to the massive deployment of U.S. reinforcements to the Korean Peninsula. For some, of course, this was exactly the point. The remaining U.S. presence, despite its relatively small size, was a potent physical deterrent, signaling the potential of far greater U.S. involvement. Pyongyang obviously knew this and was held back as a result, so the argument went.

Although the "tripwire" risk was not a new concern among U.S. officials and policymakers, Carter approached it with the overwhelming shadow of Vietnam in mind. Recollecting Carter's fledgling Korea policy, Eizenstat stressed as much: "It was only in 1975 that the sort of final, ignominious retreat from Vietnam occurred. So, it was all in the context of having lost 58,000 troops in an Asian war that should probably never have been fought and so I think it is important to put it in that context as well." Eizenstat and other aides noted that while Carter never did explicitly say it, "the tripwire thing is accurate." Carter was concerned the tripwire "could invite a new Korean War."[103] It was a message reinforced by others, whom Carter consulted early on, even before his campaign.

In 1974, while still Governor of Georgia, Carter called Retired Adm. Gene R. LaRocque, director of the privately funded Center for Defense Information, and asked about U.S. forces in Korea. LaRocque told Carter that either Kim Il Sung or Park Chung Hee "could get us involved in a land war in Asia that would tear this country apart." He added that Korea simply was not anywhere near as important as Europe and the Middle East, so such a potentially massive

[103] Ibid.

commitment needed to be rethought. Reportedly, Carter listened intently but did not share his own views.[104] LaRocque individually and his Center for Defense Information actively published various articles to the same effect around this time, indeed enough to garner Seoul's attention. The latter included LaRoque and his center as anti-ROK targets to be influenced or coopted as part of the KCIA's secretive influence-peddling campaign.[105]

A fourth factor influencing Carter's thinking toward Korea was his disgust with Park Chung Hee's authoritarian rule. The notable and increasing abuse of human rights in South Korea offended Carter's personal religious convictions. Some insiders speculated Carter was influenced in his view of Park by various first-hand missionary accounts of the human rights atrocities under the latter's *Yushin* system.[106] Moreover, beyond his own personal, religiously-motivated repulsion, was Carter's broader desire to bring a so-called new morality into U.S. foreign policy. For Carter, the anti-communist credentials of U.S. allies could no longer be the sole litmus test upon which U.S. support would be based.

Ezenstat, who helped draft the Carter campaign's domestic and foreign policy platforms, reiterated this broader framework. He noted human rights clearly were a component, and that Carter was intent to avoid "backing up autocratic governments simply because they were anticommunist." Carter's vision was in "sharp contrast to what the Nixon-Kissinger program was: as long as they were anticommunist, we didn't care what they did internally." Carter felt "our whole mentality shouldn't be based on anticommunism," and that the promotion of human rights

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[104] Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975."
[105] Gene La Rocque, "U.S. Should Leave Korea – for Money, Security," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1974; "Korea and U.S. Policy in Asia," *The Defense Monitor: Center for Defense Information* 5, no.1 (January 1976); for congressional hearings and La Rocque's own testimony on the KCIA's efforts, see: U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations: Hearings before the International Organizations Subcommittee of the Committee on International Relations*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., November 29 and 30, 1977, House, 59-69.
[106] Hayes, "Pacific Powderkeg," 139.

abroad, even among allies, "was one of the best antidotes to the appeal of communism." Such was also the basis for Carter's initial approach to Latin America, so "the South Korea thing has to be put in a similar context."[107] Again, Carter was hardly alone in his critical view of Park's repressive rule. His thinking mirrored that of the new internationalists in Congress, whose strident critiques and calls for disengagement from South Korea only grew as Park's rule-by-decree worsened in the Spring of 1975.

Fifth and finally, Carter's fledgling Korea policy must be situated within his larger foreign policy campaign strategy. It centered on criticizing and moving away from old rhetoric and ways of doing business. Carter's foreign policy focus, beyond questioning earlier Cold War certainties that wedded the United States to potentially massive military commitments and autocratic allies, was to adopt a more liberal position on human rights and democracy promotion, détente alongside further arms control efforts, and reducing the Pentagon's spending. His wider vision aligned with the Trilateral Commission's intent to refocus U.S. relations with the industrial democracies of Japan and Western Europe, improve North-South relations, and craft an overall U.S. foreign policy better able to adapt to a rapidly changing international environment.

In this larger framework, Korea simply was not a priority. Whereas Carter questioned the stationing of U.S. forces in Korea, Jody Powell remarked that Carter expressed no such sentiment about U.S. troops deployed in Europe.[108] In fact, as shown below, the rationale surrounding the withdrawal of 2ID from South Korea moved from budgetary savings (in the case of complete demobilization of the division) to the possibility of reconfiguring the division into a more mobile, heavily armored unit for deployment to the European front. In this context, the U.S. presence in

[107] Eizenstat, interview.
[108] Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975."

South Korea was not only not of primary concern, it appeared outdated and anachronistic; symbolic of the past policies Carter hoped to abjure.

In late 1974, two weeks before finishing his term as Georgia's governor, Carter officially announced his unlikely candidacy for the 1976 Democratic party ticket.[109] He was the first candidate to announce in what would be a crowded primary field, made up of an assortment of far more nationally recognizable names. On January 17, 1975, several weeks into his candidacy, Carter made his first public statement on his plan to remove U.S. forces from South Korea. Meeting with the editorial board of *The Washington Post*, Carter said he favored removing U.S. troops and would be ready to do so as soon as he became President. According to the editorial page editor, Philip L. Geyelin, Carter stated he would initially remove 5,000 troops with further removals thereafter, and he framed the decision as a budget-trimming measure, part of a larger effort towards fiscal responsibility and better defense management.[110] At the time, Carter appeared to be operating under the fuzzy notion that simply by removing U.S. troops from Korea it would automatically save money. However, the move would only save money were 2ID to be entirely disbanded. Indeed, otherwise, the removal would end up costing the Pentagon money insofar as relocation costs and the stationing of the troops in the United States rather than Korea would actually cost more. Eizenstat, while not present at the editorial board meeting, did help prepare candidate Carter and confirmed the above report.[111]

However, about two weeks later, Eizenstat would accompany Carter to the Brookings Institute's Washington headquarters for a four-hour meeting with seven of its staff members in

[109] "Formal Announcement," in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on House Administration, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One, Part One: Jimmy Carter,* 95th Cong., 1d sess., 1978, 3. (Hereafter, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*)
[110] Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975."
[111] Eizenstat, interview.

order to discuss Korea as well as other diplomatic and military issues. The meeting, according to Eizenstat, was "a significant development" in Carter's thinking on Korea.[112] Although the Brookings normally produced reports that carefully balanced the risks and rewards of the U.S. military presence in Korea and their possible withdrawal, during the meeting certain staff members adopted a far more assertive position. Barry M. Blechman, then a senior fellow at Brookings and later a member of the Carter administration (although focused on arms control rather than Korea), remembered: "I told Carter we should take out the nukes (nuclear weapons) right off and phase out the ground troops over four or five years. I said the most important reason was avoid getting the U.S. involved with ground forces almost automatically in a new war which is, of course, why the South Koreans want them there." Blechman, similar to LaRocque before, said Carter listened carefully but did not reveal his own thoughts.[113]

That spring, in the wake of fall of Saigon, while Ford officials sent concerned messages regarding South Korea's secret nuclear weapons program back and forth between the U.S. embassy in Seoul and Washington, and Park Chung Hee instituted authoritarian restrictions within South Korea, Carter went to Japan as a member of the Trilateral Commission. The Trilateral Commission was a foreign policy research and policy group, which not only provided Carter his own tutorial in foreign and defense issues, but later supplied him with quite a few high-level members of his own administration. Importantly, the trip offered Carter the opportunity to further articulate his fledgling Korea policy and even signaled its early evolution. Several considerations arose before and during his week-long visit foreshadowing some of the obstacles and contradictions, which would later complicate his Korea policy once in office.

[112] As quoted in, Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975."; confirmed in Eizenstat, interview.
[113] As quoted in Ibid.

In the lead up to the trip, Eizenstat brought in Harvard Law School professor, Jerome Cohen, with whom he was familiar based on his own time at Harvard. Cohen, an expert on East Asia, in particular Chinese law, was asked to provide draft text for a campaign statement on foreign policy, which Carter was to deliver in Tokyo. Eizenstat also helped to arrange for Carter and Cohen to meet in Cambridge, MA, on May 13, 1975, about a week before Carter's trip. On Korea, Cohen's draft was cautious, recommending that "in the immediate future we should maintain our forces and commitment in Korea," while pursuing a modernization plan that would permit a gradual reduction of U.S. forces. Cohen, who had never met Carter before, recalled that he was surprised by the latter's views. "I was struck by the urgency of his desire to get out of South Korea," he said.[114] Cohen was not opposed to force reductions or even eventual withdrawal. Indeed, he proposed as much in his own editorials.[115] Moreover, he was close to dissidents in South Korea, had travelled to North Korea, and was in favor of a notable shift in U.S Korea policy. However, he emphasized any change or withdrawal had to be done carefully and gradually, saying to Carter: "You don't want to pull the cork out of the bottle in a way that would upset Japan and South Korea." Apparently, Cohen told friends of a Carter "islands strategy" that seemed to favor offshore rather than mainland deployments.[116] While Cohen's warnings were consistent with establishment thinking, it is unclear how much they affected Carter.

Peter Bourne, another Carter aide, remembers discussing the issue with the candidate on the way to Tokyo. According to Bourne, Carter originally intended to pull out all U.S. forces, both ground and air, and said: "What I think we should do is to strengthen the air force of South Korea and withdraw U.S. troops on a rapid schedule. With adequate air cover they can defend

[114] As quoted in Ibid.
[115] Jerome A. Cohen, "U.S. Should Rethink Its Role in Korea," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1976.
[116] As quoted in, Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January, 1975."

themselves."[117] Carter reiterated as much during a May 23 press conference in Tokyo, stating U.S. troops should be withdrawn over five years, and Washington should strengthen Seoul's air force and also seek guarantees from Moscow and Beijing that they would restrain Pyongyang's desire to move south. However, various reporters and Trilateral Commission officials reputedly warned Carter that a stronger South Korean air force could prove escalatory and might make its own preemptive strike north. Even before leaving Japan, Bourne remembered, Carter began to change his mind and hedge toward leaving U.S. airpower in place.[118]

Thus, at the same time Ambassador Sneider telegrammed Washington warning of Park's effort to secure an independent nuclear reprocessing capability and more offensively-oriented missiles capable of striking deeper into North Korea, Carter was beginning to grapple with the same issue, namely: the long-running U.S. concern about preventing precipitous or escalatory South Korean actions. The slight evolution of Carter's fledgling policy, from withdrawing all ground and air forces, to only removing the former, signaled an awareness on Carter's part that a credible deterrent must remain, not only to prevent adventurism from Pyongyang, but also Seoul. Deterrence, in practice, meant dual deterrence and the maintenance of relative U.S. control over the local environment. Carter's early rethinking was underpinned by another crucial point, that is, at no point during his early or later pronouncements on Korea was abrogation of the U.S.-ROK alliance or mutual defense treaty ever considered. In fact, Carter consistently reiterated that if elected president he would maintain and honor the U.S. treaty commitment. Yet, if the commitment were to remain intact, Carter would not be able to avoid problematic questions or contradictions about the potential instabilities his Korea policy might cause.

[117] As quoted in Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

Such questions and contradictions were evident in his May 28 address, titled, "New Approach to Foreign Policy." Speaking to the American Chamber of Commerce in Tokyo, Carter delivered the most comprehensive public remarks to date on his overall foreign policy vision. He emphasized that the world in 1975 was far different from that in the 1950s and 1960s, with recent events proving that any stable future order could not be based "on a preoccupation with old strategic issues which have dominated East-West and North-South relations" since World War II. The end of Vietnam War and U.S. over-involvement in the internal affairs of Southeast Asian countries, not only lifted "a tremendous burden" from U.S. shoulders but resulted in "a mandatory reassessment by the American people of our basic foreign policies."[119] Ford officials, of course, had reached a similar conclusion and were in the process of their own reassessment. However, whereas Ford and Kissinger dealt with crisis situations, such as the *Mayaguez* incident, and aimed to firmly backstop any further reduction or perception of a U.S. retreat, Carter was more willing to push the boundaries.

While not rushing to abdicate existing commitments, Carter was certainly more willing to test the limits. He continued:

> What are the lessons we have learned? What are our likely decisions about the future? There is no doubt that our people are wary of any new involvements, but we realize that many such involvements will be necessary. We have learned that never again should our country become militarily involved in the internal affairs of another nation unless there is a direct and obvious threat to the security of the United States or its people. We must not use the CIA or other covert means to effect violent change in any government or government policy. Such involvements are not in the best interests of world peace, and they are almost inherently doomed to failure. When we embrace one of the contending leadership factions in a country, too often it is the power of the United States, not the support of the people, which keeps that leader in power. Our chosen leader may then resort to repressive force against his own people to keep himself in power.[120]

[119] "New Approach to Foreign Policy," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 66.
[120] Ibid, 67.

Alongside his emphasis on the need to move away from an overly-interventionist foreign policy, Carter reiterated the enduring U.S. interest in the U.S.-Japan alliance and the two pillars thereof, "mutual security and our great economic relationship." True to establishment form, Carter proclaimed the "security of Japan is vital to the United States, and we will maintain our commitment to Japan's defense."[121] In short, no more blanket interventions or unabashed support for autocrats, yet the larger political-strategic structure centered on Japan must be preserved.

When questioned by reporters following his speech, though, Carter conceded the contradiction between his statement that the U.S. should no longer back repressive leaders with his position that the United States should honor its treaty commitment to South Korea. For Carter and many others, Park Chung Hee was just such a leader. Carter attempted to square the circle by stating American obligations could be kept without supporting "a particular leader." Nonetheless, the contradiction remained.[122] Carter faced the same dilemma as past administrations, even if he was more willing to decry Park's repressive rule. By affirming the overall American commitment, Carter faced stark limits to any human rights pressure campaign he might be inclined to attempt. If Carter were to take some sort of action, such as limiting economic and military assistance and increasing public pressure on Park, he might weaken Park's legitimacy, thus spurring further internal crackdown or inviting another military coup by disaffected elements within the ROKG. Such scenarios were not in the U.S. interest. On the contrary, inaction would, of necessity if tacitly, signal U.S. support for (and complicity in) Park's continued rule. The point: due to the hegemonic U.S. presence in South Korea, and regardless of Carter's rhetoric or displeasure with Park's rule,

[121] Ibid, 68.
[122] "Notes on People: Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1976.

either action or inaction was automatically an act of intervention.[123] As long as the commitment was kept, Carter could not escape the dilemma.

Although Carter said he would keep the U.S. commitment, even if not to a particular leader, he still appeared to doubt the efficacy of the obligation to South Korea. At times, rhetorically at least, he indicated the commitment might not be worth keeping and needed to be rethought. Carter's rhetoric was indicative of just how far the pendulum had swung, at least within the Democratic Party, from the early Cold War days to the post-Vietnam era. The earlier "loss of China" and McCarthyite reaction hung like an albatross around the necks of successive Democratic administrations, thrusting them, due to perceived political necessity, into massive, inconclusive and immensely costly wars in Korea under Truman and later Vietnam under Kennedy and Johnson. For Truman, the specter of China and McCarthy at home helped spur the U.S.-led "police action" in Korea. The Korean War itself, in its immediate wake, catalyzed the hardening of early Cold War lines in East Asia. It resulted in the nearly instantaneous solidification of U.S. financial and political support for French efforts to re-colonize Vietnam, laying the groundwork for later U.S. intervention, and interjection of the U.S. 7th fleet into the Taiwan Strait, searing in place the division of China and Sino-U.S. enmity for the next two decades.

For Carter, however, the shadow of the so-called "loss of China" simply was not the same boogeyman. If anything, he drew an equally powerful if antithetical lesson. If such thinking had led to these earlier commitments, which proved so costly, it stood to reason that such thinking and commitments needed to be reconsidered. In fact, the latter two already had been rethought. Carter emerged after Nixon's rapprochement with Beijing (and was intent to carry it forward) and in the

[123] Pyŏng-guk Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

aftermath of the final ignominious U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. The U.S. commitment and presence in South Korea was the third of what appeared to be outdated, hard Cold War lines. Put simply, Carter did not want his own Korean War.

Although he never said so explicitly, Carter sometimes spoke in a manner indicating he questioned the continuation of the commitment, even, in fact, that it may not have been a commitment worth making in the first place; that the first Koran War was a mistake. During the campaign, his attempts to find wiggle room were evident, with one of the clearest examples coming six months after his Tokyo trip. On November 23, 1975, speaking on a panel of candidates at the Democratic National Issues Conference in Louisville, KY, Carter spoke succinctly:

> I hope we've learned some lessons. One lesson is that we should cease trying to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of other countries unless our own nation is endangered. If it were possible for us to establish democracy all over the world by military force, you might arouse an argument for it. But the attempt to do that is counterproductive. We've seen that vividly in South Korea and also in South Vietnam. The Soviet Union, with the exception of street skirmishes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, hasn't lost a single soldier in combat since the Second World War. We lost 34,000 in South Korea and 50,000 in South Vietnam, basically trying to tell other people what kind of government they ought to have, what kind of leader they should have – and it doesn't work. Either you have a repressive government taking away liberty from their people, as is the case in South Korea, to stay in office, and kicking us in the shins to demonstrate some superficial independence of us or, as was the case in South Vietnam, a constant overthrown of governments as they became acknowledged to be American puppets.[124]

Not only did Carter tie together the Korean and Vietnam Wars as two examples of the same thing – an overly-interventionist and failed U.S. foreign policy – he also stressed the continued failure of U.S. policy in maintaining support for a leader such as Park Chung Hee; one who gave Washington a hard time in order to maintain his nationalist credentials and repressive internal rule. For Carter, Park was just the kind of leader with which the United States should no longer associate. In crude terms, the initial intervention was a costly failure, and the United States had

[124] "National Issues Conference," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 78.

wrongly stuck with it. Why? For Carter, Truman's initial foray into Korea, as powerful as early Cold War pressures may have been, was mistaken then, so it was certainly even more so now, with mounting evidence demonstrating as much. Carter went on to criticize the bloated Pentagon bureaucracy and promoted cutting costs, as well as military bases and troops abroad. In closing, he returned to his earlier point that "we should not try to continue propping up military dictatorships and those that are completely at odds with our concept of government."[125]

Eizenstat, close to Carter throughout the entire campaign process, corroborated this view. He emphasized that Carter was talking about Vietnam and "the impact of Vietnam, but let's remember also that the Korean War was an extremely difficult, almost forgotten war, but a very unhappy war in which we sort of…there was certainly no clear-cut victory. We lost a lot of people, a lot of troops. We were bogged down for years." Asia simply "was not a continent in which we did very well in in terms of wars," and Carter's "feeling was we had been tapped in Asia in two very inconclusive and bloody wars and we needed to try to find ways to avoid another one." Although Eizenstat conceded withdrawing troops was probably not the best way to do that, he stressed such thinking has to be considered as a key part of the context during the campaign. In particular, he added: "we had saddled ourselves with an autocratic, unpopular regime in Vietnam and we had another autocratic, sort of military-led regime in South Korea. That did not have wide popular support…So why invest so much in a continent where we had such traumas, dual traumas, and where we're attached to an autocratic leader, like we were in Vietnam or Korea in the first war, who doesn't enjoy broad support?"[126] At this stage, months before the first Democratic primaries or caucuses, Carter remained relatively unknown on the national level, and his remarks on Korea garnered little attention. One might even chalk up his willingness to speak in such a

[125] Ibid, 81.
[126] Eizenstat, interview.

manner as a reflection of a candidate and a campaign still aiming to formulate its positions. There is likely some truth to this. Yet these same early lines of thought did remain consistent throughout the remainder of the campaign.

The 1976 election was particularly well-suited for a candidate like Carter. The political atmosphere favored a new, different type of politician, one not wedded to establishment thinking or tarred by association with recent foreign and domestic crises. Watergate, Vietnam and economic recession had opened space for an outsider. On the contrary, President Ford found himself in a particularly weak position. Ford had never been elected to executive office. In December 1973 he was appointed Vice President by Nixon under the 25th Amendment after Spiro Agnew's controversial October 1973 resignation in the face of charges of tax evasion and bribery. Then, in the wake of Nixon's own disgraceful exit in August 1974, Ford became the first unelected president in the country's history. Shortly after assuming the presidency, Ford provided Nixon a blanket pardon for any crimes he may have committed while in office, further linking Ford with a dark chapter in American history, one which most ordinary Americans wanted to leave behind. Ford also faced a growing challenge form the rightwing of his own party and its standard bearer, Ronald Reagan. Reagan and neoconservatives accused Ford of weakness. He failed to provide adequate assistance to Saigon in its final days, pursued a misguided policy of détente with Moscow and tacitly accepted Soviet domination of Eastern Europe by singing the Helsinki Accords, and was negotiating away U.S. control over the Panama Canal. Such moves were anathema to the burgeoning conservative wing of the Republican Party.

More immediately, Carter also benefitted from certain rule changes in the Democratic Party's nomination process. No longer was the process to be brokered and the nominee chosen by party bosses in backroom deals. Instead, it would be democratized and opened to over thirty

primaries, wherein ordinary voters would hold greater weight than ever before. "Just the kind of process," Eizenstat recently wrote, "for a newcomer with no other job and a gift for retail politics."[127] Early on, Carter's young, upstart political aides, such as Hamilton Jordan, were quick to realize the opportunity the rule changes provided. Not wedded to old ways of thinking or past campaigns, Hamilton and others stressed the importance of the early Iowa caucuses as a potential springboard upon which to build momentum toward the first primary in New Hampshire. It also helped that in 1973 Carter and one of his closest aides, Charles Kirbo, had convinced Robert Strauss, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), to appoint Carter as the chairman of the Democrat's Congressional Campaign Committee, through which Carter would help elect members of congress in the 1974 midterm elections. The position helped Carter gain much needed national exposure and "pile up" political debts to be used later. Carter also persuaded Strauss to give Hamilton Jordan an office in the DNC's headquarters in order to coordinate Carter's efforts and travel. Although he did not say so at the time, this was part of Carter's budding campaign for the presidency.[128]

The campaign's early groundwork paid off. Carter surprised the political world with a strong showing in the January 15 Iowa caucus. He secured the largest single percentage of votes (27.5%) among the various candidates, coming in second only to "uncommitted."[129] As Jordan had hoped, the victory helped build momentum and led to a first-place finish in New Hampshire's February 24 primary. The New Hampshire victory not only signaled a southerner could win in the north, but also that Carter's campaign was shifting into something more than just an upstart

[127] Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 33-34, Kindle.
[128] Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 33-34.
[129] R.W. Apple Jr., "Carter Defeats Bayh By 2-1 in Iowa Vote; Many Uncommitted," *New York Times*, January 20, 1976.

effort.[130] Over the next several weeks, the momentum continued. Although Carter only managed a fourth-place finish in Massachusetts on March 2, he still came away with 16 delegates, and on the same day came in first in Vermont.[131] On March 9, he again surprised pundits by coming in first in the Florida Primary, securing just over 34 percent of the vote against his favored southern challenger George Wallace's 30 percent.[132] On March 15, one day before the delegate-rich Illinois primary, Carter gave his first major foreign policy address of the official campaign season.

Addressing the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Carter rolled out familiar themes but also showed an emerging tendency to speak to multiple audiences. He echoed his broad theme that the United States' "old postwar monopolies of economic resources and industrial power have been swept aside and replaced by new structures." Whereas before, Washington had used that power "to make or break regimes with adroit injections of money and arms," sometimes in "less commendable" ways, moving forward it could and should not attempt to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of other countries unless vital U.S. interests and security were at stake. The American people: "have seen the tragedy of American involvement in Vietnam and drawn the appropriate lessons for tomorrow. They seek new vistas, not a repetition of old rhetoric and old mistakes." Nevertheless, Carter, with an eye on the larger general election and Ford's vulnerability, and aware of the political imperative of maintaining an image of strength, adopted a slice of the neoconservative critique while abjuring the whole.[133]

Reflecting Brzezinski's hardline anti-Soviet views and growing influence on the campaign, Carter said that "détente must become more reciprocal." The absence of reciprocity was also a

[130] Bill Boyarsky, "Democratic Race Won by Carter," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1976.
[131] "Final Tallies in 2 Races," *New York Times*, March 4, 1976.
[132] Kenneth Reich, "Ford and Carter Score Major Florida Victories: Wallace Era of Dominance in South Ends," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1976.
[133] "Our Foreign Relations," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 111.

favorite criticism of Henry "Scoop" Jackson, Carter's most hawkish challenger in a crowded Democratic field. Yet, moving away from the core neoconservative view, Carter implored his listeners that the United States must also "reject the strident and bellicose voice of those who would have this country return to the days of the cold war with the Soviet Union," and to envision and promote a more "pluralistic Communist world," not one of "a Communist monolith." This meant paying greater attention to China and Eastern Europe, and furthering political and economic relations with both.[134] The following day, Carter came away with 48 percent of the Illinois primary vote and 53 more delegates.[135] The same day he told editors and reporters from the *Washington Post* the United States should remove the roughly 700 tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea. "I see no reason for a single one," Carter said.[136]

Over the next six weeks, Carter achieved a series of key primary victories, turning his once unlikely candidacy into a nearly insurmountable position as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee. His March 23 victory in North Carolina, with 54 percent of the vote, ended Wallace's challenge in the south.[137] Then, with his impressive come from behind victory in Wisconsin on April 6 and surprising first-place finish in Pennsylvania on April 27, he effectively closed out Mo Udall and Henry Jackson's campaigns, both of whom had been early favorites.[138] After Carter crushed Texas' favorite son, Lloyd Bentsen, in the latter's home state on May 4, Carter's lead was really no longer in doubt. Barring a disastrous gaffe or a politically unacceptable, back-room maneuver by the "Anyone But Carter" crowd, Carter was on his way to nomination at the July

[134] Ibid, 116-117.
[135] William E. Farrell, "Ford Decisively Defeats Reagan in Illinois Voting; Carter is a Solid Winner," *New York Times*, March 17, 1976.
[136] "Jimmy Carter: The Candidate on the Issues: An Interview," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1976.
[137] George Lardner Jr., "Georgian Takes 2d Southern Race: Carter Trounces Wallace in N.C. Primary," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 1976.
[138] Robert Reinhold, "G.O.P. Crossover A Help to Carter: In Wisconsin, He Gained 3 Republican Votes for Each 2 That Went to Udall," *New York Times*, April 8, 1976; Jules Witcover, "Carter Is Winner In Pennsylvania: Jackson Runs 2d, Udall 3d," *The Washington Post*, April 28, 1976.

convention. Some thought Idaho's Frank Church or California's Jerry Brown might make a late surge, but neither joined the primary run early enough to catch up with Carter's delegate lead. Others hoped Hubert Humphrey might make his own last-ditch effort, but despite a brief flirtation with the idea, the elder statesman backed off.[139]

As Carter settled into the final stretch of the campaign as the likely nominee, he sat down with the Public Broadcasting System's (PBS) Bill Moyers for a wide-ranging interview, covering everything from his religious beliefs to his potential domestic and foreign policy. Moyers, like others in the media, were beginning to examine Carter more critically, trying to get a sense of just what he stood for. Moyers asked what the lessons were that the American people must not forget from the last ten years in order to avoid making the same mistakes. Carter responded with his standard line that the United States must never get militarily involved in another country unless its own security was directly threatened. Moyers, who had served in various roles in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, including as Johnson's White House Press Secretary from mid-1965 until early 1967, wanted specifics. Moyers, having observed the slow but steady build up in Vietnam and watched Johnson grapple with the grinding dissolution of the American effort, understood the presidency came with hard choices. He put the question squarely: "If North Korea invaded South Korea, would you get involved?" Carter, in somewhat characteristic fashion, responded evasively. "Well, we're already involved there," Carter said. "And we have a commitment by the Congress, the President, the people and the United Nations in South Korea." Yet, in the same breath, Carter remarked, "I would prefer to withdraw all of our troops and land forces from South Korea over a period of years – 3,4 years, whatever."[140] Carter, like Ford and the rest of the U.S. establishment, was adjudicating the limits of American power. Yet where Ford and

[139] "Democrats: Jimmy Carter's Big Breakthrough," *Time*, May 10, 1976, 19.
[140] "Discusses Childhood, Religion," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 171.

the neoconservatives favored drawing hard lines beyond which no further drawback must occur, Carter showed repeated willingness to see just where else the United States might disengage. Korea was a representative case.

Where, then, does the "Carter Doctrine" apply, asked Moyers, referencing Carter's noninterference pledge. Carter retreated to the safety of hindsight. In retrospect, he said, it would have applied in South Vietnam; in recent months, in Angola (in response to which Congress had passed the Angola resolution, further limiting executive power); and, in the future, in a place like Rhodesia. Based on his own rhetoric throughout the campaign, one wonders how eager he might have been to apply it on the Korean Peninsula. Either way, Carter would not be eager to mobilize military power in what he saw as dubious cases. "I don't think the American people need it. We don't have to show that we're strong. We are strong."[141] Here, Carter once again demonstrated just how differently he viewed the U.S. role in the world. For Ford and certainly for the conservative right and more hawkish members of Carter's own party, the perception or image of American power was inextricably linked to the real thing. Showing strength was strength. Carter, on the other hand, strove to disaggregate the two. Conflating perception with reality, Carter thought, was how we got Vietnam (and maybe even Korea before it). He sought new vistas, not old mistakes.

As Carter solidified his delegate lead and put to rest any possibility of a last second challenge in the lead up to the July convention, his campaign formulated a more concrete policy platform. On June 16, Carter sent his policy platform proposal, called "A New Beginning," to the platform committee of the Democratic Party meeting in NYC. The Foreign Affairs section repeated a by-then common refrain regarding nonintervention and cautioned against the U.S. government's use of covert or other means to effect violent change in foreign governments abroad.

[141] Ibid.

The proposal also directly linked Carter's fiscal conservatism with his desire to address U.S. overreach. "The Pentagon bureaucracy is wasteful and bloated. We have more generals and admirals today than we did during World War II commanding a much smaller fighting force. We can thin our troops in Asia and close some unnecessary bases abroad." Although not mentioned by name, this meant U.S. forces and bases in South Korea.[142]

One week later, with the nomination all but officially his, Carter delivered his most authoritative foreign policy speech of the 1976 election. Nevertheless, his June 23 address to the Foreign Policy Association in New York tied together familiar themes, if in a more comprehensive manner. He called for continued yet reciprocal détente, tighter economic cooperation among the industrialized democracies, improved North-South relations, and, in a direct dig at Kissinger, criticized the prevailing "long ranger" style of foreign policymaking, which lacked transparency and misled the American people. Carter then turned to the Pacific region, a region of "changes and opportunities." Chinese and Soviet forces were no longer jointly deployed as U.S. adversaries, but, rather, "confront one another." Moreover, U.S. withdrawal from mainland Southeast made possible a better relationship with the former. Echoing Ford's doctrine, Carter affirmed he would maintain "existing security arrangements" with Washington's "primary Pacific ally," Japan.[143]

As for Seoul, though: "I believe it will be possible to withdraw our ground forces from South Korea on a phased basis over a time span to be determined after consultation with both South Korea and Japan. At the same time, it should be made clear to the South Korean Government that its internal oppression is repugnant to our people, and undermines the basic support for our commitment there."[144] Thus, while Carter was transitioning to the general election, and adopting

[142] "Jimmy Carter's Platform Program," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 248.
[143] "Relations Between World's Democracies," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 271.
[144] Ibid.

certain establishmentarian lines, he held fast to what most had seen as mere vote-getting rhetoric on Korea. Although he linked any changes to consultations, with Seoul and Tokyo, Carter did not shy away from his pledge to withdrawal troops or from rhetorically linking withdrawal to Park's repressive rule.

However, the final Democratic Party Platform released at the July convention, unlike Carter's own platform proposal, was a more consensus document. Although as the party's nominee Carter and his advisors had the most say in its ultimate construction, the platform was shaped by others as well. It more visibly reflected establishment thinking. Such was evident in the Asia section of the foreign affairs plank. Present was Carter's long-running criticism of the Vietnam War and intervention in general as well as his caution against the "shocks" to Japan on previous Republican foreign policy. Although it did emphasize that a more balance, mutually beneficial trade relationship should be sought with Tokyo. Still, in other ways, the document read like a wholly establishment document, even similar to Ford's own Pacific Doctrine. "We remain a Pacific power with important stakes and objectives in the region," the section began. It continued: "Friendship and cooperation with Japan are the cornerstone of our Asian interests and policy. Our commitment to the security of Japan is central to our own, and it is an essential condition to a constructive, peaceful role for that nation in the future of Asia." As per usual, American security was expansively conceived. Japan's security was inextricably linked with America's own. It was, therefore, a commitment worth keeping, and since vital to U.S. security, worth military intervention if events required it.[145]

Turning to Korea, the platform's mixture of Carter's campaign rhetoric and establishment thinking was even clearer. Throughout the campaign Carter had, at times, discussed the U.S.

[145] "1976 Democratic Party Platform, July 12, 1976," The American Presidency Project: Democratic Party Platforms, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29606.

presence in South Korea and the need to draw it down as though it existed in a vacuum, separate from other commitments. Yet the final platform explicitly reconnected the Washington-Seoul relationship to wider interests. Most immediate, was the importance of Japan. The platform also emphasized not just *that* the withdrawal should occur, but *how* it should occur. A certain degree of hedging, somewhat lacking in Carter's earlier statements, was evident. The portion on Korea read:

> We reaffirm our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea, both in itself and as a key to the security of Japan. However, on a prudent and carefully planned basis, we can redeploy, and gradually phase out, the U.S. ground forces, and can withdraw the nuclear weapons now stationed in Korea without endangering that support, as long as our tactical air and naval forces in the region remain strong. Our continued resolve in the area should not be misunderstood. However, we deplore the denial of human rights in the Republic of Korea, just as we deplore the brutal and aggressive acts of the regime in North Korea.[146]

The platform was heavy with more cautious language. The withdrawal of troops and nuclear weapons would proceed gradually, prudently, and carefully, with retention of other important assets to signal the continuity of U.S. support or "resolve." Moreover, and more to the point, the platform acknowledged the importance of South Korea's own innate security and also explicitly linked it to the security of Japan. Yes, Carter retained future force withdrawals and criticism of Park's human rights abuses as official Democratic policy. However, by so clearly linking Seoul's security to Tokyo, a key obstacle was erected to Carter's desired approach. If the U.S. commitment to Japan's security was, as the platform suggested, "central to our own," and South Korea's security was key to Japan's, then disengaging from Korea posed serious questions.

Such questions were hardly new. They had attended all previous studies of U.S. force withdrawals, starting with the late Johnson administration. They would also immediately entangle Carter. Moreover, at the very same time he was setting forth his withdrawal policy as an official

[146] Ibid.

part of the Democratic Party platform, Ford officials were grappling with the same questions in their internal discussions surrounding Korea.

While Carter Campaigns

While Carter honed his message and fledging policy toward Korea and surprised the political world by building an early primary lead, memo traffic related on Korea began to increase within the Ford administration. Although into 1976 the central concern of high-level U.S.-ROK relations was the pressure campaign to prevent further progress in Seoul's nuclear weapons program, by January Washington had received Park's pledge to cancel a nuclear reprocessing deal with France.[147] Around the same time, Ford officials began to pick up the threads of the earlier, delayed policy review.

In January 1976, Amos Jordan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, sent Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld a study prepared by the Office of International Security Affairs (ISA) in DOD, titled "Policy Problems in Korea." The study reiterated that the situation in Korea was characterized by "the virulent nature of North-South hostility and the heavy degree of armaments," and that in such a context the U.S. force presence had been "an essential element in avoiding misperception and preserving the peace." Although general hostilities remained unlikely, there was concern regarding possible North Korean military probes in and around the five small offshore islands in the Yellow Sea. The islands and the Northern Limit Line (NLL) had been the site of skirmishes before, but because it was an election year and because of the islands' difficult geography, ambiguous legal status, and strategic and tactical unimportance, a

[147] "U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 0552 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing; Canadian Reactor Sale," 25 January 1976, Secret" The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3535292-Document-34-U-S-Embassy-Seoul-telegram-0552-to.

U.S. response to such probes would be unlikely to receive support in Congress or among the public.[148]

However, a limited U.S. response would also be problematic insofar as the islands' loss would be "severely damaging psychologically" to South Korea, could erode Park's "personal stature," and "discredit the U.S.-South Korean relationship." Moreover, the atmosphere was already marked by "public doubt about the constancy of U.S. policy." In essence, the dilemma surrounding the offshore islands was a microcosm of the situation as a whole. Washington wanted to encourage Seoul to take the lead in defense, in order to "purchase enough time" to determine how the U.S. government might respond, but also prevent the situation from spiraling out of control. Adding to this inherent dilemma, was declining public and Congressional support for U.S. Korea policy and the defense presence in general.[149]

The ISA study highlighted that the decline in support was due, in part, to a Vietnam backlash and fear of "another military venture in East Asia." It was also partly due to Park's increasingly authoritarian rule, which had caught the attention of the Hill and "certain articulate elements of the American public including the churches." Consequently, elements in Congress had pushed for removal of troops and put pressure on Park to liberalize by denying aid and threatening U.S. withdrawal. There was also concern among liberals and conservatives within Congress about the current troop posture, with 2ID in a reserve position but still north of Seoul and thus prone to automatic involvement in hostilities. Such concerns had led to a growing feeling that, at a minimum, U.S. forces should be moved south of Seoul. According to the study, congressional efforts might decrease during the election year but would not dissipate. The DOD needed to

[148] Document 274: Study Prepared by the Office of International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense, Washington, undated.
[149] Ibid.

"counter these efforts," and avoid sending the wrong signal to Pyongyang, such as moving the division southward. Such a move would indicate weakened resolve, and thus reduce the deterrent value of the U.S. presence, and, importantly, would not significantly reduce the likelihood of U.S. involvement in a contingency.[150]

Tied to the U.S. presence was the question of the UNC and military command arrangements. The ISA study reiterated the erosion of support for the U.S. position in the UNGA, underscored by the first-ever passage of dueling resolutions in June 1975, both of which called for dissolution of the UNC. Nevertheless, before altering the existing command structure, Washington had to devise new command arrangements, which, like the UNC, provided "a mechanism through which the ROK, without losing face, can place its forces under the operational control (OPCON) of an American commander." Gen. Stilwell had been in discussions with Seoul about creation of a combine command, "at the insistence of the South Koreans," whereby the commander would remain an American who would now report to both national command authorities. The change would make the new arrangement far more equal than OPCON under the UNC. From ISA's perspective, though, there were conflicting views and potential problems with such an arrangement:

> we see great Congressional problems with a combined command because of the Park regime's repressive character. We would have to explain the new command arrangements and Congress could well reject the suggestion that an American commander also report to President Park or, as our presence decreases, a Korean would command U.S. Forces. Permitting this issue to precipitate a major debate on U.S. policy toward Korea strikes us as completely counterproductive. We are searching for appropriate command arrangements and for the moment should not acquiesce in the dissolution of the UNC until acceptable arrangements have been developed.

[150] Ibid.

In the near-term, no changes should be sought. That said, the pressures for change would not abate and required a closer look at what structure would come next. The assumptions for the administration were clear, if conflicting: maintain relative U.S. control whatever changes occurred, yet prepare for an inevitable decrease in the U.S. presence and potential inversion of a longstanding hierarchy in the relationship, and, meanwhile, prevent the process from sparking Congressional pressure for even faster adjustments. The study underscored the same dynamic regarding military assistance. Seoul was better equipped than ever to take on a larger share of funding its own military expenditures. Washington would be expected to provide mostly credit support rather than grant aid for Seoul's five-year Force Improvement Program (FIP). Congress should be generally sympathetic to increasing ROK self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, the administration needed to make sure Congressional perceptions of the U.S. presence were tied to South Korea's actual capabilities rather than assistance levels per se. Although it provided a succinct run-down of the most salient problems facing the United States in Korea, the ISA study was not a formal instruction for new policy.[151]

That began to change with an April 1 memo from Thomas Barnes, Senior Staff Member of the NSC for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, to NSA Scowcroft, which recommended a new NSSM to review U.S. security policy toward Korea. The review was to study: the level of the U.S. presence, extent of U.S. military assistance, U.S. policy toward ROK self-sufficiency, and the issue of OPCON and alternatives to the UN Command structure. According to Barnes, the review was appropriate as time had passed since Saigon's fall and the examination of U.S. security objectives in the wider Asia-Pacific was now complete. It was also timely, he added, "in light of the amendment to the Security Assistance Bill for FY 1976 that calls for a Presidential report on the

[151] Ibid.

U.S. security role in Korea, and the prospects for a phased reduction of U.S. military forces." Scowcroft attached his own memo to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA Director, stating the President agreed the previous NSSM 226 should be cancelled in preparation for a new NSSM to be led by Phil Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and the NSC Interdepartmental Group for East Asia. It would focus on the U.S. security role in Korea over the next three to five years.[152]

To Barnes' point regarding Congressional assertiveness, criticism from Capitol Hill and elsewhere had grown following Park's issuance of EM-9 and crackdown the previous spring. It had continued apace after Park targeted the political dissidents behind the March 1 Declaration of National Democratic Salvation at Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul. On March 14, the same day that the United Church of Women prayed for South Korea on World Prayer Day, Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA) called for a reexamination of the U.S. alliance with the ROK. Cranston asked: "What's the difference between North and South Korea when both are "dictatorships, both imprison people who wish to express their opinions freely and when neither conduct elections?" He proposed cutting a portion of the $50 million in U.S. military aid provided Seoul.[153] On April 2, the day after Barnes' memo to Scowcroft, Senators Kennedy and Rep. Fraser sponsored a letter signed by 119 senators and representatives, alleging "suppression" in ROK and say continued U.S. support makes the U.S. "an accomplice to repression." The letter went on to state, "The policies of President Park toward political dissidents not only violate internationally recognized standards of human rights but also raise serious questions about the supportive role of the United States in

[152] United States, National Security Council, *Review of U.S. Security Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula Includes Attachment]* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061257?accountid=14784.
[153] For mention of United Church of Women see, Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea."; see also: "Senator Cranston Bids U.S. Re-Examine Ties to Seoul," *New York Times*, March 14, 1976.

its relations with the Republic of Korea."[154] The following week, Carter achieved his come-from-behind victory over Udall in the Wisconsin primary, building on his already surprising lead.

It was in this context that various high-level U.S. and ROKG officials met in Washington D.C. on April 9. The U.S. side included, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Winston Lord, Habib, Donald R. Toussaint, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, and Daniel A. O'Donohue, the Director of the Korea Desk at State. South Korean officials included Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin, Ambassador to Washington Hahm Pyong-choon, and Director of the Bureau of American Affairs in the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Park Sang Yong. Although the bulk of the conversation centered on the upcoming debate of the Korean Question at the UN, Habib recounted his recent testimony on Capitol Hill, during which Fraser "was not friendly" and Senator Cranston "indicated he was going to have a restrictive amendment added to the Foreign Assistance Act setting a timeframe for eventual withdrawal of US troops." In response, Kissinger queried, "Carter has already come out for that, hasn't he?" Habib responded affirmatively, yet incorrectly, that "that is undoubtedly the Brezinski influence."[155] Foreign Minister Park, whose government closely monitored U.S. Congressional and public rhetoric toward Korea, remarked that "Mr. Carter seems to have a better public response than expected." Kissinger conceded as much. Carter, Kissinger observed, appealed to the public as a reaction to Watergate and Vietnam. Kissinger admitted, though, he was a surprised by Carter. He thought Jackson's candidacy was the more promising one. Of course, neither Habib nor Kissinger nor anyone else on the U.S. side

[154] Richard Halloran, "Seoul Attacking Its Critics In U.S.: The Regime Reacts To Views Expressed by Legislators, Reporters and Scholars," *The New York Times*. April 18, 1976.
[155] Although Brezinski had, through the Trilateral Commission, been a sort of informal tutor for Carter on foreign affairs over several years, there is no definitive evidence the Korean withdrawal was his brainchild. It still amounts to hearsay.

mentioned the emerging policy review of Korea. Word had leaked about NSSM 226 the previous spring and caused consternation. The current election season was not the time to cause waves.[156]

The internal review was still moving forward. New orders dictated that rather than start anew, the NSC Interdepartmental Group should simply pick up where NSSM 226 had left off the previous spring. The response date for submission to Scowcroft was pushed back from May 31 to June 10, but the main areas of focus remained.[157] Nonetheless, just as quickly as the NSSM traffic emerged, it faced push-back. Morton Abramowitz, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs in ISA, the Pentagon's top official for the region, was a notable opponent. Publicly, he acknowledged the pressure from Congress for a U.S. troop pullout, but he felt it was unlikely and would be "no contribution to peace to withdraw when tensions in the area are high."[158] In private, he is far more stringent in his opposition.

Abramowitz expressed similar views as those in the earlier ISA study, to which he likely contributed. In a personal memo to William Hyland of the NSC staff on April 22, Abramowitz noted one immediate problem was that he and his staff would be tied up with planning for the next month's SCM in Honolulu between U.S. and ROK defense officials. Yet more important, Abramowitz felt, were the several fundamental problems with the policy review itself, which he derisively called a "quasi-NSSM" and "essentially a paper exercise." While the NSC memo asked them to study the level of U.S. military assistance to Seoul, Abramowitz argued that it would not be decided by them but by Congress. "We want as much FMS credits as possible, and we will get far less than we need. There is no question and no dispute among anybody on this point," he wrote

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[156] United States Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Director for, Korean Affairs, *ROK-U.S. Relations; Korean Question Discussion with Park Tong Jin]* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679085675?accountid=14784.
[157] United States National Security Council, Staff Secretary, *Review of U.S. Security Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula: NSSM 226* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679060740?accountid=14784.
[158] "U.S. to Give S. Korean Forces Control of Missile System, but Pullout Is Doubtful," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1976.

Hyland. The same went for the U.S. military presence in Korea. He flatly stated: "Nobody in the executive branch wants to move our forces out and we can only define in general terms when that might be possible. We should stop screwing around for papers' sake." Although Abramowitz agreed that the question of advanced technology transfer, particularly in the missile field, and the question of an alternative command structure sooner or later must be addressed, there was "no urgency on the matter." With these considerations in mind, he recommended the NSC memo be modified and the due date further delayed.[159]

For its part, the ROKG began devising its own strategy. In an April memo, drawn up in response to their discussions with U.S. officials, growing public and Congressional criticism, and Carter's emergent campaign, Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin outlined for the ROK Ambassador in Washington guidelines the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had sent to all its major embassies throughout the world. It laid out Seoul's position on the U.S. presence and policy toward the ROK, namely, that U.S. troops were an effective war deterrent against Pyongyang and maintained the security and the power balance in Northeast Asia and the entire Pacific region. Therefore, it was "indispensable" for U.S. forces to remain stationed in Korea. ROK officials were instructed to get other counties' foreign ministries, political figures, and the media to support their stance and to encourage them to persuade Washington against force removals. As improbable an instruction as it was, the ROK Ambassador himself was "required to have the U.S. government announce that the Carter administration would keep the same policy toward Korea as the previous ones at appropriate time and way, work tactfully in order to affect public opinion into such points, and report the outcomes at any times." How the ambassador was supposed to convince the Ford

[159] United States Department of Defense Deputy Assistant Secretary for International, Security Affairs, *National Security Study Memorandum on South Korea]* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061715?accountid=14784.

administration to make guarantees it was patently incapable of making is anyone's guess. Nevertheless, the telegram revealed the extent to which Carter's campaign promises were being taken quite seriously in Seoul.[160]

Foreign Minister Park did not limit expression of his unease to meetings with high-level U.S. officials or official ROK cables. In a public interview in mid-May, following the victory of pro-Communist forces in Angola, Park voiced marked concern about American dependability and willingness "to assert its strength to maintain world peace." The pro-communist victory in Angola, of course, came six months after passage of the Angola resolution, which had prevented the U.S. president's freedom of action to intervene. Park also decried the "nasty, backbiting criticism" of certain congressmen, such as Fraser, whose recent speech Park compared to Dean Acheson's early 1950 remarks that South Korea was outside the U.S. defense perimeter in the Pacific, which many Korean still felt helped spark the Korean War. Similarly, Fraser had said South Korea was not important to American security and U.S. forces should be withdrawn due to Park's repressive rule.[161]

As it turned out, though, in the near term at least, Park need not have worried. Within days of his critical interview, NSSM 226 was suspended due to growing internal push-back. Habib's interdepartmental working group had met once and began drafting the text and annexes of the study, but Habib informed Barnes that State and even the White House preferred to delay decision on the issues NSSM posed. Abramowitz, unsurprisingly "strongly supported Habib's recommendation." Tracking with Abramowitz earlier argument, Barnes informed Scowcroft that the U.S. force presence and level of U.S. assistance were two longer-term issues, decisions on

[160] "Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Ambassador in the United States, April 1976," in *The Carter Chill,* 1-2.
[161] John Saar, "Foreign Minister Apprehensive After Angola: S. Korean Concerned About U.S. as Ally," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1976.

which would not be manifest for some time. On the other hand, a decision of advanced weaponry and technology transfers to Seoul could be determined on a case-by-case basis, although some general guidelines would be welcome. Similarly, the OPCON issue and question of alternative command arrangements should be addressed in a separate interagency project. Of the four options presented to Scowcroft, he signed-off on Habib's recommendation, suspending the NSSM with a plan to resume it in the fall, while adding in the margin: "Our basic mistake was stopping work on the NSSM last spring when we could have used it."[162] Whether Scowcroft meant it could have been useful for upcoming discussion at the UNGA or to have actually begun a process of force adjustments, or both, is unclear. One week later, at the conclusion of the 9th SCM in Honolulu, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld affirmed with his ROK counterparts that the U.S. government had no plans to reduce the current level of U.S. forces in South Korea.

The emergence of yet another prospective policy review on Korea and its delay soon thereafter followed a now well-worn pattern of a stop-and-start U.S. Korea policy. As Ambassador Sneider warned the previous June, policy from Washington was simply too ad hoc. Considering the pressures on the U.S. commitment and the ongoing changes in the U.S.-South Korean relationship, it needed to settle into something more concrete. Nevertheless, although other priorities and an approaching election season help to explain the Ford administration's delay this time around, it ultimately had more to do with the fundamental complexities inherent to the U.S. presence and commitment to Korea and the difficulties in formulating real changes.

On June 1, Kissinger held one his semi-regular meetings with State's various regional and functional assistant and deputy assistant secretaries. During the meeting, Kissinger and Phil Habib, then in his last month as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, had a

[162] United States National, Security Council, *State Recommendation on Suspension of NSSM 226* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061931?accountid=14784.

lively back-and-forth discussion on U.S. Korea policy. Indeed, the discussion was remarkable for just how clearly and frustratingly it revealed the questions, limits, and contradictions bedeviling Washington's view of Seoul. It merits close examination.

The conversation revealed how U.S. Korea policy was often kicked down the road and degree to which even high-level officials were ignorant of key aspects of the U.S. commitment. This included a surprising lack of awareness among them about just how massive a U.S. military commitment would be required in the case of a Korean contingency. The conversation also revealed the degree to which the physical U.S. military presence was unavoidably bound up with the political, treaty commitment in a manner that made them very difficult to disaggregate from one another. Drawing down the former became problematic if Washington intended to credibly uphold the latter. Furthermore, it was not merely a question of lowering the number of military forces *per se* being problematic, but also the type of forces (i.e. ground combat forces, air and naval units) and their configuration on the peninsula. Relatedly, setting aside the local effects of force removals, the discussion shed light on the extent to which the local commitment and changes thereto also refracted outwardly and were embedded within a larger regional environment with its own political, strategic and symbolic elements.

The June 1 discussion was also illuminating considering the participants involved and their unique relationship, specifically Habib and Kissinger. Habib was an experienced, well-respected, and longtime foreign policy hand in the region, with significant insight into Korea. He had served as political counselor in the U.S. Embassy in Seoul from 1962 to 1965 and as the ambassador from 1971 to 1974. If Ambassador Sneider, his successor, was in favor of a more settled policy – a durable partnership where Washington made clear its intent to stay put – Habib too was in favor of a settled policy if in the other direction, toward a gradual but definite draw down of the

commitment. Habib had been clear about this since 1972, when following Park's October martial-law takeover, he said that U.S. disengagement had "already begun" and "should be accelerated."[163] However, he was not stringent nor impetuous in his view. He was well-aware of local complexities and willing to temper U.S. disengagement based on fall-out over Vietnam and ongoing North-South tensions. Daniel A. O'Donohue, who twice overlapped with Habib in the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, remembered that "Habib never saw it as a complete withdrawal, but as reduction and a shift to the South Koreans of greater responsibility for their own defense." [164] Still, he definitely favored a clearer policy of disengagement and greater ROK self-sufficiency.

One factor that underpinned his desire for disengagement, was his desire to disentangle the United States from South Korea's domestic politics. O'Donohue, recalled: "You should remember that Habib always favored a reduction in the US military ground presence in South Korea--whether a division or something less. Indeed, on this issue the difference between Habib and Secretary Kissinger was that Habib saw a reduction--not a withdrawal--as part of a process of moving away from operational control of the South Korean Armed Forces, through the UN Command, which so involved us in every domestic crisis in that country." [165] Habib knew the early history of Washington's difficulties with Rhee Syngman and had personally witnessed tensions early in Park's term of rule following the 1961 military coup as well as the establishment of the *Yushin* system.

Another factor behind Habib's desire for disengagement, was that he wanted U.S. forces to have greater flexibility. Not only was this consistent with the transfer of the defense burden to

[163] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 66.
[164] Interview with Daniel A. O'Donohoue, Political Counselor, Seoul (1972-1974), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 522.
[165] Ibid.

Seoul begun during his time as ambassador, but it would allow the U.S. greater discretion in how to respond in case of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. Based on current war plans, Habib was acutely aware of how massive a military commitment the U.S. faced and how little space a U.S. president would have to respond before the force of events overtook the decision-making process. Although, as shown above, Habib helped push back against the restart of NSSM 226, he still saw a comprehensive policy review and considerations of real alternatives to U.S. Korea policy as both necessary and inevitable. Such was evident during his spirited discussion June 1 discussion with Kissinger. Habib had a unique relationship with Kissinger. Unlike others, Kissinger treated him as an equal and allowed, indeed even appeared to enjoy, a level of verbal sparring with Habib. Kissinger did not adopt a similar attitude toward other subordinates.

Habib began the discussion by referencing the brewing controversy over ROK influence-buying activities in the United States. In February, Rep. Fraser had published a report on the KCIA's influence-peddling and intimidation, which also included the involvement of Reverend Moon and his Unification Church. Habib noted the issue had gained greater public notice and had sparked various investigations, with the foreign policy implication being "one more nail in the coffin of our ability to maintain the kind of support that we have been trying to maintain in Korea." Habib added that the Korea Desk at State was one of the few actors "around this place that supports our policy on Korea." Kissinger asked what the alternative was: "let the North Koreans take it?" No, but they could devise "new alternatives to our methods in achieving it," Habib said, meaning new ways for maintaining deterrence and stability. For example, Habib foresaw, at the "proper moment," reducing U.S. forces "under carefully controlled conditions, in which stability is maintained by some force – not the total force." In essence, Habib contended that the military

presence, at least as then constituted, was not necessary for their policy, but changing it would be a question of timing and method.[166]

For the sake of argument, Kissinger, clearly skeptical, asked what practical difference would be achieved with 10,000 personnel rather than 40,000. One thing it would provide, according to Habib, would be a little more flexibility in the U.S. response in case something went wrong in Korea. "In other words, back out," Kissinger retorted. Habib disagreed. Kissinger then challenged him by asking what other kind of flexibility he wanted. Habib felt that in the long run the real deterrent was the U.S. commitment itself, with U.S. air force units remaining at certain sites. However, he conceded that currently U.S. ground forces served as the main deterrent. Kissinger disagreed, saying that even were forces reduced to 10,000, you would still want 2,000 "close to the line." He asked, "What good are 10,000 back in Pusan?" In other words, U.S. troops in immediate harm's way was the deterrent. Habib, continuing with his alternative, stated that in five-year's time Washington would be better off not having anyone close to the line. Then, U.S. officials could decide whether or not to put ground forces close to the invasion corridors. Kissinger challenged, Habib wanted all the ground forces out. Moreover, once out, it was guaranteed the Koreans would know you will not put them back in, and neither would Congress provide the approval to do so.[167]

Habib defended himself, saying now was not the time to consider initiating such an action. "Carter is already talking about it, so you may get a chance," Kissinger countered. "Oh, there's nothing new about this," Habib added. He continued: "this is an old argument that's been going on for five years. Pak used to talk to me about it. As a matter of fact, he counted on the completion

[166] United States Department, of State, *Secretary's Staff Meeting, Tuesday, June 1, 1976: Reducing Military Presence in Korea* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679104079?accountid=14784.

[167] Ibid.

of the modernization plan, the withdrawal of our ground forces and the maintenance of a long-term deterrent." Now, Habib added: "We got a credibility problem because we didn't supply the armaments which we agreed to supply by 1975 and which Mr. Fraser and company are guaranteeing that they're not going to supply him by 1977. That's our problem in Korea." For Habib, a key condition to move forward would be first meeting Seoul's armament needs. Kissinger doubted this was even possible, likely a reference to the inevitable inter-Korean arms race such developments would spur; a race already underway. Kissinger, as always concerned with the larger political and strategic balance, widened the scope of the discussion beyond local dynamics: "Do you think we can pull our troops out without affecting Japan – or China, for that matter?...Beginning any time in the next five years. Do you think China will not consider it a further retreat of American foreign policy?"[168]

Habib, rather than answer the question, responded that it would take three years to remove the one remaining division of ground forces. Again, in circular fashion, the conversation returned to where it started. "And what would you have achieved when you're all through with that heroic thing," Kissinger asked. Flexibility, Habib responded, it would give Washington flexibility not "to put in ground troops in the case of attack." There was a big difference between using navy and air logistics and putting in 10 divisions of ground troops, which, Habib noted, was the current war plan envisioned. Kissinger and Winston Lord, also in attendance, were surprised. Habib meant in the case of a Chinese attack, right? No, Habib responded. The present plan, Op 57A, counted on massive reinforcement by U.S. ground forces. "Anybody who knows we have anything to do with Korea knows we can't do that," Habib added. Kissinger observed that they were more likely to do so if they had ground forces there and the main question "has to do with what is more likely to

[168] Ibid.

deter." Plus, he added, he had "never seen a paper like this from EA." Either way, both agreed now was not the time to consider such changes, particularly considering the difficulties they were experiencing in Congress.[169]

Habib's remarks on Congress appeared to set Kissinger off: "What we suffer in the Congress doesn't have a goddam thing to do with our troops there and will be accelerated after our troops are out, just as they were in South Viet-nam; and you're sure as hell not going to get the Congress to do more for Korea because there were no troops there. We went through all of this in Viet-nam, and for every concession you make you feed the appetites." At the very least, Habib noted, they had defeated a recent resolution aimed at cutting aid to Seoul. He cautioned, though, that they might not be able to do so moving forward. Even so, Habib persisted that the U.S. could ultimately satisfy its policy requirements for a credible deterrent with less force presence, and thus lower likelihood of having to introduce massive reinforcements in case of an attack. Kissinger still did not buy it: "What is the trick there? As you increase deterrence, you decrease the need for reinforcement; and you have no impact on the Chinese, where every intelligence report shows that their primary concern is our shrinking power in the Pacific." Habib reiterated no change would occur without first consulting both Seoul and Tokyo, yet the testy and inconclusive back-and-forth continued.[170]

Kissinger asked: "So we bug out with consultation, right?" "No. We decrease – make the deterrent more credible with consultation," Habib responded. Kissinger, doubtful, asked, "You make the consultation more credible by pulling out?" The lack of clarity on the overall position clearly left Kissinger exasperated. "You know, that's where the lack of training bothers me after 20 years," he continued. The entire arrangement appeared simply stuck in place without revision,

[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

so much so that any changes immediately ran up against the inertia such neglect had engendered. Kissinger could never come to agree with complete withdrawal. He understood and was willing to discuss "some cosmetic withdrawals," moving from 40,000 down to 20,000 at some point. That, in fact, was the theory, Habib responded. Kissinger was not having it:

> The theory – I know what the theory is and you know what the theory is, Phil…It's to get all our troops out and to put the best possible double-talk on it and to say, "We strengthen our commitment by your strengthening your commitment" and get the Japanese to agree with it. What are the Japanese going to say? Of course they'll agree with it – because they'll be afraid if they don't agree with it they'll make obvious what they're afraid of. Of course they'll be formally in agreement, and the Chinese were jubilant formally about our defeat in Viet-nam until it happened.

Habib countered that pursuing consultations and a gradual drawdown would be preferred to Congress forcing the issue with a resolution requiring force withdrawals. Kissinger concurred, but added that Habib might want to get started on the paper. "You may need the paper yet," he noted. Not yet, Habib responded. It was not needed yet because the issue it was presently understood by those involved.[171]

The conversation ended there, inconclusively. Nevertheless, the discussion reflected the nature of U.S. Korea policy at that time. It was beset, on the one side, by real pressures for change and, on the other side, by powerful obstacles and institutional inertia standing in the way of it. Habib himself embodied these clashing forces. He closely observed and participated in earlier events that had portended future change, yet was also sensitive to the problems confronting any administration intent to fundamentally alter the longstanding U.S. presence. As their discussion indicated, both Habib and Kissinger were aware Carter, if elected, might move forward with such a plan. Unsurprisingly, the same complexities over which Habib and Kissinger verbally sparred, would prove salient as Carter attempted to formulate and implement his withdrawal policy. Carter

[171] Ibid.

and his administration would rapidly run up against the difficulty of seeking flexibility in the U.S. force presence and commitment, especially as the physical presence and its configuration were essentially inseparable from the perceived strength of the treaty commitment itself as well as the wider regional setting within which it was embedded. In a sense, U.S. Korea policy remained stuck in place and consistently kicked down the road because it was not a real priority for high-level policymakers. However, another important factor underpinning its apparent inertia, was the real difficulty in finding a way to fundamentally redress a longstanding arrangement. Carter's time in office would resoundingly prove the point, as his withdrawal policy forced these difficulties to be squarely confronted.

However, in the short-term, U.S. Korea policy settled into a sort of pre-election interregnum, with movement in some areas but mostly holding steady. As Habib mentioned, early in June Congress approved a new aid bill to Seoul, overcoming the new internationalists' desire to punish Park for his human rights abuses by curbing military aid.[172] Around the same time, though, during the mark-up of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, the House Foreign Affairs Committee managed to insert a provision, which was passed into law, requiring the President to submit by September 30 (and at least once during the next five years) an annual report that detailed: Seoul's efforts at military modernization and self-sufficiency; the U.S. role in mutual defense efforts in Korea; and the prospects for a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces. In short, military aid would continue, but so too would critical voices in Congress. One close participant in these events, later observed that the legislation, by implication, set U.S. withdrawals

[172] Bernard Gwertzman, "House Approves New Aid Bill, Refuses to Limit Funds to Seoul," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1976; see also, "House Won't Curb Military Aid to Korea," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 3, 1976.

as a goal and called upon the executive branch to provide annual reports on the prospects for meeting it.[173]

The same month, U.S. and ROK officials also held discussions and reached an agreement on commercial nuclear cooperation in Washington. The negotiations and agreement were part of the trade-off for Seoul backing off its earlier reprocessing deal with French suppliers, seen as part of its secretive nuclear weapons program. Yet as reported in a telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Paris to the State Department in mid-July, U.S. intelligence had detected a separate ROK effort, through a Taiwanese company, to secure a reprocessing plant.[174] The intelligence demonstrated that no matter the recent agreement, Seoul's nuclear efforts may never entirely abate, and the secrecy and lack of transparency between the two allies would remain a constant.

One area where some movement occurred was in relation to the OPCON issue and the study of alternative command arrangements. A June 15 NSC memo instructed that the issue be extracted from the delayed NSSM 226, and subject to its own separate State-Defense study. "Depending on the United Nations' developments, we could conceivably be faced with the need to seriously consider an alternative to the present UNC command structure," the memo noted. If trends favoring pro-DPRK resolutions in the UNGA continued, the study would be quite useful.[175] Apparently, Scowcroft believed "the question of successor arrangements to the UNC was studied last year and that we had at least a concept as to the shape of the new organization." In a July 12 memo to Scowcroft, Thomas Barned and Clinton Granger laid out the previous efforts that had been made, and what the next steps might be. They noted that NSSM 190 in December 1973 had

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[173] Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea," 9.
[174] "U.S. Embassy Paris telegram 20831 to Department of State, "Korean Reprocessing," 16 July 1976, Secret," The National Security Archive: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3535292-Document-34-U-S-Embassy-Seoul-telegram-0552-to.
[175] United States National, Security Council, *Review of Alternatives to the Present Operational Control of U.S., Korean, and Other U.N. Forces Attachment Not Included]* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061743?accountid=14784.

directed the study of the question of future command relationship between U.S. and ROK forces. Three alternatives were reviewed to UNC OPCON, with consensus supporting an alternative of a new U.S.-ROK combined command, with a U.S. General as it head and a Korean as his deputy. Nevertheless, NSDM 251 of March 1974, though it set out a negotiating package for terminating the UNC, did not address the question of operational control following UNC termination.[176]

In 1976, DOD undertook a more detailed study of the issue, but due to internal disagreements had been unable to produce a paper. Nevertheless, General Stilwell felt the institution of an alternative arrangement was "an inevitable process, and he is pushing for staff-level discussions with the Koreans." Barnes and Granger, though, felt the U.S. government should complete its own study and find internal agreement first before starting talks with the ROK. Additionally, the study needed to consider the political and legal implications of removing OPCON from the UNC while still retaining the UNC's "Armistice Administration" responsibilities. While either State or Defense could chair the study, due to its military factors Defense was ultimately chosen to draft it, with a deadline for August 10, 1976. It is unclear if the study was completed by then, but it is highly unlikely.[177]

Another area where movement was attempted, yet to little avail, was Kissinger's effort to restart inter-Korean and four-party talks. He suggested, through Habib, cross recognition between the two Koreas and their great power allies, and again proposed four-party talks on Korea as well as the simultaneous entry of North and South Korea into the United Nations. However, Kissinger shifted his previous four-party format to include bilateral North-South negotiations, with the United States and PRC as observers. In short, the format would retain the great powers but be

[176] United States National, Security Council, *Review of Alternatives to the Present Operational Control of the U.N. Forces* 1976, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679043986?accountid=14784.
[177] Ibid.

Korean-led. Nevertheless, Pyongyang opposed the various suggestions insofar as the Park government remained illegitimate in its eyes, so direct talks and joint entry into the United Nations were non-starters. Seoul, although not opposed to North-South talks, was not too keen on the altered four-party format. The ROK Foreign Ministry's internal analysis noted a particular disadvantage: "It may possibly leave the impression of a prelude to the gradual reduction of American involvement in Korea, particularly in light of this year's presidential election," surely a reference to Carter's campaign rhetoric.[178] Carter might not have won the election yet, but his campaign promises on Korea had begun to cast a shadow. Either way, no real progress was made beyond the proposal itself.

Yet, in mid-August, Korea once again grabbed headlines and the attention of the highest levels in Washington. Consistent with past examples, it took an unexpected provocation and the threat of sudden escalation to garner such attention. Detailed accounts of the event can be found elsewhere, but Oberdorfer correctly referred to it as "the gravest threat of all-out war" since the 1953 Armistice. On August 18, in the midst of a relatively uncontroversial move to cut down a poplar tree blocking their view of a portion of the JSA occupied by North Korean soldiers, a crew of American and ROK soldiers was set upon by a group of North Koreans. Two of the Americans were beaten to death by axe-wielding assailants. In response, the Department of Defense ordered U.S. forces in South Korea on a state of emergency, and mobilized more forces and weapons to Okinawa. Then, on August 21, U.S. and ROK forces, backed by an overwhelming show of force consisting of large numbers of troops, helicopters, and bombers overhead, carried out Operational Paul Bunyan, uprooting the poplar tree and demolishing a nearby outpost for North Korean guards and some other North Korean-constructed barriers. Based on intelligence monitoring of North

[178] "Analysis on the Suggestion of the U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for Holding 4-Party Talks, 21 September 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 17.

Korea's front-line communications, the show of force left a strong impression. The event also garnered a note of contrition of sorts, as Kim Il Sung sent his first-ever personal message to the UNC in its twenty-three-year history. He called the incident "regretful" and said both sides should work to avoid similar incidents in the future.[179]

The Axe Murder incident, as it is commonly known, offered a stark reminder of an old reality. On the one hand, there was the ever-present threat of provocation, miscalculation and misperception, and escalation on the Korean Peninsula. On the other hand, during such provocations, policymakers faced stark constraints in terms of how they chose to respond, lest the response itself set off yet greater instability and full-scale war. In its immediate wake, the close call surely had a sobering influence on most observers. It strongly disincentivized any rush to tinker with or rapidly change such a tense environment. Of particular importance, though, were the disparate, clashing responses of different groups to the same event. Once the dust settled, it became evident that the event tended to affirm and reify people's view of the Korean Peninsula and U.S. role therein.

For observers such as Generals Stilwell and Hollingsworth, Ambassador Sneider, Abramowitz, Kissinger, and President Ford, as well as conservative senators and representatives, the lesson was clear. The incident demonstrated that Korea, as always, remained tense and threatening, and the need for American resolve and vigilance as strong as ever. Ford had just survived Reagan's vociferous challenge from the right. He had also adopted more bellicose rhetoric as a result of Reagan's repeated claims that he (and Kissinger) was soft on communism. Indeed, it was in the midst of Reagan's final challenge at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City, when Ford first got word of the axe murders at Panmunjom. As he wrapped up the

[179] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 75.

contested nomination and geared up for the general election, recent events in Korea provided another way for him to draw a distinction between himself and Carter, and to paint the latter as weak and in favor of retreat.[180]

On September 1, speaking at the National Guard Association's annual conference, Ford decried Carter's plans to withdrawal forces from South Korea: "We cannot lay down our arms in the simple hope that others will follow our lead…The voices of retreat talk about phased withdrawal. They talk as if our defenses won't be weakened if we only dismantle them one brick at a time. They are wrong…The world is still a dangerous place…we cannot retreat from the front lines of freedom if we are to preserve our freedom here at home."[181] Carter's promise to remove U.S. troops, which his campaign had reiterated in their post-convention defense briefing, was the height of naivete; even more so in the face of recent events.[182] Could Carter not see that the world was still dangerous, and that American staying power is what mitigated the danger? American resolve was integral to upholding freedom abroad in order to uphold it at home. Ford's was the standard Cold War line, freedom and security expansively conceived, no matter the local, possibly even inadvertent nature of the recent Korean flare-up. The American presence was a key symbolic node in a larger structure; best not to tinker with it.

The South Korean government concurred. Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin said as much in a September telegram to President Park. Reporting on his conversation with Kissinger on the sidelines of the 1976 UNGA, the foreign minister wrote that he told the secretary of state that close

[180] Hurwitz, the Korea Desk Officer at the time, remembered: "It was a question of being very tough. I think this was just prior to the opening of the Republican National Convention. Kissinger himself was under attack by those in the Republican Party who didn't like him," see: Interview with Edward Hurwitz, Korea Desk Officer, Washington DC (1976-1977), in: "Korea: Country Reader," 695; for an accessible account of the split in the Republican Party and Reagan's challenge to Ford, including a detailed description of events leading up to and during the Republican National Convention, see: Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).
[181] "Ford Criticizes Carter on Korea Troop Pullout," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1976.
[182] For the defense briefing, see: "Defense Policy," in *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Volume One*, 353.

consultation between the ROK and U.S. governments in dealing with the incident reflected the solid ties between them. Furthermore, he noted: "the ROK thinks it was fortunate that the United States responded promptly to the provocations of North Korean puppets and the demonstration of such firm resolve left a favorable impression both domestically and internationally at a time when there was certain skepticism in public opinion regarding the defense of Korea since the communization of Vietnam." An additional, if unexpected, benefit from the incident was that Pyongyang lost support among the Non-Aligned countries and "disgraced herself internationally." In fact, the loss of support was sufficient enough that North Korea withdrew its agenda item for consideration at the UNGA.[183] Therefore, fortunately for Washington and Seoul, the previously pro-Pyongyang trend at the UN did not go to another vote, which could have caused yet more pressure on the former to scrap the UNC.

However, for others, the new internationalists in particular, the incident showed why the U.S. presence was precarious and outdated. Senator George McGovern (D-SD), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on the Senate floor on September 15 that the United States was "allied in South Korea with a disreputable tyrant," who had transformed the country "into a model of totalitarian rule." Such a leader did not merit the risk of U.S. involvement in another Korean War. He proposed continuing discussions with Pyongyang, though he did not believe negotiations "would produce any significant changes in the demeanor or posture of the North Korean Government." Although he conceded the recent murder of the two American soldiers at Panmunjom was "a provocative, inhuman act," more than anything, though, the incident showed that "the forces that were sent to Korea a generation ago as a trip wire could trip this

[183] "Telegram to the President from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Report on the Meeting between the Foreign Minister of the ROK and the U.S. Secretary of State and Foreign Ministers of the ROK and Japan," 28 September 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 18-19.

generation into another wrong war in another wrong place at another wrong time." It was primarily a matter of luck that another war had not occurred. [184]

McGovern continued, the main effect of U.S. forces in South Korea "is to encourage an adventurous attitude by President Park, and to stand as irrefutable physical evidence of our involvement with his repressive regime." Instead, the United States "should begin a phased withdrawal of our force from South Korea as quickly as that can be accomplished," he remarked, before adding the all-important caveat, "without raising needless fears and dislocations in Japan." For those most deeply involved, then, the incident reified existing views. Yet even in McGovern's case, the drive to disengage was tempered by key words (i.e. "phased") and larger considerations (i.e. Japan).

Directly alongside demands for change were potential obstacles to its implementation. William Gleysteen Jr., who served as Deputy Assistant of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and also on the NSC staff late in the Ford administration, correctly observed that for most in Congress around this time a rush to the exits was not in the cards. Gleysteen, who in 1978 would be appointed by Carter as the U.S. ambassador to Seoul, recalled that when the chips were down, so to speak, a moderate leadership and a majority both in the House and Senate "rallied to support a firm military posture in Korea."[185] That did not stop a vocal minority, though, from expressing their strong displeasure and complicating relations between Washington and Seoul.

Such included Rep. Fraser and Sen. Cranston, who on October 6 sponsored and sent a letter signed by 154 other senators and representatives to ROK President Park. They expressed "profound distress" over Park's "arbitrary action" in jailing dissidents, and that Park's abuse of human rights had "seriously eroded" U.S.-ROK relations and undermined the two sides will to

[184] "McGovern Asks U.S. to Leave Korea," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1976.
[185] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 22.

resist aggression. The two felt the need to take the initiative "partly because of the lack of concern shown by the State Department."[186] It is doubtful Seoul or Washington felt any less ready to resist Pyongyang's aggression, particularly in light of the recent show of force in response to the axe murders. Nevertheless, as its own internal communications indicate, Fraser and Cranston were right that the State Department was not interested in pressuring Park on the human rights front. On October 24, State's desire for stability in the relationship was further undermined by the *Washington Post's* public exposure of what would be dubbed the "Koreagate" scandal, involving the Seoul government's efforts to garner influence in Washington through bribery and various other illicit or unethical influence-buying activities.[187] Koreagate added one more layer to an already complicated situation.

Still, it is important to note that despite these various Korea-related developments, Korea simply was not a prominent issue in the 1976 election. This was the case for ordinary Americans as well as both candidates. Very few if any voter was going to cast their ballot based on how they felt about Park's human rights abuses or Carter's promise to withdraw forces from South Korea, assuming they even knew of Carter's campaign promise. In fact, Korea did not figure very prominently in the presidential debates. However, the debates were notable insofar as they were the first to be held in sixteen years, allowing large numbers of Americans to get a closer look at the candidates.

At one point during their October 6 debate, focused on foreign policy and defense issues, Ford did allude to South Korea, mainly in the context of human rights. He stressed Seoul's "very delicate situation" in trying to balance human rights while confronting a threatening North Korea

[186] "154 In Congress Condemn Jailings in South Korea," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1976.
[187] Maxine Cheshire and Scott Armstrong, "Seoul Gave Millions to U.S. Officials," *The Washington Post*, October 24, 1976.

backed by the PRC. The best way forward, according to the incumbent, was to focus on fostering larger diplomatic discussions, which his administration had attempted. This approach, he felt, would help solve internal domestic problems over time.[188] The only other mention, again by Ford, was in their third and final debate, when he referenced how Acheson's early 1950 statement that Korea was outside the U.S. defense perimeter helped lead to the outbreak of war. Yet he cited it as a cautionary example of how unwise it is for a president to signal in advance what options he may or may not exercise if international problems arose, and in direct reference to Eastern Europe, not Korea itself. At no point during the debates did they mention Carter's campaign promises on troops in Korea.[189]

Carter was elected the 39th U.S. President on November 2, 1976. Down the stretch, Carter benefitted from Ford's gaffe during the October 6 debate, when the latter famously noted there was "no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and there never will be under a Ford Administration."[190] More broadly, Carter was also favored by the political climate, which, for the reasons outlined above, favored a change of leadership and openness to a so-called outsider. Nevertheless, Carter's electoral victory was actually quite close, both in the popular vote and electoral college. Whether close or not, Carter prevailed. He and his staff quickly shifted from campaign mode to presidential transition, and put together their foreign policy and defense teams. Officials in the now lame duck Ford Administration continued to speak out against Carter's intent to remove forces form Korea, stressing the need for stability and resolve instead of change. Others within the foreign policy, defense and intelligence bureaucracy began to issue early warnings

[188] "October 6, 1976: The Second Carter-Ford Presidential Debate," Commission on Presidential Debates, https://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-6-1976-debate-transcript.
[189] "October 22, 1976: The Third Carter-Ford Presidential Debate," Commission on Presidential Debates, https://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-22-1976-debate-transcript.
[190] Bernard Gwertzman, "Ford Denies Moscow Dominates East Europe; Carter Rebuts Him," *The New York Times*, October 7, 1976.

regarding an even more heavily armed and threatening North Korea than previously thought. Nevertheless, these warnings would fall on deaf years throughout the transition period and early Carter administration, due mainly to the sheer inundation of tasks most officials faced but also because they were not something that the Carter people wanted to hear. Even more simply, though, there had been an election. Their guy won. He had his policy plans, and like most transitions, particularly between opposing parties, the incoming group is intent to distinguish themselves from their predecessor, not adopt their views, or be told they must immediately alter their own.

Carter Wins, Seoul Strategizes

Meanwhile, always attentive to a leadership change in Washington and particularly so with Carter, the ROK government sought greater clarity on what the Carter Administration actually intended to do and strategize how it might respond. In November, either just before or after the election, the ROK Foreign Ministry's North American Division produced an internal forecast on Carter's potential policy toward the ROK. The analysis demonstrated just how closely Seoul monitored developments, including a log of Candidate Carter and senior Democratic lawmakers' remarks on U.S. military assistance and forces in Korea.

The forecast presented a rather clear-eyed analysis of the various, somewhat contradictory elements of Carter's likely policy as gleaned from his campaign rhetoric, including: reinforced cooperation with the ROK and continued U.S. efforts to defend the ROK, but also withdrawal of nuclear weapons, phased withdrawal of ground forces within five years, and the reduction of U.S. military assistance. It also assumed, somewhat incorrectly, that Carter would consult with Japan on the Korea Question and the Soviets in order to maintain peace in Korea. Overall, the North American Division saw no change in recognition of the ROK's strategic importance in the region,

but tactical modifications in U.S. policy, including the aforementioned withdrawal of nuclear weapons and ground forces. The ROK had to prepare accordingly and also assume human rights criticisms would be used to strengthen the argument for withdrawal and reduced assistance. The forecast succinctly laid out the advantages and disadvantages of such developments, and the countermeasures Seoul might take.[191]

The advantages of U.S troop withdrawal were that it would promote the ROK armed forces' modernization plan and development of defense science and technology, both as a necessity and likely as part of the withdrawal plan itself (as was the case during the 1971 Nixon withdrawal). Moreover, by ultimately granting greater independence, the withdrawal would weaken U.S. interference in Seoul's domestic affairs, provide diplomatic advantages in the NAM and U.N., and bolster opportunity for direct inter-Korean negotiations. Yet there were also multiple disadvantages: aggravating internal insecurity and hampering economic growth; weaken conventional deterrence and eliminating nuclear deterrence; raising further questions about the validity of the UNC and armistice agreement; and increased regional tensions and anxiety, with potential for Japanese rearmament and assertiveness regarding the Korea Question. What could Seoul do? If withdrawal was inevitable, the troops should be maintained at least until completion of the ROK military's modernization plan. Meantime, Seoul should negotiate in a way that complete withdrawal of U.S. troops would be postponed until a more stable and peaceful arrangements is achieved on the Korean Peninsula. Lastly, the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty should be complemented with a guarantee of a nuclear umbrella beyond the occasional rhetorical invocation of one.[192]

[191] "Forecast on Presidential Candidate Carter's Policy on ROK and Analysis on It, November 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 20-22.
[192] Ibid.

The advantages and disadvantage of a reduction in military assistance tracked similarly with those of troop withdrawal: promotion of ROK self-reliant defense efforts, decreased dependence on Washington, and weakened Congressional criticism, on one side, as against a short-term setback in the ROK Force Improvement Plan (FIP), possible misjudgment by Pyongyang, and (as Kissinger himself warned in his discussion with Habib) greater apathy and antipathy within the United States toward the ROK, on the other. To redress reductions in assistance, Seoul could push forward with the FIP through increased defense spending, diversify negotiation of the military financing program (presumably from non-U.S. sources), strengthen ROK-Japan relations, and in the process strengthen negotiations with the U.S; put differently, drive a hard bargain with Washington and get everything it could. Aside from internal forecasting and in line with foreign ministry instructions, ROK officials' main priority was to determine other country's stance on the matter and work to garner their support in opposing any notable shift in U.S. policy.[193]

Japanese officials, unsurprisingly, were key. On November 18, the Counselor of the ROK Embassy in Washington, Yoo Chong-Ha, met with Takakazu Kuriyama, the Counselor at the Japanese Embassy. During their talk, Kuriyama noted Carter's campaign remarks were well-known, but it would be a grave misjudgment to assume they knew what Carter actually would do once in office. Rather, based on the character of Carter's aides and the Democratic Party's position, he assumed Carter's withdrawal plan would be reviewed at least in the short-term basis. Over the long-term, forces would likely be removed, which was itself an unremarkable assumption in that most parties already assumed as much. Kuriyama said the Japanese Embassy still had no direct contact with Carter's immediate aides, but had discussed the matter with figures close to Carter, who had frequently asked a lot of questions about how Japan would respond to the gradual removal

[193] Ibid.

of U.S. forces. These same interlocutors often added the proviso that only ground forces would be removed without any changes to the presence and mission of U.S. Air Force and Naval units.[194]

The Japanese Embassy's official response in such conversations was that Japan does not worry so much about the withdrawal *per se*, but more as to how it might be carried out. If both U.S. and ROK authorities consented on the soundness of the policy, Tokyo could not oppose it. However, if U.S. forces were slated to leave despite strong opposition from the ROK government and nationals, "Japan would be strongly against it." Nevertheless, Kuriyama observed that Japan's Vice-Minister of Defense is already on record rejecting the withdrawal, and that the Japanese Ambassador, Fumihiko Togo and other embassy staff, have made their position clear when speaking with those close to Carter, as well as to U.S. lawmakers and academic figures. Indeed, Ambassador Fogo, who was on a speaking tour of American cities, frequently and publicly mentioned Japan did not want any changes to the U.S. force presence, as it was important to guaranteeing security in Korea and regionally. In response, ROK Counselor Yoo reiterated that he wished Japan would make clear they opposed the withdrawal outright rather than "convey a fine nuance that she would not oppose it if it would be done by the consent of the South Korean government," since it was already clear that the ROK government and nationals strongly opposed it. Counselor Kuriyama cautioned that if the ROK strongly lobbied against the withdrawal it could potentially backfire considering the critical attitude within the United States and Congress toward the ROK. It might be more effective, Kuriyama thought, to use diplomatic channels and keep silent in public; in which case it would be more reasonable for Japan to support South Korea.[195]

[194] "Talk between Yoo Chong-Ha, Counselor of the Korean Embassy to the U.S., and Takakazu Kuriyama, Counselor of the Japanese Embassy to the U.S. in Washington D.C., 18 November 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 24-25.
[195] Ibid.

However, getting a bead on U.S. views was even more imperative. On November 25, an ROK Embassy official spoke with a staff member named Mauzy, of the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and with William J. Garvelink, an aide for Rep. Fraser. The subcommittee, chaired by Fraser, would soon begin its massive effort to investigate overall U.S.-ROK relations, with particular emphasis on Korean influence-buying activities and human rights. Based on a summary of their conversation, the ROK official reported that current newspaper reporting on South Korea had "demoralized supports" of the ROK in Congress, it is "impermissible to expect the Korean issue to be case in a positive light" because supporters have diminished, and that such negative coverage was likely to continue. Moreover, the Carter team has argued the ROK must implement measures addressing human rights and responding to Congressional criticism. That said, Carter appeared intent to ask for the same level of FMS assistance to Korea for fiscal year 1978 as Ford had the previous one. South Korea would likely be criticized as a result and then forced to accept less. Thus, "it would be wise for the U.S. government to request a smaller amount of aid." The reporting was not encouraging.[196]

Within the next several days both Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Arthur Hummel, would, respectively, speak out against Carter's withdrawal proposal and state that U.S. force levels would be maintained at current levels. Nevertheless, these officials' criticisms and assurances provided relatively cold comfort. They were on their way out. Carter was on the way in. For Seoul, the trends were uncertain.

[196] "Summary of the Conversation with Mauzy, Committee Staff of the Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives, and William J. Garvelink, aide for Rep. Donald M. Fraser, 2 December 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 26.

As Carter's inauguration neared, Counselor Yoo maintained his effort to get a sense of things to come, which included two productive conversations with Edward Hurwitz, then the Director of the Korea Desk at State. On December 27, Hurwitz, formerly the political counselor in the U.S. Embassy, Seoul, recounted a recent conversation between a parliamentary official from Sweden and a government official in the PRC. Apparently, the Swedish official was told the PRC "fairly disapproved of the U.S. troop withdrawal from Korea" because of the implications of the withdrawal for its relations with the U.S.S.R. and Japan, including possible rearmament by the latter. The Soviets, as well, disliked the withdrawal in that it could "bring Communist China and the North Korean puppets close together," a constant issue in the fraught triangular relationship between Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang.[197] More insightful, though, was Yoo's conversation with Hurwitz the following day.

In their second discussion, Yoo received a bit more clarity on the ongoing transition and how things stood, at least from Hurwitz's perspective. The conversation was a critical one to the extent that Hurwitz, like a set of other key actors, was already embedded within the foreign policy bureaucracy. He was not part of Carter's own team. However, like most civil servants, he remained within the bureaucracy after the transition and carried within him a set of understandings and biases as well as expertise, all of which were part of the institutional memory of the bureaucracy itself. Consequently, he and others with similar views would invariably influence members of the incoming administration, and, as a function of their positions within the bureaucracy, the formation and implementation of any new policy. Yoo's conversation with Hurwitz, a summary of which the ROK ambassador in Washington sent in a telegram to Foreign Minister Park, indicated how the

[197] "Telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Ambassador in the United States, 28 December 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 27.

bureaucracy felt about U.S. Korea policy and what they had communicated to certain members of the incoming Carter administration.

The day of their conversation the Korea Desk and State Department submitted its report on Korea to the incoming Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, which was shortened by request to 15 pages from its original 30. The report was made after a wide exchange of views with higher authorities and the input from all relevant bureaus within State. The consensus view therein was the basic relationship between the United States and South Korea should be maintained, and it especially advised that no major change be made to the U.S. troop presence considering the current circumstances. Hurwitz noted that while the make-up of the incoming personnel was still being established, particularly at the assistant secretary level, Habib was certain to continue in office. As the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Habib would have a far wider jurisdiction than just Korea, but due to his reputation within the department and well-known expertise on the matter, it was expected that Vance would likely "heavily rely" on his advice. As a result, Hurwitz surmised, policy toward Korea should remain consistent under the new secretary of state.[198] As it turned out, Hurwitz was mostly prescient in his view. Habib would end up playing an important role as a conduit for Carter's attempt to deepen consultation with Seoul. However, despite his overall desire to see a gradually drawdown in U.S. forces, he was not a firm proponent of Carter's policy. Nor, by his own later admission, was he that closely involved due to the wider auspices of his position as under secretary.

In terms of how Carter might proceed, Hurwitz thought it was hard to say clearly. Nevertheless, Carter's own frequent modifiers, such as "carefully," "slowly," "methodically," and "in consultation with ROK and Japanese" governments, made it seem his withdrawal would be

[198] "Telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Ambassador in the United States, 28 December 1976," in *The Carter Chill*, 28-30.

difficult to implement. Notably, Hurwitz added, after Carter's campaign remarks the "Japanese government's concerns and response are so serious that the Department of State is surprised at them," and felt Tokyo would continue to oppose any changes in the U.S. forces stationed in Korea. For its part, State did not want Seoul to implement drastic reforms that might jeopardize social stability. Although the Park Tong-Sun or Koreagate Scandal would likely cause waves for the foreseeable future, the last thing Washington wanted was to aggravate the situation. Rather, it would like to see South Korean society open gradually, not force the ROK government into dramatic changes "that might compromise current economic development and destabilize the enforcement of regulations regarding the defense of Korean security."[199] In this vein, Hurwitz recounted his interaction with one of Senator Edward Kennedy's aides who came to State to question them about Korean human rights and call for measures to address them.

He explained to the aide that the situation in Seoul was far different from what Mr. John Saar and Mr. Halloran of the *New York Times* were reporting. Hurwitz said to Yoo that he did not want to be quote as saying it, but he felt one important factor in Halloran's apparently "anti-Korean" government stance was his Roman Catholic faith and ties to dissident Catholics, such as Bishop Ji Hak-sun and Poet Kim Chi-ha. When pressed by the Kennedy's aide, Hurwitz explained that the embassy in Seoul had "close and free" contact with dissidents, such as former president Yun Po Sun, who publicly expressed his anti-government views, which would never be permitted in communist societies, such as North Korea. Indeed, Hurwitz emphasized that no matter what reports said, most at State saw South Korea as "extremely constructive and promising," and though it needed to work on the extravagance and excessive vanity of certain high-income groups, State

[199] Ibid.

saw the continued growth and the relatively fair distribution of wealth as important to sustaining social stability.[200]

If Seoul was searching Seoul for clarity on what came next, at the very least there was evidence of institutional inertia on their side. Per Hurwitz, the consensus at State was that any notable change in the U.S. force presence or U.S. pressure on Seoul to adopt internal reforms were counterproductive if not dangerous policies. Further, in the several weeks before inauguration, President Ford and other high-level administration officials once again warned against sudden changes to the U.S. force structure in Korea, stressing its importance not only to Korea and Japan but to relations with China and the Soviet Union as well.[201] Likely of greater relevance to Seoul were comments by General John Vesssey, who replaced Gen. Stilwell as the four-star commander of U.S. forces in Korea in September. Vessey told the *Washington Post* on January 9 that removing troops would heighten the risk of war.[202] From the outgoing administration, to various elements in the bureaucracy and the new U.S. commander in Korea there was evident push-back against Carter's ideas of withdrawal.

None of this changed the fact that a new administration was coming in. Thus, while ROK foreign affairs officials were doing their work in Washington, the highest level of the South Korean government jockeyed to secure its diplomatic position. Seoul did so in response to Pyongyang's own maneuvering and to create as much leverage as possible in the face of Carter's arrival. In his January 1 New Year's address, Kim Il Sung proposed a bilateral peace treaty with the United States. Having been forced to withdraw their resolution at the U.N. and in the face of widespread international opprobrium for the Axe Murder Incident as well as a scandal borne of illicit activities

[200] Ibid.
[201] "Ford Urges Unchanged US Policy on Korea," *The Korea Times*, January 5, 1977.
[202] John Saar, "U.S. General: GI Pullout Would Heighten Korea War Risk," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 1977.

by various North Korean consular officials around the world, Pyongyang shifted tactics. Due to his plans for withdrawal and consistent criticisms of Park for human rights abuses, Carter appeared, from Pyongyang's perspective at least, potentially receptive to a new approach. Kim's New Year's olive branch, though not the first time such a proposal was made, was the first of several efforts by the North Korean leader to develop contacts with the Carter administration.[203]

Not to be outdone, President Park offered a counter-proposal of sorts in his own January 12 New Year's speech. In it, Park said Seoul would accept the withdrawal of U.S. military forces provided Pyongyang first signed a non-aggression pact with the ROK and proper alternative legal and institutional arrangements were established to replace the current Armistice Agreement and UNC. Seoul favored this instead of Pyongyang's proposal of first signing a peace treaty directly with Washington and having U.S. troops removed and the UNC dissolved before then restarting North-South talks. According to the *New York Times*, Park's proposal: "came as a surprise in view of repeated expressions of concern by Government-controlled newspapers and some political leaders that there might be troop withdrawals during the incoming administration of Jimmy Carter." It added that Park's statement on withdrawals was "the first such statement made by a top South Korea political leader in the 24 years of American military commitment to this country."[204] An ROK Foreign Ministry document on the proposal revealed Park's various motivations.

Essentially, Park was calling Kim's diplomatic bluff, since the ROKG viewed North Korea's proposal as yet another tactic to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul. Although the document said it was unclear whether Pyongyang would accept Park's proposal, the ROKG was doubtful, given that Pyongyang's "underlying motives lay in weakening our security posture through deceptive political propaganda and aiming to unravel the balance of power between the

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[204] "South Korea Says It Will Accept U.S. Pullout If North Gives Pledge," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1977.

north and south by having the withdrawal of American troops materialized at an early date," with the ultimate goal "to achieve unification by communizing the Korean Peninsula by force." In calling for Washington to carefully consider that matter, Seoul hoped to avoid an "institutional vacuum" resulting from troop withdrawals and institutionalize "through explicit means the North Korean puppets' position that they will not start war again." Moreover, it would prove Seoul's "flexibility over the issue of withdrawing American troops" and therefore "secured diplomatic dominance over the North Korean puppets and their supporting forces." Park's proposal was eminently reasonable and even aligned with recent NSC and State Department studies, which stressed the importance of devising alternative institutional arrangements as part of the process of any troop reduction or withdrawal. In short, it served a double purpose: undermine Pyongyang's own apparent reasonableness and outline an important step for the Carter administration to follow, or neglect at its own peril.[205]

The Seoul government, the document continued, would only accept the withdrawal of U.S. forces under one of three circumstance: 1) the goal of stationing them is achieved and there is no further need for their presence; 2) judgement is made that such a goal is cannot be met, and U.S. forces serve no meaningful purpose; or 3) a viable military alternative becomes available, meaning the ROK developed its own defense capabilities to the point it could independently deter North Korean aggression. Yet it was apparent from Seoul's perspective and indeed from the view of many in Washington that such conditions could not soon be met. First, Pyongyang currently refused to accept the legitimacy of the Park government and showed signs of its own military build-up (signs, in fact, which were growing). Second, Seoul still viewed the U.S. presence and nuclear umbrella as existentially necessary. Third, and related, the ROK still needed time, at least

[205] "The Government Stance on the Proposal to Conclude a South-North Korean Mutual Non-Aggression Pact, 18 January 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 31-34.

five years by most estimations, before it would be capable of independent defense. Moreover, Seoul knew full well that for the local U.S. command as well as the JCS, the U.S. presence remained essential, not only for local deterrence but for the larger regional strategic framework. The document concluded with a rather emotionally charged passage:

> As long as the United States does not present a satisfactory position regarding the three issues in the above, the American measure of withdrawing troops stationed in Korea would be a defeatist and unilateral capitulation in the struggle against communism. Such a measure would weaken the security and defense of the Korean people who are faced with the threat of invasion and war provocation by the North Korean puppets, and would run contrary to the moral ideals championed by the U.S. government.[206]

Try as it might, there were limits to what Seoul could do to influence the incoming Carter administration. In truth, beyond Carter, Seoul faced an enduring and uncomfortable reality, one already laid painfully bare in the wake of Nixon's Guam Doctrine if not since the inception of the alliance relationship. Ultimately, Washington was going to decide on a policy, to which the government in Seoul would be forced, as best it could, to accommodate itself.

The same day Park made his New Year's proposal President-elect Carter held a day-long foreign policy discussion at the Smithsonian Institute with about 50 members of Congress and his incoming national security team. According to participants, Carter told the assembled lawmakers he had not made his campaign promises lightly regarding troop withdrawals, but only after careful consideration of the problem of U.S. troops. What exactly that problem was is unclear, but it likely revolved around the same issues of flexibility, vulnerability and over-involvement, which figured in Carter's campaign rhetoric on Korea. Nevertheless, Carter said Washington would continue to provide air cover for Seoul, make sure it had sufficient forces of its own to defend itself, and would be consulted in the process. Secretary of State Vance, who had testified the previous day before

[206] Ibid.

Congress, reiterated the point. He acknowledged Japanese and Korean leaders were concerned, but assured no action would be taken without proper consultation.[207]

Carter also told the attendees of the Smithsonian meeting that he would use his influence with Park to ease political restrictions while moving forward with troop withdrawals. No clear response was provided when one of the lawmakers queried as to how Washington could maintain leverage over Park while reducing its greatest tool thereof. Sources also said that one of the officials of the incoming administration mentioned that some people had proposed Washington develop contacts with Pyongyang as part of the withdrawal process, and that lawmakers and the Cater team discussed the possibility of a "two Korea" policy without settling on any consensus. Overall, the discussion appeared significant as much for what it revealed as for what it left uncertain. Carter appeared intent to move forward with his campaign promise. It was not mere rhetoric. This much was clear. Nevertheless, there was no real consensus on the process by which it might be effectuated or, more crucially, a clearly articulated rationale for why it must be done.[208]

Five days before Carter's inauguration, the Department of Defense announced it had no plans to withdraw or relocate U.S. troops stationed in Korea. Yet it was unlikely many people noticed or would have cared if they had. What mattered was what the Carter team intended to do. Yet for Seoul, as well as Congress, only time would tell just how and why Carter intended to proceed.

[207] Don Oberdorfer and Edward Walsh, "Carter to Press Liberalizing of Korea, Withdrawal of GIs," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1977.
[208] Ibid.

Chapter III: Transition & Initial Formulation

"This is a matter that has been considered by our government for years. We have been in South Korea now more than 25 years. There has never been a policy of our government evolved for permanent placement of ground troops in South Korea. In 1970 and 1971 a full division of troops was withdrawn…The essence of the question is, is our country committed on a permanent basis to keep troops in South Korea even if they are not needed to maintain the stability of that peninsula? I think it is accurate to say that the time has come for a very careful, very orderly withdrawal over a period of four or five years of ground troops"

-President Carter, Remarks at a Press Conference, May 26, 1977.

"This withdrawal issue was a major bone of contention in the U.S. government…In the Pentagon, we began a rear-guard action – delay it, water it down, mitigate the decision as much as possible. Brown knew what the staff was doing and never interfered. Eventually, over the next year, even State came to oppose the withdrawal. I am sure that many will have somewhat different recollections about the sequence and nature of events, but I think it is fair to say that eventually the bureaucracy came together to oppose the withdrawal decision."

-Morton Abramowitz, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, interview by Thomas Stern

Any lingering doubts about if or how President Carter intended to move forward with his campaign promise on Korea were quickly put to rest early in his term of office. Indeed, events moved with such alacrity that within six months the administration, with Seoul's eventual if grudging involvement, devised what one participant characterized as an "operationally viable" troop withdrawal program.[1] Yet, over the same six-month period and contained in the troop withdrawal program, Carter's policy would undergo its first alteration of sorts, with the program leaving more combat units in Korea and for longer than originally envisioned (backloading it) and

[1] Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea," 18.

certainly longer than the president would have preferred. Moreover, embedded within the program were the seeds of potential obstacles to its future implementation.

First, the aforementioned backloading of the withdrawal, provided, time for review of the overall policy. Were conditions to change, the backloading of the policy permitted space for possible reconsideration. Second, and related, the rhetoric around the policy, which was repeated publicly and in classified memorandum and private communications alike, provided potential impediments to its implementation. Emphasis was placed on the need to uphold the U.S. security commitment to Seoul as well as maintain a favorable military balance on the Korean Peninsula and in the region. In other words, were the plan seen to undermine South Korea's security or the military balance or were conditions to arise that made the plan appear riskier than originally conceived, it would complicate its implementation. Put simply, the administration wedded itself to rhetoric which made moving forward in the face of such changed conditions politically costly. Third, the implementation of the plan would require the active involvement and thus agreement of other key actors. Most overt, was Congress and its role in passing the requisite legislation for the major compensatory features of the withdrawal program, as well as holding hearings and conducting studies reviewing the overall policy. Less visibly, but arguably more important, were personnel within the defense and foreign policy bureaucracy tasked with formulating the overall policy and its component parts. Their position, if they were so inclined, permitted them the space necessary to resort to the "time-honored bureaucratic technique of reversing policy by subverting its implementation."[2] Additionally, the policy required the involvement of U.S. allies, specifically Seoul and Tokyo, which allowed the former to adopt a tough negotiating stance not only to secure as much assistance as possible but also, in so doing, draw out the withdrawal process, and the latter

[2] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg, 150.*

continually to stress the interconnectedness of Japan's security with Korea's and the dangerous signals the withdrawal might send throughout the region.

These various potential obstacles embedded within the withdrawal program were themselves a direct function of the intense opposition that emerged early and often in the initial six-months of the administration: within the U.S. Military, from the JCS down to field commanders in Korea; among political appointees and civil servants within the foreign and defense bureaucracy; from different elements within Congress, each opposed to the withdrawal policy yet often from antithetical viewpoints; and, finally, from allies in the region, most notably Seoul and Tokyo. Opponents criticized Carter's policy both for how the president introduced and attempted to implement it but also for fundamental concerns about the policy itself.

In terms of its introduction and implementation, different participants expressed concern insofar as it was set on a fixed timetable, which was both too fast (four to five years) and too soon as conditions were not yet ripe for such a withdrawal. Also, Carter did not properly consult interested parties, either within the U.S. government or among U.S. allies. Carter's implementation was also flawed in that the withdrawal was not used as leverage to strike a larger political or diplomatic settlement either with North Korea or other regional powers, namely, China and Russia. Relatedly, and to the consternation of most involved, Carter failed to offer any compelling or clearly-stated rationale of withdrawing U.S. combat forces. Carter's seemingly haphazard and ill-informed implementation aside, there was a more fundamental level of opposition to the policy due to the various peninsular, regional, and psychological uncertainties the policy posed. Whether driven by an aversion to Carter's apparently rushed approach or based on a fundamental opposition to the policy, the various actors above often worked together to influence and ultimately oppose

the plan. In some cases, such cooperation occurred in a one-off, transactional or instrumental manner. In others, it was done more deliberately and in a highly coordinated fashion.

Before tracing through its early introduction and opposition, it is important to situate Carter's withdrawal program in relation to some of the more important personal and institutional relationships that affected his administration's overall foreign policy. Much of the scholarship on the Carter administration correctly highlights the extent to which the personal and institutional differences between National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and the National Security Council, on the one hand, and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the State Department on the other, strongly influenced how the administration approached various foreign policy challenges. From U.S.-Soviet arms negotiations and Soviet machinations in the Third World to U.S.-Sino normalization and the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis, the Brzezinski-Vance rivalry was ever-present and often affected how policy was shaped. Each held competing views, rooted in differing conceptions of American power (and how it should be used), the Soviet threat, and the continued salience of East-West rivalry. Eventually, Brzezinski came out on top in this struggle, as Carter and his administration turned back toward traditional Cold War conceptions of U.S. security and a more confrontational relationship with the Soviet Union.[3]

However, in relation to Carter's Korea troop withdrawal policy, this was not as important a factor. There were two main reasons for this. The first was that despite Carter's intent to

[3] Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Alexander Moens, *Foreign Policy Under Carter: Testing Multiple Advocacy Decision Making* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); Richard Thornton, *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1992); Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Jerel A. Rosati, *The Carter Administration's Quest for Global Community: Beliefs and Their Impact on Behavior* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1987); Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994); A. Glenn Mower, *Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: The Carter and Reagan Experiences* (New: Greenwood, 1987); Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and U.S. Policy towards Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Victor S. Kaufman, "The Carter Administration and the Human Rights Bureau," *Historian* 61 (Fall 1998): 51-66; for a summary of this scholarship, see: Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 3.

implement his campaign promise on Korea, Korea was hardly his or his principle advisors' main focus. Korea was down the list of administration priorities. As a result, it became the responsibility of more assistant and deputy-level personnel rather than that of the principals. The other important reason why Korea was not caught up in the traditional rivalry between the NSC and State, or Brzezinski and Vance, was that most officials involved, particularly on the deputy and assistant-level, opposed the policy. Although the reasons and degree to which officials opposed Carter's program varied, there existed a general consensus among them that it was a bad idea. So, while the highest-level of the administration focused on other priority areas, mid- and working-level personnel tasked with drawing up and implementing the policy did so in a fashion that slowed and ultimately delayed it.

Having said that, Brzezinski did serve as a kind of lone-holdout, protecting the president from fundamentally altering his policy, at least until it simply became untenable. Consequently, some have argued that Brzezinski, aside from the president himself, was actually the sole supporter of the troop withdrawal plan. Nevertheless, the documentary record does not support that interpretation, or at minimum provides a more nuanced interpretation.

A more accurate assessment is that Brzezinski worked to protect Carter from having to immediately back down or be cornered by the intense opposition around him. Brzezinski, by his own admission, which available evidence supports, worked to shield the president and allow him to find a way to retain the semblance or form of the original policy, if not its actual substance. Ultimately, this proved untenable. Brzezinski's attempt to prevent the president from being boxed in merely prolonged the process of the policy's eventual demise. Ironically, it led to the very outcome Brzezinski hoped to avoid, namely, Carter being essentially cornered and forced to back away from a widely opposed troop withdrawal plan in a more dramatic fashion than might

otherwise have occurred had the president grappled with the obstacles to the policy at an earlier date. Nevertheless, Brzezinski's actions had little to do with his innate support for the troop withdrawal or fundamental difference of opinion with Vance or State over the value of the policy as originally conceived, as was the case in relation to other policy areas. Indeed, his role in shielding the president from reconsidering the withdrawal policy, which was widely seen to degrade American power as well as the international perception of U.S. resolve, was notably incongruous insofar as Brzezinski, among Carter's principal advisors, was the most sensitive to such factors in his framing of foreign policy decisions.[4]

Hitting the Ground Running

Before the inauguration it was already evident the administration would be moving forward with Carter's campaign promises on Korea. At the first informal NSC meeting held on January 5, Korea was identified as one of the key issues facing the administration.[5] Although the Panama Canal Treaties and Secretary Vance's early trip to the Middle East emerged as the immediate priorities, various other studies were commissioned at the meeting, including a review of Korea policy, which was geared to examine the feasibility and modalities of the troop withdrawal.[6] Although the participants at the meeting were mostly aware of Carter's campaign statements, they were reportedly surprised by the speed and priority with which the promise was becoming reality.

Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington, then the Coordinator of National Security Programs for the NSC, recalled that the decision to move forward was taken even before Vance or Brzezinski

[4] For a mention of the incongruous nature of Brzezinski's support for or protection of the President's withdrawal policy, see: Smith, *Morality, Reason &* Power, 105; see also, Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 36.
[5] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 22.
[6] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 51-52; Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 22.

were able to assess the wisdom of the policy. In a private conversation, Huntington said the NSC barely had time to analyze the pros and cons of the policy, and officials were surprised at the urgency with which the policy had been thrust upon them.[7] Brzezinski said there was little support for withdrawal among the defense and foreign policy community early in 1977, and that he himself was not consulted about the idea before Carter had made the pledge during his campaign. That later claim seems highly unlikely, but it is entirely possible he did not give it much attention. He also added that he was initially indifferent to the idea; his focus was elsewhere.[8] Other high-level officials also expressed surprise at the decision. Morton Abramowitz, who was closely involved in the early conversations on the policy, remembered that at the end of the first meeting of senior officials, Treasury Secretary Blumenthal stood up and asked: "Why in hell are we doing this?"[9]

Despite the unsettled reception among senior cabinet members, planning moved apace. As noted, Carter told lawmakers of his intention to move forward with withdrawals at the Smithsonian Institute on January 12 and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on January 13. Apparently, after his inauguration on January 21, a list of his campaign promises, including withdrawal from Korea, were compiled in loose-leaf notebooks and kept for refence at the State Department and NSC as a guide to future Administration decisions. As a later Congressional report correctly stated, most "of the analysis of the problem during following months was within the framework of that promise."[10] On January 26, during his first post-inauguration press conference, Carter once again reiterated his administration's intention to remove all U.S. ground combat forces from South Korea.[11]

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[7] For Huntington's recollection, see Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 206, footnote 32.
[8] Interview with Brzezinski, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 101.
[9] Interview with Morton I. Abramowitz, Political Advisor to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (1974-1978), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 639.
[10] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 19.
[11] Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 104.

That same day, the White House issued the written instruction for the Korea policy review, which the earlier NSC meeting had commissioned. The instruction, Presidential Review Memorandum/National Security Council 13 (PRM-13), ordered a broad review of policies toward the Korean Peninsula. It was to identify U.S. interests and objectives in the peninsula, including those derived from the U.S.-Japan relationship, and analyze current developments and future trends bearing on U.S. involvement in Korea, including the current and prospective North-South military balance and diplomatic competition, policies of other major powers, and the state of U.S.-ROK relations. The review was also to examine possible courses of action for dealing with several issues and their interrelationships, including: reductions in U.S. conventional force levels, the southward deployment within Korea of U.S. forces, future military assistance levels, Seoul's nuclear intentions and efforts to acquire advanced missile technology, diplomatic initiatives to reduce tensions, U.S.-North Korea relations, and the human rights problem in South Korea as well as the Justice Department's investigation of ROKG activities in the United States.[12] On its face, the PRM appeared unremarkable, similar to memorandum from recent years calling for review of U.S. Korea policy.

Nevertheless, much to the surprise and even dismay of the officials tasked with overseeing the review, the PRM was not a call for a nuanced assessment and weighing of different choices. Instead, PRM 13 was explicitly conceived as an "implementation document," framed not as a question of whether or not withdraw, but simply how to do so.[13] Personnel involved were never asked if it was a good policy. Rather, they were simply asked how it should be implemented. Secretary Vance directed Richard Holbrooke to oversee the PRM, and an interagency group was

[12] "PRM 13: Korea," The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum: Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/memorandums/prm13.pdf.
[13] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 20.

formed under Holbrooke's watch. Holbrooke's deputy, William Gleysteen, was responsible for coordinating the draft study. As Gleysteen recalls:

> Just before or during our first organizational meeting with officers from the State Department, Defense Department, CIA, and National Security Council, we received an urgent message from Under Secretary Habib that jolted me. The White House had told Secretary Vance flatly that our review should not examine the consequences of proceeding with partial or complete troop withdrawals, only the manner of implementing the policy of complete withdrawals already publicly annunciated by the president.[14]

Vance himself remembered telling Holbrooke he was not permitted to offer as one of the options that of not withdrawing.[15] Morton Abramowitz, who lead the Pentagon's side of the study, noted that at the first meeting Gleysteen told him that he had been instructed by the White House to draw up plans to remove all U.S. combat forces within one year, a timetable which Abramowitz said the Pentagon could not go along with.[16]

The first meeting ended with a "mutinous argument" about how to deal with what was seen as a completely unreasonable policy dictated from the White House. Some refused to cooperate, and others threatened to publicize the issue, possibly through Congress. The session ended in "bureaucratic chaos." Nevertheless, the instruction from the White House and Carter's apparent determination essentially compelled officials in the working group to accept that at least some withdrawals could occur without jeopardizing U.S. interests. Overall, the consensus among them was to remain engaged so as to influence the president and the process. [17] Abramowitz recalled: "all members of the group were opposed to troop withdrawal. In fact, the only person I knew who continuously favored the proposal was President Carter."[18] Still, at the outset it was not entirely

[14] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 22-23.
[15] Vance, *Hard Choices,* 128.
[16] Interview with Abramowitz, 639-640.
[17] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 23.
[18] Interview with Abramowitz, 638.

clear where each member stood. Over time, though, the various officials involved would become increasingly unified in their opposition and deliberate in their effort to challenge it from within.[19]

Those drafting the policy review were hardly the only ones taken aback by the president's apparent urgency. Allies were concerned as well, chief among them Seoul and Tokyo. Although Vice President Mondale was also privately opposed to it, he dutifully carried out Carter's orders to travel to Tokyo to inform the Japanese government of the policy.[20] Like others involved, he was not inclined to challenge the president head-on at the outset of his first term. Both Holbrooke and Abramowitz recalled that Abramowitz told Mondale while travelling to Japan, that "we can't withdraw," to which Mondale appeared amused, reminding Abramowitz that he and Carter had recently won an election and could indeed withdraw forces if they wished.[21]

Mondale's early February trip sent less than welcome signals to Washington's two closest regional allies. First off, Mondale only went to Japan to inform and explain the withdrawal policy, not to Seoul. Unsurprisingly, the latter viewed the move as a calculated snub. In addition to abjuring a stop in Seoul, Mondale summoned Frank Underhill, then the Ambassador to Malaysia, to join him, but not Richard Sneider, U.S. Ambassador in Seoul. Underhill, the Deputy Chief of Mission in the U.S. Embassy in Seoul until 1974, was widely known to be a proponent of military disengagement from South Korea.[22]

The Carter administration turned down Seoul's request that Mondale visit, explaining that it would have been "inconsistent" with the president's view on human rights for him to send a special envoy to the ROK at that time in light of President Park's suppression of those rights.

[19] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 23.
[20] Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 104.
[21] Interview with Holbrooke; Interview with Abramowitz, both cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102.
[22] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 140.

Furthermore, administration officials indicated it would be politically unwise to show special considerations to Seoul, given the emergent allegations of questionable lobbying and alleged bribery of U.S. lawmakers. Seoul was reportedly anxious to obtain a reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment, and furious that Tokyo would be directly "consulted" about something of essential even existential importance to South Korean national security.[23] Although ROK government officials said they still did not consider the withdrawal decision firm because of the pledge to stay made by the United States 1976 SCM, their displeasure and concern was evident.[24]

In Tokyo, Mondale's visit was also less than reassuring. Rather than consultation, as had been promised by Carter throughout his campaign, the visit was correctly perceived as notification, rather than consultation, of an already settled policy.[25] Before Mondale's visit the Japanese government was known to be disheartened by Carter's campaign pledges on Korea and confidence in the United States was at a low point. During the visit, following on the earlier 1975 Ford-Miki communique that called South Korea's security "essential" to peace in the region, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda stressed that the "Korean situation deeply affects the peace and stability of East Asia, including Japan."[26] In their press conference after the meeting Mondale said: "With respect to Korea, I emphasized our concern to maintain a stable situation on the Korean Peninsula. I cited that we will phase down our ground forces only in close consultation and cooperation with the Governments of Japan and South Korea. We will maintain our air capability in Korea and will continue to assist in upgrading Korean self-defense capabilities." In respect to a time-frame for the

[23] Richard Halloran, "An Invitation to Mondale For Visit to South Korea Reportedly Turned Down," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1977.
[24] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 20.
[25] Interview with Holbrooke, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 103.
[26] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 13-14.

withdrawal, Mondale added there "was no timetable set: we did not go beyond a recital of that general approach by the Government of the United States."[27]

Although following the meeting Japanese Foreign Minister Hatoyama said he was "relieved" the withdrawal would be done gradually and more overt displeasure among high-level officials was said to have subsided, it did not go away.[28] Indeed, within days of the visit, the Foreign Ministry's chief spokesman, Kenuke Yanagiya, welcomed Mondale's assertions that Washington would seek to maintain stability, but at the same time indicated the sensitivity with which it viewed any change in the status quo for regional stability and refrained from fully endorsing Mr. Mondale's pledge that the United States would phase down forces only in close consultation with allies.[29] In Tokyo on February 16, at an annual gathering of South Korean and Japanese lawmakers, 43 visiting South Korean legislators and 243 Japanese, including seven cabinet ministers, adopted a resolution opposing the US troop pullout from the ROK. The "resolution brought into the open for the first time the widespread Japanese and South Korean opposition to the proposal," the *Los Angeles Times* reported.[30]

Despite the Mondale visit and the internal bureaucratic marching orders within the U.S government, little was known publicly about the details of Carter's policy. As the *New York Times* reported, the administration appeared determined to remove large numbers of U.S. ground forces, but that thus far it "is a policy without a formal, public rationale." An official was quoted: "We have expressed the intent to withdraw…but it is not a plan yet." No timetable had been set and no

[27] Ibid, 20; see also, "Mondale Says U.S. Will Keep Some Forces in Korea," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1977.
[28] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 14.
[29] Henry Kamm, "U.S. Stand On Korea Assures Japanese: Statements On Troop Withdrawals and Stability Made by Mondale," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1977.
[30] Sam Jameson, "Tokyo, Seoul Legislators Oppose U.S. Korea Pullout," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1977.

numbers agreed upon, according to the official.[31] Nevertheless, leading up to ROK Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin's March trip to Washington, which would be the first in-person meeting between high-level U.S. and ROK officials, private communication ensued in an exchange of letters between Presidents Carter and Park.

In his February 18 letter, which was the first correspondence between the highest levels in Washington and Seoul, Carter raised the issues of the troop withdrawal and human rights yet stressed the continuation of U.S. support and need for proceeding in a measured fashion. Carter wrote:

> As you know, I have publicly stated my intention to gradually withdraw our ground combat forces from Korea. In taking this position I have stressed that any ground force withdrawal would be over a period of time and would involve the fullest consultations with you. Further, any such reductions will be approached in a manner which leads neither to misinterpretation of our determination to maintain our defense treaty commitment nor to upsetting the overall military balance on the Korean peninsula. We are now beginning an internal study of the complex questions related to ground force levels with a view to beginning consultations with you quietly later in the spring.

Carter utilized all the requisite descriptors to steady Seoul's nerves: gradual and consultative, along with maintenance of the defense commitment, perception thereof, and sensitivity to the local military balance. Furthermore, he assured Park of continued military assistance, $275 million in foreign military sales defense guaranteed loans, the same amount as intended by the previous Ford Administration. "In requesting this figure, we are prepared to defend vigorously our security relationship and to demonstrate concretely that we remain determined to support and strengthen your own defense efforts," Carter wrote. At the same time, Carter highlighted that within Congress, which had to approve such military assistance, as well as among other groups in the country, there remained concern about the state of human rights around the world, a concern which Carter deeply

[31] Richard Halloran, "A Partial U.S. Pullout From South Korea Now Seems Inevitable," *The New York Times*, February 27, 1977.

shared. He was not interested in interfering in or reordering particular political structures, but he hoped "our friends would demonstrate their sensitivity to these issues in a manner which allows us to maintain and properly justify to Congress and the public our closer relationships." Just as Carter intended to defend the relationship, specifically in regard to security, he asked Park show consideration to what could be done for human rights in Korea and let him know his own views.[32]

A week later, Park responded. He and his government followed discussion about the reduction of U.S. ground combat forces "with keen interest." Park, following previous public and internal discussion on the Korean side, reiterated the importance of U.S. forces in Korea, not only as visible evidence of the mutual defense treaty but as "an indispensable factor" in deterring a recurrence of war on the Korean Peninsula and ensuring peace and stability in all Northeast Asia. Thus, he appreciated how Carter had framed any future withdrawal – gradual, with consultations, and sensitive to the military balance and potential misinterpretations. Nevertheless, since Pyongyang had never abandoned its "sinister scheme of communizing the whole of Korea," and Seoul had not yet acquired sufficient self-defense capabilities, he thought any troop reduction "is not desirable" and hoped it would not take place "for a considerable period of time." However, the South Korean government was fully prepared to enter into consultations if the U.S. government proposed them.[33]

In respect to human rights, Park paid tribute to Carter for his position. "I myself subscribe to those lofty political ideals," Park said. Unfortunately, though, people had mischaracterized the circumstances in South Korea and failed to properly appreciate the "special situation" of militarized division and constant threat. Not only was the North Korea government far, far worse, but the absence of a long tradition and solid foundations for democratic government in the south,

[32] "Letter from Jimmy Carter to Park Chung Hee, 15 February 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 53-54.
[33] **"**Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, 26 February 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 60-63.

led certain "senseless elements…to resort to radical and illegal anti-state actions," which undermined internal political stability, social order and economic growth but also created "a grave threat to the very existence of our nation." These were realities North Korean had tried to exploit, and with which, despite the best efforts of the South Korean government to pursue inter-Korean negotiations, Seoul still grappled. Under such conditions, Park asserted, "the overwhelming majority of the Korean people realize that the reservation of some of their rights is unavoidable in order to ensure the security, stability and the very survival of the nation. With this understanding, they came to fully support the measures taken by the Government in this regard." Park apparently welcomed Carter's belief in human rights (or his rhetoric around them), but was hard-pressed to practically apply such "lofty politics ideals" in the Korean context. The implicit point: to fervently insist otherwise would be to ignore obvious realities, which, Park claimed, the majority of Korean citizens had come to accept.[34]

On February 24, true to Carter's assurances, his administration announced it would continue to provide military assistance to Seoul. Despite simultaneously reducing foreign aid to Argentina, Uruguay, and Ethiopia due to human rights abuses, which was the first time in public memory that any administration had publicly announced a reduction in assistance because of such considerations, South Korea was exempt. Although part of the motivation may have been due to a slight relaxation in repressive measure by Seoul, about which Brzezinski had informed Carter in a February 7 memo, the central rationale was more obvious.[35] As Secretary Vance told the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, because of overriding security commitments, Washington would not reduce its aid to South Korea or other such strategically

[34] Ibid.
[35] "Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Information Items," 7 February 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 47.

placed allies, whatever their violations of human rights.[36] Carter might have strongly believed in the matter, and, indeed, privately and publicly stressed the need for action by close allies on the human rights front, but when the chips were down, strategic realities and national interest quickly trumped lofty political ideals.

Along with civilians in the defense and foreign policy bureaucracy and allies in Seoul and Tokyo, the U.S. Military was also concerned by Carter's apparent rush to implement his policy. The JCS were disconcerted by Carter's campaign promise and the fact that at no point during their December 1976 and January 1977 meetings, when they were informed by President-elect Carter that he was considering the withdrawal, were they asked to comment on the military effects of the withdrawal decision. General Vessey, the four-star military commander in South Korea, was "unalterably opposed" to the policy. Based on his opposition as well as awareness of worrisome trends in the intelligence on North Korea's order of battle, he petitioned Secretary of Defense Brown to secure an audience with the newly inaugurated president. Vessey persuaded Brown by underscoring that U.S. forces were essential to the military balance and that their withdrawal would damage Korean morale and undermine wider U.S. regional interests. During his mid-February meeting with the president, Carter listened carefully to what Vessey had to say, asked a series of detailed questions indicating he was searching for areas where Seoul might take on greater deterrent and defense responsibilities, and assured Vessey, press speculation aside, that no final decision had been made and none would be until he spoke with the General again.[37]

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[36] Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Cuts Foreign Aid in Rights Violations; South Korea Exempt: Security Links Cited: Assistance Is Reduced for Argentina, Uruguay and Ethiopia, Vance Says," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1977.
[37] Interview with Vessey, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102; for Carter and Vessey's conversation, see: "Memorandum of Conversation with President Carter by General John W. Vessey, February 18, 1977 (Secret)," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696528-Document-01-Memorandum-of-Conversation-with.

Another early source of opposition to Carter's withdrawal policy were critics of Park Chung Hee's authoritarian rule, both in and outside of South Korea. In fact, even before Carter's inauguration, the *New York Times*' Andrew Malcolm reported that the one thing uniting political foes within South Korea was opposition to Carter's campaign pledge.[38] Park's political opponents and dissidents within South Korea, such as Kim Dae Jung and Yun Po Son, welcomed Carter's human rights criticism but not his move to withdraw forces. They felt removing U.S. forces would not only increase the chance of war but also the general sense of insecurity, which Park would exploit to justify further repressive measures undermining any prospect for more democratic rule. In an interview with *The New York Times'* Henry Kamm, Yun said Carter should not remove U.S. forces simply because Park's system of rule did not endear itself to Americans. In fact, Yun argued, to "give up South Korea would challenge America's own liberal values of human rights and democracy. We are struggling to restore many of the values Americans champion." He hoped Carter would continue to publicly express support for students, intellectuals and clergy, but not rush for the exits.[39] Yun's views were echoed by one of Park's staunchest critics in Congress, Rep. Donald Fraser.

Early in Carter's term and the start of the new congress, few lawmakers paid much attention to Korea. Fraser was a notable exception. As noted, the congressman from Minnesota had persistently focused on South Korea for several years, holding multiple hearings and spearheading the study of human rights abuses under Park and illicit KCIA activities within the United States. He was arguably the most outspoken congressional critic of President Park's authoritarian rule and stringent in his calls for U.S. disengagement from Korea. Fraser's views represented a strand of

[38] Andrew H. Malcolm, "Carter's Proposal for Withdrawal From South Korea Is Uniting Political Foes There in Rising Concern," *The New York Times*, January 16, 1977.
[39] Henry Kamm, "Korea Ex-President Urges U.S. Pressure: Foe of Park Regime Feels Appeal by Carter Would Encourage Return of Democracy," *The New York Times*, March 7, 1977.

thought within Congress, which exacerbated some of the contradictions and obstacles facing Carter's policy.

On March 3, the same day the administration requested Congressional approval of a military aid package worth roughly $280 million for Seoul, Fraser wrote a long, cautionary memo to the president. Carter not only read the memo, but appeared to take certain actions based upon its contents. Fraser began by highlighting the significance of the ROK Foreign Minister's approaching visit, the first contact above the ambassadorial level between the ROKG and the Carter administration. However, according to Fraser, the administration's early moves already proved disconcerting. The State Deprtment's request for military aid and its public position on it demonstrated things had "taken a turn for the worse." First, the administration was increasing military assistance above the last year's level, which was itself an increase over the previous year. Second, and more upsetting, was Vance's statement that Washington would not consider cuts in military assistance because of U.S. security interests in South Korea. "These two statements replicate the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger line which has permitted President Park Chung-Hee to steadily reduce and eliminate the political rights of the Korean people since 1971," Fraser wrote. Moreover, Carter's announced intention to phase out ground forces would, if anything, make the situation worse. Fraser argued: "Once the United States begins withdrawing troops, our flexibility in dealing with South Korea will steadily diminish. Our maximum opportunity to attempt to help the Korean people comes while our troops are still there." For Fraser, the administration was getting ahead of itself and crafting a policy framework the elements of which worked at cross purposes.[40]

Fraser conceded that the human rights problem in South Korea was "the severest test" of Carter's commitment to human rights around the world. He saw Park's authoritarian rule and

[40] "Memo to President Carter from Cong. Donald M. Fraser, "U.S. Policy Toward Korea," 3 March 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 75-76.

suppression of political opponents like Kim Dae Jung as bearing "a striking resemblance" to the Soviet Union and the KCIA's role similar to the KGB. Nevertheless, critics of Park in congress faced a distinct dilemma insofar as they wanted to support Carter but would find defense of the administration's current position as "almost impossible." A fight on military aid to Seoul would put them at odds with the administration's position, which they hoped to avoid. Such a conflict could be headed off, Fraser argued, if Carter and his administration moved with greater firmness. For example, Secretary Vance might stress to the Foreign Minister that continued military assistance would hinge on the Park government taking major actions to improve the human rights situation in South Korea. Military aid levels were a helpful lever to pull. Since the troop presence remained the overwhelming deterrent to any North Korean aggression, temporary reductions in military assistance "will not significantly affect the security of the South." Washington had other levers, but holding back military assistance was the most effective, said Fraser. If Park were to persist in his authoritarian course, then troop withdrawals accompanied by adequate levels of military aid represented the "last remaining option."[41]

Carter, in a handwritten message below the date on Fraser's memo, wrote: "Zbig – I wanted to meet the FM – What is the status? J."[42] His note indicated he had read the memo, at least in part, and that initially the plan may not have been for him to meet Foreign Minister Park during his visit to Washington. Even more revealing was a handwritten memo Carter sent to Brzezinski and Vance two days later. Carter asserted: "I'll see the S. Korean Foreign Minister next week. Park must understand: a) American forces will be withdrawn. Air cover will be continued. b) US-Korean relations as determined by Congress and American people are at an all time low ebb. c) Present military aid support and my reticence on human rights issue will be temporary unless Park

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

voluntarily adopts some open change re: political prisoners." [43] The president's message demonstrated he had taken Fraser's warning to heart, at least on human rights, but was forging ahead with troop withdrawals. It also continued the linkage, if still mostly rhetorical, between the two issues. Lastly, it showed a president doggedly wedded to his campaign promise on troop withdrawals yet not fully grasping its complicated interconnection with human rights or the obstacles it faced.

Although only a month and a half into the administration, by the time Foreign Minister Park arrived in Washington D.C. certain lines were already being drawn against the president's withdrawal policy. Whether it was the early confusion within the bureaucracy, circumspection among military officers, distinct unease in Seoul and Tokyo (indeed in capitals throughout the region), or fledgling opposition among groups normally supportive of Carter's human rights agenda, a set of complications was forming. The ROK Foreign Minister's visit served as a key event that brought about greater public awareness of Carter's plan and also galvanized or quickened the pace of these same complications.

Foreign Minister Park arrived in Washington carrying a memo representing the ROK's official position on troop withdrawals and what it viewed as the ideal type of consultation. After laying out the historical origins and rationale of the U.S. force presence in Korea, namely, in repelling unprovoked North Korean aggression under U.N. auspices, and its importance over the previous quarter century in the maintenance of deterrence and stability in the region, and in light of Pyongyang's ongoing sinister scheme to unify Korea under communism, the memo declared: "any unilateral and precipitous withdrawal of the United States Forces from Korea would be unwise from both tactical and psychological standpoints." Lest its larger import be missed, the

[43] "Handwritten Note from Jimmy Carter for Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance, 5 March 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 77.

memo continued: "The tension in the Korean Peninsula represents in nature the continuing struggle and competition between the East and the West." Any withdrawal must be contingent on first achieving some sort of non-aggression commitment from the North, endorsed by the international community, as well as the adoption of a clear and viable alternative to the Armistice Agreement. Furthermore, and to the point of the foreign minister's visit, it was the "firm belief" of the ROKG that "as a directly concerned party" it "should first and fully be consulted with regard to any plan of modifying the present level of United States Forces in Korea."[44] Seoul's conception was clear. Withdrawal should not even be considered until certain conditions were met, conditions requiring constructive North Korean actions, actions which Pyongyang was highly unlikely to take. Only then should U.S. force modifications be considered. For Seoul, consultations should proceed rather than follow the annunciation of the policy. Carter saw it differently.

At a press conference on the morning of March 9, even before meeting the foreign minister, Carter unilaterally announced his administration's policy. "I think that the time period as I described in the campaign months, a four- or five-year time period, is appropriate. The schedule for withdrawal of American ground troops would have to be worked out very carefully with the South Korean Government." The schedule could be hashed out with Seoul, but not the policy itself. His remarks were the first authoritative mention of a timetable for withdrawal.[45] The foreign minister learned of it by reading the newspapers, as did the ROK Minister of Defense.[46] During their afternoon meeting, in addition to reiterating his intention to complete ground combat force withdrawals on the announced timeline, Carter also emphasized Washington's deep concern on

[44] "Telegram from the U.S. Secretary of State to the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, "ROK Memorandum on Troop Withdrawal," 14 March 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 82-84.
[45] Richard Halloran, "Carter Sees Pullout From Korea By 1982: Planning Withdrawal Of American Ground Forces – U.S. Voices Concern on Human Rights," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1977.
[46] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 22.

human rights problems in Korea.[47] As reported at the time, and surely picked up by the ROKG, conversations with Administration officials and key Congressmen and their aides suggested that the U.S. commitment to South Korea would "inevitably diminish, with the Administration and Congress moving roughly in the same direction." Moreover, the growing Koreagate scandal might give Capitol Hill the impetus to push forward if the White House faltered. The same reporting made note of the ongoing internal policy review and emerging outline of policy options, with exact numbers, timing, and diplomatic elements of the plan still to be settled.[48]

Carter's overall pledge of troop withdrawals was well-known. He had made it many times publicly, and repeated it in his letter to President Park. However, the unilateral manner by which he announced it and its pre-set timeline went directly against Seoul's desires. Additionally, Carter's announced intention to withdraw from South Korea, seen as "a vital buffer against Communist powers on the mainland," threw "further fuel" on the debate in Tokyo over its defense weaknesses.[49] Carter's announcement "came as a shock" to General Vessey, to whom Carter had given his personal assurance that no withdrawal policy would be formally announced until they had first discussed the matter again. Vessey's concern was exacerbated when, around the same time, he heard from Abramowitz, a senior Pentagon civilian official, that the withdrawal policy was an announced presidential decision to be carried out faithfully by the Department of Defense.

It also once again appeared Carter was intent to dictate to the bureaucracy. For some, his precipitously announced timeline undercut their role in the examination and assessment of the policy before it was set in place. On March 7, two days before Carter met with Foreign Minister

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[47] United States White House, *Details of a meeting between South Korean Foreign Minister Pak Tong-chin and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance regarding U.S. withdrawal of ground troops from South Korea* 9 Mar. 1977. *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8rKQB5.
[48] Halloran, "Carter Sees Pullout From Korea By 1982."
[49] Andrew H. Malcolm, "Defense Weaknesses and U.S. Plan for Korea Pullout Spur Japanese Debate on Military Requirements," *The New York* Times, March 22, 1977.

Park, the JCS sent their recommendation regarding the troop withdrawal to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, communicated as part of the PRM-13 review process. General Vessey, the commander in Korea, had given his concurrence to the memo's recommendations. In the memo, contrary to Carter's announced four to five-year timeline and desire for complete removal of all combat troops, the JCS recommended the withdrawal be limited to a phased, partial reduction of U.S. ground combat forces of roughly 7,000 troops by October 1982. The feeling among the JCS was that such a limited reduction (rather than complete withdrawal) could be effectuated without "seriously degrading deterrence, adversely affecting the delicate balance on the Peninsula or disrupting regional stability." According to Army Chief of Staff General Bernard W. Rogers, the JCS took a far more cautious approach and recommended a continued evaluation of the situation throughout the period until 1982 and an evaluation at that time of the impact of the withdrawal of 7,000 personnel. In effect, Carter's March 9 announcement signaled a rejection of the JCS recommendation before it was ever even considered.[50]

If Carter's announced timeline and meeting with the ROK foreign minister garnered some public attention, and bucked the Joint Chief's recommendation, most developments related to the Korea withdrawal remained under the surface. When it came to foreign policy, both for the administration and certainly for the interested or informed public, U.S.-Soviet relations and Carter's proposal for "deep cuts" in nuclear arms, carried by Vance to Moscow in late March, garnered the lion share of interest. Nevertheless, behind closed doors the next month and a half was an eventful time as various bureaucratic elements worked out their positions on the withdrawal policy as part of the process surrounding PRM-13. Following the chaos and disbelief that characterized initial meetings, various officials started to get a sense of one another's positions and

[50] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 8.

take the reins of their respective portions of the policy review framework. There began an orchestrated effort to coordinate their positions in such a manner so as to temper what was variously seen as an overly hasty if not fundamentally flawed withdrawal program. Although such internal discussion and efforts remained mostly unknown or unknowable to outsiders, there were an assortment of public indicators that the withdrawal policy and U.S. Korea policy in general was in for some bumps ahead.

On April 12, a visiting congressional delegation met with President Park in Seoul. The group included four House Democrats on a tour of countries in the region that received U.S. military assistance. The delegation reportedly discussed the ongoing Koreagate allegations, as a result of which Park told the assembled lawmakers no "kisaeng" parties would be held for visiting lawmakers, but also covered the issues of human rights and U.S. military support. The lawmakers reiterated the Carter administration's concern for human rights, with which they agreed. However, Rep. Lester L. Wolff (D-NY) noted that the United States needed to avoid getting involved in other countries' "internal politics." Instead, it should use "only persuasion" but "no pressure." Wolff simultaneously called for continued military assistance for Seoul. South Korea was a "unique" case, Wolff remarked, in which the threats from Pyongyang appeared genuine. "If national rights of the South Korean people are destroyed, then there can be no human rights for anyone," he said, a sentiment which, the *New York Times* correctly observed, echoed the arguments of Park and his supporters.[51]

The topics of discussion presented an assortment of issues that would complicate relations between Seoul and Washington, but also bedevil Carter's withdrawal policy. Controversy over the Koreagate scandal was only just beginning to heat up. Yet no matter its inherent diplomatic and

[51] "Park Says South Korea Will End Partying for U.S. Congressmen," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1977.

legal complexities, which had no direct connection to the withdrawal program, the scandal did not exist in a vacuum. Ultimately, it could not be separated from other parts of the U.S.-ROK relationship. The same could be said regarding human rights. On the one hand, there was the need to acknowledge human rights abuses and try to persuade Seoul to address them. On the other hand, pressure had to be tempered so as to avoid an overly interventionist policy and also because the militarized divide still presented a genuine security threat.

Travelling together with the delegation from the House Committee on International Relations was Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Holbrooke was the first Carter Administration official to visit Seoul. In light of Mondale's earlier snub and the less than ideal manner with which Carter had welcomed Foreign Minister Park in Washington, Holbrooke's visit was a way to help settle some nerves and maintain a relatively stable alliance relationship amidst several potential problems. In terms of diplomatic protocol, as an assistant secretary his visit did not directly reciprocate the foreign minister's visit to Washington. Nonetheless, Holbrooke put the best spin on what most saw as an unstable state of affairs.

On human rights, Holbrooke went out of his way to downgrade the issue, saying he had not even mentioned the matter when meeting with Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin. Washington had "already expressed its concern about the human rights situation in Korea," Holbrooke remarked at a press conference. Consistent with Secretary Vance's pronouncement on military aid, Holbrooke saw the relationship as too strategically important to sacrifice over public pressure on human rights.[52] Holbrooke's views, similar to the heads of other regional bureaus at State, put him

[52] Sam Jameson, "Carter Official Sidesteps Human Rights, Praises U.S. Relations With S. Korea," *Los Angeles Time*, April 12, 1977.

directly at odds, often in a highly contested manner, with Patricia Derian, the administration's hard-charging appointee put in charge of the new cabinet-level position on human rights.

Despite the ongoing Congressional and Justice Department investigations of alleged Korean bribes of U.S. officials, and the fact that Washington and Seoul were at odds over the withdrawal, Holbrooke was optimistic about the alliance. Contrasting with how others might have characterized the situation, Holbrooke asserted: "I think our relations with the Korean government right now are very good. We have very close, continuing relations at all levels, and I am very satisfied with them right now. For me – in my work, personally – it's a great source of pleasure to be able to work closely and continually with the Republic of Korea." In regards the withdrawal, Holbrooke noted that the administration had explained the issue to Beijing, telling the Chinese in private exactly what the administration had been saying in public. However, no private contacts about the withdrawal had been made with Pyongyang and he was not sure if any had been made with Moscow. One critical way to read his remarks was that no effort was underway to situate the withdrawal within a wider diplomatic settlement, as the ROKG and others had recommended. Nevertheless, Holbrooke stressed that the administration hoped to work out details of the troop withdrawal and begin formal consultations with Seoul "sometime near the middle of the year," and that Washington would consult with South Korea before anything was actually done.[53]

On the one hand, Holbrooke's visit and remarks represented a bit of damage control. He showed a degree of sensitivity to Seoul's position on human rights and consultation. Yet, on the other hand, the assistant secretary made clear that much of the withdrawal details would be determined before consultation took place. He balanced between massaging the U.S.-ROK relationship at a troublesome moment, while adhering to Carter's line on troop withdrawals.

[53] Ibid.

Holbrooke's public stance of measured support for the withdrawal convinced many, erroneously, that he was a firm proponent of Carter's policy. His measured approach belied his otherwise activist effort behind the scenes. Indeed, by deliberate design, he publicly maintained remarkably consistent support for the withdrawal while at the same time taking on a sort of leadership role in the internal bureaucratic struggle, acting as a troubleshooter to corral the various relevant actors that had a stake in the policy.

Maintaining a measured public front without outright flare-ups against the policy was all the more important, according to Holbrooke, so as to give him space to work quietly within. He told his allies: "If you give me running room, we can turn it around. If you go on the warpath, we'll have a catastrophe."[54] According to one account, Holbrooke gradually helped "orchestrate the plot that upended the policy," keeping "his allies on a short leash." Indeed, rather than "indicating that the opponents were vanquished, the lack of a single media leak signaled that the opponents were unified."[55] Although in the Spring of 1977 his effort was only just beginning, his allies would include fellow political appointees and civilian bureaucrats throughout State, Defense and the NSC, officials within the military, and key congressional lawmakers. While there were no significant leaks surrounding the depth of the internal bureaucratic opposition, not all displeasure with Carter's policy could be tamped down. Although the most public opposition was yet to come, there were, for keen observers of the scene, indications of potential flare-ups ahead. They emanated most overtly from local American field commanders.

Within a week of Holbrooke's visit, reports emerged of the local military command's unease with Carter's policy and what some saw as the faulty logic underpinning it. An unidentified but reliable officer said they would be "very disturbed" if the withdrawal proceeded without

[54] Interview with Holbrooke, as cited in Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 148.
[55] Ibid, 147-48.

sufficient compensation for the reduction in combat power that would follow Carter's intended withdrawal of all combat troops. Such compensation, including antitank systems, helicopters, artillery and intelligence gathering capabilities, would be necessary to maintain the security of the remaining U.S. forces as well as Seoul. Increased defense spending by the South Korean government was one step, as was the addition of more U.S. air forces, but neither would be a sufficient substitute for the ground forces. "The one thing the President owes, and the Republic of Korea expects, is consultations on the whole matter, whether it's special weapons or conventional weapons," the officer said. Beyond the question of consultation was the larger effect of Carter's policy on perceptions of the American commitment. "I think the Korean listen to our words about our commitment to their defense, and then they look at our actions – and find a little difficulty rationalizing the two…There are a number of people who seriously question President Carter's moves," and that the American command shares much of Seoul's concern.[56] For all the rhetoric coming from Washington about being attuned to the local military balance, there were already indicators that it had shifted since 1971, when there was rough parity between North and South, to an imbalanced superiority for North Korea in 1977.

The officer observed that 2ID may have been mostly of political importance in the early 1970s, but the change in the balance had given it a newfound military relevance "because of what the North Koreans did in the intervening years." The physical presence of 2ID had also taken on enhanced importance as a result of the new forward, offensive defense strategy devised by Generals Hollingsworth and Stillwell. He added: "We see no lessening in (North Korean preparations for war. If Kim Il Sung thinks he can get away with it, if he thinks he can separate us from the Republic of Korea, I'm sure that given the right circumstances, he will attack." He also

[56] Sam Jameson, "U.S. Military Sees Need to Balance Korea Pullout, Officer Says," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1977.

took issue with those advocating withdrawal on the grounds that U.S. troops, stationed so close to the DMZ, would be automatically drawn into a war, giving Washington little to no time to decide whether to commit troops. Air force units, which Carter pledged to retain, would be "no less hostage." Furthermore, 2ID was already stationed far enough back of the front line so as to permit the President time to decide whether or not to commit them to battle, yet "close enough to the front for Kim Il Sung to see that he sure as hell isn't going to get to Seoul without wrestling with a few Americans."[57]

The officer's point was clear and compelling: Why alter this arrangement if remaining U.S. forces would be no less hostage to war, less prepared for it were war to occur, and present a less robust deterrent to possible North Korean aggression? These were questions and concerns voiced time and again throughout the U.S. military command as well as by key lawmakers on the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. Legislators often genuinely shared these views. However, they also had them reinforced by various study missions abroad and hearings at home, during which they interacted with local and regional commanders as well as military brass at the Pentagon. As the policy process proceeded, the two groups worked in symbiotic fashion, with the military's concerns amplified by a growing number of skeptical congressional voices. In truth, though, such criticisms were not new. General Vessey himself was on record saying the withdrawal would decrease deterrence and likely increase the chance of war. Despite the anonymous nature of the criticism, it foreshadowed more overt and contentious opposition to come.

Indeed, around the same time as the aforementioned reports regarding the local command's concerns, Lt. General John Cushman, Commander of I Corps (US/ROK) Group in South Korea, returned to Washington to brief Secretary of Defense Brown and other senior military officials on

[57] Ibid.

recent war gaming results. The same intelligence of increased North Korean military capabilities cited by the anonymous military officer had led to initiation of the war gaming studies. In addition to a more robust threat, the studies revealed decreased warning times for U.S. and ROK forces in the event of a North Korean invasion.[58] The local command's concerns were generally shared by higher-level military officials. They represented just one of several salient reasons participants involved gave for strongly doubting the wisdom of Carter's policy. Yet such skepticism remained mostly behind-the-scenes.

The East Asian Informal

Before turning to these internal discussions, it is important to shed light on the backgrounds and thinking of three key bureaucratic personnel involved, each of whom played a definitive role in the internal process. Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Morton Abramowitz, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Michael Armacost, the senior staff member for East Asia on the National Security Council made up a particularly important coterie of bureaucratic infighters. From early on they came together and as the policy process ensued, they would play a definitive role in the actual formation, implementation, and obstruction of Carter's withdrawal policy.[59] Their respective institutional positions, backgrounds and perspectives, and the informal coordination mechanism they devised proved crucial to the overall process.

Unlike their respective superiors, Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Brown, and NSA Brzezinski, they could intently focus on their one regional area rather than the overall scope of U.S. foreign policy interests. Whereas Secretary Vance grappled with multiple, wide-

[58] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 8-9.
[59] Interview with Hurwitz, in: "Korea: Country Reader," 695.

ranging issues and demands on any given day, some planned, some suddenly emergent, the scope of Holbrooke's responsibility was far more limited. He and his staff could concentrate on a smaller set of issues in a more intensive manner. Relatedly, in their regional focus they were responsible for the formation and implementation of policy, based on directives issued from the principles. Although tasked with faithfully executing the broad policy orders they were given, their mid-level position permitted, indeed required, that they construct the policy in a more detailed fashion to make it practicable. This allowed them space to structure the policy in manner that could conceivably attenuate what they felt were overly hasty measures. Put simply, their bureaucratic position and professional expertise allowed them to channel and mitigate politically-driven policies.

Together they formed a triangular network, embedded within the most important foreign policy and national security institutions within the U.S. government. Holbrooke at State, Abramowitz at Defense, and Armacost at the White House, each was a key node in their own administrative hierarchy. Together, they coordinated the process within and across their respective institutional bailiwicks. Their proximity to the principles above as well as their supervision of lower-level staff gave them a particularly advantageous vantage point. Strictly speaking, they did not control the process, but they exerted considerable influence over it.

When tapped to be the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Richard Holbrooke was only 36 years old. He was the youngest person ever to be appointed to the position. In fact, initially his youth was one of several reasons why people did not know what to make of him. However, he was appointed to the role because of his already considerable experience both in and outside of government, understanding of the policymaking process, and extensive relationships throughout the U.S. government and among the informed public. Before joining

Carter's campaign and then administration, Holbrooke had worked as a journalist and policy analyst and, more importantly, in the foreign service, including ten years of experience, from work in the field in Vietnam to the highest reaches of the U.S. government in Washington.

While an undergraduate at Brown University, Holbrooke majored in History and worked tirelessly as a writer and editor on the staff of the *Brown Daily Herald*, during which time he threw himself into the coverage of foreign affairs. The highlight of his experience was a trip to cover the abortive Four Power Summit in 1960 in Paris, where Charles de Gaulle was supposed to host Dwight Eisenhower, Nikita Khrushchev, and U.K. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Despite the dissolution of the summit, Holbrooke was able to briefly rub elbows with idols of his, such as the *New York Times*' Abe Rosenthal and Scotty Reston as well as the *Times*' assistant managing editor Clifton Daniel. Holbrooke's energy and demeanor so impressed Daniel that he secured a position on the *Times* staff for the duration of the summit, which he later parlayed into a position as a copyboy and clerk at the *Times*' between his junior and senior years.[60]

Upon graduation in 1962, Holbrooke was sworn into the U.S. Foreign Service. He was inspired to join the service, in part, by Dean Rusk, the father of his childhood best friend and then President Kennedy's Secretary of State. For his first assignment, he served as a Rural Affairs representative in Vietnam, assigned to a dangerous province in the southern portion of the Mekong Delta. In his area of responsibility, he was tasked with expanding the so-called strategic hamlet program, a key element of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort. Although Holbrooke believed the Kennedy administration's optimistic line on the war, it did not take long for his time in the Mekong Delta to undermine that belief. He also developed close relationships with other officials and

[60] For Holbrooke's background as a journalist, see: E. Benjamin Skinner, "Reporting Truth to Power," in *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke in the World*, ed. Derek Chollet and Samantha Power (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 44-57.

journalists in the area, whose assessments he found to more accurately reflect conditions on the ground, shorn as they were of the official optimism of the embassy in Saigon and official circles back in Washington.

After three years in the provinces, he moved to the embassy in 1965. Over a two-year period in the capitol, he was an aide to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and then Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, and also served in a unique assignment as special assistant to Deputy Ambassador William Porter Jr., with responsibility for civilian military affairs in support of U.S. counterinsurgency operations; all of this by the age of 25. In 1966, Holbrooke returned to Washington. In addition to his official responsibilities, Holbrooke became an instant hit among Beltway correspondents, with whom he began to form a mutually beneficial and life-long association. To them, he was more than just a bureaucrat, having actually spent more than three years in Vietnam, the country that dominated foreign policy discussion throughout the decade.[61]

Officially, Holbrooke was appointed as a special assistant to President Jonson's Deputy National Security Advisor, Robert W. Kromer. That year Johnson created a special office within the White House focused on coordinating military and non-military operations in Vietnam, with Kromer appointed to lead the effort. As Kromer's assistant, Holbrooke demonstrated the same forceful energy and adroit maneuvering among his various connections that would be his hallmark in the Carter years and throughout the remainder of his career. Komer's nickname was the "blowtorch," and Holbrooke became known as the blowtorch to the blowtorch. "It was extraordinary," recalled Peter Rosenblatt, who worked with Holbrooke on the small White House team, "Dick was only in his twenties but he already knew everyone throughout the entire government." Another associate, Frank Wisner, remembered of Holbrooke at that time: "He could

[61] For Holbrooke's background in the foreign service and Vietnam, see: Gordon M. Goldstein, "Richard Holbrooke and the Vietnam War: Past and Prologue," in Ibid, 76-95.

identify the pressure points and move them by whatever means necessary, including coercion and bullying." This included his first interaction with Leslie Gelb, then a foreign policy advisor to Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY), during which Holbrooke demanded an audience with the Senator while standing in the senator's waiting room. Gelb diffused the situation, and the two walked outside and talked about the political and military problems in Vietnam for two hours. Thus began forty-five year friendship, during which Gelb would himself move between jobs in government and the press, including alongside Holbrooke during the Carter administration. [62]

By late 1967, Holbrooke had been recruited to serve as the principal Vietnam policy advisor to Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, the State Department's second-most influential voice on Vietnam, behind Dean Rusk. In that role he managed interagency coordination among State, Defense, the JCS, CIA, and the White House from September 1967 to June 1968. It was also during this period that he drafted part of the Pentagon Papers. Holbrooke's portion provided a history and critique of the American pacification or counterinsurgency program in Vietnam. In fact, it was Gelb who recruited Holbrooke to write the chapter. Gelb had since moved over to the Department of Defense as an international security specialist in the office of Secretary of Defense McNamara. Gelb was responsible for identifying the most talented minds in the military and diplomatic circles of the U.S. government to prepare the comprehensive analytical history. Gelb noted that Holbrooke's portion was "far and away the most idiosyncratic volume of the whole study." Soon thereafter, Holbrooke took on his last assignment as the youngest member of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, led by Averill Harriman. Philip Habib, already a highly respected diplomatic, who had worked with Holbrooke in Saigon, gave the latter the

[62] Ibid, 88.

somewhat nebulous title of "expert" so as to give him a seat at the table, much to the confusion of their Vietnamese interlocutors.[63]

Following the failure of the peace talks and the election of Richard Nixon that fall, Holbrooke resigned from State several months later. Holbrooke went on to a mid-career fellowship at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and served as the Director of the Peace Corp in Morocco for two years. He returned to the United States in 1972 and left the foreign service after a decade in government. Soon afterwards Holbrooke became the managing editor of the then upstart magazine *Foreign Policy*, an experience he would later call "among the most important in my life and my career." Professor Samuel Huntington, who had helped start the magazine in 1970 and remembered Holbrooke from his time at Princeton, convinced him to take the reins following the sudden death of Joseph Campbell, the magazine's first editor. [64]

Holbrooke's time managing *Foreign Policy* was important for an assortment of reasons. To begin with, it gave him the opportunity to deepen his relationship with the press and policy analyst community unrestrained by an official government position. The magazine was widely read in Washington, New York and other outposts of the foreign policy establishment, and its editorial board was intentionally made up of younger experts, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Cooper, Stanley Hoffman, David Halberstam, and Morton Halperin. They also generally drew their contributions from a younger generation. Moreover, *Foreign Policy*, like Holbrooke himself, was for those who were at least momentarily out of power.[65] As a result, Holbrooke was able to examine some of the larger questions facing U.S. foreign policy from a far more

[63] Ibid, 89-92.
[64] Skinner, "Reporting Truth to Power," 54.
[65] Aaron Latham, "Carter's Little Kissingers," *New York Magazine*, December 13, 1976, 96.

unencumbered perspective. Like many others in the establishment, for Holbrook the "searing experience of the United States faltering" in Vietnam "taught a rigor and discipline in evaluating the limits of American power," fostering "a cautionary narrative of the risk of strategic overextension."[66] As mentioned in the first chapter, Holbrooke demonstrated as much in his September 1975 article, "Escaping the Domino Trap," in *New York Times Magazine*, in which he thoroughly and thoughtfully examined the state of U.S. policy in Asia following withdrawal from Southeast Asia and *rapprochement* with China.

Not long after Holbrooke wrote the article he would begin the process of joining Carter's campaign. As one contemporary account noted: "Holbrooke is a point where many lines cross. He is on the Trilateral Commission, like so many other Carter advisers. But he is also the managing editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine, from which he took a leave of absence to work to get Carter elected. Most other experts whom Carter has consulted more than once have written for *Foreign Policy*." Holbrooke appeared to have first crossed paths with Carter in Kyoto, Japan, during the Georgia Governor's trip there in the Spring of 1975 as part of the Trilateral Commission's plenary meeting.[67] As explored previously, it was during this trip Carter started to roll out and slightly adjust his fledgling policy ideas on Korea. However, in was not until early 1976 that Holbrooke moved toward the Carter camp.

Initially a supporter of Sargent Shriver in the 1976 campaign, Holbrooke changed course following a lively four-hour dinner in Washington with Candidate Carter and several other elite Washington journalists in January 1976. Holbrooke later described Carter as surprisingly calm and intellectually curious. At the end of the evening, Carter told the assembled guests he would like their help. The next day Holbrooke called Carter's office and offered it. He went on to provide

[66] Goldstein, "Richard Holbrooke and the Vietnam War: Past and Prologue," 93-94.
[67] Latham, "Carter's Little Kissingers," 96.

foreign policy advice to the campaign over the winter. He joined a Carter foreign-policy task force in the spring, and in July of 1976 got a call to come to Atlanta to head the team coordinating defense and foreign policy issues for the campaign. In short, although he was steeped in the ways of Washington and the inter-workings of the government bureaucracy and foreign service, Holbrooke reentered the fray as an appointee to a political campaign after several years critiquing U.S. policy from the outside.[68]

Morton Abramowitz, contrary to Holbrooke, had remained in government since he first entered. Eight years older than Holbrooke, Abramowitz joined the Foreign Service in 1960, after having served in the U.S. Army. His first assignments took him to Taiwan and Hong Kong where he served, respectively, as an economic and political officer. In 1966 he returned to Washington as a special assistant in the Economic Bureau at State, and in 1968 he became a junior staff member on the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG). SIG, part of the undersecretary of state's office, was established to study the U.S. military relationship with South Korea. Abramowitz recalled that at that time there was increasing unhappiness with Park Chung Hee, and the working group started with an examination of the Pentagon's requirements for the defense of South Korea. It was chaired by a representative from Defense, Earl Ravenel, a deputy assistant secretary in the Office of System Analysis in the Pentagon.[69]

However, Abramowitz group was combined with another working group created because of the *Pueblo* incident in January of 1968. The combined effort was led by Joe Yager and was responsible for a study of the general American defense posture toward South Korea; a direct result of Cyrus Vance's trip to Seoul as a special representative of President Johnson following the North

[68] For account of the dinner and Holbrooke's move to formally join Carter's campaign see: ibid; see also, Skinner, "Reporting Truth to Power," 54.
[69] Interview with Abramowitz, 384.

Korean commando raid on the Blue House and the seizure of the *Pueblo* days later. James Leonard, the Country Director of the Korea Desk at the time, remembered that Vance recommended the study be conducted by people who had little to do with Korea, so that they would not have in-built prejudices.[70] Abramowitz was thus directly involved in the first intensive review of U.S. policy toward Korea in more than a decade.

Participants in SIG felt Washington must begin to focus on the real potential for sudden escalation on the Korean Peninsula and immediate American involvement. The consensus was that American forces should be gradually withdrawn and more of the defense burden passed onto Seoul. The thinking was bolstered by the fact that participation in the Vietnam War had so soured the American public it would not support further U.S. involvement overseas, particularly in Asia. As examined above, in the short-term the review had no practical effect due to the presidential election cycle and turnover in administrations, but it did force the higher levels of the U.S. government to begin to grapple with the troublesome realities and questions surrounding the U.S. military presence in Korea. That said, the policy review was picked up by Nixon and Kissinger and formed the basis for their own review and eventual withdrawal of 7ID in 1971. At the time, Abramowitz agreed with the consensus and supported Nixon's withdrawals, and, as he later admitted, "as the junior member of the SIG working group, I went along with the views of my seniors, who felt stronger than me." However, while on sabbatical from 1971 to 1972 at the Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS) in London, Abramowitz began to rethink the matter.[71]

According to Abramowitz, he "took another look at the situation and came to a different conclusion, namely, that the presence of American troops in Korea was essential to the maintenance of stability on the Korean Peninsula and the achievement of long-range goals of peace

[70] Interview with James F. Leonard, 387.
[71] Interview with Abramowitz, 386.

and eventually unification." Moreover, he added, part of the reason for his change of view was that the U.S. domestic situation had changed, and since 1968 he "had gained considerable experience and knowledge and could strike out on my own." While at ISS, he wrote an Adelphi paper, "Moving the Glacier," which generated "quite a stir," may have influenced some policymakers, and got a lot of attention and praise in Seoul. The thesis was straightforward: "I noted that the long-range answer to the tensions on the peninsula – however remote – was a North-South dialogue leading eventually to a peace agreement and unification. I took the position that the withdrawal of our troops was inimical to the achievement of that long-range goal because it reduced any incentive the North might have in coming to the negotiating table." In sum, the remaining U.S. troop presence was essential for stability in Korea and only inter-Korean negotiations could foster the conditions necessary for further disengagement. Abramowitz also wrote and spoke about the importance of the peninsular presence for wider regional stability.[72]

Following his sabbatical, Abramowitz returned to government duty where he had his views reinforced at both State and Defense. In 1972, he was the Director of the East Asia Division of the Bureau of Research and Intelligence (INR). The next year he served at Defense, as a Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary of Defense, Elliot Richardson, who was on record as being opposed to further Korean withdrawals. Then from 1973 to 1974, he was the Political Advisor to the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Command. Finally, in 1974 he returned to the Pentagon to serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, in the office of International Security Assistance (ISA).

As shown above, Abramowitz was actively involved in the Ford Administration's ongoing attempts to reassess and reorient U.S. Asia policy following Vietnam and during the drawn-out

[72] Ibid.

withdrawal from Southeast Asia. While Holbrooke examined the issues at a comfortable distance with a more critical eye from his perch at *Foreign Policy*, Abramowitz worked in the policy trenches and adopted a firm stance, consistent with his earlier re-thinking of the issue. As far as Korea went, no further withdrawals should occur. He actively worked to shut down discussion about restarting an internal review of U.S. force levels in the Ford Administration's final months and was clearly against Carter's campaign pledges on the matter. He hoped political campaign rhetoric would quickly fall away once confronted by professional opposition and policy realities.

Michael Armacost was the third member of this important group. Like Abramowitz, he was also a bit older than Holbrooke and had remained in government since joining. However, he was recruited to the Foreign Service out of academia, entering it well after both Abramowitz and Holbrooke. After a year teaching at the International Christian Academy in Tokyo, Armacost became a staff member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, where he served as an Asia specialist from 1969 to 1972. After a brief two-year stint as a special assistant to the U.S. Ambassador in Tokyo, Robert S. Ingersoll, he returned to policy planning from 1974 until 1977, at which point he was recruited by Zbigniew Brzezinski, through his Chief of Staff Rick Inderfurth, to become a senior staff member for East Asia at NSC.[73]

Armacost shared Abramowitz's thinking regarding the 1971 withdrawal under Nixon and agreed with the theory behind the Nixon Doctrine. "I was for the logic of having countries taking on the responsibilities for themselves, getting help when they needed it but not turning over the primary responsibility to others," he reflected. Similar to Abramowitz, Armacost observed the inertia that underpinned most official thinking on Korea before Nixon's shift in policy, insofar as "people, at least people in the government, tended to have a stake in maintaining an arrangement

[73] Michael Armacost, interview by the author, July 3, 2018.

that worked, even though it meant we were kind of over-extended." Nevertheless, he did not remember huge controversy about the withdrawal under Nixon, whereas "there was a lot more in the case of the second division." Armacost, like Abramowitz, had by the mid-1970s come to appreciate the wider regional importance of the local Korean deployment, and understood the defensiveness of many within the bureaucracy to Carter's campaign pledge to withdraw the remaining combat forces.[74]

Speaking about himself and Abramowitz and others already serving in the bureaucracy when Carter arrived on the scene, Armacost remembered a fair degree of collective suspicion: "Nobody was that keen on another round of Korean troop withdrawals. They were extremely skeptical about Carter, and people in those positions tend to be skeptical of things that emerge out of campaigns because they are professionals and their job is to try to come up with professional views, and the political scene throws up a lot of stuff, but it isn't necessarily very professional. It's political." Like others around him, Armacost believed that, once elected, Carter's rhetoric would dissipate, and the bureaucrats' professional knowledge would temper the political impulses borne of the campaign. Yet initially doubt persisted. The doubt extended to their new colleague Richard Holbrooke, who, after all, was a political appointee. He had come directly out of the campaign, and played a lead role coordinating its foreign policy positions.[75]

It was not only civilian bureaucrats who viewed Holbrooke with skepticism. Holbrooke's youth and brashness, and the perception of him as a dove on Vietnam led William Safire, just starting his career at the *New York Times*, to peg him as a leading member of "the new boy network." The group was made of several young men, most of whom had met in Vietnam and were now moving into real positions of power and influence under Carter. They included Tony

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

Lake, director of policy planning at State; Leslie Gelb, assistant secretary for political-military affairs; Peter Tarnoff, essentially Secretary of State Vance's chief of staff; and Richard Moose, assistant secretary of state for Africa. To one degree or another, each of them were critics of the Vietnam War. The image of dovishness was enhanced, of course, because Carter was viewed by the American foreign policy establishment as soft on foreign policy. In practice, however, Holbrooke and Gelb were more hardline than Carter. Still, early on the opposite perception held.[76]

In fact, Holbrooke's perceived position on Korea was one of the issues that confirmed such a suspicion about his apparent dovishness. The skepticism was understandable. Holbrooke coordinated the Carter campaign's foreign and defense policy, and in his many campaign speeches and interviews Carter left little doubt about his position on Korea and future withdrawals. Moreover, Holbrooke himself, in his September 1975 piece for the *New York Times Magazine*, had taken the position that withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Korea should be an eventual U.S. objective. However, such was not a particularly remarkable view; most observers felt it was inevitable and many officials actively promoted it. Furthermore, in the piece Holbrooke was clear that any withdrawal likely would not and should not occur anytime soon. His was a thoughtful analysis weighing the various considerations and complexities that would attend any future withdrawal.

At the outset, though, Holbrooke's new colleagues and staff were not entirely clear where he stood. It did not take long for them to discover that their views on the matter were mostly in concert. William Gleysteen, selected as Holbrooke's deputy, remembered their first meeting: "I was especially curious about his views on normalizing relations with China, the Korean problem, and American steadfastness in Asia. We seemed in basic agreement." He continued:

[76] Richard Bernstein, "Restoring America's Role in Asia," in *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke in the World*, ed. Derek Chollet and Samantha Power (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 122.

> To my relief, he emphatically denied rumors that he was responsible for Carter's ideas on troop withdrawal. We both assumed that Carter would have to modify his position once he faced realities as president of the United States. When we reviewed East Asian matters with secretary of state designate Cyrus Vance before Carter's inauguration, he also seemed to agree. All of us assumed that the president would be willing to examine the effect in and around the Korean peninsula before carrying out his pledge.[77]

Michael Armacost shared a similar story. Holbrooke's "earlier views on the subject weren't clear to us or at least to me," but that from the time they first met in January 1977 "whatever his previous views had been, he and Mort and I generally had a common approach to these issues and that was very helpful when you have interagency agreement at that level." Although Armacost recollected that "Dick came with a little more open a mind on" the troop withdrawal and his "early convictions on this issue were a little cloudy because they came during the campaign in which we weren't engaged," he was persuadable and his views shifted.[78] Richard Bernstein, in a chapter on Holbrooke's role in Asian affairs, put it succinctly: "in any early confrontation of his theoretical idealism and practical reality, he soon changed his mind and joined what became almost a conspiracy among the leading members of the administration's foreign policy team to get the president to back off the idea." Peter Tarnoff and Abramowitz later described Holbrooke as an early and, indeed, leading member of a bureaucracy intent to temper Carter's impulses.[79] Once in office, Holbrooke, all but denied the *New York Times Magazine* piece's existence, made Gelb promise not to mention it to anyone, and was so touchy about it that Gelb had to stop kidding him.[80]

Formally, the interagency process included Holbrooke at State, Abramowitz at Defense, and Armacost at the National Security Council in the White House, and others at the CIA, Arms

[77] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 18-19.
[78] Interview with Armacost.
[79] Bernstein, "Restoring America's Role in Asia," 124; interview with Abramowitz, 642.
[80] Packer, *Our Man*, ch.6, Kindle.

Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), and the JCS as well. As noted, they were tasked with determining how to carry out Carter's campaign pledge on the Korean withdrawal, not to determine whether or not it should be done. Armacost, like others, recalled that the initial "discussion was set by the President's comments during the campaign," but "we had dealt with the Korean issue before so people had convictions that had been derived before the campaign." On the one hand, the consensus feeling was disagreement with the thrust of Carter's position, yet, on the other hand, they were compelled to do their jobs. Armacost continued: "And, so you wind up, if you are working over in the White House particularly…you're working for the president and so whatever comes out of campaigns, it's part of your job to see that it gets reasonably considered in the interagency discussion. But it doesn't mean you necessarily rally to the views that were expressed for political rather than foreign policy reasons."[81] Their best course of action, no matter how strongly they opposed Carter's position – in fact because they opposed it – was to remain engaged in the process to best influence the policy.[82] However, the interagency process was hardly innovative. Across administrations, it was the standard process by which complex policies were reviewed, formulated and implemented, particularly when their component parts fell under the jurisdiction of various departments and agencies, as any troop withdrawal from Korea clearly did.

Just as important as the formal interagency process, if not more so, was the informal mechanism the participants developed. Early on in the administration, Holbrooke spearheaded the creation of what became known as the East Asian Informal (E.A. Informal). Every Monday, Holbrooke, Abramowitz, and Armacost, and sometimes Gleysteen (and later others) would meet in Holbrooke's office at State to discuss and coordinate their respective department's efforts. Initially jarred by the politically-driven and seemingly hasty nature of Carter's policy instructions

[81] Interview with Armacost.
[82] Ibid; Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 33.

on the withdrawal, they acclimated themselves to its implementation, and the informal process was of immense assistance. Once they had established the basic consonance of their views, Holbrooke, Abramowitz and Armacost found interagency agreement much less cumbersome. The small size of the group and their longtime friendship also helped. It was "very helpful when you have interagency agreement at that level…when you have a common view there you can do pretty well with the principals," Armacost said. He added: "We each could manage our bosses reasonably well because I am sure each bore in mind the range of views each boss, one's boss had, because you had to deliver the boss for anything that was going to fly."[83]

Fortunately for them, most of the principles were uneasy about if not opposed to Carter's stance on the withdrawal. "Vance supported as fully," and "we knew through Deputy Assistant Defense Morton Abramowitz that Secretary of Defense Brown and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with us," wrote Gleysteen.[84] While Vance had written to Candidate Carter in October 1976 that, "I believe that it is correct to work toward the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces," he emphasized it should be done on a "phased basis." In his memoir, Vance acknowledged that he, Brown and others felt distinct apprehension about the policy as conceived by Carter.[85] For his part, Secretary Brown held a similarly conflicted view. As he remembered, he "had defended the Carter position during the campaign," but "did not think it was a very good idea." He "thought a tolerable argument could be made for it," especially considering "the South Koreans had clearly gotten stronger, and economically they were pulling away from the North even then."[86] Still, Brown felt "the timing was wrong." Like Vance, his disagreement was not "of principle" but of

[83] Interview with Armacost.
[84] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 24.
[85] Vance, *Hard Choices*, 129.
[86] Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge 1977-1981*. U.S. Government Official ed. Secretaries of Defense Historical Series; Volume 9 (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017) 378-379.

the "degree and timing" of the withdrawal. [87] Consequently, he did not allow "any daylight between the president and myself," but did not prevent others from working against it. Abramowitz said that he "was totally against the withdrawal and early on made my opposition known to my new boss," Secretary Brown. He added that Brown knew what he, Holbrooke and Armacost were doing to rally opposition to Carter's policy and did not obstruct their efforts.[88]

By mid-April, the interagency review for PRM-13 was complete. On April 21, the Policy Review Committee (PRC), chaired by Secretary Vance, met in the White House Situation Room from 3:00 to 4:00 pm in order to discuss Korea and weigh each department's position on the troop withdrawal, including preferred timelines and conditions for its implementation. National Security Advisor Brzezinski, his deputy David Aaron, and Armacost represented the NSC; Vance, Holbrooke and Habib the State Department; Secretary Harold Brown, Deputy Secretary Charles Duncan, Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs David McGiffert, and Abramowitz the Defense Department; Gen. George S. Brown and Lt. Gen. William Smith the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral Stansfield Turner the CIA; Secretary Blumenthal and C. Fred Bergsten the Treasury Department; Bert Lance and Edward R. Jayne the Office of Management and Budget; and Paul Warnke and Marvin Humphreys the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA).[89]

There was "general agreement" among the participants on the Intelligence Community's (IC) assessment that Pyongyang enjoyed a substantial advantage in the static military balance over Seoul, without the addition of U.S. forces. However, the "prevailing view" was that American ground combat forces could be withdrawn from South Korea "without undermining the deterrent, provided our troops are withdrawn slowly, we offer substantial assistance to the Republic of Korea

[87] Brown and Winslow, *Star Spangled Security*, 171-173.
[88] Interview with Abramowitz, 639-640
[89] "Policy Review Committee Meeting, "Korea," 21 April 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 98-100.

in augmenting its firepower and overcoming other deficiencies in its defenses, consult closely with the South Koreans and Japan on this issue, and remain prepared to provide air, naval, and logistic support for the foreseeable future." Sounding a distinct note of caution, though, "several participants" in the meeting "raised the question as to whether the potential risks -- given the inherent uncertainties -- might exceed the benefits of full-scale withdrawal of ground troops." In addition to the assistant and deputy secretaries, those unnamed dissenters were Secretary of Defense Brown, Stansfield Turner, and most likely JCS Chairman Gen. George Brown. Harold Brown later told OSD historians that "the two people who were negative about it were Stan Turner and me," perhaps forgetting about CJCS Brown's known opposition.[90] As they had already expressed before the PRC meeting, various officials believed a proper cost-benefit analysis had yet to occur, which was essential when undoing such a longstanding arrangement as U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula.

Regarding ground force withdrawal options: "No one favored a quick withdrawal of all ground combat and combat support forces. All agreed that we should allow ourselves some flexibility with regard to the timing of the later stages of our withdrawals in order to take the political and military situation into account." More specifically, State leaned towards a five-year, three stage process, with one brigade to be withdrawn in 1978, with a simultaneous announcement that further withdrawals would occur on a phased basis – the second brigade in FY 79 or 80, the third in FY 82.[91] One anonymous Pentagon participant said State, with its position on the PRM, "rolled over" and simply accepted Carter's decision.[92] State's position did align with the

[90] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 720-721, endnote 7.
[91] "Policy Review Committee Meeting, "Korea," 21 April 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 98-100
[92] Hayes, *Pacific Powerkeg*, 141.

president's announced five-year timeline for withdrawal, but by phasing it after the initial withdrawal of the first brigade, it allowed space for later reconsideration.

Defense, consistent with the JCS recommendation cited above, favored back-loading the withdrawal, removing the first brigade and support units in 1978, but postponing removal of the other to brigades until 1982. "This," Defense felt, "is mere prudence, would give US the best chance of retaining operational control of ROK forces during the transitional period of our troop withdrawals, and be mare protective of the U. S. ground forces remaining." ACDA provided the most conservative recommendation, favoring early withdrawal of 700 personnel "with subsequent withdrawals contingent on a reduction in tension." ACDA was against any process requiring injection of more advanced weaponry or that might spur a local or regional arms race. OMB was agnostic other than indicating the necessity for a more precise accounting of the budget implications of each alternative. Lastly, the NSC favored withdrawal of two combat brigades by 1980 (similar to State), while leaving future plans regarding the third and final brigade "intentionally vague for the time being."[93]

Questions were also raised about the importance of OPCON and whether the United States could retain it under the several withdrawal options being considered. The participants determined the subject required further study, with detailed analysis of the cost and benefits of preserving U.S. OPCON as well as formulating alternative command arrangements. There was also some difference among the principles "concerning the desirability of describing withdrawal plans publicly in terms of broad aggregate numbers or in terms of brigades and appropriate support elements."[94] The issue of operational control as well as how to frame the withdrawal, whether in terms of the overall number of troops versus the type and number of units, went back to Nixon's

[93] "Policy Review Committee Meeting, "Korea," 21 April 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 98-100
[94] Ibid.

1971 removals. The two issues were ultimately intertwined as the Carter administration finalized the withdrawal program over the next several months. By framing the withdrawal in the number of brigades (even if in practice those brigades were undermanned), would allow Washington to stretch out its retention of OPCON, an option preferred by the JCS as well as local U.S. commanders.

In terms of the timing and methods of consultation, it was determined that Ambassador Sneider and General Vessey could initiate consultations in Seoul as soon as a Presidential decision was made, but that President Park would essentially be *informed* of the first stage of the withdrawals; and "we would consult with them regarding an appropriate package of compensatory measures, future command arrangements, and, possibly, the phasing of subsequent ground force withdrawals." Congressional leaders "should be informed of the President's decision just prior to discussions with the South Koreans," but one "unresolved problem involves the question of when and how to approach Congress on a possible compensatory package."[95]

Considering all of the above, the participants agreed that each department and agency needed to develop (by June 1) more detailed proposals regarding these various issues, and the net risks and benefits of the troop withdrawal needed "to be set forth more clearly in the inter-agency paper before Presidential decisions are reached." Holbrooke, chair of the interagency group on East Asia, would undertake such an assessment. Again, there was evident unease with the speed of the decision, and all agreed on the importance of holding a full NSC meeting to discuss "this major issue."[96] The meeting and presidential decision would come much faster and forcefully than some would have preferred. Gleysteen remembered the consensus was to somehow persuade Carter to accept a policy option that would consist of a withdrawal of a largely symbolic number

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

of ground combat forces along with a larger number of noncombat units, followed by a careful review of the situation before any further withdrawals.[97] Nevertheless, despite the preference for the slowest option, Carter overruled most his principles and their staffs when confronted with the matter.

On April 27, a week after the PRC meeting, the full NSC met, chaired by Carter himself. Carter reaffirmed his original idea to remove all ground combat forces within four to five years, starting in 1978. The withdrawal would include provision of military assistance, continued deployment of U.S. air units in Korea, and close consultations with Seoul. However, Carter added, unless President Park demonstrates a commitment to human freedoms, it will be difficult to secure and sustain adequate support from Capitol Hill for military assistance to Seoul. Although Washington would remain faithful to the treaty commitment to the ROK, "if a conflict were to occur requiring US intervention, we could expect no more public support than previous Administrations enjoyed in the last stages of the Vietnam war." The principles all concurred "the withdrawal of ground forces over four or five years could be managed without upsetting the military balance on the peninsula," yet a "variety of concerns and caveats…were expressed about the timing and modalities of the withdrawal process." Such reservations were not new, but the full NSC meeting presented one of the first opportunities to squarely present them to the president.[98]

Carter's principle advisors, Brown, Vance and even Brzezinski urged the president to allow for some flexibility in the case of "unforeseen changes in the political/military situation, and to preserve diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis Pyongyang and/or Seoul." Carter listened intently but then

[97] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 24.
[98] United States National Security Council, *Summary of the 4/27/77 National Security Council (NSC) meeting on South Korean issues. Topics include: plans for the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from South Korea; provisions for U.S. military assistance to South Korea; status of South Korean human rights performance* 27 Apr. 1977. *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*. http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8iXob2.

went against their advice, arguing that any indication that Washington was not removing its ground forces could lead Park to increase tensions on the Korean peninsula to forestall further withdrawals.[99] Secretary Brown emphasized the importance of offsetting the withdrawal through the provision of equipment and firepower transfers to the ROK forces. Vice President Mondale noted that despite the relative equanimity which Tokyo had publicly displayed, it could not conceal its "serious apprehensions" about the policy. He emphasized keeping close communication with the Japanese government. Brzezinski and Vance remained mostly mum on further reservations they may have felt at the time.[100] However, both Vance and Brown later observed that on the several occasions when they directly broached the subject with Carter the president remained insistent.

Gen. George Brown expressed his concern that the withdrawal would lead to "the loss of operational control over ROK forces," which would "diminish our ability to shape the ROK response to incidents, to keep track of developments within the South Korean military, and to coordinate air and ground combat in a conflict." His suggestion, rather than speaking about specific numbers of troops, was that Washington instead refer to its forces as a "division minus," so as to enhance chances of retaining OPCON "as long as possible." CIA Director Stanfield Turner, in addition to his concern about IC assessments of an enhanced North Korean threat, felt that the withdrawal would inevitably feed the perception that "U.S. power and strategic resolve" were receding in the region. No offsetting measures – whether careful phasing or provision of military assistance – would mitigate "Asian uncertainties about our power and will."[101] Concrete, physical drawdowns, no matter how they were packaged, had psychological effects. Contrary to Gleysteen

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] *Summary of the 4/27/77 National Security Council (NSC) meeting on South Korean issues*

and others' hopes, Brzezinski refused to go along with the other principles.[102] Aside from stressing a certain degree of flexibility, Zbig favored the NSC's previously mentioned option: withdrawal of two brigades by 1979 or 1980, leaving subsequent intentions for the third and final brigade "vague for the time being." Although Carter rendered no final decision at the meeting, he provided marching orders for his several advisors and their departments to follow.[103]

A special envoy needed to be appointed in order to begin early consultations with President Park in Seoul. While Carter mentioned Vice President Mondale or Gen. George Brown as possible candidates, Vance would provide his final recommendations in the next few days. The emissary's mission was to reassure Park of the firmness of the U.S. treaty commitment, elicit Park's views on phasing of withdrawals (beyond the first phase) and necessary military upgrades, and "quietly reiterate" U.S. concerns about human rights; but "the latter issue should not be the primary focus of discussion." The collective feeling was that a link between human rights and strategic considerations and military assistance should be avoided, yet President Carter felt such a linkage, due to Park's own actions within South Korea, might ultimately be unavoidable. In addition to appointing an emissary, in the coming weeks the State Department was to develop proposals for handling the public and Congressional elements of the withdrawal policy. The CIA would analyze Asian perceptions of U.S. intentions as a result of the withdrawal policy, and State, the Defense Department and NSC would develop proposals to deal with such regional perceptions and mitigate their negative consequences. Lastly, Secretary Brown and Defense were tasked within two weeks to draw up detailed proposals for scheduling troop withdrawals and offsetting measures.[104]

[102] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 24.
[103] *Summary of the 4/27/77 National Security Council (NSC) meeting on South Korean issues*
[104] Ibid.

Two days after the full NSC meeting, while an official Presidential decision had yet to be issued, Holbrooke publicly reiterated the administration's stance, saying the United States was reviewing its entire military policy in Korea, including the American "nuclear umbrella." The president, said Holbrooke, "has decided he wants to withdraw the U.S. forces from South Korea over a four- to five-year period in a careful way, with concomitant help to the South Korean forces at the same time."[105] Despite his internal opposition to the policy, Holbrooke's public remarks understandably led outside observers to the conclusion that he was himself a firm supporter of Carter's stance.

Meanwhile, Secretary Brown already had gone ahead with Defense Department planning. In an April 26 memo, Brown instructed the JCS to prepare plans to withdrawal either 4,300 or 10,000 troops (one to two brigades of 2ID) by the end of 1978, with all the remaining combat forces to be removed by June 1980, June 1981, or June 1982. The JCS were also to assess what military assistance Seoul would need to complement the withdrawals. As part of the planning process, the Chiefs asked the commanders-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and USFK for their advice. Both opposed the 1978 pullout as "not a viable option" in that it would create gaping holes in South Korean defense capabilities too costly and difficult to fill by 1982. The commanders warned that total withdrawal by December 1980 would run a "significant risk to peace on the Korean peninsula." Moreover, CINCPAC alerted. "What might appear now as an acceptable U.S. troop reduction will be extremely costly, exceed the short-term ROK capability to absorb equipment and training, and possibly increase the risk of North-South hostilities."[106] Previously, the regional and field commanders had been left out of the initial policy decision regarding whether or not troops should even be withdrawn. They had opposed the notion then.

[105] "U.S. Studies Role of Military in Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1977.
[106] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 381.

Now, when presented with the brass tacks of the policy's early formulation, they expressed even more detailed reasons for doing so.

Nevertheless, Carter was not convinced and shortly thereafter on May 5 issued Presidential Directive-12 (PD-12), "U.S" Policy on Korea." The directive stated the U.S. Second Division and supporting units would be gradually withdrawn from Korea. One brigade and supporting elements (but no less than 6,000 ground force personnel), should be removed by the end of FY 1978, and a second brigade and supporting elements (but no less than 9,000 ground force personnel) should be withdrawn no later than the end of June 1980, with withdrawal of the final brigade to be determined at a later date. Carter had chosen the NSC-preferred option among the several presented. The understanding, though, was that the complete removal of all ground combat forces would occur by 1981-82. The directive instructed the Pentagon to provide by May 16 a detailed plan for removal of the first two brigades. Final decision on the precise phasing of the withdrawals would be made following consultations with key Congressional leaders and the governments of South Korean and Japan.[107]

Importantly, U.S. Air Force units would remain in the ROK "indefinitely," and the Pentagon was to submit, also by May 16, a detailed proposal for the military assistance package, consisting of FMS credits and the transfer of equipment, necessary to "overcome deficiencies arising from the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces." By the same date, Holbrooke's Interagency Group was to submit a report covering other measures aimed to "sustain deterrence in Korea and avoid misunderstandings of U.S. intentions by South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and other countries," including: enhanced military exercises; temporary augmentation of U.S. air units; the Congressional scenario for military assistance to Seoul; command arrangements; diplomatic

[107] "Presidential Directive/NCS-12," The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum: Presidential Directives (PD), https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/directives/pd12.pdf.

moves; and public declarations. Finally, Carter directed a special emissary visit Seoul to initiate consultations and reassure Seoul of Washington's "firm intention to fulfill our treaty commitment," as well as elicit President Park's opinion on the measures above (including also "the preservation of a favorable investment climate in South Korea"). The emissary should also reiterate U.S. concern on human rights and inform the Japanese Government of U.S. plans in Korea.[108]

With PD-12, Carter's troop withdrawal plan was taking concrete shape. Its constituent parts made it look increasingly practicable, even if still suboptimal to its many detractors. As it was, the Joint Chiefs only agreed to support the plan, if the Mutual Defense Treaty was reaffirmed, if sufficient military assistance was provided, and if the U.S. Air Force and Navy remained in Korea after withdrawal. Yet, as William Gleysteen recalled, "Carter did not call for any corresponding actions by North Korea, nor did he make his decision contingent on a satisfactory evolution in Korea's security environment."[109] Combined with the requirements set forth in the president's directive, the absence of such elements in the plan not only left it open to further criticism, but also potential obstacles to its implementation. Such obstacles might arise as a result of complications in the steps concretely outlined in the directive, or due to changes in the security environment, which though not one of the stated conditions in PD-12, could not be neglected were they to impinge on those that were.

Considering the fact that their original advice against significant troop withdrawals had been "totally discounted" by Carter and Brzezinski, while reluctantly agreed to by the NSC staff and Secretary Brown, the Chiefs' follow-up plan in response to PD-12 was "rife with qualifications." On May 14, the JCS communicated to Secretary Brown their tentative acceptance

[108] Ibid.
[109] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 24.

of the plan, but noted it "cannot be executed without risk" and significant cost. Again, skeptical about the ROK military's ability to absorb U.S. military equipment and necessary training by 1982, the JCS recommended no additional withdrawals above the 15,000 until that year, after which a residual force of roughly 6,000 U.S. combat troops should remain to support and liaise with the ROK. Furthermore, the JCS endorsed a plan for gradual improvement in material and training of ROK forces, a continued military assistance program, and periodic reassessments of the directive to ensure it aligned with actual conditions on and around the Korean peninsula.[110]

Two days later, Deputy Defense Secretary Charles Duncan presented the Defense Department and JCS plan to the president. In his memo to Carter, he cautioned that the plan was tentative and subject to change due to new evaluations or consultations with Seoul. Highlighting an additional concern of the JCS, and especially of local commanders – namely, the security of U.S. forces as the withdrawal proceeded – Duncan mentioned the plan aimed to "preserve and maximize the combat power of the remaining ground forces" so that the third and final combat brigade would be "capable of defending itself." Duncan also reiterated doubts about the ROK's absorptive capacity of 2ID equipment as well as its ability to provide the requisite trained manpower to operate it. The Defense-JCS plan foresaw as a "rock bottom" number, over the next five years: $500-600 million to provide new weapons and $200 million more to improve Seoul's existent artillery, tactical mobility, and ground air defense. As it turned out, once consultations and further planning was completed over the next two months, Duncan's rock bottom-number was off by over $1 billion.[111]

Although Secretary Brown or his deputy Duncan would communicate directly with the President, more mid-level personnel hammered out the details based on marching orders from

[110] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 381-382.
[111] Ibid, 383.

above. Morton Abramowitz, as noted, was one of these officials. Indeed, he helped put together the nuts and bolts of the plan, which involved officials from the Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA) within Defense and the Bureau for Politico-Military Affairs in State. He later recalled:

> I was asked to focus on enhancing our military assistance program for Korea to help offset the proposed American troop withdrawal. I led an inter-agency task force on this issue, consisting primarily of the logistic component of JCS, DSAA and the State Department. We produced a report despite the fact all members of the group were opposed to troop withdrawal. In fact, the only person I knew who continuously favored the proposal was President Carter. Our task force proposed a massive military assistance program to South Korea as an offset to U.S. troop withdrawal.[112]

The planning itself became a vehicle whereby professionals throughout the bureaucracy were able to harness their institutional positions and expertise to introduce entirely reasonable conditions, conditions which not only helped make the withdrawal practicable and realistic but also hemmed in Carter's more insistent inclinations for a more rapid disengagement from South Korea.

Abramowitz continued: "In the Pentagon, we began a rear guard action – delay it, water it down, mitigate the decision as much as possible. Brown knew what the staff was doing and never interfered." In fact, Abramowitz position was similar to Brown's. The issue was not so much the principle of the policy as the timing, context and method.

> My main objection to the decision was that it was premature. The stability on the peninsula was still too dependent on our military presence. Human rights did not enter into my calculations. I felt that our withdrawal significantly enhanced the possibility of Northern intervention, particularly coming after our failure in Vietnam. Carter's decision was imprudent. It was clear that we could not reverse it, but we did manage to develop a time frame for withdrawal which made it more acceptable. In the meantime, we could bolster South Korea's defense capability by providing a wide range of modern weaponry.[113]

[112] Abramowitz interview, 638.
[113] Ibid, 640.

To be clear, Abramowitz and his staff's efforts were not cynical. They believed they were providing the soundest range of options in order to pragmatically implement Carter's withdrawal policy. Providing massive military assistance to Seoul and drawing out or phasing the withdrawal as much as possible was not done merely to bog down the implementation process. Although it served such a purpose, it was borne of their genuine, professionally-informed concerns about security and how to make the best of a politically-motivated policy with which they were at odds. The measures Abramowitz and his staff proposed surely served an instrumental purpose in slowing down the policy and, as his remarks attest to, they were aware of this. However, the instrumentality of such measures did not detract from their legitimacy.

While the internal bureaucratic struggle took shape within the executive branch, new and more noticeable obstacles arose outside of it. These included Congressional opposition to the policy, which began quietly but later "grew into an insuperable obstacle"; President's Park's skillful bargaining tactics as part of the consultation process in Seoul; and, lastly, outright public criticism by active duty military officers of Carter's policy.[114] These various developments emerged at the same time, increased public awareness of Carter's policy as well as the number of actors involved, and worked in a mutually reinforcing manner. Furthermore, they directly affected internal administration discussions and the concrete formation of the withdrawal program. These several strands came together in late May around the special emissary's trip to Seoul.

As previously discussed, Carter's advisors offered their final suggestions for the special emissary, or as it happened, emissaries. Harold Brown and Vance recommended that both Gen. George Brown, the Chairman of the JCS, and Phil Habib, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, go to Seoul to begin consultations. In the lead up to their trip, Brzezinski sent Carter a

[114] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 24.

preparatory memo. Although Brzezinski had supported Carter's policy, or at least had not expressed the same reservations as his fellow cabinet members, he presented Carter a rather clear-eyed analysis of certain issues ahead. While Gen. Brown and Habib would begin consultations with the Park government, it was only a beginning; "follow-on discussions" would be required. The SCM in July or August would be an opportunity to complete negotiations surrounding the overall withdrawal plan. However, "we need to avoid the impression that the summer SCM will be a time to wrap up a large set of tradeoffs for the withdrawals." Brzezinski continued: "We have embarked on a longer-term process. We cannot get legislative authority for some compensation measure that quickly. No U.S. forces will be moved until next year." Carter, in his preparatory conversation with Brown and Habib before their departure, noted that "these are genuine consultations," yet he reiterated they "be quite firm in delineating the general timeframe" for the withdrawal, while at the same time "retaining flexibility" on planning.[115]

In Seoul, Gen. Brown and Habib found Park ready to consult but also drive a hard bargain. Ever since the Nixon Doctrine and withdrawal of 7ID and the uncertainty borne of the U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia, Park had acclimated himself to a precarious U.S. commitment. Although displeased with Carter's policy, Park instructed his advisors and government officials "not to beg" and instead adopt a "can do" attitude. Privately, though, his national security advisors were strongly opposed to the withdrawal policy and held out hope they might change the withdrawal schedule.[116] During his first meeting with Brown and Habib on May 25, Park said he neither agreed with nor understood Washington's decision, but he accepted the essentials of the withdrawal policy schedule. Nevertheless, he insisted on significant compensation. This included:

[115] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Your Meeting with General Brown and Phil Habib," 20 May 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 131-136.
[116] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 23.

cost-free transfer to the ROK of 2ID's equipment; additional U.S. military assistance, equipment and weaponry; and support for ROK coproduction of much of the military requirements for its ongoing Force Improvement Plan (FIP). Moreover, Park sought a modification of the withdrawal: retention of two brigades (if under-strengthened) and the division headquarters, until the third phase of the withdrawal (sometime after June 1980) and the completion of compensatory measures before the final phase.[117]

Another important matter was the creation of a new military command architecture and the issue of operational control. The establishment of a bilateral command was a necessary step of any troop withdrawal. As U.S. forces were drawn down, they would gradually transfer defense responsibilities and, ultimately, OPCON to their ROK counterparts. The tightly combined, interoperable, and more equitable bilateral command would facilitate the process. Backloading the withdrawal by maintaining the division headquarters and two combat brigades to the final phase, would help justify U.S. retention of OPCON. Park and his military advisors proposed as much because they knew U.S. military officials, from Gen. Vessey in Seoul to PACOM and the JCS back in Washington, preferred to hold onto OPCON for as long as possible as well as extend the overall withdrawal schedule. They also proposed it because it fit with Seoul's preference. Rather than a cynical or conspiratorial ploy to undermine Carter's policy, both sides understood they held shared preferences, the mutual adjudication of which undoubtedly served the additional instrumental purpose of hemming in Carter's inclination toward a more rapid withdrawal.[118]

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[117] "Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal: Consultations with President Park," 25 May 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 137-144.

[118] Park noted that once the final phase was complete, Seoul would take on full OPCON. Brown, though not categorically opposed to the idea, replied that the issue would require further study. The U.S. presence, Brown explained, would continue to consist of important logistical, command and control, and intelligence units, in addition to air force units. Moreover, congressional oversight would be necessary were Washington to transfer OPCON and put its forces under the direction of a foreign commander, see: Ibid.

Although Park adopted a restrained and realistic position during the talks with Habib and Brown, he still drew a contrast between the ROK and Vietnam, saying Washington's investment in the ROK was a "good investment for U.S." in terms of maintaining peace and security in Korea and the region.[119] During their second meeting on May 26, Park once again raised the question of the U.S. rationale, observing he could not understand it. Habib, whose close association with Korea and the region made him a natural choice as emissary, had, by his own admission, not actually spent much time on U.S. Korea policy under Carter. Nevertheless, he did his best to address Park's concern. He explained the decision came after close examination of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the larger regional context, and Park's own efforts to establish military self-reliance, and was based on Washington's belief was that the withdrawal could be executed without causing undue instability of insecurity. Habib also said it reflected the domestic situation in the U.S., a reference to the American public's post-Vietnam malaise and desire to avoid foreign military interventions. Such rationales were hardly reassuring. Lastly, Habib pointed to the growing strength of the ROK economy, the spirit of the Korean people, and Washington's confidence in the capability of ROK forces supported by a modified U.S. force presence.[120]

In a final meeting, Habib and Ambassador Sneider told Park that the withdrawal policy was not linked to human rights and that Carter would make no precipitous decision regarding ROK security. However, the administration might very well face problems with Congress, and the legislative authorization and support for the U.S. commitments related to the policy. Thus, Park could be helpful by showing flexibility on human rights issues, which he agreed to as long as

[119] Ibid.
[120] "Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal: Second Meeting with President Park," 26 May 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 145-148.

Carter refrained from public pressure.[121] Alongside his official meeting with Park and other ROK officials, Habib tried to meet with prominent political dissidents and critics of Park's dictatorial rule. These included Kim Kwan Suk, secretary general of the National Council of Churches of Korea, former president Yun Po Sun, and former Foreign Minister Chyung Yil Hyung. The latter two had been sentenced to prison terms for having signed the Myeongdong Declaration the previous year. Although all three were invited to a reception at the U.S. Embassy, Habib was only able to meet with Kim, who, despite his disagreement with Park's rule, expressed opposition to Carter's troop pullout. Yun Po Sun held a press conference from his home (where he was on house arrest), saying he, too, opposed the withdrawal of U.S. forces until democratic government had been restored. The pullout was counterproductive. He feared it would leave Carter with insufficient leverage to obtain greater political freedom in South Korea.[122]

Park and dissidents within Korea were not the only ones to question the Carter administration's rationales. Indeed, the inadequacy of the administration's rationales were a topic in the White House's internal communications. Brzezinski's deputy, David Aaron, in a memo to Carter summarizing Brown and Habib's report of their talks with Park, noted as much. Aaron's memo was telling in that it revealed the contradictions of the administration's stated rationales as well as Carter's displeasure with the direction the policy was taking. Aaron, citing Zbig's agreement, conveyed concerns related to the Brown-Habib report. In dealing with the growing Congressional reaction to the administration's Korea policy (see below), "it is important to go beyond merely stressing that military security will be maintained; we should also explain what will be achieved by a U.S. ground force withdrawal." In preparation for Brown and Habib's

[121] **"**Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "Human Rights: Meeting with President Park," 27 May 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 149-151.
[122] Henry Kamm, "Park Said to Yield Reluctantly to U.S. Korea Plan," *The New York Times*. May 26, 1977.

pending testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House International Relations Committee, the NSC, together with State and Defense, would draw up "positive objectives." Unfortunately, two possible positive outcomes of the policy, namely, the flexible use of 2ID outside of South Korea or cost savings (either because 2ID would be disbanded or used elsewhere in place of another disbanded U.S. military unit) were undermined by Brown and Habib's talks with Park. The withdrawal program as currently negotiated would leave the "shell" of the division in place so long that any flexibility would be lost. Moreover, the large compensatory measures (meaning both equipment transfers and increased military assistance) and the fact that there was no plan to disband 2ID after its removal, undercut the possibility of limiting expenses.[123]

For his part, Carter wrote in the margin next to Aaron's discussion of compensatory actions, "Do not get over-obligated," and when it came to the second increment of troop withdrawals not occurring until June, 1980, "Seems too slow."[124] Brzezinski reiterated Carter's concerns about compensation and timing in a memo to Vance and Secretary of Defense Brown.[125] Nevertheless, the president's position met push-back within the bureaucracy. Michael Oksenberg expressed his and others' concern in a June 1 memo to Brzezinski. He was "troubled" by Carter's indication that the planned rate of withdrawal was too slow. The schedule was "totally within keeping his earlier decision," Oksenberg observed. He continued: "Can we be sure he recalled accurately his earlier decision? Was he aware he was altering it after his negotiators had discussed with our allies the timetable he had set? And, does not his marginal injunction retract his earlier instruction that the consultations with the Koreans should be meaningful.?" President Carter's

[123] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from David Aaron, "Brown/Habib Report on Korea," May 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 152-154.
[124] Ibid.
[125] United States White House, *Memorandum to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown from Zbigniew Brzezinski regarding President Jimmy Carter's reaction to plans for U.S. troop withdrawals from South Korea*. 31 May 1977. *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8j8eq4.

insistence that cost-savings be pursued and a decision be made on what will happen to 2ID prior to Habib and Brown's congressional testimony not only went against the policy as determined thus far, but "requires major decision on force disposition within a ten-day period of time." Oksenberg's associates at Defense informed him "it is impossible to make a rational decision on a matter of such major consequence within the time allotted."[126] Additionally, Habib and Brown were already expected to testify amidst growing congressional concern; concern which had been sparked by events occurring around the special emissaries' trip to Seoul.

As noted above, U.S. military officers had opposed Carter's policy. In classified memo traffic, interagency briefings, and off-the-record comments to reporters, their opposition was a matter of record. General Vessey had personally appealed to Carter and himself had raised the risk of war as a result of the withdrawal in an anonymous interview with a United Press International (UPI) reporter before Carter had even issued PD-12.[127] Nonetheless, no military official had outwardly, publicly disavowed the policy. However, days away from Habib and Brown's Seoul visit, Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, chief of staff in the USFK headquarters and the third-ranking general in Korea, spoke along similar lines in an interview with John Saar of *The Washington Post*.

Apparently failing to define the proper rules of attribution, Singlaub flatly stated, "If we withdraw our ground forces on the schedule suggested it will lead to war." He added that "many other senior military people" inside and outside of the country held the same view. To Singlaub's point, in the same article an anonymous headquarters Army officer affirmed, "I don't know anybody who is not staggered by it…There's no military or strategic logic for withdrawal. In fact,

[126] United States National Security Council, *Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Michel Oksenberg regarding the rate of U.S. troop withdrawals from South Korea. The second increment will be withdrawn no later than the end of 6/80*. 1 June 1977. *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8j8X3X.
[127] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 382.

there's a very good case for reinforcing."[128] Reflecting on Singlaub's objection, Abramowitz later recalled: "Of course, he was reflecting the views of all the senior military officers in the Pentagon, as well as those of the UN Command in Korea under General Vessey."[129] Another "well-informed American source" stated that, "No one understands why they are being pulled out…Carter says the withdrawal won't endanger South Korean security or upset the military balance. Our military people say that would be a mistake. They think it can't be done." Gen. Burn's, Vessey's deputy who earlier had given cautionary briefings to the JCS, remarked that the withdrawal had to avoid any disastrous change in the military balance or the credibility of the U.S. commitment.[130]

Singlaub argued just such a mistake was being made insofar as Carter's decision was based on outdated intelligence, which did not account for worrisome changes in Pyongyang's order-of-battle and offensive orientation. "An intensive intelligence effort over the last 12 months has discovered North Korea to be much, much stronger than we thought…My deep concern is that people making decisions are basing them on information that's two or three years old," he warned.[131] No matter the salience of his views or widespread agreement among fellow officers, Carter was furious with Singluab's public remarks. He immediately recalled him to Washington. On May 21, hours after giving Brown and Habib marching orders for their talks with Park, Carter met with Singlaub at the White House, reprimanded him for insubordination and ordered his reassignment to Fort McPherson in Georgia. According to presidential aides, Carter's decision was a signal he would not abide by insubordination over his Korea policy. Secretary Brown, speaking on his removal from Korea, said: "Public statements by General Singlaub inconsistent with announced national security policy have made it very difficult for him to carry out the duties of

[128] John Saar, "U.S. General: Korea Pullout Risks War," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1977.
[129] Interview with Abramowitz, 640.
[130] Saar, "U.S. General: Korea Pullout Risks War."
[131] Ibid.

his present assignment in Korea." [132] The Defense Secretary repeated the message the following day on *Face the Nation*. Privately, fellow officers expressed anger at Singluab's treatment and again said they shared his views.[133]

The Singlaub affair came at an inopportune moment for the White House. Just as it began consultations with Seoul (and Tokyo), thus bringing additional actors into the process, the Carter administration faced its first public break-in-ranks over the withdrawal policy. Simultaneously, Capitol Hill began to insert itself in the process as well, yet not in the way Carter or his advisors had hoped. While Habib and Brown held preliminary discussion on the compensatory steps and phases of the withdrawal with Park in Seoul, drama ensued back in Washington.

On May 25, Singlaub testified before the Investigation Subcommittee of the House Armed Service Committee, otherwise known as the "Stratton committee," named after its Chairman, Rep. Samuel S. Stratton (D-NY), a persistent opponent of Carter's Korea withdrawal policy. During testimony, Singlaub repeated his claim that withdrawal would lead to war, and South Korea was militarily weaker than North Korea (even with U.S. 2ID) and would be even less prepared were American troops removed. He told the committee that senior ROK officials "state flat out, clearly, unequivocally, that with United States ground forces withdrawn, Kim Il Sung will attack." According to Singlaub, the majority of U.S military and civilian officials in the ROK agreed, and their views were based on new intelligence on North Korea. Furthermore, the USFK command was never asked for its opinion on the plan, and its requests for an explanation went unanswered. "We have not heard any rationale, we have not heard any reason given…It is making our job

[132] Bernard Weinraub, "Carter Disciplines Gen. Singlaub, Who Attacked His Policy on Korea," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1977.
[133] Bernard Weinraub, "Defense Chief Backs Korea Plan, Says the Military Must Support It," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1977.

extremely difficult," Singlaub claimed.[134] His depiction of events was not entirely accurate. The command had been asked for advice on the plan. However, it was never asked to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed withdrawal or whether or not it should be done. It only was asked how to implement the withdrawal and provide several alternative withdrawal schedules. Still, Singluab tesitifed, "We (the U.S. Command in Korea) pointed out the very serious adverse impact of such a proposal." Moreover, an investigation of message traffic between the U.S. Command in Korea and JCS failed to reveal any record of a request for a rationale. Nevertheless, Gen Rogers, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, later testified that during his April 1977 trip to Seoul he had informed Singluab no rationale had been provided.[135]

Singlaub's testimony and the perception surrounding it introduced a new dynamic into the withdrawal policy. The more liberal Democratic members of the committee, such as Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA), accused Stratton and others of using it to attack the president's Korea policy, whereas conservative members began to shed a critical light on and challenge the efficacy of the withdrawal.[136] In addition, Singlaub's remarks and the Congressional reaction elicited one of Carter's most robust and public statements to date. At a press conference the day after Singlaub's testimony, Carter stated:

> This is a matter that has been considered by our government for years. We have been in South Korea now more than 25 years. There has never been a policy of our government evolved for permanent placement of ground troops in South Korea. In 1970 and 1971 a full division of troops was withdrawn. Many leaders in our country and in the Republic of Korea have advocated complete removal of ground troops from Korea. Melvin Laird, the former Republican Secretary of Defense, is one of those. President Park himself, the President of the Republic of Korea, has called for the removal completely of American troops. The essence of the question is, is our country committed on a permanent basis to keep troops in South Korea even if they

[134] Bernard Weinraub, "Ousted General Says Most U.S. Officials in Korea Fear Removal of Ground Troops Will Lead to War," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1977.
[135] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 8.
[136] Weinraub, "Ousted General Says Most U.S. Officials in Korea Fear Removal of Ground Troops Will Lead to War."

> are not needed to maintain the stability of that peninsula? I think it is accurate to say that the time has come for a very careful, very orderly withdrawal over a period of four or five years of ground troops.[137]

Carter cited changed strategic conditions (i.e., a shift away from hard Cold War divisions in a post-Vietnam Asia) and a growing South Korean economy as additional reasons for the withdrawal. Of course, by affirming his administration's intent to complete the troop withdrawal in four to five years, Carter was answering his own question: U.S. troops were no longer necessary for stability. It bears noting, though, that the same condition of stability, created an in-built discursive constraint on the policy in that it might need to be reconsidered if it was seen to undermine that same stability. Moreover, he asserted, his policy was hardly novel. U.S. forces were never meant to be in Korea in perpetuity. Previous administrations had removed troops with this belief in mind and even had plans for complete withdrawal. His was merely completing the process. To be sure, Carter's comment on President Park required a bit of qualification, which an ROKG spokesperson soon provided. Park had spoken of an ultimate U.S. withdrawal with an important caveat, namely, that it occur only once South Korea had completed its FIP and was entirely prepared to take on its own independent defense, not, as Carter indicated, at some predetermined and ultimately arbitrary deadline.[138] However, the accuracy of Carter's comments (much like Singluab) was one thing. What they represented in terms of his thinking and the perception around them was another.

The response to Carter's remarks revealed how others saw the very same U.S. force presence and international conditions quite differently than the president. Even administration officials contributed to the confusion. Commenting on the withdrawal policy, an unnamed official told the *New York Times*: "Nobody in their right mind can claim that a withdrawal improves

[137] Jimmy Carter, "President Carter's News Conference," Department of State Bulletin 76 (1977): 653-654.
[138] Sam Jameson, "To Asians, the Americans Are Inscrutable: Absence of Rationale for Korea Pullback Risks Confusion Over Intent," *Los Angeles Times*. June 8, 1977.

deterrence. It diminishes deterrence. But it doesn't diminish it to a degree that worries people. There are risks but not great risks in this policy."[139] Again, the administration publicly offered no positive rationale or gain from the policy, only the avoidance of too negative a consequence. Furthermore, the policy did, in fact, worry people. Carter's comments "came with the first substantial signs of Congressional unrest, especially among conservatives, over the troop withdrawal plans." [140] Sen. Goldwater, of the Senate Armed Service Committee, asked, "What I would like to know is where was this official policy defined and announced by the President or the Pentagon?" He continued: "I can't find such a policy declaration. It has not been presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee, of which I am a member, and so far as I know it has not been presented to the committee on foreign affairs."[141] In the wake of Habib and Brown's consultations and the Singlaub flare-up, House and Senate committees prepared to take up the matter.

Members of the informed public, too, sounded the alarm. Richard G. Stilwell, retired Army general and former CINCUNC/CINCUSFK, was a prominent example. Replaced by Vessey only months beforehand, Stilwell became an active commentator and critic of the Carter administration. He cited the same local and regional setting as Carter. However, contrary to the president, he cited them as reasons to maintain the U.S. force presence. Locally, "So long as Kim Il Sung…remains convinced that an attack on South Korea will bring into play both the deployed and offshore United States military power, it is likely that he will be deterred from military adventure." The U.S. presence, moreover, provided "the only lever that might force the North to accept the reality of

[139] Bernard Weinraub, "Issue and Debate: The Korea Withdrawal: Some Officers Are Nervous and Congress Wants to Have a Say," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1977.
[140] Bernard Weinraub, "Carter Defends Plan to Reduce Forces in Korea," *The New York Times*, May 27, 1977.
[141] Weinraub, "Issue and Debate: The Korea Withdrawal: Some Officers Are Nervous and Congress Wants to Have a Say."

two Korean states, a precondition for amelioration of tensions." Beyond peninsular deterrence and inter-Korean negotiations, Stillwell highlighted the regional significance of U.S. troops in Korea. "They are valuable – indeed essential – assets in furthering our major objectives in Northeast Asia: strengthening the partnership with Japan; minimizing the Soviet presence; improving relations with the People's Republic of China; sustaining the region's economic momentum…[disengagement] entails the gravest of risks, not only on the peninsula but also in Northeast Asia and far beyond."[142] Stillwell's views matched Singlaub's, and were prevalent throughout the military chain of command and among civilians at the Pentagon.

It was in this context that Habib and Brown testified before Congress. On June 10, they spent the morning before the subcommittees on Asian and Pacific Affairs and on Investigations, both of the House Committee on International Relations, and the afternoon in a closed-door, executive session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As directed by the White House, neither emissary was able to provide exact details or numbers on the timing, schedule or the compensatory package related to the withdrawal plan. However, they confirmed the plan would end up costing rather than saving taxpayer money, due to the compensation to Seoul, relocation costs of 2ID, and new base construction. Leaders in Seoul and Tokyo preferred U.S. forces would remain, Habib and Brown said, but grudgingly accepted provided "adequate measures" were taken to substitute weaponry and the 1953 U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty were reaffirmed. Habib noted that consultations were as yet preliminary with further negotiations to begin later, and Congress would be informed throughout. Ruffling liberal members, both Habib and Brown said the withdrawal was not a lever for human rights, and the Carter administration would move

[142] Ibid.

forward even if the human rights situation got worse. Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.) expressed astonishment at the remarks.[143]

Repeating a now standard administration line on the withdrawal, Gen. Brown told lawmakers, "There is some risk involved but it is of an acceptable degree." As long as carried out gradually, he continued, "war would not result from a rational decision" on Pyongyang's part, but, he added, "we cannot account for irrational acts." For his part, Habib echoed Carter's recent remarks. The withdrawal "is a natural, proper development in our ongoing security relationship" with Seoul, and in arriving at the policy "we have carefully weighed the military and international considerations involved."[144] Various lawmakers were dubious. They doubted the degree to which the issue had been studied as well as the intelligence upon which it was based.

Senate Minority Leader, Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-TN), strongly criticized the plan. In a written statement following the executive session, he wrote, "we are withdrawing from Korea on the basis of a campaign promise [by Carter] and not a careful and comprehensive review by the U.S. government." The withdrawal, Baker warned, would "create uncertainty throughout free Asia, stimulate regional tensions and risk a major outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula." Sen. Baker and others were worried by a CIA briefing their staff had received, which had included new intelligence on North Korean forces. The briefing reportedly showed North Korean forces to be stronger than previously thought and had increased concern about shorter warning times in case of a North Korean attack.[145] As Brzezinski informed Carter in a memo reviewing the hearings, even Senator Humphrey, a supporter of Carter's policy, indicated "it was an extremely serious matter and deserved the most careful study." Apparently, the CIA had not informed the State

[143] Don Shannon, "No Savings Seen in U.S. Korea Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*. June 11, 1977.
[144] Don Oberdorfer, "Gen. Brown Backs Korea Withdrawal, Is Doubtful on Savings," *The Washington Post*, June 11, 1977.
[145] Ibid.

Department that it had briefed the Committee nor about its alarmed reaction. Consequently, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations planned further inquiries into the withdrawal plan and requested the CIA provide documentation on the new intelligence. The committee refused to hear more testimony from Habib and Brown until after it heard from CIA Director, Stanfield Turner, on the military balance in Korea and the security situation in wider region.[146]

Brzezinski reported to Carter on the conflicting feelings within the administration about the hearings. Habib felt they went fine and that further briefings would strengthen the administration's case and Congressional support for compensation and other offsetting measures. On the contrary, Holbrooke had "a more pessimistic assessment," that "the resistance shown by the Foreign Relations Committee to your policy must be taken seriously and that we may have lost control of the consultative process."[147] As events would quickly demonstrate, Holbrooke's interpretation was the more prescient of the two. Less than a week after Habib and Brown's testimony, Carter's plan faced its strongest push-back yet when the Senate refused to endorse it.

On June 16, Sen. George McGovern (D-SD), a supporter of U.S. disengagement from Korea and Carter's policy and a firm critic of Park's human rights record, sponsored an amendment to a larger Senate bill, which would have affirmatively endorsed the pullout. It faced overwhelming opposition. Even a compromise amendment proposed by Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) offering a mild endorsement of the withdrawal plan, faced likely rejection. According to McGovern, rejection of Byrd's initial compromise amendment would have opened the possibility of a "worse setback," a potential floor amendment putting the Senate on record as directly opposed to the policy. As a result, Byrd issued another, more watered-down compromise, which passed 79-

[146] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Korean Troop Withdrawals: Brown/Habib Testimony," 10 June 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 167-168.
[147] Ibid.

15 when put to a floor vote. It stated that U.S. policy toward Korea "should continue to be arrived at by joint decision of the President and Congress," and, further, that any withdrawal, if eventually agreed upon, should move in stages, with due regard for the interests of Japan and other regional nations and with "regular consultation with Congress." Even this was too permissive for certain opponents of Carter's policy, which included a coalition of Republicans, such as Senators Baker, Goldwater, Robert Griffin (R-Mich), and Bob Dole (R-Kan), and Southern, defense-oriented Democrats like James Allen (D-Ala) and Sam Nunn (D-GA).[148] Collectively, they felt the matter required further study. Goldwater (channeling Singlaub) was convinced the withdrawal "could lead to war in South Korea," whereas Baker said he thought they were "effectively putting the stamp of approval on the President's announced plan…and I don't think we know enough about that."[149] Although the amendment was non-binding, it portended very real opposition to Carter's seemingly impetuous desire to move forward.

The immediate White House response, rather than assuaging Congressional concerns, rang as a defensive, even combative retort. The day following the Senate resolution calling for a "joint decision" with Congress on the troop withdrawal, deputy press secretary, Rex Graham, said the White House would comply with the Senate request for an annual report assessing the troop withdrawal and that President Carter would "consult" with Congress.[150] However, Graham said, the President's basic decision to remove ground combat forces had been settled. The statement left observers with the feeling, once again, that "consultation" for the Carter administration meant informing others of a decision already made. Carter's seeming unwillingness to fully involve

[148] Spencer Rich, "Senate Refuses Endorsement of Korea Pullout," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1977; see also, Graham Hovey, "Senate Bars Support For A Korea Pullout: Removes Backing of Carter Policy From Committee Bill," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1977.
[149] "Defeat for Carter on Korea Troops," *The Guardian*, June 17, 1977.
[150] "U.S. Reiterates Position on Korea," *The New York Times*, June 18, 1977.

Congress in decisions of foreign or national security policymaking was, in one sense, merely the most recent iteration of longstanding tension between separate branches of government, Nevertheless, it also went again his own oft-invoked campaign promise to pursue a more transparent and democratic foreign policy.

The administration began to focus on refining its message, in particular through Secretary Vance. Vance made the rounds, first defending the administration's policy in an interview for an ABC television and radio news program, and a week and a half later through remarks at the National Foreign Policy Conference for Editors and Broadcasters.[151] However, it was on June 29 in front of the Asia Society in New York City that Vance offered the administration's first high-level statement on its East Asia policy in general and Korea policy specifically. Ever since Habib and Brown returned from their trip to Seoul and Tokyo, administration officials had pegged the Asia Society speech as a good opportunity for an authoritative statement; a chance to "convince people in this country and abroad that ground troop withdrawal is not tantamount to a U.S. retreat from Asia," as Holbrooke told Carter and his principal advisors.[152] On the one hand, Vance explicitly affirmed the U.S. security commitment to South Korea and its intention to remain a robust Pacific power, yet, on the other hand, the secretary defended Carter's decision to move forward with the troop withdrawal from Korea. Although Vance included the requisite qualifiers about "a carefully phased withdrawal," that would "not endanger the security" of the ROK and be

[151] "Secretary Vance Interviewed on "Issues and Answers," Department of State Bulletin 77 (1977): 78-83; for address to editors and broadcasters, see: "Secretary Interviewed at Foreign Policy Conference for Editors and Broadcasters," Department of State Bulletin 77 (1977): 121-126.
[152] United States White House, *Summary of a conversation with President Jimmy Carter regarding Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman George Brown and Under-Secretary of State Philip Habib's consultations in Seoul, South Korea and Tokyo, Japan concerning U.S. troop withdrawals from South Korea and their impact on the defense of both Japan and South Korea,* 10 June 1977. *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8j8gW4.

done with "the concurrence of Congress," the speech left certain salient queries unanswered.[153] Rhetoric aside, if the administration truly was committed to Seoul's security and to being a Pacific power, why implement a policy that many in the region, U.S. military, and even administration itself believed would undermine that commitment?

In regard to the regional reaction, the administration was likely over-confident internally about how well Habib and Brown sold the troop withdrawal policy to Park in Seoul and Prime Minister Fukuda in Tokyo. While Park and Fukuda may have put on a brave face, their respective staffs and governments were undoubtedly opposed to the policy. Although Fukuda and the Japanese government had toned-down some of their criticism in the wake of Mondale's earlier visit, it was well-known strong doubts persisted. Fukuda himself pressed Carter to adjust his policy during his March visit to Washington, asking that the language and policy of withdrawal be shifted to one of troop reductions instead.[154] Meanwhile, informed observers maintained that "virtually the entire Japanese defense and foreign-policy establishment opposes Carter's decision."[155] The CIA's internal analysis of the potential consequences of the withdraw, including foreign reactions to it, stated: "the military situation in Korea will be less certain than it is now, and the general perception of the US as an Asian power will be diminished." Measures taken to offset or reduce risks of a withdrawal might mitigate the effects. Nonetheless, the analysis confirmed that Tokyo was against Carter's policy, more so than Nixon's removal of 7ID and holds lingering belief that Washington treats Northeast Asia as less important than Western Europe "due to a racist order of priorities." Nor was Tokyo the end of it. Taiwan saw the withdrawal as reinforcing perception of

[153] "America's Role in Consolidating a Peaceful Balance and Promoting Economic Growth in Asia," Department of State Bulletin 77 (1977): 141-145; for reporting on the speech, see: Bernard Gwetzman, "Friendly Relations With China Termed Key Goal By Vance," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1977.
[154] Lee and Sato, *U.S. Policy toward Japan and Korea*, 1982.
[155] Donald Zagoria, "Why We Can't Leave Korea," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 2, 1977; see also, Zagoria, "Korea: To Stay or Not To Stay," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1977.

a U.S. reduction in regional commitments and the inevitability of U.S.-Sino normalization, while ASEAN states shared the general concern that stability in Korea be maintained, and saw a link between the maintenance of U.S. power in Asia and their own security in terms of a general equilibrium.[156]

Evidence of regional unease, though, hardly was restricted to classified CIA reporting. Indeed, the day after the CIA issued its internal analysis, Sam Jameson of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote an article titled, "To Asians, the Americans Are Inscrutable: Absence of Rationale for Korea Pullback Risks Confusion Over Intent." In addition to a "significant degree of skepticism" among South Korean officials, leaders throughout the region "see pullout as further evidence of US gradually turning its back on Asia." Fukuda, in conjunction with his own misgivings, said the leaders of the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand all asked him to relay their concerns to Carter. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, among the more vociferous critics, said the withdrawal was "a momentous decision with profound long-term consequences for the security of Northeast Asia and probably for the rest of Asia." The Philippines' Marcos said Carter's policy was "just a repetition of the same old pledges to commitments they [the Americans] say they will lie up to in Asia." Again, Jameson reported, many Asian officials saw the policy as the result of "cultural and ethnic bias," which put European ahead of Asian concerns.[157]

Despite its efforts, the Carter administration could not assuage opponents or get ahead of the discourse surrounding the withdrawal policy. Critics opposed the policy not only for how it was being introduced and executed but also based on a fundamental disagreement with the policy itself. No matter the administration's rejoinders about moving gradually or carefully, or pursuing

[156] "Central Intelligence Agency, "US Ground Forces Withdrawal: Korean Stability and Foreign Reactions," 7 June 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 159-166.
[157] Jameson, "To Asians, the Americans Are Inscrutable: Absence of Rationale for Korea Pullback Risks Confusion Over Intent."

a set of consultative diplomatic negotiations, its rhetoric was belied by its actions. Or it was belied enough, that is, for negative perceptions to build. In terms of encasing the withdrawal process in an inter-Korean and larger regional settlement, Vance had at least mentioned the possibility of four-party talks and the cross-recognition of the two Koreas (i.e. recognition of Pyongyang by Washington and Tokyo, alongside Seoul's recognition by Beijing and Moscow). Negotiations with Beijing and Moscow to foster a more stable environment had also been floated.

Nevertheless, as Habib himself conceded in his congressional testimony, no real talks had occurred and Beijing and Moscow's interpretation of events or reaction to the withdrawal was merely speculative at that point.[158] To be fair, although Pyongyang had made deliberate efforts to develop direct contacts with the Carter administration (shown below), the North Korean leadership had also maintained its truculent and exclusionary stance toward the Park government in Seoul, thus precluding any genuine progress in inter-Korean relations. Moreover, even under the best of circumstances, fostering a diplomatic settlement around the Korea issue was inherently difficult. It had bedeviled generations of U.S. policymakers. Still, it was seen as a necessary step toward any fundamental change in the U.S. presence. Indeed, for many, it was a step that had to precede such change. The Carter administration, though, had put little if any high-level effort into bringing other powers into the process. Beyond the question of how to properly execute the withdrawal policy in terms of a more concerted diplomatic effort, there was also abiding uncertainty around the North Korean threat, or, more specifically, what intelligence assessments had been factored into the administration's policy review.

In this vein and based on Brzezinski's recommendation, Carter approved of Stanfield Turner's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In addition to the

[158] Oberdorfer, "Gen. Brown Backs Korea Withdrawal, Is Doubtful on Savings."

uncoordinated CIA briefing the committee had received, committee members also requested access to the intelligence annex that had been part of the PRM-13 process. Indeed, Brzezinski told Carter certain committee staff members already possessed the intelligence annex, gotten through unauthorized sources. The annex, which noted the static North-South military balance had worsened since 1970, left doubt in the mind of legislators whether or not Seoul would in fact be capable of defending itself once American ground forces were withdrawn, as the administration claimed. Although Brzezinski suggested it might advance the administration's case to turn over a relatively more optimistic intelligence assessment, such a move would set an "extremely unfortunate" precedent. It would undermine objective and candid assessments from intelligence analysts, who would fear their work could be get caught up in political debates between the executive and legislative branch. Instead, the hope was that Turner's testimony might settle congressional nerves.[159]

On June 20, Turner delivered his closed-door briefing on the CIA's estimates of the impact of the withdrawal. He gave a more balanced assessment, stressing certain factors that favored the ROK. The outcome was mixed. After the testimony, Senator John J. Sparkman (D-Ala.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said there had "been some confusion over the basis of intelligence as it relates to the question of a possible pullout of U.S. ground troops from Korea," but that he saw "no urgency" on the matter. In the near future, Sparkman said, the Senate likely would take no immediate action one way or the other.[160]

If Holbrooke had been concerned before that the administration was losing control of the consultative process, such fears soon considerably worsened. On June 27, based on a request from

[159] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Korean Troop Withdrawals: Brown/Habib Testimony," 10 June 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 167-168.
[160] "Sparkman Sees 'No Urgency' on Korea Pullout," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1977.

the Stratton subcommittee in the House, the staff of the assistant secretary of defense for congressional relations handed over a series of politically sensitive JCS, CINCPAC and COMUSKOREA cables. Mike Armacost sent Brzezinski a memo expressing notable frustration over the move, one which, to his mind, was not properly coordinated with the NSC. The messages were turned over, Armacost wrote, "at just the moment when it appeared we were beginning to regain some control over the matter on the Hill." The secret and top-secret messages included Gen. Vessey's recommendations on the schedule for the withdrawal and military assistance requirements arising from the withdrawal, on which matters "final decisions of the Executive Branch are yet to be reached." In exasperation, Armacost noted:

> It is an outrageous procedure. Openness is one thing. Providing the Congress the internal recommendations of the JCS even before the final decisions are in is quite another. These messages constitute an invitation to the Congress to insert themselves into the formulation of the details of our programs by playing off one agency against another; to use the recommendations of one group to elicit comparable information about proposals of other agencies; and to employ the military's arguments as a standard with which to judge and perhaps criticize our future decisions.[161]

Brzezinski reported to Carter that the "unprecedented hemorrhage of internal documents" would complicate the administration's Korea policy, and while he complained to Secretary Brown, who took responsibility, the damage was done.[162]

The result was yet another fissure in the administration's position just as the White House began to prepare for the SCM to be held in Seoul in late July. Congressional opposition among Republicans and hawkish Democrats only increased. Even Carter's backers expressed concern. One Senate supporter admitted that the administration "did not have its ducks in a row." Rep. Sam Stratton kept up the pressure, saying "Nobody has come to talk to us about the withdrawal plan."

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[161] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "DOD Transmission to the Congress of JCS Recommendations Concerning Troop Withdrawals," 29 June 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 169-170.
[162] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 384.

He called for additional hearings and tougher cross-examination of Gen. Brown, Chairman of the JCS, and Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, the Army Chief of Staff. In the midst of the uproar, an unnamed Pentagon source, considered an expert on Korea, incongruously told the *Los Angeles Times* while they were not concerned about the hearings preventing the withdrawal of troops, they were worried that Congress might not approve the funds for the necessary compensatory package for South Korea.[163] How the administration planned to move forward with the withdrawal without funding for the compensatory package was anyone's guess. As its internal discussions indicated, that was not an option.

As Generals Brown and Rogers prepared to give testimony before the Stratton subcommittee, Secretary Brown communicated to Carter the main elements of the final consultations likely to be covered in Seoul at the annual SCM. In a July 12 memo, Brown said the U.S. side would inform Park that it plans to retain two brigades and the division's command headquarters until final phase of the withdrawal. It would do so because Park viewed it as of "highest psychological importance," and because Park would allow ROK troops to remain under U.S. OPCON until the final phase, which is "what we want on command arrangements."[164] After all, internal intelligence assessments and inter-agency discussions alike warned Seoul would likely seek greater control over their own forces, removing the restraining influence of the United States over ROK reactions to DPRK provocations.[165] Drawing out U.S. OPCON would help to mitigate this. Although, Carter had agreed in principle to this alteration of the plan, he had yet to officially inform Brown of it. The SCM was the time to finalize this, Brown stated, or it would cause major

[163] Norman Kempster, "Skirmish Shaping Up Over Korea Pullout: Opponents of Carter's Plan Think 'Inept' White House Lobbying May Defeat It," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1977.
[164] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Harold Brown, "My Trip to Korea," 12 July 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 172-175.
[165] "Central Intelligence Agency, "US Ground Forces Withdrawal: Korean Stability and Foreign Reactions," 7 June 1977."

difficulties in the new command arrangement. The new combined command and OPCON arrangement would come into existence in October 1978, as the first troops were withdrawn, and it would exist alongside the UNC, which would be maintained until a suitable alternative were devised to continue the Armistice Agreement or it was replaced with some form of peace treaty.

Additional supplementary measures to be discussed would include: an improved U.S. air posture, increasing U.S. aircraft from 60 to 72, and adding E-3A AWAC visits from Okinawa starting in 1980; and larger, more frequent, and more well-publicized military exercises and deployments. In terms of U.S. arms transfer policy, Park wanted the ROK to be included in the list of close allies having a special relationship, similar to NATO, Japan, and the ANZUS countries, and thus permitted more advanced arms transfers. Brown recommended against inclusion, but stressed the need to indicate Washington's willingness to meet Seoul's military needs, which, incidentally, was consistent with Carter's wish to encourage the development of the appropriate ROK defense industries, including coproduction of certain material. Brown noted that Secretary Vance concurred with his recommendations.[166]

The next day, Vance and Brown sent Carter a more detailed memo, prepared jointly by State and Defense, laying out the nuts and bolts of the new security assistance program Washington would offer Seoul. The package consisted of two main components: the transfer of equipment and material from the departing 2ID forces, equivalent to $800 million, and a one-time additional FMS credit worth $275 million. However, this was in conjunction with a continued annual $275 million FMS credits to support the ROK FIP until FY 1981. Thus, total assistance would reach around $1.9 billion in FY 78-81. According to Vance and Brown, the package was: militarily essential; of significant enough economic help; big enough to assuage but not satisfy Seoul's concerns; and

[166] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Harold Brown, "My Trip to Korea," 12 July 1977."

modest enough to satisfy critics in Congress. Congress would decide on both the transfer package and increased FMS credits, and they felt it was best to seek Congressional approval for a one-time transfer package this year, rather than seeking additional FMS over several years as part of the annual appropriations process. For Park and his advisors, the package was necessary to bolster self-sufficiency and enhance ROK ground forces defense capabilities before the withdrawal was complete. Meanwhile, it was essential to the credibility of the policy in the eyes of the other regional states, Congress, and the informed U.S. public. Furthermore, beyond its military rationale, Vance and Brown emphasized the economic effect of the compensatory package insofar as it would help maintain commercial and investor confidence in the ROK economy, an economy of increasing importance in Washington's pollical-economy vision for the region.[167]

Additional matters needed to be hammered out. The issues of War Reserve Stocks for Allies (WRSA), meaning large caches of pre-placed ammunition, would have to be finessed. In the meantime, it would be stressed that preexisting stocks would be made available immediately in an emergency. Regarding the defense industry, Washington would provide technical assistance programs to help solve production problems, develop production concepts, and train personnel. However, the level of technology transfer would need to be closely monitored to meet legitimate requirements only, but not cause a drain of ROK resources or contribute to undesirable weapons development. As Brown previously recommended, Washington should approach ROK requests on a case-by-case basis, yet do so sympathetically, which would likely include requests for purchase of the F-16 and improved Chaparral and co-production of the Vulcan anti-aircraft gun. [168] While Vance and Brown provided Carter a rather nuanced distillation of the several military packages

[167] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown, "New Security Assistance Program for South Korea," 13 July 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 176-187.
[168] Ibid.

and funding scenarios, press reports of internal studies indicated potentially enormous costs ahead, totaling upwards of $8 billion, with long lists of costly weaponry such as F-16s, nuclear-capable Honest John missiles, and help for new ROK defense production facilities. Although administration officials stressed Carter had yet to approve anything and the lists were "outside estimates," the reports served notice that the withdrawal plan would be costly, dispelling any notion of budget savings, and could introduce new levels of offensive weaponry into the peninsular environment; in short, several more complicating factors.[169]

Last, and of particular salience, Vance and Brown addressed the legislative strategy. Both the foreign relations and armed services committees would need to be closely consulted. However, since appropriations would not be possible in 1977, they would have to submit a request no later than September 15 for passage next year, and also at some point ask the appropriations and armed services committees for funds to reequip the 2ID so that replacement items could be obtained concurrently with the withdrawal. Above all, the administration: "must involve Congress in the review of the Korea program rather than presenting the program as a fait accompli, with present Congressional ambivalence prompted by: 1) uncertainty about specifics of the policy, and 2) feeling in Congress that they are not being consulted on a national security policy of major significance." However, at the very same moment Carter's principal advisors stressed the importance of bringing Congress along, events were occurring that undermined the administration's ability to do so.[170]

The morning Vance and Brown sent their memo to the president, Gen. Bernard Rogers' testimony before the House Armed Services Committee "opened a gap for the first time in public

[169] "Pentagon Urges Big Arms Sale to Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1977; see also, Henry C. Wilson, "Study Sees $8 Billion for Korean Arms," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1977.
[170] Ibid.

between the uniformed service chiefs and Carter's plan."[171] While the Singlaub flare-up might have been seen as the case of an isolated, disgruntled officer, Roger's testimony revealed a more significant breach between Carter and his chief military advisors Although already known to officials involved in the internal review process surrounding PRM-13, Rogers testimony revealed to the public that the JCS originally did not want to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from Korea within a four- to five-year period. Instead, the JCS proposed only "a phased partial reduction of 7,000 Army spaces" by September 30, 1982, with a continuing review of the situations, but that their "option was not the one adopted." Rogers also told lawmakers that the JCS felt the plan should be altered to leave the option for retaining a combat brigade in place, roughly 5,000 troops.[172]

Regarding the withdrawal as currently conceived, Rogers said, "There is a risk involved, greater than the risk in retaining the status quo," but if Washington assisted the ROK and remained a Pacific power, "the risk will be an acceptable risk." Rogers admitted to the committee that when he was asked by Gen. Singlaub what rationale he had been given for the withdrawal, he replied, "none." The committee's deliberations also determined that the JCS made its much more cautious recommendation on March 7, just two days before Carter made his first public mention of the four- to five-year withdrawal plan. CIA Director Turner, who had earlier testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also testified before the House Armed Services Committee. He reiterated the administration's claim that, although the risk would increase somewhat due to the withdrawal, the ROK would be able to handle the new circumstances because of how it would be carried out.[173]

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[171] Don Oberdorfer, "Joint Chiefs' Korea Plan Was Denied," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1977.
[172] "Army Head Says Service Chiefs Opposed Plan for Korea Pullout," *The New York Times*, July 14, 1977.
[173] Ibid.

Once again, administration officials were offering a negative rather than positive justification for the withdrawal policy: the consequences, though worse than the status quo, could be mitigated. The lack of clarity or absence of a more positive assessment left members of the armed service committee contending that they needed to see internal deliberations around the policy. "Only the President and secretary of defense seem to know what is going on," said Rep. Charles H. Wilson (D-CA).[174] It was unlikely their unease was assuaged by Chairman of the JCS Gen. George S. Brown's testimony the following day. Brown echoed Rogers' testimony, but emphasized the Chiefs' concerns were heard. "While it is accurate to say the judgment went against the chiefs in a fundamental way, the Chiefs' cautions were included in the program," Brown said. He added that their views were presented "frankly and fully" to Carter at the White House on April 27, before the final decision was issued under PD-12 on May 5.[175]

Gen. Brown also pushed back against the criticism of some, within Congress and from Seoul, that Carter's withdrawal was merely a replay of the 1949 U.S. pullout from Korea, which helped precipitate the Korean War. "This time it is the reverse: we are leaving forces there: we are making it quite clear stability will be maintained and we are maintaining the mutual defense treaty," he contended.[176] In defense of Carter's plan, he stated that when U.S. forces were left in Korea following the war, it was not expected that they would be there forever. He welcomed the initiative to withdraw in that Washington had "been unfair to the Republic of Korea because they have leaned on us militarily" instead of taking responsibility for such activities as planning, supplying forces, and gathering intelligence. Again, Gen. Brown said, the withdrawal posed "an additional risk – but an acceptable risk," and the JCS accepted the plan as announced by Carter on

[174] "Joint Chiefs Differed With Carter on Pullout in Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1977.
[175] "Chiefs of Staff Not Ignored on Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1977.
[176] Ibid.

May 26, since it would involve significant military help for the ROK, from retention of U.S. intelligence, observation, naval and air forces to repeated affirmations of the U.S.-ROK mutual defense treaty; which, indeed, had been conditions for JCS approval. Furthermore, Brown assured the committee that the withdrawal would be assessed as it moved forward and that at any time it was concluded the withdrawals would imperil U.S. national security, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff would be negligent if they didn't stand up" and recommend the program be "readjusted."[177] Such caveats and notes of caution established in-built obstacles and potential off-ramps were new conditions to arise and assessments to change. Moreover, Rogers and Brown's combined testimony provided all the more reason for skeptical lawmakers to be alert to a policy they increasingly opposed.[178]

Although Secretary of Defense Brown informed Carter that Congress could be cumbersome, he felt ultimately the administration could convince enough members to support the policy.[179] However, following an informal briefing session Brown held with Congressional leaders and key members at the White House days before heading to Seoul, Brzezinski presented a far less optimistic assessment. According the Brzezinski, the reaction of the assembled lawmakers to Brown's Korea briefing "was very chilly." In a thorough memo to the president, Brzezinski outlined several significant insights borne of Brown's meeting as well as trends over the last several months. Carter's national security advisor laid out the various reasons lawmakers gave for

[177] George C. Wilson, "Brown Says Joint Chiefs View Korea Plan as 'Acceptable Risk," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1977.
[178] Lest anyone forgot about the constant risk of escalation on the Korean Peninsula, during General Rogers and Brown's testimony a U.S. CH-47 cargo helicopter had accidentally strayed into DPRK airspace just north of the DMZ and been shot down. The U.S. quickly accepted responsibility for the mistake, and Gen. Brown said the incident should not be linked with the withdrawal. For its part, Pyongyang was notably reserved in its response, reflecting its still persistent desire to establish contacts and negotiate with Washington. Nevertheless, the isolated event could not help but reaffirm some observers concerns and belief that the presence of U.S. forces is what helped to stabilize an inherently escalation-prone environment; or, on the other hand, that their presence would immediately embroil such forces and the U.S. government in a sudden, unwanted conflict.
[179] Keefer, *Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge*, 385.

opposing the policy; how such opposition might complicate the administration's plan moving forward; and how, as a result, Secretary Brown should approach the pending talks with Park. Possibly most important, though, Brzezinski offered the first real indication that Carter might have to rethink the overall policy.[180]

Brzezinski's memo is worth quoting at length. He began by outlining in general terms the opposition to the administration's withdrawal policy. During Brown's briefing: "Not one Senator or Congressman spoke up in support of the troop withdrawal. Many expressed outright opposition or noted significant misgivings. It is clear that we face an uphill battle on this issue with Congress. Some are still uneasy with the manner in which the decision was made. Others are still waiting for a convincing rationale," he wrote. On the latter point, he highlighted a key error: "There have been a variety of explanations why troop withdrawals are not a bad idea, but no compelling case has been presented as to why it is a good idea." Brzezinski then got more specific in terms of individual members and their problems with Carter's plan and how they would collectively complicate requisite legislation in a manner that would make moving forward exceedingly difficult if not impossible:

> Derwinsky, Tower, Glenn, and Stratton all expressed concerns about the impact of the withdrawals on our reputation as a great power. Case and Humphrey acknowledged misgivings that our withdrawal was not made conditional upon reciprocal moves by North Korea to stabilize the status quo. Don Fraser noted that the policy would save no money, yet would relinquish a source of leverage in relation to internal political reform inside South Korea. Lester Wolf, Clem Zablocki, and others echoed these concerns. In short, sentiment in favor of troop withdrawal is at best lukewarm and passive. This is bad enough, but worse yet are the indications that it will be very difficult to secure the needed military assistance to upgrade ROK defenses as we withdraw. To withdraw without providing such assistance would be disastrous to our Asian policy and our reputation as a serious world power. Yet support for an aid package is going to be difficult to muster. George Mahon and Chuck Percy both suggested that there could be no less propitious moment to ask for additional aid for Korea. Some, like Fraser, will

[180] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Congressional Reaction to our Korean Policy," 21 July 1977." In *The Carter Chill*, 193-194.

> oppose on human rights grounds. Others because they are against military assistance per se. Still others because they oppose the withdrawal. And many Congressmen may vote against a request to prove to the folks back home that their vote has not been bought. Les Aspin is persuaded that these groups together constitute a majority of the House of Representatives.

Support for the policy was itself weak. Moreover, support for the legislation needed to carry out an essential element of the policy (i.e. military assistance to Seoul in order to mitigate the effects of U.S. withdrawal) was tenuous at best, and the policy simply could not be executed without such offsetting support. Moving forward without it not only would directly undermine South Korean security (the very security the administration repeatedly committed itself to uphold) but would significantly undermine the perception of Washington as a reputable power in the region, contrary to Secretary Vance, Brown and others' constant rhetorical reassurances that the United States would remain a strong Pacific power. The administration increasingly found itself bound up by its own terms; terms which the innate imperatives of U.S. preponderance as well as peninsular and regional hegemony thrust upon it.[181]

Ironically, the additional reasons for Congressional opposition that Brzezinski emphasized (i.e., human rights and Koreagate) were factors President Carter himself had emphasized or were seen as another potential reason for disengagement. Yet in practice, due to the combination of political and electoral considerations in Congress and the legislative mechanisms of the withdrawal plan itself, they had morphed into obstacles. So, then, based on these various considerations, what were the implications for the president's policy moving forward? Brzezinski offered several revealing conclusions. First, in talking with Park and his advisors, Harold Brown "will have to pull his punches a bit." He will affirm Washington's determination to offer substantial military assistance, but leave flexible the mix of equipment transfers and FMS credits (emphasizing the

[181] Ibid.

former while minimizing the latter) and avoid saying exactly when a request will be sent to Capitol Hill.[182]

Second, Brzezinksi warned: "To secure support for aid, the Administration will have to mount a very major effort involving the expenditure of significant political capital without any certainty that such an effort can succeed on the Hill." Third, revealing why such political capital would need to be expended and also how the administration was hemmed in by its very own rhetoric, Brzezinski wrote: "Congress considers the presence of U.S. troops essentially in terms of our defense interests, but assesses military assistance in terms of other factors. We say we cannot remove U.S. troops without augmenting ROK military capabilities. Congress buys the proposition, but would prefer to accommodate it by leaving troops there rather than by appropriating a large new assistance package." Fourth, all of the above as well as the Koreagate scandal, "may warrant some adjustment in our withdrawal policy…through a stretchout in the schedule or by making its implementation conditional upon steps by North Korea." Brzezinski concluded: "We have preserved flexibility for such a contingency by avoiding a fixed date for the completion of withdrawals. We need not fall back now, but I wanted to alert you to the fact that we may have to face these tough choices when Harold Brown comes back from his discussions in Seoul."[183]

Brzezinski's analysis supports his claim that, rather than being a fervent proponent of Carter's withdrawal policy, he focused more than anything on protecting the president. He attempted to help Carter studiously adjudicate a way to step back from the plan's initial thrust while at the same time maintain some of its substance. Brzezinski's warnings suggest a clear awareness of the obstacles facing the policy, not just in terms of the Congressional approval necessary for its implementation, but also about the deep reservoir of circumspection with which

[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

many salient actors perceived the withdrawal. Either way, Brown's trip to Seoul was a significant step and would help set the course for the remained of Carter's term.

During their June 25 meeting at the Blue House, Brown was accompanied by Richard Sneider, U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, Gen. George S. Brown, CJCS, David E. McGiffert, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Gen. Vessey, CINCUNC/CINCUSFK, and William Gleysteen, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Park, meanwhile, was joined by South Korea's political and military leadership, including: Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha, Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin, Minister of National Defense Suh Jyong Chul, Chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Ro Jae Hyun, Chief of Security Cha Ji Chul, Secretary General Kim Chung Yum, and ROK Ambassador to the United States Kim Yong Shik. The two sides hammered out the final elements of the withdrawal program.[184]

At the start of the withdrawal, the overall number of U.S. military personnel stood at around 40,000, with those slated for withdrawal accounting for about 26,000, including 14,000 ground combat forces and 12,000 support personnel. The timing, process, and the unit composition of the three phases or stages of the withdrawal were as follows. The first stage would end by late 1978, during which 6,000 men (one combat brigade and support elements) would be withdrawn. During the first phase, a dozen F-4 aircraft would be added to the existing U.S. Air Force tactical fighter wing already in the country, increasing its size from 60 to 72 aircraft. Furthermore, in the fall of 1978 the new combined U.S.-ROK military command would be established as a transitional structure to improve operational efficiency and start to pass off more of the defense burden to

[184] "Memorandum of Conversation, President Park Chung Hee, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, et al., July 25, 1977 (Secret)," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea?, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696529-Document-02-Memorandum-of-Conversation-President.

Seoul by phasing the top ROK military commanders into the strategic planning for the defense of the peninsula.[185]

The second stage would involve primarily support troops, around 9,000, and would be completed around June of 1980. Much of the core combat capability of 2ID, roughly 11,000 troops, including two combat brigades and the division headquarters, would remain until the third and final phase. The timing of the third phase would depend upon political developments, and the final ground combat units could potentially remain until July 1982. Such a date was important in that it would occur after the next presidential election, thus allowing a reelected or newly elected president to reassess the third and most important phase of the withdrawal. If and when the final withdrawal occurred, the United States would still retain in South Korea about 10,000-16,000 personnel, consisting of air force units as well as certain headquarters, logistic, communications and intelligence personnel to facilitate combined operations to repel aggression and the redeployment of U.S. ground combat forces if required. Also, a small number of U.S. personnel would also continue to man the JSA at Panmunjom in the DMZ, in accordance with the UNC responsibilities under the armistice.[186]

Additional elements of the withdrawal program included increasing the length, size, frequency, and public awareness of alliance military exercises; the transfer of military equipment and material and increase in FMS credits; technical assistance to the ROK defense industry as well as potential sale of advanced military technology. The military transfer package included, as planned, the $500-800 million in military equipment transferred directly from the departing 2ID forces to the ROK military and $1.1 billion total in FMS credits to purchase new equipment, both of which would require congressional approval for the necessary funds, as well as legislative

[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

oversight. In terms of the sale of more advanced weaponry, Brown said Washington was willing "in due time" to sell the ROK the new F-16 lightweight air superiority fighter plane, but not sell them the M-60 tanks, instead encouraging use of M-48s. Washington wanted to make sure the weaponry provided was not only appropriate to Seoul's needs, but, consistent with past practice, did not foster overly offensive ROK capabilities (and a local arms race) or lead Seoul to adopt and potentially export the weapons and thus compete with U.S. defense manufacturers.[187]

Reporting on Brown's trip, the *Los Angeles Times* observed, "short of calling off the withdrawal itself, which…the South Koreans would have preferred, the American responses gave in to South Korean requests right down the line." The newspaper correctly observed that the plan to backload the withdrawal and potentially sell Seoul F-16s, were major concessions in what had been the Carter administration's original plan. In addition, Brown presented to Park a personal letter from Carter affirming the Mutual Defense Treaty and the U.S. commitment to South Korea's security, which the ROK government made public the same day in South Korean newspapers. Meanwhile, Secretary Brown bolstered the message during a news conference in Seoul before departing for Tokyo. South Korea, he said, "is and will continue to be protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella." His statement was apparently one of several things Seoul requested.[188]

One area of disagreement revolved around when the compensatory package would be completed. During their meeting, Park welcomed the proposed compensatory steps, "but insisted they must be 100 percent complete before the final withdrawal of U.S. forces, something Brown said he could not promise."[189] The difference was evident in the language of the Joint

[187] Ibid.
[188] Sam Jameson, "'Nuclear Umbrella' Will Keep Protecting S. Korea After U.S. Pullout, Brown Says," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1977; see also, "S. Korea Assured of Protection by U.S. A-Weapons," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1977; "Infantry Unit to Be Last Out of Korea," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1977; Bernard Weinraub, "U.S. Will Keep Bulk Of Combat Forces In Korea Until 1982," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1977.
[189] "Memorandum of Conversation, President Park Chung Hee, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, et al., July 25, 1977 (Secret)."

Communique following the SCM, which noted that the compensatory measures "will be implemented in advance of, or in parallel with, the withdrawal." ROK Minister of Defense Chul reportedly said he preferred no withdrawal at all, but in the event that their desire was "to realize the compensatory measures first, then withdrawal," with another unnamed ROK official clarifying: "We aren't suggesting that a single soldier can't leave the peninsula until all the compensatory offset measures have been completed. But before the last and main batch can leave, we should have sufficient offsetting security measures to create and provide a situation of stability."[190] Even if Brown would not guarantee completion of the compensatory package before the final phase, he asserted publicly that it "is only through the process of gradual transfer of capabilities (to the South Koreans), of gradual increase in Korean material capabilities – antitank capabilities, artillery, communications equipment, air mobility and tanks – that the deterrent can be maintained and peace preserved."[191] Moreover, whereas both Brown and Ambassador Sneider argued a more stable political situation would eventually be created on the peninsula if the balance of military power did not depend upon the presence of U.S. forces, they also implied that if the situation changed the pullout could be stopped.[192]

Brown also argued that a sound five-year withdrawal program now would prove better than a "spasm withdrawal" ordered by Congress in the future, adding what some called a "new rationale," namely, deliberate executive branch action on withdrawal rather than precipitous Congressional disengagement some time later.[193] Although such concerns had been voiced by past administrations, if anything, the opposite tendency was increasingly evident on Capitol Hill, which

[190] John Saar, "Seoul Given Commitment By Carter: Talks Show Both Sides Are Worried About U.S. Pullout," *The Washington Post*, July 26, 1977.
[191] Sam Jameson, "U.S. Offers $1.9 Billion Aid to S. Korea in Troop Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1977.
[192] "Infantry Unit to Be Last Out of Korea," *The Washington Post*.
[193] Ibid.

is to say, congressional pressure on the Carter administration to retain U.S. forces in Korea. Indeed, Brown, who believed that an "educational approach" could garner majority support for the policy in Congress, was still worried about opposition among lawmakers. Reportedly he discussed with his Korean counterparts the same Congressional dynamics Brzezinski laid out in his June 21 memo to Carter. He cited a somewhat incongruous tripartite congressional coalition against the withdrawal, consisting of lawmakers opposed on military grounds; others opposed to the Park regime on human rights grounds and against funding it, but also concerned the withdrawal would worsen abuses within South Korea; and, finally, those influenced by the ongoing Koreagate scandal who wanted to avoid the appearance of complicity and the political or electoral costs associated with it.[194]

By July's SCM, the troop withdrawal program consisted of clear requirements that made its implementation operationally viable. Yet, those same requirements formed potentially inbuilt obstacles to its completion. As noted, the military transfer package and foreign military sales credits required legislative approval and thus opened space for congressional obstruction. The back-loading of the withdrawal, which would leave the bulk of 2ID's combat capabilities and headquarters in place until the third and final phase, coupled with the Carter administration's discourse regarding the maintenance of the U.S. commitment to South Korea's security and the preservation of a stable military balance, left open the possibility of further barriers to implementation. If new conditions arose, which undermined Seoul's security and the administration's own rhetoric on stability, the withdrawal would have to be reconsidered.

It bears repeating, though, that such requirements were built into the withdrawal program because the various actors involved in its formulation perceived Carter's policy as undermining

[194] Saar, "Seoul Given Commitment By Carter: Talks Show Both Sides Are Worried About U.S. Pullout."

basic patterns in the U.S.-ROK relationship; patterns embedded within South Korea's domestic political structure, within a heavily militarized and combustible peninsular divide, and within a wider regional strategic setting. So, while new conditions quickly arose, including a worsening U.S.-ROK diplomatic row over a metastasizing Koreagate scandal, human rights pressures, and growing concern about intelligence reports indicating a more robust North Korean threat than previously forecast, all of which complicated the implementation of Carter's withdrawal program, the requirements of the program that opened space for such factors to undermine Carter's plan were themselves borne of more deep seated opposition to the policy itself and were already embedded in the process.

Chapter IV: Opposition Grows Along Patterned Lines

"There is concern about the solidness of the U.S. commitment…It is characterized by those who hear us say we're going to remain a Pacific power, but look at what we're doing. Our actions seem to say we're moving the power we have out of the Pacific…very concerned, I was concerned that the withdrawal would weaken our deterrence here to a dangerous point…The President listened to my concerns and said he would do it in a fashion that doesn't upset peace and security…President Carter's decision is based on a vision of the future, a Korea four or five years from now in which United States ground troops won't be required. That's not the situation now. Ground forces are required. Our job is to help President Carter's vision of the future come through. But none of us can control all the wires of the assembled props of the stage five years from now. We don't know what five years will bring. Hopefully, it will bring just exactly what President Carter is looking for; a more stable situation on the Korean peninsula; a situation where our ground troops won't be required."

-General John W. Vessey Jr., interview with Bernard Weinraub of *The New York Times*, August 3, 1977

"Short of an overt break with the U.S., a cooling in the relationship between the U.S. and the ROK, while having obvious dangers for the ROK, also contains pitfalls for the U.S. At present we enjoy a positive reputation and favorable position in the growing and increasingly affluent Korean market. This position would undoubtedly be eroded. At present we are in a position to influence Korean decisions on strategic planning, in particular in the fields of acquisition and development of weapons systems. This influence would decrease and affect not only overall U.S. strategy but directly the ability of the CINCUNC to control events. Finally, and importantly, the U.S. position in Asia is to a significant degree a function of our role in Korea. To the degree that our role in Korea changes inadvertently we are placing Asian perceptions of U.S. policy at hazard."

-Ambassador Richard Sneider, U.S. Embassy, Seoul, in telegram to the Secretary of State, March 15, 1978

While the in-built requirements in the withdrawal program formed barriers to its implementation, so too did various factors not in the program. Many observers were critical of the absence of a diplomatic effort toward Pyongyang or to Moscow and Beijing to facilitate creation

of more stable peninsular and regional conditions, which they felt were essential prerequisites to any substantial change in the U.S. military presence. The lack of any real diplomatic effort related back to critics' concern about Carter's seeming lack of appreciation for the manner in which his administration's actions in Korea posed a wider, spill-over effect far beyond the Korean Peninsula.

Skepticism along these lines intensified the already strong opposition among Republican and Democratic neoconservatives in Congress as well as in governments in Seoul, Tokyo and beyond, but also led increasingly to concern among President Carter's more moderate Democratic allies on Capitol Hill. Although the latter were inclined to support Carter's basic policy, they felt the conditions, timing and implementation simply were not right. Congressional concern about Carter's Korea policy was manifest in a series of fact-finding missions, hearings, and critical reports centered on Korea and the region, carried out by key committees and subcommittees in both houses. Lastly, and possibly most significant, while opponents in Congress and among the informed public challenged Carter, dissenters within the bureaucracy continued and indeed intensified their internal opposition to the policy.

As explored in earlier chapters, the internal review of U.S. policy toward Korea under previous administrations indicated any further or fundamental change in U.S. force levels would require replacing the Korean Armistice Agreement with a viable and more stable alternative diplomatic arrangement. Such an arrangement would of necessity involve the two Koreas in some sort of non-aggression pact, as well as a larger peace treaty requiring U.S. and Chinese involvement (the four-party approach), and possibly, by adding Tokyo and Moscow, a larger six-party arrangement. Although there was some formulaic rhetoric about its importance, the Carter administration made no real effort to include a concrete diplomatic element in its withdrawal policy. Critical outside observers and internal dissenters alike saw it as an afterthought, notable for

its absence. As mentioned, Brzezinski had alerted Carter to the fact that, among other reasons, many lawmakers were opposed to the withdrawal because it "was not made conditional upon reciprocal moves by North Korea to stabilize the status quo."[1]

To be fair, in theory Carter and other administration officials were interested in fostering improved inter-Korean relations and potential talks with Pyongyang. However, the latter's persistent intransigence toward the regime of Park Chung Hee and its obvious effort to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul was a non-starter. Even had the Carter White House pursued a deliberate and focused effort to foster a diplomatic settlement, which it did not, such a settlement was elusive at best. Yet, for the opponents of the administration's withdrawal policy this was exactly the point. If a diplomatic settlement was a prerequisite to military disengagement, and Pyongyang's position made achieving a settlement highly unlikely, then why move forward with the withdrawal plan?

Officials involved in the inter-agency process were clearly attuned to this inconsistency and the potential obstacle it created to garnering the necessary support for the withdrawal, a policy quite a few of these same officials were already against. Indeed, while Secretary of Defense Brown was negotiating the final details of the withdrawal program at the July SCM in Seoul, officials back in Washington acknowledged that when it came to the diplomatic angle, they were behind the curve and essentially playing catch up. Brzezinski's deputy, David Aaron, wrote Armacost that it "has been the missing dimension of our troop withdrawal policy." The process could include U.S.-ROK-DPRK tripartite talks or talks with all interested great powers, but would require first consulting with Seoul and thus should not be pursued "without excessive hustle or pressure." Someone, likely Armacost, keenly aware of how much of a detriment this posed to the withdrawal

[1] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Congressional Reaction to our Korean Policy," 21 July 1977."

policy, wrote in the margin of the memo, "Let's move on this."[2] Still, Armacost was sensitive to the opportunity they had already missed by not exploring diplomatic options first before pushing the withdrawal program forward.

Despite the SCM providing details on the withdrawal timeline and significant compensatory elements, and Secretary Brown reassurances of U.S. commitment to South Korea's security, opposition persisted, with the administration's lack of a diplomatic approach often cited. To skeptics, it appeared as though Carter thought the withdrawal could be executed in a vacuum. Rep. Stratton, already outspoken on the matter, threatened he might urge Congress to prohibit removal of the final two combat brigades until U.S. military chiefs said the situation was safe, arguing that they should be kept in place as a "diplomatic bargaining chip" to make Pyongyang sign a non-aggression pact.[3] Moreover, while Secretary Brown stopped in Tokyo to reassure the Japanese government and reiterate that the United States would remain an Asian power, uneasiness persisted. Japanese officials remained "plainly war and puzzled about the phased withdrawal," with senior defense officials telling American correspondents that Washington apparently received no assurance, or quid pro quo, from the Soviet Union or North Korea that the withdrawal would be accompanied by an easing of tensions by Pyongyang.[4]

Armacost, aware of these sentiments, alerted Brzezinski to the opportunity they had lost due to the precipitous nature of the withdrawal policy. In an August 4 memo, he laid out various premises that should guide the U.S. diplomatic approach to the Korea issue. "A serious and substantive dialogue between North and South Korea is an indispensable pre-requisite to the

[2] "Memorandum for Mike Armacost from David Aaron "Talks between North Korea and South Korea," 26 July 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 195-196.
[3] "Curb on Korea Pullout Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1977.
[4] Bernard Weinraub, "Japan Ponders Its Own Defenses As U.S. Prepares Korea Pullout," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1977.

evolution of political and security conditions conducive to a durable peace and to major further adjustments in the U.S. diplomatic-strategic role on the peninsula," he wrote. They could encourage such talks as best as possible, and even explore four-party or six-party talks. Nevertheless, he cautioned, "We must recognize that this is not the most propitious time to launch initiatives on the diplomatic front. By failing to make our troop withdrawal plan conditional upon specific North Korean countermoves, we forfeited our most consequential lever on Pyongyang." They missed an important chance by settling on a withdrawal program first. Consequently, now they had to move carefully, as any eager diplomatic move would be interpreted as an attempt to provide cover for a withdrawal already decided upon. Armacost warned the administration must avoid initiatives that "belie the reassurances" they repeatedly had given to Seoul concerning U.S. policy toward North Korea, or that might prompt the Japanese to undertake their own "unseemly initiatives" to "beat us to Pyongyang."[5]

Brzezinski, focused as he was on keeping Carter's withdrawal plan as viable as possible, communicated to Vance the importance of developing the administration's diplomatic approach. Contrary to Armacost, who was circumspect about what realistically could be achieved, Brzezinski wanted to explore various initiatives and to analyze the "ways which the implementation of the troop withdrawal plan could be used to promote such a result."[6] The *New York Times* editorial board echoed Brzezinski's impulse holding that the five-year timetable "might facilitate rather than retard diplomacy," yet conceded that such thinking ran contrary to the views of critics on Capitol Hill, the South Koreans, and of dissenters within the Administration, which, though left

[5] United States National Security Council, East Asian and Pacific Affairs Staff, *Talks between North Korea and South Korea Attachment Not Included]* 1977. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061877?accountid=14784.
[6] United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, *Talks between North Korea and South Korea* 1977. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061168?accountid=14784.

unnamed, certainly included Armacost.[7] This did not stop Brzezinski from pushing a possible effort to use a third party to contact Pyongyang, but not without ROK consultation and not for direct, bilateral U.S.-DPRK talks. Meanwhile, Washington needed to make clear to Moscow and Beijing that the United States would honor its commitments to Seoul, and that Moscow should counsel moderation to Pyongyang. Moreover, in preparation for the upcoming 32nd UNGA, the first of Carter's term, Brzezinski recommended that the East Asian Interdepartmental Group, chaired by State, prepare a study of additional initiatives designed to encourage an early resumption of North-South talks, with or without Washington's involvement. At that point, it was unclear whether or not Pyongyang would reintroduce a resolution calling for dissolution of the UNC and withdrawal of American forces.[8]

In Beijing in late August, Vance broached the Korea issue with his Chinese interlocutors. In his conversation with PRC Foreign Minister Huang Hua, Vance's ambivalence was evident insofar as he framed completion of the withdrawal along conditional lines yet also urged Beijing to take moves necessary to the plan's completion. Vance reminded Hua that "we have made it clear that the ultimate withdrawal of the last elements of the U.S. ground forces will only be made in light of the circumstances that exist at that time, including the political circumstances, and thus in terms of the potential danger to the Republic of Korea." Beyond the question of the military balance (crucial in its own right), Vance had in mind the diplomatic setting. Washington, as previously stated, was ready to speak with Pyongyang provided Seoul was present, as well as develop relations with North Korea assuming Beijing and Moscow agreed to the same with South Korea. The Carter administration welcomed discussions looking for "realistic replacement

[7] "Withdrawal Symptoms in Korea," *The New York Times*, August 2, 1977.
[8] United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, *Talks between North Korea and South Korea* 1977.

arrangements" for the UNC, but they must be approached in a constructive way. It also supported dual admission of the two Koreas to the United Nations "without prejudice to unification," and welcomed four-party talks to improve dialogue between North and South Korea and help find a peaceful resolution of problems in the area should Beijing and other parties be willing to do so.[9]

Vance's proposal did not find a receptive audience. The following day, Foreign Minister Hua adopted Pyongyang's line in full, stating that "the United States continues to try to delay the dissolution of the UN Command and the total withdrawal of US armed forces from South Korea, and it is also trying to perpetuate the division of Korea so as to obstruct the reunification of Korea." Reunification was the common desire of all the Korean people, Hua argued. They should settle the question of their independence and peaceful reunification among themselves, free from outside interference. Put simply, the U.S. should negotiate peace directly with Pyongyang and withdrawal its forces. The two Koreas could then settle their collective fate on their own. In his last day of talks in Beijing, Vance received a similar if less intense, more philosophical response from PRC Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping. Deng put the Korea issue in the same category as the two Chinas, two Germanies and the two Vietnams. Not only had the last two been reunited, but in each case nationalist sentiment for reunification was "a tide which is irresistible." The question was not if but when.[10]

For Washington, Beijing's position was not surprising. Beijing was hard-pressed to adopt a position on Korea that clashed with its One China policy; accepting dual admission of the Koreas would clash with its unwillingness to recognize Taiwan's legitimacy. Furthermore, at the moment,

[9] "Memorandum of Conversation with U.S. Secretary of State, and PRC Foreign Minister et al, 22 August 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 232-233.
[10] "Memorandum of Conversation with the U.S. Secretary and PRC Foreign Minister et al, 23 August 1977," in Ibid, 234-235; for conversation with Deng, see, "Memorandum of Conversation Between the U.S. Secretary of State and the PRC Vice Premier et al, 24 August 1977," in Ibid, 236-237.

PRC-DRPK political relations were better than U.S.S.R-DPRK ones, and Beijing's main concern was growing Soviet Far Eastern deployments. Beijing was disinclined to push a strategically important ally, such as Pyongyang, towards Moscow, particularly as the latter fostered improved relations with a newly unified Vietnam. Beijing knew full-well Pyongyang triangulated between its two largest allies. It preferred to maintain Pyongyang's relatively pro-Beijing orientation. Lastly, based on those same concerns about Soviet encroachment in the region as well as the reaction it might elicit in Tokyo, Beijing was not eager to see the U.S. remove troops from Korea. U.S. intelligence reports and various private conversations indicated as much. However, PRC leaders would never openly admit it for fear of Pyongyang's response.

Despite Vance's lack of traction in Beijing, Seoul watched Washington's effort with keen interest. The Park government expressed a desire to follow the Carter administration and develop better relations of its own with Beijing and Moscow. Brzezinski informed Carter, "since the U.S. is seeking improved relations with Peking, Seoul must also develop its own rapprochement policy toward the PRC," with Park asking for "an in-depth study of U.S.-China policy as a basis for future South Korean initiatives towards the PRC."[11] It also came to Brzezinski's attention that the Park government hoped to use members of a Japanese Friendship Association, who were travelling to the PRC and DPRK, in order to initiate contact with the two countries. Seoul wanted to begin a dialogue with Beijing about the Korean Peninsula and express its desire for a non-aggression pact with the North and joint entry of both Koreas into the U.N., and to restart North-South talks.[12] On August 29, Brzezinski, eager to try to move the process along, informed Vance that the

[11] United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, *Information Items* 1977. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679044599?accountid=14784.
[12] United States White House Situation Room, *Additional Information Items* 1977. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679061860?accountid=14784.

administration should support such efforts. "In response to this report, the President stated that we should push this as well," he wrote.[13]

Nevertheless, Beijing and Moscow's own reticence to develop contacts with Seoul notwithstanding, Pyongyang remained adamant that fostering direct U.S.-DPRK talks was what it wanted. Inter-Korean talks were, at the moment, dead on arrival. Although there was some discussion about potential tripartite U.S.-ROK-DPRK talks, it was not yet something Washington eagerly pushed, nor which Seoul was ready to pursue; not, that is, without first holding thorough consultations with the Carter administration on the framework. That came later. By late August, to the relief of both Seoul and Washington it was apparent Pyongyang was not going to introduce the Korean issue at the 32nd UNGA, due to its fear a new vote would reflect the erosion of its international support since the 1975 U.N. resolution calling for the dissolution of the UNC and withdrawal of foreign forces.[14] Pyongyang was also still trying to initiate direct contact with the Carter White House. Although Carter and his advisors had been clear no direct contacts would occur without South Korea's approval and presence, rumors of the possibility persisted in private diplomatic channels. Seoul's nerves were further frayed by a vocal minority in Congress, which in addition to its continued broadsides against Park's human rights abuses, called for direct contacts with Pyongyang.

Nevertheless, Seoul continued to express frustration over the lack of wider diplomatic progress. The Carter administration's failure to initiate serious initiatives before formalizing the withdrawal program and its lackluster effort after the fact, coupled with Beijing and Moscow's own restraint and Pyongyang's intransigence, highlighted all the more the lack of a stable

[13] United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, *South Korea/North Korea: Efforts Toward Dialogue* 1977. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679043841?accountid=14784.
[14] United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, *Information Items* 1977.

diplomatic setting for the withdrawal itself. Seoul, understanding full-well the complexities and difficulties surrounding the issue, still persistently echoed this theme, and held it up as yet another reason to doubt the efficacy of the withdrawal program. In both its private and public communications, it emphasized the lack of a clear political settlement as a reason to reconsider the policy.

In San Francisco on September 16, while in transit to the UNGA, ROK Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin spoke with assembled reporters. He urged the Carter administration to get assurances from the PRC and Soviet Union before executing the withdrawal. Only if Washington reached a "certain understanding" with the two regional powers before removing troops, could it avoid being criticized for "rash and hasty action," Park argued. He continued: "To be sure, the withdrawal of the United States ground forces from Korea will put the wisdom and courage of the United States to the test in Asia before a good many free Asian countries that are carefully watching the future development." Never missing a chance to stress both their local and broader importance, Park asserted U.S. "ground forces in Korea have played a vital role as a deterrent against the recurrence of a war on the Korean peninsula and as a stabilizer of peace in the whole northeastern Asian region." According to Park, this was all the more reason for a clear and stable diplomatic settlement to be found as well as for compensatory measures to precede the withdrawal so that "the military balance and stability would not be destroyed on the Korean peninsula."[15] As examined below, the compensatory package was then facing mounting obstacles in Congress and among the informed public.

The foreign minister stuck to the theme at the U.N. Meeting with the Special Assistant to the U.N. Secretary-General Ferdinand Mayrhofer-Grunbuhel on September 22, Park and ROK

[15] William Endicott, "Get China, Russ Word to Stay Out of South Korea, U.S. Told," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1977.

U.N. Permanent Observer Duk Choo Moon said there was no indication of progress on the Korean question. Pyongyang was unresponsive to Seoul's proposals for bilateral talks. Furthermore, while the ROK government hoped the United States, China, and Soviet Union would eventually use their influence to help resume North-South dialogue, the Chinese reaction to Secretary Vance's entreaties were not very positive. Consequently, Seoul would avoid taking new initiatives until Beijing and Moscow took a positive interest in seeking a solution. Nonetheless, Park remarked that the ROKG was pleased the Korea issue would not be on the agenda for the 32nd UNGA insofar as debate would have been useless and divisive. With chances of unification being "very small," South Korea hoped to become a full member of the United Nations. Mayrhofer-Grunbuhel asked if that meant both Koreas should be members. "Yes," Park responded.[16]

When it came to the planned withdrawal of American troops, Park reaffirmed that would depend on political and military developments and that should there be any provocations, it would have to be reconsidered. For Seoul, despite its involvement in U.S.-ROK talks on the details of the withdrawal program, the policy was not a settled one. Foreign Minister Park's remarks were consistent with the position taken by the South Korean government from the outset of consultations. The qualified language was also expressed by President Park in a personal letter to Carter days following the SCM.

Thanking Carter for the reassurances as well as clarity laid out during the SCM, Park stressed the need for compensatory steps to precede final removals. He also noted: "the military balance on the Korean peninsula and other developments affecting peace and security in this region would be the subject of continuing consultations between our two Governments to ensure that the deterrent to north Korean aggression remains strong." Again, beyond hard military considerations,

[16] "Notes on a Meeting in the Office of the Secretary-General on Thursday 22 September 1977 at 9:30 a.m.," in *The Carter Chill*, 241-242.

these "other developments" included the very diplomatic efforts toward which no real progress had been made. Thus, the use of qualified language and need for "continuing consultations" implied the need for continued talks, not only to assure the process was measured but, if need be, potentially altered.[17]

Importantly, President Park and his advisors' qualified language also aligned with the reserved rhetoric Secretary Vance used in Beijing and Secretary of Defense Brown used following the SCM in July. Neither Vance nor Brown were firm proponents of the withdrawal plan. They were also well aware of Holbrooke and Abramowitz's continued disapproval of the policy. So, while Vance and Brown as Carter's principal advisors faithfully worked to execute the president's policy preference on Korea, they did not actively contest the budding opposition underneath them. Furthermore, the principals were focused much of the time on other administration priorities, not to mention the overall scope of U.S. foreign and defense policy. Consequently, their deputies not only had the space and time to focus intently on their specific regional responsibilities, but the principals depended on and to an extent deferred to their specialized knowledge. The deputies' persistent doubts, which they did not hesitate to voice, surely seeped upwards and influenced the principals' thinking. In both of their memoirs, Vance and Brown recall that on more than one occasion they expressed their reservations to Carter about his troop withdrawal policy. Carter, though, remained adamant.[18]

Brzezinski, too, was well-aware of the opposition at the middle-level of the bureaucracy, specifically among the three main members of the EA Informal: Holbrooke, Abramowitz, and, his own deputy and Asia specialist on the NSC, Michael Armacost. Although cognizant of the military risks of the troop withdrawal, including the negative effect on peninsular deterrence and the

[17] "Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, 5 August 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 218-219.
[18] Brown and Winslow, *Star Spangled Security*, 169.

regional military balance, the three EA Informal members were more concerned with its political risks. To them, the policy was developing in an "ad hoc" manner, "sprung on our allies" without consideration of its impact on other foreign policy objectives, and was "bereft of strategic purpose."[19] They voiced their reservations at interagency meetings and were also able to inject their concerns, to a relatively successful degree, into the interagency process. They were able to help structure policy options and the final withdrawal program in such a manner that important compensatory and offsetting measures were included and the overall withdrawal schedule was back-loaded. Beside such bureaucratic tactics, though, they also took their concerns directly to Brzezinski and tried to warn him of the drawbacks and potential spillover effects of the policy, and the need to reconsider it entirely.

They felt Carter approached the Korea withdrawal as though within a vacuum, disconnected from other important policy considerations throughout East Asia. They also saw the withdrawal decision as one of several foreign policy initiatives that undermined allied perceptions of U.S. credibility. Speaking about the withdrawal within a larger regional context, Abramowitz recalled:

> We felt that some of the ideas from the White House were weakening our alliances with the Japanese, the Koreans, the Filipinos, etc. as well as building impediments to improving relations with China. We were afraid that the Asian countries would view our actions – or inactions – as an indication that we were reducing our interests in Asia; that might have serious consequences for our posture in the area as well as our national security. We felt that the initial general gesture of the Carter administration would be interpreted in Asia as the continuation of retreat from the area and reinforce the fears of the countries in the region from our withdrawal from Vietnam. This skepticism of administration's policies and initiatives in East Asia were felt most deeply by Mike Armacost at the NSC, Dick Holbrooke, the State assistant secretary for EA, and myself.[20]

[19] Interviews with members of EA Informal, as cited in, Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.
[20] Interview with Abramowitz, 642.

It was with this larger concern in mind that the group sought a direct audience with Brzezinski. The meeting lasted for about an hour. Although Brzezinski listened patiently, he did not indicate any agreement with their position. After all, "he was Carter's NSC advisor and always defended the president's policies," Abramowitz said. He continued: "As far as I recall, he never gave an inch on Korea during the lengthy evolution of that process. He may not have had his heart in following the president's wishes, but he certainly did not fail to push Carter's agenda."[21] Brzezinski referred to the meeting as having met with "the three Cassandras," and that the group was "trying to make the President flip flop." [22]

Abramowitz could not recall this particular meeting changing any of the administration's initiatives, but their intervention did raise "some flags in Brzezinski's mind which may have subsequently affected his thinking." Although he could not be sure of it, Brzezinski "certainly listened to our concerns and understood them."[23] Indeed, as previously noted, Brzezinski was already aware in early 1977 of the disquiet throughout the defense and foreign policy community. Brzezinski recalled that within a year, by early 1978, there was "little difference of views among agencies" in their negative evaluation of the policy on either military or political grounds, or both. There was, he said, "very little disagreement within the system that the withdrawal was an unwise idea." At that point, he was often the only person still supporting the withdrawal at interagency meetings, trying, he claimed, to keep Carter from having to override the unanimous views of his advisers. [24] Nathaniel Thayer, who became the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for East Asia several months into the administration, remembered thinking that, "Brzezinski did not quite know

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid; Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 147.
[23] Interview with Abramowitz, 642.
[24] Interview with Brzezinski, as cited in, Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.

what to do with the issue. Everyone below was telling him the withdrawal was crazy."[25] To be fair, by early 1978 several new obstacles had arisen confounding the policy, including more ominous intelligence on North Korea's military capabilities. Nevertheless, long before the emergence of such intelligence assessments, internal opposition to the withdrawal was readily evident.

Holbrooke, Abramowitz, and Armacost worked the seams within the bureaucracy and exerted pressure at key moments in the interagency process. In that sense, they played definitive roles. However, their opposition was framed by external trends, too. They acted behind closed doors, but their opposition was bolstered and informed by increasing public skepticism about Carter's policy and the negative signals many felt it sent regarding the credibility of U.S. commitments. Moreover, while the participants involved did not frame it in such terms, the skepticism aligned tightly with the basic patterns in the U.S.-ROK relationship outlined in the introduction, and their various domestic, bilateral, and regional and international logics.

Congressional Studies and Challenged Patterns

Following what they saw as the Carter administration's rushed rollout of the withdrawal policy, lawmakers began to study the issue more closely. After expressing initial reservations during earlier hearings and the attempts to pass a non-binding but supportive bill in the months before the SCM, lawmakers and their staff started to take trips to Seoul and other regional capitols to gain a better sense of the South Korean reaction. Senators Hubert H. Humphrey (D-MN) and John Glenn (D-OH), respectively the chairmen of the Subcommittees on Foreign Assistance and Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,

[25] Interview with Nathaniel Thayer, as cited in, Ibid.

were one of the first and most prominent examples. Both senators were particularly important in that they generally supported Carter's inclination to drawdown American forces, yet were skeptical of elements of the policy and how it had been introduced. If Carter was going to succeed in carrying out the policy, their support was crucial. Unfortunately for the administration, their study mission only added to their reservations.

Over the next six months, Humphrey and Glenn's efforts were replicated by others, including Rep. Samuel Stratton, who, in addition to holding constant hearings back in Washington, made his own fact-finding trip to the region. As a member of the Committee on Armed Services and the chairman of its subcommittee on investigations, Stratton focused on the military's perspective. These missions produced extensive reports, which laid out varied concerns (political, military, and symbolic) on multiple levels. From the domestic-level fallout within South Korea, to potentially fundamental changes in the bilateral U.S.-ROK relationship, to instabilities and vacuums in the wider regional and strategic environment, the congressional studies chartered how Carter's withdrawal decision was seen to undermine basic patterns in the U.S.-ROK relationship. Following their visits to Seoul, Tokyo and elsewhere, the various lawmakers would return to Washington, share their findings, and further complicate Carter's ability to execute what he thought was settled policy. Although the reports themselves were not published until late 1977 or early 1978, they reflected the thinking at that time.

Domestic-level Patterns within South Korea

Congressional delegations interviewed a wide-ranging group of people in South Korea to gauge their reaction to Carter's withdrawal decision. As noted, President Park himself stressed a can-do attitude. This was shared by South Korean businessmen, who showed confidence in the

resilience of the ROK economy and even saw an opportunity in the withdrawal. In addition to the positive outlook of various foreign investors, Kim Duk Choong, president of Daewoo Industrial Co. Ltd., and other businessmen expressed confidence that the withdrawal opened new employment and production opportunities for the South Korean defense industry, both for domestic output and export growth.[26] The attitude reflected their inherently adaptive tendency as businessmen, but was a function of genuine confidence borne of Seoul's remarkable economic growth and rapid modernization.

However, to be clear, the opportunity for further growth, specifically in the defense sector, assumed a certain ongoing American presence, coupled with the compensatory aid package and other offsetting measures. Moreover, while congressional missions surely encountered a spectrum of opinions, with some expressing ambivalent attitudes toward the withdrawal, the overall consensus was clear: "No one, including various dissident leaders, agreed with the decision. Some accepted it as a fait accompli and focused on the compensation package, while others held out the hope that a reassessment might still change the decision."[27]

While Senators Humphrey and Glenn and their staff gathered opinions, the *New York Times* reported on the "sense of shock and bewilderment" among ordinary South Koreans. They feared U.S. withdrawal would negatively affect economic growth, and lead to North Korean probing and eventual assault. To them, Carter's decisions signaled a lack of U.S. commitment in the wake of the "Indochina debacle." One intellectual explained: "A whole generation has been brought up with American troops in their midst. The United States presence has been a fixture. Whether rationally or not, we feel we are faced with the prospect of defending the country by ourselves."

[26] Mike Tharp, "On Target: South Korean Economic Outlook Bullish Despite Carter's Plan to Pull Out Troops." *The Wall Street Journal*, August 30, 1977.
[27] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 23.

Cho Chong Han, a Seoul physician, put it more starkly: "It's almost like weaning a baby. We depend on the United States for our survival. We need the U.S. Suddenly you're leaving. Our inertia has been shaken." An ROK official, citing Seoul's ongoing FIP effort, stressed "we are in the process of becoming stronger." However, the withdrawal: "raises totally unnecessary additional risks that shouldn't arise. When South Korea will improve its armed forces to match the North, that will be the time to withdraw."[28] This, of course, left open the question of who would determine when such a point had been reached as well as the obvious dilemma that any effort Seoul made to strength itself would be mirrored by Pyongyang's own.

The greatest concern, though, was conveyed by opposition leaders of the New Democratic Party (NDP), National Assemblymen from President Park's own rubber-stamp Democratic Republican Party (DRP), university professors and political dissidents. NDP Chairman Lee Chul-seung, who was politically close to President Park, remarked, "everyone in South Korea opposes the withdrawal, even the shoeshine boys…you do not hear Yankee go home from us; we know what Communism is." The Speaker of the National Assembly, Chung Il Kwon, a former Prime Minister and sometimes mentioned as a future president, told Humphrey and Glenn's staff: I don't understand why President Carter is in such a hurry to withdraw ground forces…it is a small U.S. investment and it is of great benefit to all free Asian countries." Under Chung's guidance, who had strongly opposed Nixon's 1971 withdrawal, the National Assembly passed a resolution that: 1) requested release of political prisoners under Park's Emergency Measures, 2) called for closer U.S.-South Korean ties, and 3) opposed the "one-sided withdrawal" of U.S. ground forces.[29] There was growing consternation in Seoul that the withdrawal, in conjunction with tensions over the

[28] Bernard Weinraub, "U.S. Withdrawal Plan Puzzles South Korea: Officials Fear Pullout Will Leave Seoul at Mercy of the North and Disrupt Economy," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1977.
[29] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 23.

Koreagate scandal and human rights critiques, was sending the relationship between Seoul and Washington into a tailspin.

Meanwhile, political dissidents, while deeply opposed to Park's authoritarian Yushin system, were also strongly against the withdrawal. On the one hand, they welcomed Carter's rhetoric on human rights and pressure on Park to loosen restrictions. It affirmed their belief the U.S. was an important partner in their drive for a democratic Korea. On the other hand, though, they were "well aware of the threat to their remaining freedoms," and saw the withdrawal as removing U.S. leverage against further state crackdowns. Indeed, it was in the wake of the earlier Nixon withdraws and U.S. retreat from Vietnam that Park had initiated and justified his *Yushin* Constitution.[30] Among dissidents, the general sentiment was that Carter's withdrawal decision would exacerbate rather than improve political conditions in South Korea.

Furthermore, while they felt President Park had used the North Korean threat instrumentally in order to maintain his dictatorial rule, dissidents were not oblivious to the military dangers posed by Pyongyang. However, they regularly argued that the most effective way to defend against it would be to foster a more democratic system within South Korea. As far as they were concerned, Park's *Yushin* system actually undermined the Korean people's ability and willingness to confront the communist threat from the North. Carter's withdrawal, by causing

[30] On the role of external variables in the construction and justification of the Yushin system, See: Tae Yang Kwak, "The Nixon Doctrine and the Yushin Reforms: American Foreign Policy, the Vietnam War, and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Korea, 1968-1973," *The Journal of America-East Asian Relations* 12: 33-57; on top of laying out these specific groups' reservations, Sen. Humphrey and Sen. Glenn summarized a range of additional comments they received during their study mission in Seoul: "Why should the United States change a policy that has been working well for 25 years?; U.S. airpower alone will not provide deterrence. Vietnam showed the inadequacy of airpower; South Korea has had no real explanation of the U.S. policy. It cannot be Korean economic progress alone since West Germany has a much stronger economy and U.S. troops will remain there. Thus, there must be some racial element involved; North Korea's leaders remain aggressive and irrational. By giving them the exact withdrawal schedule they will be able to plan their attack well in advance; It will soon become clear to the United States that withdrawal without war is impossible. There must be a reassessment. We need 8 to 10 years to make the necessary changes; There has been unwarranted bad press in the United States regarding Korean human rights and the bribery scandal. We hope it does not cloud Congress' decision on military aid; Korea is critical to northeast Asia. If the United States withdraws from Korea, it withdraws from Asia," see, Ibid, 23-24.

greater insecurity on Park's part and thus providing justification for tightening an already highly abusive authoritarian order, thus would undermine both their internal as well as external security.

Further complicating the domestic-level effects of Carter's withdrawal policy was, as mentioned, the fact that it became linked with Koreagate and human rights issues. The suddenness of the former and the existential questions it posed became intertwined with the latter two issues. This development increased in coming months and fostered a crisis-like feeling in U.S.-ROK relationship, one which the country team at the U.S. embassy studied closely and which influenced Korean attitudes from the highest levels of the government to ordinary citizens. It represented a fevered response to the pressures of the moment as well as deeper adjustments in the relationship. Put simply, the relationship between Washington and Seoul was experiencing a transition, borne as much from internal changes within South Korea as shifts in the international system and U.S. policy. In this context, Carter's overall approach to Korea, from his withdrawal policy to his rhetoric on human rights, sent mixed and often clashing signals to different groups within Korea, which not only fostered increasing skepticism and displeasure among these different groups toward Washington, but also exacerbated existent antagonisms between them.

Bilateral Hierarchy & Sovereignty Questions

In Seoul, the U.S. military command was also subject to a steady supply of questions and concerns from their Korean counterparts, which the local American officers themselves often shared. Gen. Vessey highlighted the persistent gap between Washington's word and deed: "There is concern about the solidness of the U.S. commitment…It is characterized by those who hear us say we're going to remain a Pacific power, but look at what we're doing. Our actions seem to say we're moving the power we have out of the Pacific." Initially, Vessey said, he was "very

concerned…concerned that the withdrawal would weaken our deterrence here to a dangerous point." President Carter listened to his concerns and said he would implement the withdrawal in a manner that did not "upset the peace and security." Nevertheless, the president's policy was based on a vision of the future, a Korea four or five years hence, when U.S. ground troops would not be required, but "that's not the situation now." His job was to help President Carter's vision come through, but "none of us can control all the wires of the assembled props of the stage five years from now." Hopefully, that vision could be met, but it would require more than just congressional passage of military aid and equipment transfers. Vessey said:

> It's a question of hardware, training, money and time. Time to acquire the hardware, assimilate the hardware, train on it. We're talking about modernizing an entire fleet of Korean tanks. They need additional antitank weapons, more artillery, helicopters, air defense systems. We have a fairly sizable force of helicopters…All right, if you said all the helicopters we have will go to the Koreans, it would be very difficult just training enough pilots, training parts-supply people just to keep that fleet of helicopters. There are a lot of hurdles. It's a prodigious undertaking – it won't be cheap for us if we're to do what the President says we're going to do.[31]

While congressional approval was necessary (but, in the short-term, increasingly doubtful), so too was the significant lead-time time to insure the South Korean military not only possessed the material and weaponry but the operational capacity to use it. After all, as the withdrawal program was constituted, thousands of U.S. military personnel would remain and likely be engaged in any future conflict on the Korean Peninsula. There was an understandable expectation that the South Korean military must be capable of effectively employing new weaponry and equipment under those conditions. Gen. Vessey had opposed the withdrawal decision from the outset and did not hesitate to continue to voice his own nor echo the apprehensions of the South Korean military. By doing so, he reinforced the Carter administration's own rhetoric but also laid particular emphasis

[31] Bernard Weinraub, "U.S. Commander Says Seoul Needs Big Arms Buildup," *The New York Times*, August 3, 1977.

on the enormity and uncertainty of the task it had set for itself. While dutifully working to implement the policy, Vessey, like others in the bureaucracy in Washington, issued constant if prudent warnings, which helped frame and thus potentially check the policy.

Alongside such pragmatic considerations, American G.I.s and officers on the ground expressed ambivalent feelings regarding tactical inflexibility within the ROK chain of command as a result of hierarchical cultural practices. According to local U.S. officers, whereas Americans saw training manuals as guides, which the local commander or officer had to interpret on the fly, South Korean officers viewed it as the bible and would not take initiative without their superiors say so. U.S. officers openly worried about their South Korean counterparts' ability or willingness to make quick, independent decisions under wartime conditions; conditions to which U.S. personnel would still be subject due to the remaining force presence and mutual defense treaty obligations.[32]Again, visiting congressional delegations were presented with these same questions and concerns by the local military command and South Korean government and military. Officials conveyed concerns regarding the contradiction between the Carter administration's rhetoric regarding the U.S. commitment and the actual physical removal of military forces. After all, it was the physical force presence which made the political commitment credible.

As outlined in the Humphrey and Glenn and Stratton subcommittee reports, there were three main roles played by U.S. ground forces in South Korea that helped to stabilize the situation: assistance with defense, deterrence, and truce-keeping responsibilities. In case of war, the U.S. ground forces provided considerable firepower advantages that would help in the defense of Seoul specifically and South Korea in general. The ground forces also provided "for an automatic U.S. response that serves as an important deterrent." Last, in relation to the armistice, "the United States

[32] Bernard Weinraub, "G.I.s at Korean DMZ Voice Mixed Feelings About Pullout," *The New York Times*, August 2, 1977.

is able to orchestrate truce-keeping operations and restrain any overly zealous South Korean reactions to incidents." Various senior military officers privately believed the second and third roles, namely, deterrence and truce-keeping, could not be passed off from Washington to Seoul in the allotted five-year timeframe, and that the first, defense, could only be transferred with great difficulty, as expressed by Gen. Vessey above. Consequently, they were concerned about the withdrawal plan and felt it dangerously increased the chance of war. Other military officials, Ambassador Sneider and the State Department, disagreed with this interpretation, stressing the withdrawal would not be total and the roles could be continued if proper adjustments were made.[33] Nevertheless, even if military considerations were not as pressing for the latter group, the large political and diplomatic effect were (see below). Overall, though, in regard to each role or function, Carter's plan was perceived to undermine an essential pattern in the relationship, that is, the role of the U.S. as the guarantor of the ROK's external sovereignty. More specifically, it posed potentially disruptive potential both to its spatial and authority dimensions.

Spatially, this involves problematizing the idea-type characteristics of the nation-state, characteristics often taken for granted. Spatial or territorial sovereignty, what some call external sovereignty, signifies quite simply the territorial integrity of the nation-state, the inviolability of its borders. Not only are most states defined, in part, by their territorial boundaries, but it is assumed that a key characteristic of their sovereignty is the independent defense of their own boundaries. Yet, in the case of South Korea, this assumption was complicated by its history. Since the inception as a political and juridical entity, it was dependent on the United States for the ultimate preservation of its territorial sovereignty. Except for one year (June 1949-June 1950),

[33] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 3, 35; Stratton Subcommittee Report, 16-17.

Seoul looked to Washington or, more specifically, U.S. forces stationed on its sovereign territory for its defense.

In terms of the spatial configuration of the relationship, the forward deployed U.S. tripwire was, for ROK defense and foreign policy elites, the ultimate physical manifestation of the political commitment embodied in the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. Although Nixon had removed 7ID in 1971 as well as realigned 2ID further south to the forward edge of battle area (FEBA), U.S. troops were still positioned between DPRK forces and Seoul. Carter's plan, however, would remove all U.S. combat ground troops and realign much of the remaining U.S. air force, command and control, and logistics elements south of Seoul. If Nixon's policy had merely loosened the tripwire, Carter's plan was seen to remove it altogether (or loosen it in a fundamental way). If the retention of Seoul, the economic and political heart of the country, was considered essential, which it was, then such a perception made sense. In other words, a critically important spatial configuration was being undermined; one within which South Korea's national security and remarkable economic modernization had been incubated.

This spatial configuration was being undermined on both military and psychological grounds. Militarily, 2ID was deployed in forward yet reserve position, "capable of moving into either of the two major corridors that lead like fingers to Seoul." These corridors were the Kaesong corridor in the west, used as an invasion route by North Korean forces in 1950, and the Chorwon corridor to the east. These U.S. units possessed more firepower, mobility, and better communications than any ROK division due to replace them. Any North Korean general leading an invasion south would have to calculate his maneuvers with these American units in mind; "a serious military problem." Psychologically, and even more compelling from the North Korean view, was the fact that these units were part of a larger U.S. force structure. As Gen. Singlaub

testified before the subcommittee and Stratton had reprinted in the subcommittee's report, they represented "the tipoff an iceberg of U.S. combat power…If that force were removed, that element of constraint would also be removed, that is, Kim could launch his attack without fear of running into U.S. ground forces…That element of deterrence…cannot be replaced by any number of ROK divisions."[34] Indeed, based on recent developments the remaining units had taken on an even more disproportionate significance despite their relatively small size.

Before 1974, defense plans had envisioned the temporary occupation of Seoul until ROK (and U.S.) forces regrouped and counterattacked. However, in 1974, Generals Hollingsworth and Stillwell developed a forward defense concept designed to defeat DPRK forces before they reached Seoul, reflecting Seoul's "vital importance as the economic and population center of the country." The forward defense strategy had several important components, including: deployment of additional ROK forces north of Seoul; the need for strong, in-depth reinforced defensive positions, massive firepower, mobility, excellent communications, tactical air support, better air defense and substantial warning time before an attack. "The net result," Humphrey and Glenn noted, "is that in military terms U.S. forces play a relatively larger role now than they did before 1974 in the defense of Seoul, thus making ground troop withdrawal more difficult."[35]

The Carter administration's plan for an alternative deterrence and defense structure rested on several measures: continual reaffirmation of the Mutual Defense Treaty and U.S. "nuclear umbrella"; stressing the deterrent nature of remaining U.S. air wing and naval support, bolstered by a deployment of a dozen F-4s; expanded joint combined military exercises, demonstrating U.S. reinforcement capabilities; and the all-important pledge to provide a significant military

[34] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 16-17.
[35] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 39.

compensatory package.[36] Thus, the effectiveness of the alternative deterrent would depend, in part, on the confidence South Korea placed in the continuing U.S. commitment and the importance Pyongyang placed on the air and naval support Washington would supply in the event of a war. ROK officials did not hesitate to communicate their lack of confidence. In terms of the reduced and more southernly deployed U.S. force, Kim Dong Jo and Kim Dyang Won, President Park's top national security advisors in the Blue House, told Humphrey and Glenn's staff: "We are in the post-Vietnam era and now verbal commitments cannot do what physical presence does…the purpose of troop withdrawal from South Korea must be seen by North Korea as a U.S. option not to become involved in another Asian ground war." Moreover, it was not just the absence of the physical presence north of Seoul, but the make-up of remaining U.S. forces south of it. In Korea, "the foot solider is what counts…Vietnam showed us the impotence of air power," Choi Yong Hui, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, told the staff.[37]

To make matters worse, new information soon emerged further eroding South Korean confidence. Leaked U.S. documents revealed yet another troubling gap, this time between the Carter administration's official rhetoric and what its classified studies said. On September 7, the syndicated conservative columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, who opposed Carter's foreign policy in general, wrote about the PRM-10, a top-secret interagency study of U.S. force structures. Evans and Novak noted PRM-10 was gloomy about U.S. forces holding the South Korean capital of Seoul were the North Koreans to invade today. Even with U.S. air and naval interdiction, the study suggested, Seoul could not be held, all of which contradicted Carter's

[36] Ibid, 40.
[37] Ibid.

assurances that his decision to remove ground combat forces would not undercut the U.S. commitment to South Korea.[38]

It also undermined the current U.S. military doctrine which considered the retention of Seoul a necessity. "Thus," they wrote, "South Koreans face the same problem as the West Germans: Shall they believe public pronouncements of U.S. leaders or private documents of their staff experts?"[39] Retired General Richard Stillwell, the former CINCUNC, confirmed as much during his testimony before the Stratton subcommittee. Stillwell said: "My estimate is that North Korea has achieved the capability for independent action for up to 90 days during which it could engulf Seoul." Furthermore, Stillwell argued, Pyongyang could invade without the Moscow or Beijing's knowledge, but in the actual event they would be forced to help it.[40] PRM-10 stressed that the forces brought to bear in the early stages of a war favor North Korea other South Korea "in all categories." Despite this, after such initial success, North Korean forces would be unlikely to gain and sustain major breakthroughs or wear down South Korea in sustained combat.[41]

Nevertheless, such a judgement was said to depend on U.S. ability to commit five carrier task groups, two marine amphibious forces, one army division and 24 fighter squadrons to the Korean conflict. The success of reinforcements on this level would itself depend upon "the availability of air and amphibious transportation for the forces and their arrival in time to affect the outcome of the initial thrust at Seoul." It was possible the war could well be over before the United States arrives at the decision to move such forces into place. If war broke out, then, any future U.S. administration would face a stark dilemma. Remaining U.S. air, naval and logistic forces would likely be quickly involved, as the North Korean forces made quick progress early-

[38] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "PRM-10 and the Korean Pullout," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1977.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "North Korea Could Attack Without Russ OK: Stillwell," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1977.
[41] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 10.

on, as many expected they would. Thus, U.S. forces would either have to be withdrawn completely, thus rupturing irrevocably the U.S.-ROK alliance and doing untold damage to U.S. credibility, or they would have to be heavily and rapidly reinforced without a guarantee the reinforcements would arrive in time to make a difference. "Either decision," the Humphrey and Glenn report noted, "could meet with stiff opposition from the American public."[42]

PRM-10 further challenged the Carter administrations stated rationales for the withdrawal. "Once the U.S. land forces are out of Korea," the document stated, "the U.S. has transformed its presence in Asia from a land-based posture to an off-shore posture. This . . . provides the U.S. flexibility to determine at the time whether it should or should not get involved in a local war." The document went on to divulge another damning and previously unpublicized reason for the withdrawal: "the risk of automatic involvement (which was a major factor in removing land force from Korea) is minimized. However, should the U.S. decide to intervene, military forces would be readily available."[43] For South Koreans, the dilemma was clear and unsettling. If current U.S. force levels were inadequate, how would decreasing them not make their security even more precarious? On top of this, if the withdrawal was predicated on giving the U.S. more discretion over whether and to what extent it would be involved in the case of a North Korean attack, how could the ROK believe the Carter administration when it publicly affirmed its commitment?

ROKG officials and ordinary Koreans also questioned the inconsistency in the Carter administration's rationales insofar as they did not apply the same standards elsewhere, particularly in Europe. Seoul's economic growth, enhanced capabilities and increasing self-sufficiency all were cited as reasons for the withdrawal. Nevertheless, Carter was not withdrawing U.S. forces from West Germany and other European allies, whose level of economic development far exceeded

[42] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 41.
[43] Evans and Novak, "PRM-10 and the Korean Pullout."

Seoul's. As one respondent remarked: "It cannot be Korean economic progress alone since West Germany has a much stronger economy and U.S. troops will remain there. Thus, there must be some racial element involved." [44] Bolstering the sentiment was the fact that the Carter administration planned to reconfigured 2ID as a mechanized infantry division Korea for future deployment to the European theater once it was removed from South Korea.[45]

The untethering of the spatial dimension of the U.S. role as the hierarchical guarantor of South Korea's external sovereignty thus brought to the surface an assortment of military as well as psychological complications. For, in addition to the pragmatic concerns vis-à-vis defense and deterrence, the longstanding nature of this spatial arrangement (i.e. the forward, tripwire deployment of U.S. forces perched between the DMZ and Seoul), coupled with the historical memory of the Korean War, a catalyzing critical juncture, made undoing or loosening the deployment inherently problematic. For these reasons, the components of the withdrawal program were all the more important, specifically the implementation of the compensatory package and the backloading of the withdrawal and formation of the combined forces command. Nonetheless, rather than obviating apprehensions about Carter's withdrawal, a closer look at these components reveals how they directly reflected the risks the policy posed to the authority dimension on the U.S. role as guarantor of South Korean sovereignty. Indeed, the compensatory element of the program interacted with the untethering of the forward deployment in contradictory ways.

Much like the nation-state's role in upholding the territorial inviolability of its own political borders, conventional understanding takes for granted that it has control over its own defense, specifically in the form of its independent defense and military capabilities, constrained, as in the

[44] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 23.
[45] Bernard Weinraub, "Army Weighs Moving 14,000 G.I.s From Korea to Fort Drum, N.Y," *The New York Times*, September 8, 1977.

case of all states, by limited resources and technology. Yet, again, in the case of South Korea, such as assumption is complicated. Historically, South Korea was "dependent upon the United States for practically all of its military hardware, originally in military assistance grants, but more recently in the form of foreign military sales and credits." Seoul often depended on or deferred to the United States in the case of particular types of defense capabilities. Although partly due to Seoul's desire to limit defense spending and focus on economic growth and modernization (in other words, leveraging the political-economy advantages of security dependence), it was also a function of its genuine dependence upon Washington and deliberate restrictions the latter imposed upon it.

Washington consistently limited Seoul's offensive capabilities and "discouraged development of defense industries in South Korea because of a concern over the capability to successfully attack the North." Although such a concern had waned to a certain degree by the late 1970s, the earlier pattern of dependence and U.S. imposed constraints resulted in asymmetrical military growth and capabilities between the two Koreas.[46] Much like the spatial instabilities posed by Carter's policy, the consequences of this pattern had "become acutely apparent since the United States has proposed the total withdrawal of its ground force from Korea."[47]The compensatory package, which was so essential to the execution of Carter's withdrawal program (JCS and allied support depended upon it), embodied the contradictions of Carter's policy as it reconstituted this longstanding U.S. impulse to maintain relative control or influence over its smaller ally's capabilities, actions and strategic decisions, yet at a moment when the physical U.S. presence was being drawn down in a more fundamental manner than ever before. On the one hand, the Humphrey and Glenn report noted, the compensatory package was devised in such a way that it

[46] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 15.
[47] Ibid.

would provide offsetting capabilities to adequately replace the firepower and mobility losses due to the removal of 2ID in order to "allow the ROK Army to assume a greater share of its own defense." Yet, on the other hand, it had to be limited so as not to spur a local or regional arms race, or "provide South Korea with sufficient offensive assets to successfully attack North Korea."[48] Washington needed to avoid compensatory measures so robust that it could no longer influence events.

The dilemma was evident. By limiting Seoul's replacement capabilities, by not allowing the ROK military to take on the exact same level of firepower as the departing 2ID, a less robust deterrent was unavoidable. Again, this invariably undermined the perception of U.S. credibility as well as overall military readiness were a conflict to actually occur. Moreover, because of the insecurity it was bound to trigger, it could lead to the same outcome it was supposed to avoid: Seoul's pursuit of more independent defense and strategic options. Additionally, but still of somewhat limited importance, Washington was concerned about the political-economy of defense export markets, and how the South Korean defense industry might begin to compete with American firms.[49]

The administration's own internal memo traffic reiterated the point. On September 21, 1977, Armacost warned Brzezinski about concerns he encountered in Japan regarding whether or not the U.S. military assistance to Seoul would feed an arms race, which lawmakers like Senator McGovern had been publicly arguing in Washington. Armacost noted that the assistance would not spur an arms race because it is "not designed to facilitate the ROK's achievement of an overall

[48] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 46.
[49] Kenneth H. Bacon, "U.S. Plans to Help South Korea Build Up Its Weapons Industry as Troops Pull Out," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 1977; Andrew H. Malcom, "South Korea Builds A Defense Industry: Stresses Self-Reliance at Time When U.S. Prepares for Pullout and Plans to Cut Arms Sales," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1977.

superior military position," and "the equipment transfers that we contemplate are designed precisely to improve the defensive position of the South, not to enable it to obtain a capacity to "go North." Thus, "the emphasis on air defense missiles, TOW anti-tank weapons, etc," Armacost wrote. Brzezinski agreed with Armacost's recommendation that though the administration had not made such an argument publicly, it was worth exploring options with State and Defense.[50]

The dynamic was also evident in the administration's reticence to sell F-16s to Seoul. As mentioned, Secretary Brown had floated the possibility of such a sale as a way to settle Seoul's nerves during the July SCM. For its part, Seoul wanted to purchase the new aircraft and secure a co-production agreement as well. While officials at Defense and the JCS and local USFK commanders did not oppose the sale, State, ACDA and Carter himself were skeptical. The proposed sale would "introduce new sophisticated weapons into the area for the first time," and "might prompt North Korean requests for equivalent Soviet aircraft." The sale also directly contradicted Carter's arms transfer policy and commitment to move toward demilitarizing regional conflicts.[51]

Most worrisome, of course, were the ultimate limits of Seoul's self-sufficient defense: an independent nuclear deterrent. As previously explored, it was only in the waning months of the Ford Administration that Washington had faced down Park's secretive nuclear weapons program. It was common knowledge Seoul possessed the capability to achieve nuclear breakout if necessary. After roughly seven years of construction, its first civilian nuclear plant was nearing completion, with ambitious plans to quickly and rapidly expand its capacity.[52] Although under international safeguards, such growing capabilities meant that the scientific knowhow existed if weaponization

[50] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "Korea: Claim that our Assistance Package Will Feed a Local Arms Race," 21 September 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 239-240.
[51] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 47.
[52] "Korea Set to Enter Atomic Age With Nuclear Power Plant," *The New York Times*, August 18, 1977.

became a priority. Humphrey and Glenn observed that the ongoing FIP, even when completed, would "still leave South Korea with a firepower imbalance" vis-à-vis Pyongyang, which coupled with withdrawal of 2ID, "could lead to substantial insecurity in the South." Such potential insecurity, they warned, had "already resulted in renewed calls from many circles for development of a Korean nuclear weapon." President Park and his advisors had warned as much.[53]

Foreign Minister Park told the National Assembly that although Seoul was party to the NPT, it would make "an independent judgment" if the country's survival was at stake. Lee Chul-sung, then the leader of the opposition NDP, told visiting congressional staff that if insecurity prevailed his party "may not find any justifiable objection to demands by some ruling party assemblymen that South Korea build its own atomic weapons." Humphrey and Glenn noted the marked costs of such a move, including alienating Washington, disrupting regional stability, and inviting a possible pre-emptive strike from North Korea, yet observed the existence of reports that Seoul already may have attempted to develop the weapon and a delivery system for it.[54] Although the Senators and their staff did not know for sure, and public revelations would not emerge until late 1978, Carter and his principle advisors were well aware of Seoul's earlier efforts.

Lastly, there was the question of operational control. Much like territorial sovereignty and independent defense capabilities, control over its own military is a taken-for-granted characteristic of Westphalian sovereignty. However, in the ROK's case, this was a problematic assumption, with distinct consequences for U.S. force removals. The backloading of the withdrawal directly tied into this dynamic. In addition to drawing out the withdrawal for as long as possible, the backloading of the plan was also specifically designed so that the local U.S. four-star general could maintain U.S. operational control for as long as possible, which, as Secretary of Defense Brown

[53] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 33.
[54] Ibid.

told Carter, is "what we want on command arrangements."[55] One secret State Department paper remarked that, on the one hand, the plan "makes it essential to enhance ROK command and control capabilities" within a combined command structure, but, on the other hand, "we believe we must continue to exercise operational control over the ROK to maximize command capability and to retain our present ability to prevent risky moves on the part of the Korean forces."[56] Moreover, U.S. officials raised concerns about the contradictory dynamic that would arise before the third a final phase of the withdrawal was complete. Apprehension about the new command structure was related to the contradictory nature of the Korean armistice.

Even with the removal of all U.S. ground troops, the senior U.S. Commander would remain responsible for carrying out the terms of the armistice as the U.N. Commander. As a result, he would be in overall operational control of Korean ground troops called on to resist any North Korean invasion or other violation of the armistice. This was an issue, the Stratton Subcommittee report noted, insofar as command and control problems "faced by a U.S. commander operating exclusively with Korean troops would be likely to place him at a very significant disadvantage and run the risk of further eroding the influence and credibility of the United States."[57] The report went on to highlight the many "unprovoked acts of aggression, infiltration and contrived incidents," from the earlier Blue House raid to the attack at Panmunjom in 1975, the 1976 Axe Murder incident, and the more recent downing of a U.S. helicopter that accidentally strayed into North Korean airspace in July 1977. "These incidents illustrate the volatility of the political and military situation on the Korean Peninsula. Were it not for the presence of U.S. forces and their restraining

[55] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Harold Brown, "My Trip to Korea," 12 July 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 172-175.
[56] United States Department of State 1977, *Command Arrangements*, http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/1679044419?accountid=14784.
[57] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 4.

influence in response to those incidents, any one of them might have been sufficient to ignite the fuse of another war in Korea," the report stated.[58]

Removing U.S. ground combat forces, Humphrey and Glenn argued, would: "create a situation in which the U.S. Commander as the CINCUNC could order truce-keeping measures but would not have forces available to police those orders. The animosity between the two Koreas is deeply engrained and highly emotional. Without U.S. troops in Korea there would be less restraints on South Korean reactions to new incidents thus increasing the possibility of an escalation in the conflict."[59] In short, Carter's plan, if fully implemented, would push up against the outer limits of a long-standing hierarchy in the relationship, and potentially cause severe instabilities and, at worse, a conflict to which the U.S. remained treaty-bound to respond.

The establishment of a bilateral U.S.-ROK combined command would increase cooperation but could not obviate this glaring contradiction. Indeed, from a certain perspective, it exacerbated it. Moreover, the working assumption was that following completion of the final phase, Seoul would take back full OPCON. A move about which various U.S. officials expressed doubts. They were intent that whatever "third generation solution" would be devised, while giving "ROK commanders greater autonomy," would retain "the built-in restraints of the current arrangements."[60] Secretary Brown had stressed to Park Chung Hee that any new command arrangement after the CFC – a transitional arrangement attending the withdrawal – would require thorough study, consideration of the ongoing U.S. logistical and intelligence role, and consultations with a potentially wary U.S. Congress.

[58] Ibid, 14.
[59] Humphrey-Glenn Report, 41-42.
[60] Ibid, 42.

In sum, Carter's policy posed a distinct problem for Seoul and for U.S. strategists and officials. It increased South Korea's insecurity (in military and psychological terms), while, to the chagrin of Washington, provided it the space, capabilities, and incentive to adopt a more independent defense posture and behavior vis-à-vis its American partner. The debate within the bureaucracy reflected the acute nature of the questions forced upon officials by the withdrawal.

Regional Strategy and Perception

The SCM provided as clear a picture yet of how the withdraw policy would be carried out. It also signaled Carter was definitely intent to implement the policy, the efficacy of which many observers genuinely doubted. Again, within days of the SCM criticism abounded. Japanese officials, in conjunction with their concern about the lack of a diplomatic quid pro quo with Moscow or Pyongyang, reiterated that they still did not feel they had received "adequate explanations" for the policy and saw the troop pullout as a larger U.S. retreat from the region, which would result in greater communist influence at a time of increasing Soviet presence in the region. It left them with "a profound uneasiness about American reliability."[61] Although outwardly Tokyo expressed satisfaction with Secretary Brown's visit after the SCM and officially held the troop withdrawal was a bilateral U.S.-ROK issue, informed observers knew otherwise. The Japanese only reluctantly accepted what they considered a fait accompli and held out hope the policy would be reconsidered.

American officials, too, were concerned about the spillover effect of the withdrawal on Tokyo. Indeed, this was one of Holbrooke's central concerns. The so-called "Japan problem" (as one contemporary observer put it), which is to say the real and perceived effects of the withdrawal

[61] Weinraub, "Japan Ponders Its Own Defenses As U.S. Prepares Korea Pullout."

on Japan's security and economy, was manifold. For historical and domestic reasons, Korea was significant to Japan. Before WWII, the only attempts at invasion of Japan had been staged from Korea, moving across the relatively narrow 100-mile Korean straights. Domestically, roughly 600,000 ethnic Koreans lived in Japan, and millions of refugees were expected if South Korea were to fall. Next, South Korea's economic growth and Japan's distinct involvement therein amplified its economic importance to Japan. By 1977, trade volume between the two was $3.7 billion, and Japanese investment in South Korea was estimated at $690 million. Last, and possibly most important, the ROK was considered of "international political and strategic importance to Japan." For Japan, regional strategic politics were seen as determined by the U.S., Soviet Union, and PRC. Korea was the "vortex" of this tripolar balance. Put simply, if the United States failed to protect the ROK, the Japanese would have little belief in US determination to defend Japan….

As previously discussed, the importance of Japan to postwar U.S. designs strongly influenced the original U.S. commitment to South Korea. Since then, and especially over the 1970s, the American perception of Japan's importance had steadily increased, as it became economic superpower.[62] Interrelated with Japan's economic importance was its strategic value. Congressional opponents of the plan feared U.S. disengagement from Korea could result in one of two outcomes. On the one hand, Japanese policymakers, doubtful of the U.S. commitment at a time of increased Soviet Far Eastern deployments, might acquiesce to communist influence and move leftward outside the U.S. orbit. On the other hand, but for similar reasons, Japan might swing right, rushing to remilitarize and thus instigate a regional arms race and potential nuclear proliferation. Both scenarios went against fundamental tenets of U.S. foreign policy in the region. It bears repeating that Carter, from early on in his campaign for president, spoke explicitly about

[62] Larry A. Niksch, "US Troop Withdrawal from South Korea," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 3 (March 1981): 331.

the importance of Japan to U.S. interests. Thus, Carter himself constructed discursive barriers that could not but affect perception of the withdrawal.

Among other Asian leaders, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew was one the more vociferous opponents of the withdrawal. He echoed Tokyo's concerns, but framed his criticism even more expansively. On August 4, speaking to other ASEAN leaders, Yew stated that U.S. "security considerations of the last two decades are no longer relevant. Their only major strategic consideration in Asia is Japan…But this has not inhibited American plans for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces in Korea in five years, despite a distinct lack of Japanese enthusiasm for this step." The troop withdrawal, Yew told reporters, was "a momentous decision with profound long-term consequences for the security of the northeast and probably the rest of Asia." Yew saw it as part of Carter's plan for a decreased U.S. presence in Asia which, in turn, was "a specific threat to nations that believe in the capitalist system," and that the U.S. promise of aid to Seoul was an empty one.

Similar sentiments were voiced by leaders through the region, and by Asian Ambassadors to administration officials and key lawmakers in Washington. Although the exact nature of the criticism in Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia differed depending on each country's geopolitical situation, each one tended to analyze the withdrawal in connection with other U.S. policy initiatives in the region. Taken together, conversations with these various regional leaders demonstrated they were "concerned with the continuing U.S. commitment to Asia which they perceive as essential for peaceful evolution in the region." Of course, nowhere was the sentiment more immediate and intense than among South Koreans, who did not hesitate to communicate their concerns to American officials.

Following their visit, Humphrey and Glenn walked away with an even greater appreciation for the "critical impact" the withdrawal would have in Korea but also "on the peace and stability of East Asia". "Indeed," they argued, "one of the most important but often overlooked aspects of the Korean withdrawal is the effect it has on other East Asian nations. These countries see it as one of a series of steps indicating a weakening United States commitment to that region." Consequently, they emphasized not only the pragmatic but the "symbolic" importance of the military compensatory measures, and the need to "proceed with great care and with renewed diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula, while being mindful that those decisions will also have a major impact on all nations in the East Asian region." Their reservations were matched, if not exceeded, by their colleagues who would soon conduct their own study missions. Put simply, preexisting skepticism was growing.

Policy Obstruction: Koreagate, Congress, & Alterations of the Withdrawal

The Carter Administration hoped to introduce legislation for the military transfer and assistance package in the fall session in order to signal its commitment to Seoul and regional allies. However, it was constrained in doing so. Congress planned to adjourn in mid-October and was set to consider legislation related to other contested administration policies related to the Panama Canal Treaties and sale of spy planes to Iran. The Carter White House was reluctant to place yet another controversial measure before the congress.[63] The outstanding opposition and skepticism surrounding the withdrawal and bubbling tensions over Koreagate meant the legislation faced definite roadblocks. Again, this was not new. Brzezinski and others had warned Carter in the run

[63] Weinraub, "Army Weighs Moving 14,000 G.I.s From Korea to Fort Drum, N.Y."; see also, Don Oberdorfer, "Legislation to Support U.S. Korean Pullout Faces a Delay," *The Washington Post*. September 10, 1977.

up to the July SCM about such obstacles. Yet events soon quickened in the fall of 1977 and on into 1978.

In late August, Park Tong Sun, the central protagonist in the Koreagate affair, told a press conference in Seoul after being investigated by the Seoul District Prosecutor's office that he had not bribed U.S. legislators and therefore did not need to be further interrogated by Congress or U.S. law enforcement authorities. This did not stop the U.S. Justice Department from indicting Park in early September on thirty-six counts of conspiracy to bribe U.S. lawmakers, defraud the U.S. government, mail fraud, racketeering, and illegal campaign contributions. Developments around the case quickly ramped up tensions between Congress and the Carter Administration on the one side and the Park government on the other. Seoul announced it would not return Park to the United States to face charges, citing the fact that no extradition treaty existed between the two countries and, more than that, its sovereign rights as an independent country.[64]

Within hours of Seoul's announcement, the House rejected by a surprisingly tight margin (205-181) an amendment that would have cut off roughly $110 million in economic assistance to Seoul. Though it also rejected more decisively (268-120) a proposal that would have cut off both economic and military assistance, which showed there were limits to how far most lawmakers would go, the message was clear.[65] At the same moment the White House announced Carter had sent a personal letter to President Park requesting cooperation on the matter, the outspoken Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill Jr., told the House that Seoul's failure to cooperate would "only strain its relations with the United States." He continued: "Doubts as to the continued advisability of our

[64] "House Rejects Move to Reduce Korea Aid: Caputo Amendment Designed to Spur Cooperation in Tongsun Park Inquiry Loses 205-181," *The New York Times*, September 9, 1977.
[65] Ibid.

partnership with the Republic of Korea are being expressed all across America…Our alliance cannot thrive under these conditions."[66] From there things got worse.

In view of the close rejection of the "symbolic cut" in economic aid, Rep. Stratton said "there is a fairly substantial amount of reluctance to vote for anything for Korea right now." Senator Cranston, himself a proponent of withdrawal but not necessarily supplying more arms to the Park government, said congressional and public attitudes "certainly could complicate" things. [67] Senators Adlai E. Stevenson (D-Ill) and Harrison H. Schmitt (R-NM) chairman and vice-chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee, respectively, which was conducting its own independent investigation into Korean influence-buying activities, strongly encouraged Seoul to cooperate. They noted that far more damning information existed than had been made public and were open to curtailing economic assistance if the ROKG did not do so. Yet, like many of their Senate colleagues they were not willing to go so far as to cut off military or security assistance.[68] Nevertheless, tensions grew by the day, with mounting press coverage of the linkage between the scandal and the likely obstruction of the arms passage; coverage that itself fostered a sort of "fevered state of affairs," noted the *New York Times* editorial page.[69]

Despite these warnings, on October 21 Carter sent a letter to Speaker O'Neill along with a bill requesting authorization for transfer of defense articles and military aid to the ROK.[70] In it, Carter explained the basics of the withdrawal, writing that "our security relationship is not a static

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[66] Martin Tolchin, "O'Neill Sees Strain On Korean Alliance: Says Failure to Cooperate With Inquiry on Tongsun Park May Harm U.S. Relations," *The New York Times*, September 8, 1977.
[67] Oberdorfer, "Legislation to Support U.S. Korean Pullout Faces a Delay."
[68] Richard Halloran, "Stevenson Warns South Koreans To Cooperate on Tongsun Park," *The New York Times*, September 20, 1977.
[69] The *New York Times* editorial page highlighted the detrimental effect the sensationalistic press coverage was having, by fostering a "loaded, overstated view" of the scandal, see: "South Korea's 'Plan,'"*The New York Times*, December 1, 1977; see also: "South Korea: The Wrong Bludgeon," *The Washington Post*. September 9, 1977; Andrew Macolm, "Seoul Risking Image in U.S.: It Faces Dilemma on Park Bribery Charges," *The New York Times*. September 12, 1977.
[70] "Carter Wants to Give $800 Million in Arms to S. Korea in U.S. Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1977.

one and the specific *ways* in which we seek to accomplish our basic objectives must be evaluated in the light of present circumstances." He added: "The ground force withdrawal is a natural evaluation of our ongoing security relationship." Such evolution, Carter explained, was based upon several considerations: Seoul's economic growth and enhanced defense capabilities; continued U.S. determination to maintain the basic security commitment embodied in the Mutual Defense Treaty as well as a significant military presence in the ROK and the Western Pacific; an assessment of the broader international context surrounding the Korea Question, in particular the pattern of interrelationships between the great powers; and a readiness to conduct ongoing consultations with Congress in order to assure the withdrawal does undermine the military balance on the Korean Peninsula or weaken ROK defense capabilities.[71]

Nevertheless, Carter once again framed the U.S. commitment to South Korea in expansive terms. "Peace and Stability in Northeast Asia are vital to our national interests, and stability on the Korean Peninsula is essential to that goal," he wrote. While the first phase of the withdrawal "will take place in 1978" and he urged "Congress to enact promptly the proposed legislation," he repeated the now standard invocation that the withdrawal would proceed in such a manner that stability would be maintained, firmly keeping in place the rhetorical constraints that had attended his policy since the election. [72]

Despite his urging, Congress refused to act promptly. Days after the request, Rep. Clement Zablocki (D-Wis), Chairman of the International Relations Committee, said he would not even bring up the funding request in his committee because "it won't be approved." He said, "It can't be approved until this issue is resolved," speaking about Seoul's refusal to cooperate with both House and Senate investigations into Korean influence-buying efforts. Instead, he announced

[71] "Letter to Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., from Jimmy Carter, 21 October 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 243-246.
[72] Ibid.

quick action on a resolution introduced by Rep. John J. Flynt Jr., Chairman of the House Ethics Committee, expressing the "sense of the House" that Seoul should "cooperate fully and without reservation with the investigators," which the other 11 members of the committee co-authored. The resolution stated forcefully that Seoul's cooperation was essential so that "the historic alliance of the United States and the Republic of Korea may persevere," a rhetorical broadside the committee staff felt would alert the Park government of the serious threat to the economic and military aid it received from Washington.[73]

On October 28, Zablocki's committee unanimously approved the resolution, blaming Seoul for the influence-buying scheme and demanding its cooperation. With reports that members either were outraged by Seoul's actions or concerned with the harmful political costs of offering the latter support at that moment, Zablocki said a favorable reaction on the transfer package bill "would be impossible." House Speaker O'Neill further closed the door, saying the bill would not come to the floor that year in any case.[74] Although various representatives expressed concern about the withdrawal and the amount of pressure being placed on Seoul, it did not stop the entire chamber from voting to unanimously pass the Ethics Committee's resolution, 407-0, on October 31.[75] Importantly, despite dominating the headlines, Koreagate did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, it exacerbated preexisting negative attitudes toward Seoul among the new internationalist crowd in Congress and among the informed public, adding yet another layer of complications to the legislation.

Democratic Congressmen Reps. Thomas J. Downey (D-NY) and M. Robert Carr (D-Mich), both of the House Armed Services Committee, had requested and received declassified numbers

[73] Adam Clymer, "House Unit Blocking Weapons For Korea: Chairman Cites Seoul's Refusal to Cooperate in Investigations," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1977.
[74] T.R. Reid, "Support for Korea Fading," *The Washington Post*. October 28, 1977.
[75] "House, in 407-0 Vote, Urges Seoul to Cooperate in Scandal Inquiry," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1977.

from Defense, which highlighted the disparity between the large amount of U.S. aid to Seoul relative to Soviet and PRC assistance to North Korea. Unlike many of their fellow committee members, the two supported withdrawal yet looked askance at providing yet more assistance. "These figures destroy the image of North Korea as a muscular giant about to swallow up the helpless South the moment we pull out. The South has twice the population and more than three times the gross national product of the North. If, under these circumstances, some say the South is unable to defend itself without U.S. firepower, we are entitled to ask why," they said in a joint statement.[76]

Furthermore, they wrote, "If, after all we have given it and all President Carter plans to give it, the South Korean government is unable to defend itself, this will be the South Korean government's fault and not ours." Although not categorically opposed to further aid, their statement indicated patience was running thin with the oft repeated argument that Seoul just needed a bit more assistance in order to stand on its own. The same arguments attended Nixon's 1971 withdrawals.[77] In a similar vein, the Center for International Policy, a liberally-oriented think tank, released a report arguing "South Korea appears well prepared to defend itself," with larger ground forces than the North and more reserves. It highlighted that Carter's $800 million transfer package would being yet another add-on to the $25 billion in direct military and economic assistance already given since the end of the Korean War. Moreover, the report contended, aid was being given to President Park, who manipulated the threat from the North merely to stay in power.[78]

[76] Harold J. Logan, "Aid to South Korea Said Twice That Given to North: U.S Troop Withdrawal Backed," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1977.
[77] Logan, "Aid to South Korea Said Twice That Given to North: U.S Troop Withdrawal Backed."
[78] "S. Korea Can Defend Itself, Study Says," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1977.

Most troublesome from Seoul's perspective was the link some made between human rights and a continued U.S. assistance. Sen McGovern represented the more outspoken version of this position. A fervent critic of U.S. support for anti-communist dictatorships, McGovern argued that the U.S. security guarantee should be based on Park's human rights record. Not only should Carter remove U.S. troops, McGovern said, but also refrain from providing extra arms as part of the withdrawal, despite it being a condition of JCS support for the policy.[79] In short, McGovern stated, "it is time for a complete reappraisal of the U.S. diplomatic policy toward Korea," which should include taking the lead in initiating direct talks with Pyongyang on military problems. Carter, should "embrace all possible means of halting the military competition and reducing tensions between the North and the South," McGovern felt. He also criticized Park for stoking tensions, stating he "has made statements indicating that he does not rule out a surprise attack against the North," a claim the ROK embassy in Washington strongly disputed.[80] Although forcefully stated, McGovern's opinions were not the consensus view. In fact, *The Washington Post* characterized his statements as similar to Pyongyang's own (which they were). Nevertheless, they could not but increase tensions between Washington and Seoul.[81]

The Carter Administration worsened matters with its own mixed messaging. Before the authorization request was sent to Congress, unnamed White House sources said Carter was determined to move forward with the withdrawal regardless of Seoul's inflexibility on military or political issues, which suggested the president could seek the pullout even without the compensatory package.[82] The suggestion was reinforced when, soon after Carter's request met immediate pushback, Brzezinski's press aide, Jerrold Schecter, said the first phase of the

[79] "McGovern's Warning to Korea," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 1977.
[80] Susanna McBee, "U.S. Gives Visa to High Official From N. Korea," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 1977.
[81] "McGovern's Warning to Korea."
[82] Oberdorfer, "Legislation to Support U.S. Korean Pullout Faces a Delay."

withdrawal would begin in 1978 with or without Congressional approval of the weapons transfer.[83] It is entirely plausible the administration was posturing in order to spur action on the legislation. Brzezinski himself counselled Carter several times over the course of the policy process to hold to his original position or only carefully step back from it, lest he suffer political costs for indecision otherwise. Moreover, a 12-page State Department report sent to Congress amidst the pushback (prepared in accordance with the law passed under President Ford requiring a periodic review of the situation on the Korean Peninsula), stated the withdrawal would proceed only "if accompanied by significant material and other measures to strengthen and modernize the ROK forces."[84] Nevertheless, the same report also warned Congress that North Korea was engaged in a "major, long-term buildup" of its military, resulting in a "sizable advantage in weaponry over South Korea" and improved capacity "for offensive war," but reaffirmed the administration's plans to withdraw U.S. ground forces. Put simply, it sent a confused signal, which coupled with the persistent new internationalists' critiques above, spelled an alarming scenario for Seoul: both no aid and no troops.

Meanwhile, although overshadowed by Koreagate, opposition to the troop withdrawal itself continued apace. In fact, it deepened due to the further study of the issue conducted by key congressional committees and members of the informed public. Rep. Stratton's subcommittee held persistent hearings on the issue, which included former CINCUNC Richard Stillwell's testimony above. Stillwell stressed the military and psychological cost of the policy on local deterrence and the recently enhanced importance of the relatively small U.S. ground force because of the more offensively oriented defense concepts he had helped implement during his tenure. Other informed

[83] T.R. Reid, "Support for Korea Fading."
[84] "North Korea Threat to South 'Remains Serious,' U.S. Says," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1977; see also, "Administration Says North Korea Is Building Up Military Forces," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1977.

observers highlighted the fact that because of the current climate, the withdrawal likely would empower Park and worsen rather than improve human rights conditions. G.C. Hildebrand noted that Defense and Army studies in 1975 had grappled with the same dilemma, namely, the need to separate force removals from internal or domestic conditions within the ROK. Carter should not devise the policy as a "punitive device," he wrote. "It is important that partial withdrawal be not perceived as a demonstration of U.S. displeasure with the domestic political practices of South Korea," which was a difficult proposition due to the heated rhetoric and criticisms being levelled by the more liberal segments of the Congress as well as the Carter Administration itself.[85]

Other lawmakers followed Sens. Humphrey and Glenn's lead in conducting study missions to the region, including individual trips by Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-NY) of the House Committee on International Relations and Sen. Jacob Javits (R-NY), the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Solarz's fact-finding mission highlighted the spillover effects of Carter's policy, noting that Japan was "skeptical, to put it mildly" about the plan. He published his report in October around the time Carter relayed his request to the House.[86] Sen. Javits, who visited Japan, Korea, and Taiwan in November and December and published his report upon his return to Washington, was far less restrained in his criticism of the policy than his fellow committee members Sens. Humphrey and Glenn. Javits, much like Rep. Stratton, highlighted the collective Japanese and Korean unease and called for a full reconsideration of Carter's plan. "I strongly recommend that the Congress explore that plan in a deliberate and *de novo* fashion, weighing in its decision and recommendations the potential impact of the drawdown not only on the immediate military balance in Korea but also on the whole strategic and diplomatic equation in northern Asia

[85] G.C. Hildebrand, "Korea: Troop Cut Can Mean Rights Cut: U.S. Pullout Will Result in More Aid to Strengthen the Despotic Seoul Regime," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1977.
[86] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *Security Issues in the Far East. Report of a Fact-finding Mission to South Korea and Japan*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977, 6.

and the western Pacific." Like others, he also suggested that Congress should condition its approval of the transfer package on the requirement for negotiation of a *quid pro quo* from the North Koreans, Soviets, and Chinese.[87]

In short, the legislation for the transfer package was caught between various forces, which made its passage look increasingly unlikely. Various leading lawmakers, aware of the risk posed to the legislation and by extension U.S.-South Korea relations, counselled restraint and encouraged critics to separate Koreagate from the larger importance of the relationship. They expressed fear regarding the serious repercussions on Japan and among other U.S. allies in East Asia, in light not only of the Korea pullout plan but also the possible pullback from the Philippines, depending on how base negotiations with Marcos played out. Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.V.), himself generally supportive of Carter's policy, decried the linkage between the two as well as Seoul's lack of cooperation. "Other Asian countries must realize that the stability of the whole area could be jeopardized by the failure of the Government of South Korea to act in this regard," he said. Sen. Glenn, who had already made his trip to the region but had yet to release his report, stressed: "It is important that we keep unhappiness over the bribery charges separate from the larger question of regional security."[88] Similar sentiments were voiced in the House.

Rep. Derwinsky (R-Ill.), one of Seoul's firmest supports, argued the chamber needed to demonstrate objectivity and judge the military aid issue in terms of U.S. security interests. Rep. Solarz also urged Congress to put the resolution in its proper perspective, and separate it from both the troop withdrawal and Koreagate issues. Rep. Charles Wilson (D-CA), another strong backer of the ROKG, accused the press of putting undue pressure on Congress and Seoul, in an attempt

[87] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Study Mission to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977, 9.
[88] Hedrick Smith, "Byrd Says Seoul Risks U.S. Help Over Park Case," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1977.

to depose President Park. He went so far as to accuse South Korean witnesses who provided critical testimony before Congress as being "a group of defectors and traitors." Despite sounding caution, such voices were nonetheless drowned out by the contested nature of the moment.[89]

Carter and his principal advisors were also increasingly cognizant of the extent to which Congressional resistance was fouling up the policy and their own discordant messaging had contributed to the process. Part of the problem was a divergence in executive and legislative branch prerogatives, as contestation arose between the efforts of the Departments of Justice and State to work out an agreement with Seoul, from which several congressional committees felt excluded. As reports emerged that Washington and Seoul were nearing a deal on Tongsun Park, including preliminary questioning at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul and further questioning in a neutral country if not in Washington, the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House Committee on International Relations released a small portion of its massive, yet-to-be-published study on U.S.-ROK relations, in particular, a detailed ROK government plan detailing its clandestine operations to be carried out in the United States. The plan, which Seoul repeatedly denied, corroborated similar reports from the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (i.e. House Ethics Committee), and showed that the Park government had directed the effort, using KCIA agents within the United States.[90]

The divergence worsened when it was announced in late December that Washington and Seoul had agreed to a plan for Tongsun Park to testify in U.S. court in exchange for immunity from bribery and other charges if he provided evidence against past or present U.S. officials in the

[89] "House, in 407-0 Vote, Urges Seoul to Cooperate in Scandal Inquiry."
[90] On preliminary reports, see: William Chapman, "U.S.-S. Korea Accord on Park Interview Reported," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 1977; on the House Committee's release of the ROK plan, see: T.R. Reid, "Korea Influence 'Plan' Bared by House Panel," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 1977.

case.[91] Tempers flared in early January when Justice Department officials interrogated Park in Seoul (with ROK officials present), offering full immunity for the 36 charges he faced. Leaders of the House Ethics Committee, including Leon Jaworski, the hard-driving special counsel for the committee's own investigation who had also been the special counsel during Watergate, attacked the agreement in that it precluded Congressional testimony or questioning of Park by congressional investigators.[92] Just as it appeared the administration might be getting a handle over the Tongsun Park issue, with an agreement in late January for him to testify before Congress, House leaders widened the ring by demanding access to Kim Dong Jo, the former ROK Ambassador to Washington and at that time the special advisor to President Park.[93]

Observing the degree to which tension over the Koreagate issue was becoming a "domestic issue" within South Korea and undercutting President Park's already frayed confidence in the U.S. commitment, not to mention undermining the withdrawal policy, Brzezinski warned Carter of the need to get a handle on matters.[94] This spurred Carter to stress the importance of the U.S. relationship with Seoul to a group of visiting editors and publishers at Camp David on January 13, notwithstanding Koreagate and human rights violations in the ROK. Due to the "unpleasant inter-relationship" with the scandal, Carter said, "We lose sight of the fact that South Korea is a strong ally of ours." Furthermore, he continued: "We have had a defense pact with the South Koreans ever since 1954…We intend to honor all the elements of that defense treaty. We are committed to the security of South Korea. We would like to have the differences between them and North Korea

[91] Robert L. Jackson, "S. Korea to Let Park Testify: Bribe Figure to Get U.S. Immunity," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1977.
[92] Robert L. Jackson, "U.S. Officials in Korea to Pry Out Park Testimony: Immunity Offered for Details on Scandal," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1978.
[93] "S. Korea Is Warned Of Danger to Aid," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1978.
[94] On Koreagate and Tongsun Park affair becoming a "domestic issue" for Park, see: "Memorandum from the White House, 27 October 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 249; on Brzezinski telling Carter of Park's growing concerns about the issue and his relationship with Carter, see: "Memorandum to Jimmy Carter, 28 December 1977," in Ibid, 261-262.

resolved in a friendly and mutually constructive fashion." While he supported inter-Korean talks, Carter would not speak with the North without the ROK. Although the message was intended to reassure observers of the U.S. commitment, it would not have gone unnoticed, particularly in Seoul, that Carter also remarked that 2ID would not be disbanded but, rather, refitted for as a reserve to NATO forces in Europe.[95]

Days later, Carter sent Park a letter in which he noted improvements in human rights in the ROK, their success in negotiating a deal surrounding the Park Tongsun case, and reaffirmed his effort to secure congressional approval for the compensatory package for the withdrawal.[96] Yet matters were hardly settled. While Park responded with his own letter thanking Carter for his efforts, he noted that the "current situation in the United States leads us to assume that it will take still some time before we are finally able to put this unhappy case to rest."[97] Just days before House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-AZ) had formally warned that the "South Korean government should be fully aware of the dire circumstances that will result from a continued confrontation in this matter," meaning its lack of cooperation in making Kim Dong Jo available for questioning. "The friendship between the United States and South Korea is at stake here as well as our continued support of that country," they cautioned.[98] Pressures only built, with Congressional leaders requesting the Justice Department grant access to secret intelligence reports regarding the ongoing Koreagate investigations, and Jaworski strongly criticizing Justice and State for their obstruction.[99] He criticized the former over whether or not current congressmen could be open to criminal charges and the latter over its agreement with Seoul that international agreements

[95] "S. Korea Still 'Strong Ally' Carter Says," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1978.
[96] "Letter to Park Chung Hee from Jimmy Carter, 17 January 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 266-267.
[97] "Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, 30 January 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 269-270.
[98] "S. Korea Is Warned Of Danger to Aid."
[99] Charles R. Babcock, "Hill Asks Justice Dept. for Intelligence Reports on Korea Lobby," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1978.

excused ambassadors from giving evidence in trials and hearings.[100] He requested Carter's assistance, and then added to the sensationalistic state of affairs by comparing Koreagate with Watergate.[101]

The administration's concerns about Speaker O'Neill and Jaworski's persistence were evident in its internal communications and the press. Some officials also indicated an alteration in the withdrawal schedule was in the works. Michael Oksenberg, an NSC expert on East Asia, informed Brzezinski in a January 24 memo that because of their close personal ties, President Park likely would not allow Kim Dong Jo to testify, a position, Oksenberg correctly observed, which Washington would also take "if the tables were reversed." Thus, the problem was that if O'Neill stuck with the demand, the transfer package might die.[102] Once Tongsun Park, granted immunity for his testimony, appeared before members of the House Ethics Committee in Seoul circumstances worsened. He not only admitted the KCIA had ordered him to influence U.S. policy with illicit payments to members of Congress but also implicated Kim Dong Jo in the process. On February 10, Armacost, working alongside Oksenberg at the NSC, also forewarned Brzezinski. "[W]e face a serious possibility of stalemate with Jaworski over access to Kim Dong Jo," he wrote. He continued: "If Jaworski attempts to use the equipment transfer package as leverage to get his way, we may find our troop withdrawal policy unraveling." Therefore, Armacost counselled the most prudent option could be to postpone for a year the first phase of the withdrawal. He argued that the administration could still complete the withdrawal in the original four to five-year

[100] Richard Halloran, "Jaworski Differs With 2 Agencies in Korea Inquiry," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1978.
[101] Warren Brown, "Carter Aid Sought in South Korea Influence Probe," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 1978.
[102] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 71; on the reporting related to Carter officials growing apprehensions, see: J.F. Horst, "Korea Scandal: Bloodhound on a Leash," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1978.

schedule, but by holding off the first phase they could allow lawmakers to work out the Koreagate issue without linking it to the military transfer package.[103]

While officials spelled-out their concerns internally, Carter's principals worked to reinforce Carter's own public messaging. On February 8, Secretary of State Vance testified before the House International Relations Committee. Vance disputed Jaworski's statements that State had not cooperated with the House Ehtic's Committee's investigation and also strongly pushed back against Rep. Fascell's (D-FL) suggestion that Washington cut off military aid if Seoul refused to turn over former ambassador Kim Dong Jo. Fascell, like his colleague Rep. Fraser, was a firm opponent of President Park and hardly eager to provide yet more assistance to what he saw as an untrustworthy and authoritarian regime. Vance asserted: "We have interests in peace and stability in that area…We should make our decisions based on our treaty and the national security interests of our country."[104] One week later, Defense Secretary Brown, while meeting Gen. Vessey in Honolulu, made an early announcement of the administration's intent to bolster its air strength in South Korea with the addition of 12 F-4s in order to signal the U.S. commitment to Seoul. Beyond the air force add-ons, Brown told assembled reporters that it "would be a very serious matter if the Congress did not approve the necessary transfers and foreign military sales credits" necessary to assure Seoul's security during the withdrawal.[105] Upon his return to Washington, Brown testified before the same House committee Vance had addressed, defending the administration's military assistance request.

[103] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 71.
[104] "Vance Decries Aid to Korea as Leverage for Testimony," *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1978; see also, "Vance Says Korea Aid Not Lever," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 9, 1978.
[105] Bernard Weinraub. "U.S. Will Increase Its Air Strength in South Korea: 'A Very Serious Matter,'" *The New York Times*, February 19, 1978.

Chairman Zablocki, who told Brown he doubted "such legislation can go through this year," asked if the administration would still proceed with the withdrawal without Congressional approval of the aid package. Brown hedged, saying, "we are planning the first withdrawal and we will continue to make these plans" on the assumption Capitol Hill would act favorably.[106] Nevertheless, Brown added: "The phasing of our withdrawal permits a continuing assessment of the situation on the (Korean) peninsula. Obviously, if North Korean military capabilities were to grow unexpectedly faster than South Korea's, or if Pyongyang embarks on a pattern of aggressive behavior, we would need to reexamine our plan."[107] Like Vance, Brown pushed back when asked by lawmakers whether or not, in light of the Koreagate scandal, the U.S.-ROK relationship was even essential to U.S. national security interests. He responded that it was particularly important due to the security and perception of Japan, but also because South Korea itself was rapidly becoming an economic "success story" and despite human rights abuses was still more open than North Korea. While he decried ROK influence-buying activities, Brown reiterated: "To look at Korea solely in terms of this scandal without regard to our security interests and responsibilities would endanger not only South Korea and its people, but the stability of northeast Asia and the security of this country as well."[108] Only adding to ongoing tensions, on the same day Brown testified, Sen. Stevenson warned he might block a $500 million U.S. loan through the Ex-Im Bank meant to finance the ROK's purchase of two nuclear power reactors if Seoul did not provide access to former ambassador Kim. Stevenson, already pressuring Seoul from his perch atop the Senate Ethics Committee, would use his position as Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee's

[106] Bernard Gwertzman, "House Panel Skeptical on Aid Plan for South Korea," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1978.
[107] Sam Jameson, "America is Withdrawing Its Troops From Korea, Not Its Commitment," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1978.
[108] Gwertzman, "House Panel Skeptical on Aid Plan for South Korea."

Subcommittee on International Finance to block the loan. He had blocked a similar loan three years before until Seoul agreed to ratify the NPT.[109]

In pushing for passage of the transfer legislation, Brown emphasized the expansive value of the commitment to South Korea, not just to nearby Japan but all the way back to America's own national security. Ironically, it was the same logic Javits, Stratton and other critics had employed to question the merit of the withdrawal. President Ford, too, had characterized the U.S. presence in the same expansive terms during the 1976 election. Moreover, Brown's caveats, namely, that the administration was attuned to potential obstacles moving forward (i.e. North Korean military growth or provocation), while intended to demonstrate prudence on the administration's part, upheld the discursive or rhetorical constraints embedded in the withdrawal program itself. Coupled with his expansive characterization of the commitment, such a tendency hemmed in the administration in on its very own terms.

Gen. Vessey offered a similar if more overt example of this tendency with his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee two days later. Various committee members had recently initiated their own Pacific Study Group in order to investigate the withdrawal policy, which many of them viewed skeptically. Although Vessey, like Brown, strongly encouraged passage of the transfer package and said "the Administration has designed a very sensible plan for carrying out" the withdrawal in phases, he once again noted that "if I had my say, I would not withdraw." If Carter's plan were fully executed with all its attendant offsetting measures, Vessey remarked, Seoul would be able to fend off an attack from Pyongyang once U.S. ground forces were completely withdrawn by 1982. "I would like to add, however, that a war will be a disaster for the republic even if they win," he said. Although the press indicated Vessey appeared

[109] Richard Halloran, "Stevenson to Stall A U.S. Loan to Seoul," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1978.

uncomfortable when providing his personal opinion, it was consistent with the same steady warnings he had proffered publicly and privately since the outset of Carter's term. Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times* observed how Vessey's testimony overlapped with Gen. Singlaub's, who had been reprimanded and ultimately forced into retirement for his insubordination. Also giving testimony that day was Abramowitz, who while he stressed to lawmakers that U.S. air and naval power would be indefinitely maintained in the ROK in order to deter an attack, would not discuss a possible delay in the withdrawal schedule if the military aid package were not approved. Nevertheless, alongside Armacost and Holbrooke, he was arguing for just such an adjustment behind closed doors.[110]

Developments continued apace over the coming weeks. On the one hand, the scandal did not abate. The South Korean government denied President Park had any involvement in the scandal, calling Rep. Fraser's claims to the contrary "fictitious allegations," and refused access to Kim Dong Jo.[111] Meanwhile, new public survey data indicated increasing, indeed majority support for the withdrawal alongside opposition to the arms transfer.[112] On the other hand, Washington strove to uphold key elements of the policy, including launching the joint U.S.-ROK Team Spirit military exercises; the largest alliance exercises ever held. The exercises, one of the several offsetting measures in the withdrawal program, were meant to signal the U.S. commitment on the eve of the first phase of the withdrawal, showing "we can reinforce our forces in Korea quickly and that those forces are ready to carry out combat operations with the forces on the ground," Gen.

[110] "U.S. Chief in Korea Opposes Pullout: Tells Senate Group Future War Would Be Disaster for Seoul," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1978.
[111] Richard Halloran, "Ex-Rep. Hanna Concedes Guilt In Korea Case," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1978
[112] A March 1978 AP-NBC news survey showed a majority of Americans, 61%, supported the pullout plan, up from only 45% in August 1977, while only 32% supported the arms transfer package, against a majority of 56% who opposed it, see: "Poll Shows Public For Korea Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1978.

Vessey said. They also included the first-ever deployment of U.S. Lance surface-to-surface nuclear equipped missiles, a concrete signal that the so-called "nuclear umbrella" remained intact.[113]

In the press coverage surrounding the exercises, close observers would have encountered local U.S. generals and officers extolling the unique advantages Korea offered as a large garrison for U.S. forces, confronted by warlike conditions. Among the interviewees, Gen. Vessey once again added that the local command met Carter's plan with "reluctant acceptance," but that "If it had been my decision to make, I would not have decided to withdraw the troops."[114] Also of particular note was North Korea's vehement response. The DPRK's permanent observer at the U.N., Han Si Hae, told the secretary general the exercises were intended as preparation for nuclear war in Korea and the United States was introducing new weapons and troops under the UNC, in violation of the U.N. Charter and Armistice Agreement.[115] Pyongyang then cancelled a Red Cross-sponsored conference on reuniting divided families, which some had been seen as a potential prelude to the resumption of inter-Korean negotiations.[116]

April began as inauspiciously for Carter's withdrawal as March had ended for inter-Korean talks. Sen. Glenn, whose January report had been only cautiously supportive of Carter's policy (unlike the others which were almost universally opposed), sent Carter a personal letter taking a firmer stance. Glenn was concerned about the premature nature of the withdrawals, partly due to the Koreagate scandal and likely delay in military aid. Yet Glenn also cited Vance's Asia Society speech from June 1977, specifically the administration's stated goals to renegotiate the Armistice, seek dual admission of the two Koreas into the United Nations, and see normalization of relations

[113] Sam Jameson, "South Korea, U.S. Launch Biggest Military Exercise," *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1978.
[114] Ibid.
[115] "Notes on a Meeting Held in the Secretary-General's Office on Monday, 20 March 1978, at 4.45 pm," in *The Carter Chill*, 284-285.
[116] "North Korea Cancels Family Unification Talks To Protest Maneuvers," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1978.

between Seoul and Pyeongyang. Glenn wrote: "such steps take time, and little or no progress has been made on these goals. Thus, it is possible that a deferral of the withdrawal could be used as minimum leverage to return the two Koreas to a negotiating table." Moreover, although he supported the basic policy, the withdrawal "must be tied to the actual, in-place ability of the South Koreans to take over, and not to a time-table set prior to what has developed into a different and unforeseen situation…1978 is not the year to begin the drawdown."[117] As one of the Senators more sympathetic to Carter's position, Glenn's resistance was telling.

On the same day, Holbrooke, Abramowitz, Armacost and Oksenberg wrote a memo to the principals, Vance, Brown and Brzezinski, warning the Korea policy was "at a critical juncture." Congress might not pass the equipment transfer legislation. Jaworski held the key and could not be expected to be helpful. If they went ahead with the first phase without the package, the JCS "would withhold their support." Further, as long the Korea issue remains, it would be "hard for us to generate broad support for our Asia policy." In short, the administration's refusal to discuss modifications to the withdrawal plan was "becoming high-risk policy." The pertinent Subcommittee Chairman would not provide strong assistance on the bill – Glenn favored postponement, Wolff was skittish for personal reasons, and others feared the electoral costs in the coming midterms – and if they pressed forward they would have to "expend major political capital to protect the Korean package" with success far from assured. The EA Informal members put it succinctly: "A defeat would be devastating for our credibility in Asia. We have consistently told the Koreans and Japanese that our aid would accompany the withdrawals. JCS support for the withdrawal plan is contingent upon honoring that pledge." With non-combat support units already being rapidly withdrawn and House markup on the transfer bill scheduled to begin in mid-April,

[117] "Letter to Zbigniew Brzezinski from John Glenn, 4 April 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 293-295.

they could no longer delay action; any modifications had to be decided upon in the next two weeks.[118] Events moved quickly.

On April 6, the Stratton Subcommittee adopted a resolution, 7-1, with Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA) a fervent opponent of the U.S. presence and President Park as the lone holdout. The so-called Stratton Plan would have authorized transfer of $80-90 million in weaponry then being used by the combat brigade scheduled for withdrawal in 1978. It could be seen as a measure to protect the remaining American troops rather than as "aid" to Korea, thus minimizing the political problem for legislators. However, it would only permit the withdrawal of the one brigade (6,000 troops) on the condition that a "basic ground combat force" of U.S. troops remain until a political settlement is achieved between North and South Korea, which many considered unlikely. The Stratton plan was framed as a "middle ground" between two conflicting options: first, approval of the entire $800 million in arms and equipment, thus allowing the withdrawal schedule to move forward as proposed by Carter, which was highly unlikely for the reasons cited above; or, second, no action on any of the $800 million and a request, backed by Senators Glenn and Nunn (D-GA), to leave in abeyance any removals until the Koreagate scandal was settled. Officially, the Carter Administration was sticking with the original plan: 2,000 non-combat troops had already left through attrition and administrative measures and the withdrawal of combat forces would begin October 1. However, unofficial reports indicated key members of administration were aware a major decision by Carter was necessary in next few weeks; Vance and others were aware of options but apparently Carter had not yet been briefed.[119]

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[118] "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Holbrooke), the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Abramowitz), and Michael Armacost and Michel Oksenberg of the National Security Council Staff to Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Brown, and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), 4 April 1978," in Ibid, 324-337.
[119] Don Oberdorfer, "Hill Unit Approves Troop Withdrawal From S. Korea," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1978.

Despite reports emerging of an agreement between Seoul and the House Ethics Committee over access to former Ambassador Kim Dong Jo, the details were limited and the deal still tentative.[120] The administration had to move. On April 11, Carter's principal advisors met, along with David Aaron, Holbrooke, Abramowitz, Armacost and Oksenberg. In light of the fact that the aid package faced overwhelming odds, they discussed Carter's various options for the withdrawal schedule and how Congress may or may not respond, how such options would affect normalization with Beijing (which, though a policy goal from the beginning of the administration, had become a priority in 1978), how they might influence perceptions of U.S. credibility in Asia, and how the JCS and Vessey would respond. Brzezinski summarized for Carter what he saw as the main points of the discussion and told the president he would present him an options paper once he met with the JCS and CIA Director Stan Turner.[121]

The four options discussed were those laid out by the EA Informal members in their April 4 memo to the principals. Option 1 involved moving forward with the withdrawal program as originally conceived, without passage of the transfer package. The result? Intense JCS opposition and Vessey's resignation; the potential for Congress not to fund any further steps; and a signal of a severe retreat from the region and weakness, which would undermine U.S. allies and normalization. Option 2 included delaying the first phase by six months to a year which would appease the JCS, Vessey and U.S. allies, and would help with normalization. It would take the issue away from Congress, allowing it to settle the Koreagate matter, and would further backload the policy. However, it would also risk demonstrating a policy reversal by Carter and another example of weakness on his part. Option 3 would stretch out the first phase by only partially

[120] "Seoul Said To Agree To Envoy Testimony," *The New York Times*, April 9, 1978.
[121] "Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Summary of April 11, 1978, Meeting on Korea, and China," 11 April 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 300-305.

withdrawing the first combat brigade, including just one of its three battalions, and would seek partial funding (i.e. the Stratton option). It would please Congress, but still could backfire if it did not pass the necessary transfer legislation and would leave the JCS and Vessey uneasy because it would undermine remaining troops and weaken deterrence. It would not necessarily hurt normalization and would allow Carter to appear to stay on track with the original policy. Lastly, Option 4, delaying the entire policy, was a nonstarter.[122]

The discussion itself was notable in that Brzezinski demonstrated a lack of detailed knowledge about the policy and an almost begrudging adherence to it. After reviewing the problems they faced, he said: "This may have been the wrong decision, but now it has been made. We cannot afford to go back on it." When confronted head-on with serious obstacles, he appeared to be more concerned with protecting the president politically than questioning the policy itself. "Fine," he said, "the President could announce, perhaps in response to Congressional urging, that he will withdraw but one battalion in December. He will withdraw a second battalion in, say, March and a third battalion in May." He continued: "In my opinion, delay – Option 2 – is worse than a slowed-down and stretched-out withdrawal." Then, seeming to reveal the extent to which the policy was not a high priority of his, Brzezinski asked those assembled, "Precisely what has the President pledged to do?" Once informed about the exact phasing of the program, he went on: "Well, the question is whether the President is willing to defer the withdrawal of the entire brigade and perhaps take out one battalion instead, postponing the withdrawal of the remaining battalions by at least three months. This is the option to which I am inclined." Vance and Brown, both dubious about the policy and well aware of their deputies' feelings and obstructionist efforts, differed. They preferred Option 2, delay the entire first phase for at least six months or a year.[123]

[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

As planned, on April 19 Brzezinski held another Policy Review Meeting, joined this time by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Warren Christopher, Deputy Secretary of Defense Charles Duncan, CJCS David Jones, Stan Turner, and Carter's personal aide and *de facto* Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan. The understanding among them was that they could not expect passage of the $800 million transfer package and a major lobbying effort would be necessary even to secure partial passage. This risked complicating other legislative priorities, and, further, to move forward with the withdrawal of the combat elements of the first brigade would expose them to excessive foreign and political costs. Therefore, they had to make some adjustments to the withdrawal schedule and wait until the next year to seek equipment transfer authority. They weighed three options, which consisted of slight variations on the aforementioned Options 2 and 3, foregoing an attempt to move forward with the original plan or consideration of overall delay of the entire withdrawal (Options 1 and 4). The first option, backed by Defense and the JCS, was to postpone withdrawal of any combat elements as well as non-divisional combat units (i.e. an Honest John missile battalion) for a period of six to twelve months. State recommended a similar option, but was prepared to accept removal of the Honest John battalion, if it was considered politically useful to signal the administration's intent to move forward with the withdrawal plan.[124]

The third option, pushed by Brzezinski, involved proceeding on schedule with the first combat battalion of the first brigade, while delaying withdrawal of the other two battalions and Honest John battalion by six months, in order to allow Congress time to act on the equipment transfer bill. "I believe this course of action will signal to Congress that we intend to follow through with our basic policy, while mitigating the impact on Asia and buying some additional time on the Hill," Brezezinski noted in his memo to Carter setting out the options for approval. In the margin

[124] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "Korean Troop Withdrawals," 19 April 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 306-309.

of the memo, following "our basic policy" Brzezinski scribbled: "and avoid the impression of another policy reversal." In regard to the public handling of the decision, Brzezinksi wrote to Carter, the rationale for the adjustment needed to be fully understood by the press; the Congressional leadership fully informed of the decision to make modifications; and requests should be made to the House and Senate subcommittees then marking up the Foreign Assistance bill to hold up their reports for several days until the issue could be worked through with the leadership and U.S. allies. Furthermore, Carter should reaffirm his intent to complete the troop withdrawal by 1981-1982, and that the further "backloading" was being undertaken at the behest of the Congress, which was unable to properly address the security dimensions of the relationship while "the Tongsun Park affair hangs over its head." Carter's announcement two days later hued closely to Brzezinski's preferred option and recommendations.[125]

On April 21, Carter released a statement postponing most of the first phase of the withdrawal, limiting it mostly to the noncombat personnel in the process of removal (1,400 having already left) and a roughly 800-man combat battalion. In terms of overall numbers, only 3,400 of the 6,000-person brigade would be removed by the end of 1978, leaving in place the other 2,600 troops, consisting of the two other combat battalions, the brigade headquarters and supporting elements. According to the statement, "because of the crowded legislative calendar and other matters concerning Korea," (code for Koreagate) the decision to adjust the schedule was "prudent."[126] Some, such as Rep. Zablcoki, Chair of the House International Relations Committee,

[125] Ibid.
[126] "Statement of the President, 21 April 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 310.

praised the move as "a reassurance" Carter would provide proper aid and took some of the pressure off of Congress for immediate action.[127]

However, it was not only Koreagate that had obstructed the process, but basic opposition to the plan itself. Indeed, despite Carter stating he had not abandoned the policy, the adjustment, wrote the *Washington Post's* Don Oberdorfer, raised questions "about the eventual fate of the controversial plan." Sen. Glenn, whose early yet somewhat permissive skepticism was turning into firmer opposition, said Carter was "wrong" to even make a partial withdrawal without aid, saying it will be interpreted as a sign "America is pulling back all over the world."[128] Sen. Henry Jackson, against the policy all along, applauded the decision. It was a "step in the right direction," and said he hoped it would "lead to a rethinking of the Administration's original decision."[129] Rep. Stratton, too, quickly moved to inject his already well-known reservations into the process.

Five days after Carter's announcement, Stratton's subcommittee released its report, which was highly critical of the withdrawal plan. "In the opinion of this subcommittee," it stated, "the public announcement of this withdrawal…has already contributed to instability in Asia, has damaged our cooperative defensive relationship with Korea and has had a measurable impact on our relations with our other Pacific Allies." According to the report, the U.S. presence in South Korea served the same purpose as American forces in Europe: as a crucial deterrent force. "Withdrawal of these troops," it continued, "will further impair the deterrent with almost no discernable gain…With the world already faced with serious security problems…American can ill afford to run the risks that a present timetable for withdrawal of American troops would entail."[130]

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[127] Don Oberdorfer, "President Slows U.S. Pullout From Korea," *The Washington Post*, April 22, 1978; see also: Terrence Smith, "Carter Cuts Total of U.S. Troops To Leave South Korea This Year," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1978.
[128] Oberdorfer, "President Slows U.S. Pullout From Korea."
[129] Smith, "Carter Cuts Total of U.S. Troops To Leave South Korea This Year."
[130] "Hill Report Hits Decision To Pull Out of S. Korea," *The Washington Post*, April 26, 1978.

The peninsular force presence, once again, had outsized importance, to local deterrent, to the entire Pacific Region, and most broadly as a cog in a larger structure underpinned by U.S. resolve to maintain international stability. The next day, April 26, Stratton proposed and the entire House Armed Service Committee passed an amendment, by a 24-12 vote, which would require Carter to keep 26,000 troops in South Korea until a peace treaty replaced the armistice agreement, and also prevent Carter from removing the initial 6,000 troops without Congressional approval of transfer package (which Carter had just delayed). Although Congress would have to approve and Carter sign it for it to take effect, an unlikely possibility, the amendment indicated burgeoning obstacles on Capitol Hill borne of deeper study of the policy and cooperation with other stakeholders geared to hem it in.[131]

Withdrawal Symptoms & Growing Pains

Several weeks after Carter's announcement, the CIA's East Asia-Pacific Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis (of the National Foreign Assessment Center), based on a previous request sent the NSC a report detailing both problems and prospects in U.S.-ROK relations. It noted relations slowly had begun to take a turn for the better, following "a year of probably the most serious strains since the Korean War" due to interconnected tensions over Koreagate, human rights, and the withdrawal. Nevertheless, despite some improvement, there remained "a strong undercurrent of concern in South Korea about the direction of US policy in Asia and the durability of the US security commitment." Problems were borne not only of the aforementioned tensions, themselves exacerbated by different cultural and political traditions, but also by the broader process of evolution from a patron-client relationship to one based on greater

[131] "Panel Vote Calls For Korea Units," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 27, 1978; see also: "Hill Unit Votes to Require Carter To Leave Troops in South Korea," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1978.

equality; put simply, by growing pains.[132] The single largest variable driving the evolution of the relationship was Seoul's remarkable economic growth and the confidence to which it gave rise.

Nevertheless, in practice, the aforementioned tensions could not be entirely divorced from the underlying evolution at hand. Indeed, as noted, one of the rationales for the withdrawal was Seoul's growth and relatively greater self-sufficiency. Further, the push for self-sufficiency and industrial deepening was itself partly driven by the earlier force removals and mission transfers under Nixon. Those same early 1970s adjustments and the uncertainties they caused, led Seoul to initiate the influence-buying scheme to begin with and contributed to the foundation of the *Yushin* system, which was the basis for much human rights criticism. Moreover, these near-term factors ran up against the ongoing maturation of the relationship in complicated ways. On the one hand, Seoul, now more capable and assertive than ever before, bristled at the manner by which Washington tried to implement the withdrawal and pressure it over Koreagate and human rights. On the other hand, though, it still was adjudicating its own transformation. It was no longer a developing country but was also not yet a middle power. Therefore, it remained ultimately dependent on Washington, caught in a sort of halfway point; no longer acquiescent to unilaterally imposed American policy yet not able to fully push back and thus risk a breach in the relationship.

The undercurrent of concern identified in the May 1978 CIA report had, in fact, been the subject of diplomatic discussions and reporting for months. In December 1977, in a conversation with Peter Anghel, Third Secretary in the Romanian Embassy in Washington D.C., State Department officials David Blakemore, Deputy Director of the Korea Desk, and Robert Martens, Director of Regional Topics in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, emphasized these

[132] "Central Intelligence Agency, "US – South Korean Relations: Problems and Prospects," 10 May 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 324-329.

issues and forecast the potential for changes ahead.[133] Blakemore and Martens told Anghel U.S.-ROK relations were going "through a tense period, whose outcomes are difficult to predict," due mainly "to pressure from the US [on the ROK] to fulfill certain objectives at a time when either the government in Seoul was unprepared to achieve, or these objectives interfered with South Korean plans for strengthening its economic and military forces." They then ran through the "three very difficult and interdependent issues" of withdrawal, Koreagate and human rights and way they were testing bilateral relations, concluding: "This entire situation, as well as Seoul's economic achievements, has led to strengthening South Korea's national pride and confidence in its own abilities. Consequently…Seoul might decide to increasingly distance itself from the United States, if the pressures continue, although this is a very remote possibility."[134] Blakemore and Martens' summary foreshadowed a similar if more thorough report offered by Ambassador Sneider several months later.

On March 15, amidst the simmering tensions over Koreagate and while administration officials contemplated adjustments to the withdrawal schedule, Ambassador Sneider sent Secretary Vance a comprehensive telegram titled, "US Korean Relations: A Delicate Period." The telegram was based on the embassy country team's two-month investigation "looking closely at the mood in Korea with respect to current relationship with the U.S. and prospects for the future." Sneider emphasized a mix of traditional concerns alongside a recognition of the evolving nature of the relationship as well as Seoul's more assertive attitude. He catalogued the tension and uncertainty caused by the combination of the withdrawal, human rights criticisms, and diplomatic

[133] Based on the documentary record, Anghel regularly visited with officials at State. The summary reports of their conversations that he sent back to the Romanian Foreign Ministry in Budapest often aligned with various other sources, which adds to the credibility of his reports as trustworthy sources for what was actually said in such meetings.

[134] "Telegram 085579 from the Romanian Embassy in Washington, DC, to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 December 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 259-260.

pressures over Koreagate, as well as anger in Seoul over allegations U.S. bugging of the Blue House and Washington's ongoing insistence that Seoul lower barriers to trade.[135]

Among ordinary citizens and high level-officials alike, Sneider wrote: "Many Koreans…are beginning to question whether or not the fabric of the relationship has not been or is not being fundamentally altered in what most would view as a negative direction." He continued, writing that many see need to "refurbish" the relationship. Although the "U.S. remains the guarantor of security," the psychological costs of retaining the relationship are perceived as increasingly high. There was evidently increasing confusion about the actual content of U.S. policy and the inability of Washington to reach final solutions to problems. The U.S. form of government was itself perplexing, manifest by public confrontations between Executive branch and Congress over the compensatory measures, Kim Dong Jo, and the Ex-Im bank loans, all of which cast in a skeptical light U.S. statements reaffirming the relationship. Whereas the ROK government spoke with one voice, Koreans could not get a clear sense amidst the many mixed massages coming from Washington.[136] A key point of contention was that:

> US pronouncements and policy are also seen as contradictory insofar as reasons cited for the troop withdrawal and adjustments in the US-ROK relationship are the ROK's economic growth, defense capabilities, increasing self-sufficiency, and international recognition, yet simultaneously the US continues to treat the ROK as the 'small boy' and act with what many call 'great power chauvinism' by disrespecting ROK sovereignty in demanding access to Park Tongsun and Kim Dong Jo, and threatening to cut-off economic and military aid.

For older Korean, whose attachment to the U.S. "is embarrassing at times," recent shifts were causing profound reexamination of the long-term viability of the relationship, as they see all recent events as part of a coordinated effort by the US to disengage from Korea; even the massive Team

[135] "Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul to the U.S. Secretary of State, "US Korean Relations: A Delicate Period," 15 March 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 281-283.
[136] Ibid.

Spirit exercises, while supposed to signal the U.S. commitment and readiness to defend Seoul, were interpreted by this crowd as "a cover for withdrawing additional US forces." For younger Koreans, who unlike their elders did not share the Korean War experience, the recent course by the United States is inducing "increased national pride and an increased drive to stand alone." Senider cited younger Koreans on the embassy staff being questioned by their friends why they work for the U.S.[137]

While none of this indicated a rapid or definitive shift, he warned that the conditions were present for such a shift if relations were not treated with care, with three main themes evident among Koreans: the need to refurbish the relationship, increase ROK self-sufficiency, and reduce the level of dependence on the U.S. Sneider also emphasized how these various trends heralded certain pitfalls for the U.S. It could lead to the erosion of the positive reputation and favorable U.S. position in the growing and increasingly affluent Korean market. It might also result in limitations on the U.S. ability to influence Korean decisions on strategic planning, in particular in the fields of acquisition and development of weapons systems, which would affect not only overall U.S. strategy but directly the ability of the U.S. commander to control events. Last, Sneider wrote: "the U.S. position in Asia is to a significant degree a function of our role in Korea. To the degree that our role in Korea changes inadvertently we are placing Asian perceptions of U.S. policy at hazard." In order to mitigate such pitfalls and help refurbish the relationship, Sneider counseled that the manner of dealing with issues had importance far beyond the issues themselves. He asserted that recent U.S. actions had been seen as heavy-handed, exposing many raw nerves and undermining Korean "face" by publicly pressuring the ROKG.[138]

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

Rather, the approach should be a steady, quiet, non-confrontational one, involving increased high-level trips, military aid, and the maintenance of U.S. forces in the country in order to "maintain positive thrust in the relationship." Visits by U.S. officials and their proclamations in South Korea "carry more weight than when made in D.C." Recent examples, included a visit by Under Secretary of Defense William Perry as well as one by Deputy Secretary of Defense Duncan in connection with the Team Spirit exercise, both of which signaled a more forthcoming U.S. posture on qualitative arms improvements. With Koreans "watching for any indications of diminished US support or commitment," important opportunities included the upcoming SCM in July and establishment of the CFC in the fall. It was important to keep in mind, Sneider said, the "interconnection in the minds of many Koreans between US actions regarding economic and trade issues and what they reveal about the US security commitment." The overwhelming importance of the U.S. presence and commitment conferred upon it a disproportionate significance for most observers in Seoul.[139]

Sneider's telegram reflected an abiding concern about the potential disruption of basic patterns in the relationship, from loosening relative U.S. control over Seoul's actions to the potentially destabilizing spillover effects this could have throughout the region. Yet it also evinced an awareness of a new type of era in the relationship. Indeed, his March 1978 telegram harkened back to his comprehensive 1975 message described in the previous chapter, wherein Sneider catalogued worrisome trends in the relationship and the need to develop a "durable partnership," within which the U.S. would commit explicitly to keeping U.S. forces stationed in Korea indefinitely and pursue a more mature approach to Seoul consonant with the latter's increasing capabilities. As he wrote in 1975, U.S. policy toward Korea was poorly defined and based on an

[139] Ibid.

"outdated view of Korea as a client state." It did not provide a viable conceptual approach to Korea, which fit its prospective middle power status.[140] The same discordant trend in U.S. policy Sneider observed in 1975 had continued and even increased under Carter.

As described in the introduction, historically the U.S. commitment to the ROK had been almost entirely derivative of broader interests, lacking its own innate value. As a result, high-level policymakers had neglected the relationship, failing to adequately adjust it to changing conditions. Yet by the late 1970s, with Seoul's remarkable growth and increasing capabilities, the commitment was becoming important in its own right. As Brazinsky argues, South Korea was one of the few examples of a postcolonial state and society that had achieved rapid growth and modernization. The very success of Korean agency under American tutelage was good reason to maintain the relationship and adjust it to new conditions. Indeed, as Washington moved toward the so-called Second Cold War amidst a series of new international instabilities, a resurgent Soviet threat abroad, and a neoconservative reaction at home, it had become all the more imperative to keep it embedded firmly in the U.S. orbit.[141] While it was not entirely apparent when Sneider sent his telegram in March of 1978, the reorientation of U.S. policy toward a more durable and upgraded partnership would soon begin. Nevertheless, while his message showed an awareness of emergent trends within South Korea, Sneider showed far greater sensitivity to the insecurities of the Park government and the powers-that-be than to the political opposition and dissidents with the country.

Much as the traditional hierarchy of the relationship was challenged by Carter's withdrawal policy, so too was the U.S. role as a potential partner of political dissidents in their fight to create

[140] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 65.
[141] As Brazinsky argues, South Korea was one of the few examples of a postcolonial state and society achieving rapid growth and modernization. The very success of Korean agency under American tutelage was all the more reason to maintain the relationship, while adjusting it to new conditions; see: Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*.

a more democratic system in South Korea. If one side of the U.S. commitment was to build South Korea up as a heavily militarized bulwark on the Cold War periphery, the other was to help to modernize it as a "showcase for democracy" in a larger bipolar conflict. Such disparate purposes led to complicated, even clashing outcomes.[142] One the one side, the U.S. was crucial for South Korea's external security but also for the internal legitimacy of the ROK's deeply anti-communist political elite, dependent on the U.S. for essential political, economic, and military support. Sneider's telegram essentially called for a more mature version of this same pattern. However, on the other side, opposition groups had traditionally looked to the United States, the foreign power responsible for the establishment of democratic institutions within South Korea, as a model of liberal democracy and strategic partner in their struggle against undemocratic, repressive rule.

Nevertheless, Carter's human rights policy posed a problem. The discordance between word and deed that marked the withdrawal policy also characterized the administration's approach to human rights in South Korea. It was mixed and contradictory from the outset. From the Park government's perspective, Carter was more outspoken in his criticism than any previous U.S. president. As shown, he often questioned the utility and morality of basing U.S. relations with allies solely on anti-communist imperatives, and specifically with Seoul he had publicly and repeatedly called for it to loosen its internal controls. Coupled with the mixed messaging on the withdrawal, Park and his advisors, already dubious about the American commitment from the Nixon adjustments, were all the more concerned. The pressure of the two issues and the Koreagate affair as well had a demonstrable effect internally. Regime supporters and opponents alike cited all the above when criticizing Park's leadership. Yet, if Carter's rhetoric and policy on human

[142] Hyung Baeg Im, "The US role in Korean Democracy and Security since the Cold War Era," *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 6, no. 2 (2006): 157.

rights toward South Korea caused consternation among official circles, it appeared increasingly inadequate among political dissidents.

Although Carter certainly came into office intent to promote a so-called new morality in U.S. foreign policy, his morality was often exaggerated. Indeed, Carter "repeatedly demonstrated a preparedness to push aside morality in the name of protecting geopolitical or strategic interests."[143] South Korea was an immediate example of this tendency, which became more more marked over Carter's term in office. Despite Carter's rhetorical criticisms of Park's *Yushin* system, his administration quickly made Seoul an exception to the policy. As mentioned, while limiting arms sales to certain Latin American countries on the basis of human rights (a first in U.S. foreign policy), South Korea was exempt from the policy on security grounds.[144] The message was reinforced soon thereafter by Holbrooke in the first high-level visit by an administration official to Seoul.[145] The contested and limited nature of the administration's human rights policy toward Seoul played out in internal battles between Patricia Derian, Carter's hard-charging appointee in charge of the new cabinet-level position on human rights at State, and the various heads of the regional bureaus at State, particularly Holbrooke at East Asia.

The East Asia Department successfully limited Derian's influence and, with the assistance of Sneider in the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, was able to water-down the annual report on human rights conditions in the country.[146] They painted a less critical and damning picture than Derian or dissidents in Seoul would have preferred. Dissidents were outspoken on this point, sending Carter a letter arguing that the State Department's annual reports gave the false impression that there were

[143] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 4.
[144] Gwertzman, "U.S. Cuts Foreign Aid in Rights Violations; South Korea Exempt: Security Links Cited: Assistance Is Reduced for Argentina, Uruguay and Ethiopia, Vance Says."
[145] Jameson, "Carter Official Sidesteps Human Rights, Praises U.S. Relations With S. Korea."
[146] "Telegram 085579 from the Romanian Embassy in Washington, DC, to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 December 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 259-260.

no serious human rights problems in the ROK.[147] They signaled out Sneider specifically. Rev. Moon Ik Hwan, a well-known opponent of Park's within the Catholic Church, said: "If the American Government, through its Ambassador here, continues to back this totalitarian Government, then the Korean people's faith in the United States will fade. We thought the U.S. stood for democracy." Yun Po Sun, the 81-year old former ROK president, commenting on the approaching completion of Sneider's term, remarked, "The departure of Mr. Sneider brings no tears to my eyes," as he was known to have toned down the section of human rights abuses in the recent State Department report sent to Congress and favored so-called "quite diplomacy," which for dissidents meant a do-nothing approach.

In fact, from the beginning of Carter's term, the political opposition and dissidents in South Korea noted and criticized the inconsistencies in Carter's policy, calling for more forceful measures on Washington's part.[148] Indeed, it was a sentiment that only grew over time. Although the opposition criticized the Park government for political corruption, which they felt sullied Korea's honor and threatened its traditionally close relationship with the United States, by mid-1978 there was "increasingly sharp grumbling among Mr. Park's opponents over the lack of support from president Carter." [149] In addition to the political opposition and dissidents' disapproval of the troop withdrawal policy – which they felt would worsen conditions – they began to challenge the authenticity of Carter's rhetoric. The drift would grow in coming months.

Shift Toward Reassurance

[147] "S. Korea Dissidents Protest U.S. State Dept. Rights Report," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1978.
[148] Kamm, "Korea Ex-President Urges U.S. Pressure: Foe of Park Regime Feels Appeal by Carter Would Encourage Return of Democracy."
[149] Andrew H. Malcolm, "Park and the Opposition Shift Tactics In Korea," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1978.

After Carter's announcement, although tensions continued between Capitol Hill and Seoul over the issue of access to former ambassador Kim Dong Jo the matter gradually moved toward a resolution. This would clear the way for passage of the military transfer package and military assistance to Seoul, and also remove an important impediment to U.S.-ROK relations in general. Additionally, officials from the ROK Foreign and Defense Ministries and the DRP, the pro-government ruling party, welcomed Carter's semi-delay of the first phase. As one pro-Park legislator, said: "Apparently the United States government has accepted our position that it would be dangerous to withdraw the American ground troops before sufficient compensatory measures have been taken."[150] Still, as the CIA assessment above observed, doubts persisted.

Congress, while less openly obstructionist, maintained reservations about the policy and even as it began to move the transfer package along through the requisite committees, injected caveats into the process. Also, though Seoul was somewhat relieved by Carter's alteration of the schedule, distrust did not abate. As a result, in the months following Carter's April announcement the administration's Korea policy focused more on reassurance, much in line with Sneider's recommendations. Reassurances came from various high-level officials, including Carter himself, and added additional caveats and layers of caution into an already faltering policy. The most notable signal came with Brzezinski's own visit to Seoul to meet directly with Park in late May.

In the lead up to his visit, though, several important developments occurred. Various committees started to move on the transfer and military assistance package. However, rather than signaling the withdrawal policy now met their approval, their actions evinced ongoing concerns. Again, the Carter Administration was still moving forward with the withdrawal, if now at a slowed-down pace. Consequently, the committees saw the need to insure necessary support was provided

[150] "South Korea Welcomes Carter's Troop Decision," *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1978.

in order to mitigate the multiple instabilities that might result from the withdrawal, outlined in their various study reports. Yet even while passing legislations, they inserted cautionary restrictions

On May 2, the House International Relations Committee approved, as an amendment to the fiscal 1979 security assistance bill, the $800 million transfer package, yet Rep. Solarz tacked on two restrictions, one setting $800 million as the limit of the value and the other specifying that none of the equipment could be transferred until the U.S. troops left. Solarz's restrictions were geared toward limiting costs and ensuring the safety of U.S. forces throughout the process. Even so, this was only a first step. The entire House would need to vote on and pass the bill with the Korea-related amendments within it.[151] The Senate Foreign Relations Committee followed suit on May 11, voting to require the president give Congress a comprehensive report on viability of each withdrawal phase four months in advance. The committee also approved an amendment that as U.S. units were withdrawn, their equipment should be transferred together with training for its use.[152]

Meanwhile, just before Brzezinski began his trip to the region, Gen. Vessey continued to sound a cautionary note from Seoul. In fact, in light of how swiftly Gen. Singlaub had been reprimanded and forced into early retirement, Vessey's continued public remarks, which tracked with Singlaub's own, are all the more notable. He remarked that Carter's recent postponement had "pretty well assuaged" concern, but added "I think there is still a good deal of concern about whether or not its advisable to pull out the ground troops." Vessey elaborated further: ""As the commander of the forces here in the face of a fairly formidable and sizable enemy, I wouldn't want to reduce the size of the forces at all. That decision isn't mine to make. The President made it and we're going to support him." In conjunction with adding sizable additional defense burdens during

[151] John M. Goshko, "Carter's Korea Pullout Plan Passes Test in House Panel," *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1978.
[152] Bernard Gwertzman, "Senate Panel Keeps Arms Ban On Turkey," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1978.

Seoul's own modernization program, the withdrawal would require comprehensive new military planning after generations of planning based on a combined defense with the U.S. Direct U.S. tutelage and ROK dependence in some defense areas would have to be entirely restructured.[153]

Brzezinski's Seoul visit was part of a larger trip, whose main purpose was to move along the normalization process with Beijing. As shown, the administration's internal discussions surrounding the alteration of the withdrawal schedule paid particular attention to how it might affect normalization, with emphasis on the need to maintain a U.S. force presence in the area as a backstop. In short, U.S. credibility was seen as just as important in Beijing as it was in Seoul and Tokyo. Nevertheless, in Beijing during their official discussions surrounding Korea, PRC Foreign Minister Hua relayed to Brzezinski much the same message as he had to Vance a year prior.

On their first day of talks, Brzezinki reiterated that despite the withdrawal policy, Washington and Tokyo shared "an expressed interest in maintenance of peace on the Korean Peninsula—an interest also implicitly shared with you." Brzezinski added that even with some reductions, "We intend to remain in South Korea in spite of the gradual reductions in ground forces. There will still be a physical military presence as well as naval presence in the area." Having said that, Washington felt it was important the two Koreas talk with each other on the basis of equality. If it was useful, Brzezinski said, the United States would participate in a dialogue involving both Koreas; in other words, tripartite talks.[154] Nonetheless, Brzezinski asserted: "No one should have any misunderstanding regarding the depth, durability and firmness of the American commitment to the security and wellbeing of the Republic of Korea. Anything less than that would be highly destabilizing to the peace and security of the Far East and would certainly be

[153] Andrew H. Malcolm, "U.S. Has Quietly Begun the Pullout Of Its Troops From South Korea," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1978.
[154] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Dr. Brzezinski and Foreign Minister Huang Hua, 20 May 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 336-337.

exploited by the Soviet Union in a manner detrimental to American interests and threatening to Japan and to the countries in that region of the world." If in 1977 Vance had stressed to Hua that the withdrawal's final phase would only move forward based on political conditions, Brzezinski stressed that even after the withdrawal the U.S. commitment remained steadfast.[155] The next day, Hua adopted the standard line, telling Brzezinski Beijing's views were the same as those expressed by Hua Guofeng, Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP and Premier of the PRC, during his visit to Pyongyang earlier that month.[156]

If Washington truly desired stability, Hua argued, they needed to withdrawal all of their aggressive troops and stop providing aid to the Park Chung Hee-clique. According to Hua, Pyongyang had no intention to invade the South, and that Beijing firmly supported the "just proposal made by the DPRK for independent and peaceful reunification of Korea." Washington needed to negotiate directly with Pyongyang, as "the sole legal representative of the Korean people" and "the principal immediate party concerned on the issue of Korea." Brzezinski's response was just as predictable, essentially a firm restatement of the previous day's remarks. "I must state frankly," he said, "that the U.S. has no intention of withdrawing militarily or politically from its association with the ROK." Seoul was recognized throughout the world, had made remarkable economic, social and political progress, and withdrawal would be destabilizing and detrimental to both American and Chinese interests, and "would prove frightening to the Japanese and would alter the military and political balance in the Far East." Again, Brzezinski affirmed, Washington was prepared for tripartite talks, if both Koreas desire them. However, Washington

[155] Ibid.
[156] "Hua Urges U.S. to Quit Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1978.

would "not engage in separate talks with the North Korean government, and we will not participate in any efforts direct or indirect to weaken the political stability and the security of the ROK."[157]

In his report to Carter, Brzezinski wrote that the "only area of professed disagreement was Korea," where Beijing claimed to favor complete U.S. withdrawal, which "I rejected outright." Brzezinski also informed Carter that in thanking Hua for the latter's assurances that Pyongyang would not attack Seoul, he "pointedly referred to the assurance as involving no repetition of the North Korean attack," a not-so-veiled reference to the Korean War.[158] Nevertheless, administration officials were acutely aware of the masquerade-like quality to the discussions with Beijing. Oksenberg wrote in a memo to Brzezinski that both sides shared "an underlying interest in stability." Each of them "must provide reassurances to our adversarial allies," as China was still competing with the Soviets for influence in North Korea, "while we must reassure the South in part to comfort Japan." Consequently, he observed: "the real differences between us at this point are less than the rhetoric suggests. But we harm the Chinese cause by saying this. Hence, in our public statements, it is best to ignore the genuine commonality of our views."[159] Yet officials did not hesitate to do so when reassuring allies behind closed doors.

In Tokyo, where Brzezinski's stopped before arriving in Seoul, he informed Prime Minister Fukuda about his talks with the Chinese. He explained that he told them "in a friendly but categorical way" the U.S. would remain in Korea and its commitment "was unshakeable," and that "the U.S. posture was a positive contribution to the peace and stability of the Far East and that the real adversary of the U.S. and China was in the North," meaning, of course, the Soviet Union.

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[157] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Dr. Brzezinski and Foreign Minister Huang Hua, 21 May 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 338-339.
[158] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, 25 May 1978," in Ibid, 350.
[159] "Memorandum From Michel Oksenberg of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski)1, 25 May 1978," in Ibid, 351.

Importantly, Brzezinski apprised Fukuda that Washington would not enter separate talks with the North.[160] The latter issue had become a matter of apprehension in Seoul due to speculation among diplomatic circles that Washington might be considering some sort of talks.

For Pyongyang, Carter's criticism of Seoul's human rights record and campaign promise to withdraw U.S. forces, cast him in a different light than previous U.S. presidents. He seemed open to a new, possibly more direct approach. Consequently, Pyongyang demonstrably scaled back its normally bellicose rhetoric towards Washington, evinced in its reserved response following the downing of an American helicopter, which accidentally entered North Korean airspace in July 1977.[161] Although North Korean officials decried the March 1978 Team Spirit exercises and had begun to show increasing concern that Carter was backing off his "promise" to withdraw ground forces, the rhetoric remained restrained.[162] Pyongyang had also repeatedly reached out to Carter from the start of his term. Attempts included a personal letter from Kim Il Sung after Carter's election, and another from Heo Dam to Secretary Vance soon thereafter. Additional efforts were channeled through third parties, including the leaders of Gabon, Pakistan, Yugoslavia and Romania.[163] Indeed, Yugoslavia's Tito and Romania's Ceausescu each made direct appeals to Carter when visiting him in Washington in March and April of 1978, respectively. Based on Kim Il Sung's personal request, each sounded out Carter on the possibility of talks. Carter responded

[160] "Memorandum of Conversation between Takeo Fukuda and Zbigniew Brzezinski, 23 May 1978," in Ibid, 340-341.
[161] "Telegram 085068 from the Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 August 1977," in Ibid, 230-231.
[162] "Memo for Dr. Brzezinski, "Noon Notes," 3 May 1978," in Ibid, 314.
[163] Telegram 085374 from the Romanian Embassy in Washington, DC, to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 October 1977," in *The Carter Chill*, 247-248; "Memo for David Aaron from Mike Armacost, "HIRC Request for Our Responses to North Korean Approaches," 31 March 1978, Ibid, 289.

similarly on both occasions. He was not opposed to discussions with Pyongyang provided Seoul was first consulted and also present on an equal basis during the talks.[164]

Carter officials were not taking the bait. Although Pyongyang's proposal, specifically its apparent willingness to enter tripartite talks, appeared novel, in actual practice its approach was no different than before. As Kim Il Sung himself told Ceausescu when the Romanian leader visited Pyongyang in May 1978, they might permit a sort of tripartite framework, yet one within which Pyongyang and Washington first met directly. Establishing a post-Armistice peace agreement and settling security issues was a U.S.-North Korea matter. The issue of reunification could be dealt with afterwards on an inter-Korean basis.[165] It was a stance DPRK officials adopted in other forums. Around the time Ceausescu visited Pyongyang, the DPRK's Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Jong Mok and Permanent Observer to the United Nations Han Si Hae conveyed a similar message to UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. They wanted talks with Washington to replace the Armistice, adding: "The United States has occupied that country for thirty years, but they were convinced that ultimately they would be forced to withdraw. The situation is developing in favour of our side day by day."[166]

For its part, Seoul, through Foreign Minister Park, had recently voiced its displeasure with the tripartite proposal.[167] Therefore, Brzezinski arrived in Seoul in late May to inform Park about the recent talks in Beijing and U.S.-PRC normalization. Yet, more than that, he came to reassure the leadership in Seoul about the constancy of the U.S. commitment – not only to continue the withdrawal in a deliberate manner while maintaining a military balance on the peninsula – but also

[164] "Unofficial Translation of the Yugoslav Minutes of Conversation between President Carter and Yugoslav President Tito, 7 March 1978," in Ibid, 277-278.
[165] "Minutes of Conversations at the Official Meetings between the Romanian Delegation and the Korean Delegation, May-June 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 354-373.
[166] "Notes of a Meeting Held in GA-200 on Wednesday, 31 May 1978, at 3:15 p.m.," in *The Carter Chill*, 352-353.
[167] William Chapman, "Seoul Objects to Proposal for Talks With North Korea, U.S.," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1978.

to decline direct talks with North Korea. Upon arrival, Brzezinski hand delivered a personal letter from Carter to that explicit effect.

Meeting on May 25, Brzezinski told Park about his recent exchanges with Beijing, suggesting "the Chinese are concerned about their political influence deteriorating in North Korea if the Chinese do not provide at least formally strong support for Kim." The reason for Beijing's position was their concern "North Korea could develop an orientation not unlike that of Vietnam." It was strategically important from the PRC standpoint "that they not be confronted by pro-Soviet governments in both Vietnam and North Korea." After further discussion about strategic competition between the PRC and Soviets, and the different perceptions of U.S.-PRC normalization held by the USSR and DPRK, Brzezinski commented on how these regional developments "enhanced the importance of sticking to fundamentals." One such fundamentals was the importance of preserving close cooperation between Washington and Seoul. A second was that the U.S. would not deal with North Korea behind the ROK's back. A third was that it was in South Korea's interest, too, that U.S.-Chinese strategic relations expand. A fourth was that, to the extent possible, South Korea should continue communicating a willingness to talk with North Korea, provided such talks were on the basis of equality. It was at this point Park asked about Ceausescu and Tito's recent visits to Washington and the tripartite talks proposal, "stating it was his impression that the US favored such talks." Brzezinski remarked that it was Tito's proposal and Washington would only explore it if the ROK government was interested. Brzezinski asked if it was.[168]

Park said they were not much interested because Pyongyang continued to say it would "not deal with the present ROKG as a full partner." Park added: "the DPRK is seeking a discussion

[168] "Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Zbigniew Brzezinski, 25 May 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 342-347.

similar to that which occurred between the US, South and North Vietnam at end of Vietnam War. The ROKG has no interest in playing "bridesmaid" while the US and DPRK play bride and groom." Reassuring Park, Brzezinski stressed that Washington would only favor such talks if the ROK did, and would not promote them. "In the future we will be guided in our attitude toward the tripartite talks by your views," he said.[169] Although this was not disingenuous at the time, it would appear so later, when Carter made what many interpreted as a last-ditch, even slapdash effort to promote just such talks in the run up to his own summit visit to Seoul in June of 1979 (more below). Nevertheless, for the time being, Park was somewhat reassured. In a personal letter on June 8, he thanked Carter for his efforts at working for the compensatory package and postponement of most of the first phase of the withdrawal, and also wrote he "felt much heartened by the forthright position you took when discussing the Korean situation recently with Tito and Ceausescu, respectively."[170] In line with Brzezinski's recommendation and perhaps bolstered by the reassurances he received, Park soon showed some flexibility toward Pyongyang.

In June, in an abrupt political reversal, Park accepted a DPRK proposal that had been made in the Nodong Shinmun for the two countries to meet and discuss possible resumption of trade. Park dropped his previously strenuous objections to North Korea's insistence on nongovernmental cooperation, as the proposal included economic advisors and private businessmen. Park also mentioned the possibility of ministerial talks.[171] Nevertheless, Pyongyang quickly rejected Park's proposal, calling instead for direct talks with Washington and immediate removal of American

[169] Ibid.
[170] "Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, 8 June 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 376-377.
[171] Dusko Doder, "Park Accepts Plan to Discuss Renewal of N. Korean Trade," *The Washington Post*, June 24, 1978.

troops and nuclear weapons from the ROK, rather than the four to five-year timeline set by Carter.[172]

Brzezinski's conversation with ROK Prime Minister Choi Kyu-hah was also of note. Brzezinski provided much the same assurance to Choi as he had Park. Echoing the contents of Carter's personal letter, Brzezinski observed that Pyongyang's primary interest in seeking dialogue was "to drive a wedge between the U.S. and ROK and that the U.S. has no interest in such discussions." Choi, who agreed, stressed that the compensatory measures should proceed the withdrawals and also "the importance of ROK security to all of NE Asia." While "the ROKG was making deliberate efforts to bolster its own strength," Choi clearly was merely offering the latest iteration of the Park government's official line. Seoul was working to upgrade its capabilities, but it needed additional time and help, and adjustments in the U.S. force presence should only come after that was achieved. In response, Brzezinski offered both reassurance and push back. The "US commitment was unshakeable," he said. He mentioned the ongoing creation of a new U.S. rapid strike force as evidence. Nevertheless, he also emphasized Seoul's advantages over Pyongyang and the need to continue to assume a proportionate share of its own defense burden. "Any society," Brzezinski remarked, "which looks to others for its own security loses the will to maintain that security." Brzezinski's stance was two-fold, reflecting the administration's overall position at that point in the policy process. Provide necessary reassurance, yet officially maintain that the withdrawal was moving forward and Seoul needed to keep up its end of the bargain.[173]

In the days following Brzezinski's visit, close observers would have once again picked up on Gen. Vessey expression a cautionary note. Like Brzezinski, he too highlighted the steadfastness

[172] "North Korea Asks Talks With U.S," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 25, 1978.
[173] "Conversation between Brzezinski and Prime Minister Choi Kyu-hah, 25 May 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 348-349.

of the U.S. commitment insofar as Carter had said in "hard, clear terms" that the withdrawal plan did not signal total withdrawal from that part of the world. However, in military and security matters, Vessey warned, "actions speak louder than words." He was also less sanguine about the military balance. Whereas Brzezinski stressed Seoul's advantages, Vessey told a group of visiting editors that "Every indication we have is that North Korea is building armed forces oriented offensively toward attacking South Korea. When the time is right – if that's the only way to do it – I would guess that he would invade." He reiterated Carter's own assurances as a way to reinforce prudence. "The president has said he's going to withdraw the American ground troops in a fashion that doesn't upset peace and tranquility on the Korean peninsula…Really, that's the only reason we have those forces here. As long as he can do it in a fashion that doesn't upset peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, one can't argue with the decision."[174] The manner by which he employed Carter's own rhetoric implied that the withdrawal could not, in fact, be carried out without upsetting peace and stability. Although he did not say so explicitly, Vessey remarks layered in additional doubts or caveats in the process.

The administration's focus over the summer months remained to move past Koreagate and secure passage of the compensatory package and additional FMS legislation. Traversing the former would help to secure the latter, and both directly involved Congress. The House and Special Council Jaworski had kept up the pressure. First the House International Relations Committee and then the whole House passed a resolution warning it "will be prepared" to cut economic or agricultural aid to the ROK if Seoul continued to refuse access to Kim Dong Jo, and on June 22 did so when it voted 273 to 125 to cut off $56 million in "Food for Peace" aid from an agricultural

[174] "N. Korea Buildup Worries General," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 28, 1978.

appropriations bull, while leaving intact $275 million in U.S. military aid.[175] The following day, Kim Dong Jo resigned from his post as one of Park's foreign policy advisors, saying he did so to limit further trouble for his country caused by the ongoing investigations.[176] The Senate appropriations subcommittee, taking a longer view of the U.S.-ROK relationship and responding to general disenchantment with the Koreagate controversy (the results of which proved far less substantial than previously portrayed), voted to include the $56 million as Seoul began to move toward a resolution on its end.[177] Finally, with Jaworski's resignation clearing the way, Seoul agreed in early August to make Kim Dong Jo indirectly available for questioning to the House Ethics investigation through the transmittal of written questions to be sent to Seoul. Based on the agreement both the House and Senate agreed to continue food aid.[178]

While Koreagate sputtered to a lackluster end (with but a few loose ends remaining), Carter impressed upon Congressional leaders the need to pass the military assistance and transfer package. Significantly, his request included a new precautionary wrinkle. In a June 20 letter to Speaker O'Neill, Carter wrote: "I expect the withdrawal program to be carried out in a manner which preserves a military balance and thus protects the security of the Republic of Korea. Should circumstances affecting the balance change significantly, we will assess these changes in close consultation with the Congress, the Republic of Korea and our other Asian allies. Our plans will be adjusted if developments so warrant." Although the language on the military balance and ROK security was not new (it had attended the discourse on the withdrawal since the 1976 campaign), the caveat on new circumstances was somewhat novel, at least coming from Carter. It reflected the

[175] Charles Babcock, "House Panel Votes to Warn Korea of Aid Cutoff," *The Washington Post*, May 25, 1978; "House Votes Korea Warning," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 1, 1978; Richard Halloran, "House Votes To Halt Food Aid For Korea In Influence Dispute," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1978.
[176] "Ex-Envoy Linked to Bribe Case Resigns Korea Post," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1978.
[177] "Senate Panel Votes Food Aid to S. Korea; At Odds With House," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1978.
[178] "S. Korea to Cooperate in Probe," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1978; Charles R. Babcock, "Senate Approves Continuation of South Korea Food Aid," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 1978.

emergent if not yet consensus view that North Korea's order-of-battle might be larger and more threatening than previously thought. In the letter, Carter also mentioned the various reports issued by the Senate and House, calling for further study of the policy and consultation with Congress, which recommendations he endorsed.[179]

However, the Senate rather than the House moved first. On June 26, the Senate passed a bill authorizing transfer of military equipment and FMS credits amounting to $1.1 billion. Importantly, though, it also included an overwhelmingly bipartisan amendment challenging the withdrawal policy. Passed by an 81-7 vote, the amendment stated the withdrawal "may seriously risk upsetting the military balance in that region and requires full advance consultation with Congress." The amendment's chief sponsors, Senators Charles H. Percy (R-IL) and Sam Nunn (D-GA), further warned that it could encourage another North Korean invasion of the South, a stance that tracked with Gen. Vessey's comments above.[180] Senate passage also happened to coincide with the 11th U.S.-ROK SCM, held in San Diego July 26-27.

Whereas the previous year's SCM had produced the withdrawal program and its main components, at the meeting in San Diego the allies' military authorities charted its early implementation. Nevertheless, they did so with fresh concerns or caveats in mind. At the outset of the SCM, the same day the Senate passed its amendment, Secretary Brown reaffirmed the American commitment to Seoul and said the withdrawal would be carried out only if the military situation warranted it.[181] The following day, at the close of the meeting, Brown provided further remarks underlining the somewhat ambiguous status of the withdrawal. Currently, Brown said, there is "no reason at this time to change our overall plan." However, in response to questions

[179] "Letter to Speaker Tip O'Neill from Jimmy Carter, 20 July 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 385-386.
[180] John H. Averil, "Senate Against Korea Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1978.
[181] Bernard Weinraub. "South Korea Is Assured On U.S. Defense Role," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1978.

about Senate concerns embodied in the recent amendment, Brown remarked that the administration had "been consulting with the Congress and will continue to do so" and the timetable was "not inflexible." Indeed, he observed, it had already varied from the original plan. Brown asserted the withdrawal would be carried out "with due regard for the military balance," while admitting that over the last year "there has been an increase in numbers of North Korean artillery pieces, tanks, aircraft."[182] Brown's official rhetoric on prudence, which matched Carter's own, coupled with the creeping evidence of negative trends in the military balance continued to layer in potential hindrances to the policy's implementation.

Nevertheless, as things stood, key elements of the program were still in motion, in particular the creation of the Combined Forces Command (CFC), the bilateral military command due to replace the longstanding UNC as the main military command responsible for the defense of South Korea. At the SCM, the allies issued the TOR I (The Terms of Reference for Military Committee and Combined Forces Command) and Strategic Directive No. 1, laying the formal institutional groundwork for establishment of the CFC later that fall. As the most thorough study of U.S.-ROK alliance institutionalization states, the CFC "was designed to cope successfully with intra-alliance risks resulted from US forces reduction, improving combined military interoperability, and with security problems originated from North Korea."[183] Put differently, it was meant to channel or encase U.S. force withdrawals and defense burden transfers to Seoul into a more closely bound and sophisticated alliance architecture, while still upholding deterrence. Although originally conceived as a transitional arrangement, which would have to be adjusted into some form of third-generation architecture following the final phase of the withdrawal, in the near-

[182] Jack Jones, "Brown Reaffirms U.S. Pullout From Korea Despite Senate's Warning," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1978; "Brown Asserts Seoul Is Menaced by North; Vows Support by U.S.," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1978.
[183] Kwak, "The United States-ROK Alliance, 1953-2004: Alliance Institutionalization," 171.

term it met the interests of both Washington and Seoul. For the latter, it kept U.S. and ROK forces tightly bound; in fact, it connected them even more intimately. For the former, with the U.S. four-star general atop the CFC, it preserved relative U.S. control or influence while it adjudicated the withdrawal process.

Days after the SCM and the same day Seoul agreed to make Kim Dong Jo available for questioning, the House followed the Senate's lead, passing its own version of the military transfer and assistance package. By a vote of 279-117, the House passed an amendment to the $2.5 billion foreign security assistance act, which required stricter funding limits and time restraints on the withdrawal policy. Proposed by Rep. Stratton, the amendment cut the originally planned transfer package from $800 million to $90 million and required the president come back and report on the situation before each phase of the withdrawal and before more funds would be passed. After both House and Senate bills were resolved in conference, Congress passed the International Security Act in September, incorporating a section authorizing the roughly $800 million cost-free transfer of arms and equipment to the ROK from U.S. forces as they withdrew, as well as $275 in FMS credits. The final version included the Senate Foreign Relations and House International Relations Committees' detailed and pointed requirements for the president to report analytically well in advance of the implementation of each withdrawal phase. The Senate version was essentially identical with the recommendations laid out in the Humphrey and Glenn report mentioned above. Thus, the passage signaled an important step in an administration policy still officially in place, yet also the results of deeper congressional study and reservations regarding that same policy.[184]

Nevertheless, the "termination of the Koreagate affair" coupled with the passage of the security assistance package meant U.S.-ROK relations were "going through a calmer period,"

[184] Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea," 23.

noted a September 21 Romanian diplomatic cable, cataloguing another conversation between Petre Anghel, the Third Secretary of the Romanian Embassy, and David Blakemore of the Korea Desk. Moreover, the telegram reported, relations had settled due to the "salience in the US foreign policy agenda of problems like the Middle East" and "relations with the USSR."[185] Carter and his principal advisors had been directly involved in negotiating the Camp David Accords throughout the month, while simultaneously adjudicating increasingly worrisome signals from a deteriorating situation in Iran. Meanwhile, SALT II negotiations were entering their final stage, and Washington's focus in East Asia centered on pending normalization with Beijing. Korea, as was often the case, was down the list of priorities, even more so, in fact, as some of the biggest near-term hurdles had been cleared.

Seoul's focus, though, remained consistent. As noted in a CIA analysis at the time, the ROK government welcomed Carter's April revision, yet the revision renewed hopes the overall withdrawal policy would be reversed. In the face of "reappraisals of North Korean capabilities" (a reference to the creeping consensus in the wider intelligence community about a more threatening DPRK order of battle), Seoul "almost certainly will seek to review with the US plans for military aid, the transfer of technology, and the withdrawal scenario itself." Additionally, ROK officials began to push for further indications of U.S. support, in particular a possible Park-Carter Summit meeting. Seoul "views visits by ranking US officials....as strong indications of US interest."[186] A Carter visit was high priority. While relations with Washington remained first and foremost, Seoul was also pursuing several other diplomatic initiatives in the fall of 1978, including: an effort to get the UN Secretary General to visit Seoul; further develop its fledgling and tentative relations with

[185] "Telegram 085.304 from the Romanian Embassy in Washington to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 September 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 393-394.
[186] "Memorandum, "US-Korean Security Relations in 1978," 12 October 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 408-409.

Moscow through various semi-formal and informal contacts; potentially piggy-back on the recent Japan-PRC Treaty for Peace and Friendship by fostering inroads with Beijing; and reinitiate inter-Korean talks. After meeting with the UNSG in New York, ROK Foreign Minister Park proceeded to Washington to pursue some of the aforementioned goals.

Nick Platt, who replaced Armacost as one of the chief Asia hands at the NSC after the latter moved to Defense (taking over Abramowitz position as Deputy Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs), briefed Brzezinski on Park's pending visit. Platt noted that Secretary Vance was unable to meet Park due to his Middle East trip, so Brzezinski would meet the foreign minister instead. Park would be "primarily interested in sounding out idea for a Carter-Park summit." However, Brzezinski "should do little more than agree in principle" to the meeting, and make clear that clear progress on human rights was a prerequisite.[187] Platt's memo indicated Carter was at least sticking to his rhetoric on the issue of human rights if not forcefully pushing the matter. Carter may have been spurred as much by his more liberal flank in the Democratic Party as by his own conscience.

Following Park Chung Hee's rubber-stamp reelection in early July and perhaps sensing the drift in Carter's policy toward an emphasis on stability above moral principle, forty-two new internationalists in the House wrote Carter a letter on August 29 criticizing Park's rule and reelection as "alarmingly similar to that of the Soviet Union." Drafted by Reps. Fraser and Fascell, the legislators noted: "Experience shows that our most durable alliances are with governments which owe their authority to the freely expressed will of a majority of the people."[188] Nevertheless,

[187] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Nick Plate, "Your Appointment with Korean Foreign Minister Park Tong-chin September 29," 28 September 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 401-403.
[188] "Antidemocratic Rule in Korea Weakens Alliance, Carter Told," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1978; for reporting on Park's rubber-stamp reelection see: Sam Jameson, "In South Korea, It's Still Repression as Usual," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1978.

reflecting its balancing act between pressure and permissiveness, Platt told Brzezinski to stress the importance of human rights improvements "without making a clear linkage" to improved relations between the allies.[189]

Consistent with this, Brzezinski told Foreign Minister Park during their September 29 meeting at the White House that the administration desired to move forward, despite the ongoing yet winding-down Koreagate issue and other tensions in the relationship. Though he could not commit to it explicitly, when told by the visiting ROK officials they hoped Carter could meet with Park soon, Brzezinski mentioned the possibility of a Spring 1979 trip around the Economic Summit in Tokyo.[190] Part of moving forward meant fostering improvements in the diplomatic situation in and around the peninsula, essentially encouraging the ROK efforts mentioned above. Relatedly but more achievable than complex diplomacy involving multiple parties, moving forward meant tighter security cooperation between Washington and Seoul. This was given increasing emphasis not only because it would help the allies move forward but also because of an increased need for stability.

As stated in a late October intelligence analysis on the military balance in Northeast Asia, the: "US seeks to influence continued political stability and economic growth in the region, in particular a continued partnership with Japan, peaceful evolution of a strong and friendly partnership with ROK, and establishment of PRC as a long-term competitor of the Soviet Union." Although over the longer term the central concern was the threat to U.S. and Japanese forces in the region posed by Soviet naval and naval aviation forces, Korea "presents the most immediate concern to Japan and the U.S.," with "trends on Korean Peninsula unfavorable to the South."[191]

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[189] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Nick Plate," in *The Carter Chill*, 401-403.
[190] "Conversation between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Foreign Minister Park Tongchin, 29 September 1978," in Ibid, 404-406.
[191] "Intelligence Analysis, "Northeast Asia Balance," 20 October 1978," in Ibid, 410-412.

Again, the latter was a reference to growing evidence of an enhanced threat from the DPRK, given yet further weight by the discovery of another tunnel running under the DMZ, the third since 1974.[192]

The analysis further underlined how the present trends in North Koran ground combat power "may be destabilizing and promote an arms race on the Peninsula," including the possibility of nuclear proliferation if South Korea perceived "an inadequate US defense commitment." [193] Although not a new concern, the release of the massive Fraser Report in late October along with the first press accounts yet of Seoul's secretive nuclear weapons program and Washington's previous effort to squelch it brought the issue into public view unlike it had ever been.[194] Below the nuclear level, Seoul also recently took Washington by surprise with the successful test of its first ever Korean-made ground-to-ground missile. Although U.S. officials knew such missiles were under development, they were taken aback at how quickly Seoul succeeded in producing their own indigenous version. The ROK military had long depended on American-built Honest John and Nike Hercules missiles.[195] At the moment, then, the emphasis was on reassurance and cooperation so as to maintain stability, and Secretary Brown's upcoming visit to inaugurate the CFC offered the most immediate and powerful example.

Nevertheless, from Washington's view its support could not be so robust that it had the same effect as lack of support, namely, spurring a local arms race. The dynamic between offering assistance while maintaining a restraining influence, was highlighted in the potential sale of F-16s

[192] On Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) summary of increasing evidence of more heavily armed and forward deployed DPRK forces but without mention of increasing DPRK overall manpower numbers, see: "Intelligence Analysis, "Korean Balance," 7 June 1978," in Ibid*l*, 374-375; for coverage of third tunnel, see: "Korea Reds accused of Tunneling South," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1978.
[193] "Intelligence Analysis, "Northeast Asia Balance," in Ibid*l*, 410-412.
[194] J.P. Smith, "Glenn Asks Probe of Korea Arms Plan," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1978; see also: Gillette, "U.S. Squelched Apparent S. Korea A-Bomb Drive."
[195] "S. Korea Tests Its First Ground Missile," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1978.

to Seoul. In his briefing memo to Brown, which also contained a personal letter from Carter to Park, Brzezinski wrote that the president "has decided that you should not inform President Park at this time that we are prepared to notify Congress of our intention to sell sixty F-16 aircraft to the ROK." Although Brzezinski's remark indicated the administration may have decided it would sell the sophisticated aircraft, but wanted to avoid telling the South Koreans so as to maintain a degree of leverage in negotiations, the issue was more complex. Carter had rejected the early sale of F-16s (roughly 60 aircraft) following a "heated intra-governmental debate." As noted, the JCS, Defense and USFK commanders favored the sale, while the ACDA, State and Carter himself, feared it insofar as it went against the president's policy of avoiding introduction of advanced weaponry into regional conflicts and might potentially spur Moscow to proffer greater assistance to Pyongyang.

The issue of F-16s notwithstanding, Brown's visit, wrote Carter, was geared toward firming up the relationship through "the smooth implementation of the plans we have agreed upon and continued cooperation on security and other matters…our agreements are so much greater than our differences." Carter continued: "Secretary Brown's visit marks important new steps in our close relationship. The inauguration of the ROK-US Combined Forces Command takes appropriate account of the Republic of Korea's growing strength. The arrival of an additional United States Air Force squadron demonstrates to the world that the U.S.'s commitment to South Korean security is as strong as ever." He also expressed "hope" that they would be able to meet in 1979.[196] With Carter's letter in tow, Secretary Brown visited Seoul in early November.

On November 7, Brown, Gleysteen, Gen. Vessey, Assistant Secretary of Defense David E. McGiffert, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Armacost met with President Park and ROK

[196] "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Korea," 2 November 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 424-426.

Defense Minister Ro Hae Hyun. At the meeting, Brown sought to underscore advances in the alliance relationship since their previous meeting in July of 1977. He checked off several items: Carter's April 1978 adjustment, which showed the administration would conduct the withdrawal only in a "careful and prudent fashion"; Congressional approval of the transfer package; the increased size and tempo of joint military exercises; expanded U.S. support to the ROK's defense industry; the formal activation of the CFC; and, lastly, continued coordination of diplomatic efforts, especially in regard to North Korea. In the latter, Brown saw signs of enhancing ROK security in international developments, citing the apparent cooling of relations between Pyongyang and Moscow as well as Beijing's emphasis on modernization with the help of the West, which, Brown said, should increase the PRC's stake in avoiding instability or conflict in Korea. Despite such positive developments, though, Brown several times noted concern about Congress, specifically the need for approval of an increase in U.S. FMS credits, other military sales (such as the F-16), and co-production of military aircraft.[197]

Park acknowledged and was appreciative about the steps Washington had taken to alleviate concerns, which demonstrated Pyongyang could not take advantage of the withdrawals. Nevertheless, he was not as sanguine about regional developments. No matter what Beijing and Tokyo said at the signing of the Friendship Treaty – that it would result in the reduction of tensions on the peninsula – he saw no sign Pyongyang wished to change its policy. He also was wary about the Soviets own insecurities and reaction to normalization between China and Japan and the United States, and how the Soviets might look to improve ties with North Korea and maybe even tempt the latter to disturb stability in the region. Last, Park warned Brown about building up China too

[197] "Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and President Park Chung Hee, et al., November 7, 1978 (Secret)." The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea, http://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696530-Document-03-Memorandum-of-Conversation-Secretary

much. After all, he noted, they were still communists. Brown, like Brzezinski had, reassured Park that at present Beijing pinned down Soviet divisions on their eastern front and that Washington had no plans to sell weapons to China.[198]

Formal assurances notwithstanding, there were signs of ongoing displeasure and doubt in Seoul. Surrounding Brown's visit, government-controlled newspapers ran editorials calling for further "revision" of the withdrawal policy, meaning cancellation. The sentiment likely was bolstered by Gen. Vessey, who, following his skeptical line, told the local press a week before Brown's arrival that the post-1979 removal plans were "not clear."[199] An unnamed ROK General, in reference to the arrival of 12 U.S. F-4 jet fighters, which Carter framed as an indication the U.S. commitment was "as strong as ever," remarked: "It is ridiculous – exchanging 12 jets for an infantry division."[200] Indeed, President Park, usually reserved, made his own unusual public remark critical of Carter's policy the same day he received the latter's letter.[201]

Nonetheless, uncertainty and alliance friction aside, the creation of the CFC marked an important shift in the relationship. While a key component of Carter's withdrawal program, it also represented a distinct milestone in the maturation of the alliance; part of a process underway since the early 1970s. Under Carter, it was reaching a sort of apogee. Put simply, the establishment of the CFC was a tangible move away from a patron-client to a more relatively equal and integrated relationship.

As shown above, by the mid-1970s, the UNC's legal status and appropriateness for defending South Korea had become increasingly tenuous. All non-U.S. members of the UNC had removed their combat troops. The UNC was constantly criticized by China on the UN Security

[198] Ibid.
[199] William Chapman, "Brown in Seoul To Reassert Commitment," *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1978.
[200] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Foreboding On Korea's DMZ," *The Washington Post*, November 24, 1978.
[201] William Chapman, "Carter Plans To Meet Head Of South Korea," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 1978.

Council and had been called into question by dueling resolutions in the UN General Assembly. The creation of the CFC, as a separate entity from the UNC, meant that while the latter continued to supervise the Armistice Agreement, the CFC and U.S.-ROK alliance became solely responsible for South Korea's defense.

Creation of the CFC reflected an ongoing process of greater integration between the U.S. and ROK militaries, a process driven both by the U.S. desire to pass off more of the defense burden to its ally as well as advancements in South Korea's own military strength. In immediate terms, the CFC served as a cooperative means for dealing with Carter's troop withdrawals. It would enhance ROK operational capability while U.S. units were removed, and also improve the interoperability of alliance forces. Meanwhile, for Seoul, the CFC helped retain the USFK presence. The restructuring of the alliance hierarchy that was part of the process was manifest in several concrete ways.

Whereas under the UNC the United States essentially held unilateral OPCON over ROK forces, under the CFC OPCON was jointly guided by both allies. Although the commander-in-chief of the CFC (CINCCFC) was a four-star U.S. general, within the CFC he answered to both U.S. and ROK National Command Military Authorities (NCMA) through the annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) and newly established Military Committee Meeting (MCM). Additionally, the CFC command structure consisted of an equal number of U.S. and ROK officers, serving under the CINCCFC and his four-star ROK Army deputy commander. Last, CFC OPCON was more restricted than under the UNC, consisting only of ROK and U.S. units on the official List of Combat Units, which the MC could change at any time. Consequently, in times of peace, ROK officers could engage in limited yet independent peacetime operations outside of CFC OPCON, an important fact when considering events in the winter of 1979-1980 and around the

Kwangju massacre. To be accurate, though, the arrangement was one within which the United States still wa first-among-relative-equals. The overwhelming majority of ROK and American forces remained under both the armistice and potential wartime OPCON of the CFC, headed by the local U.S. commander.[202]

Nevertheless, as important as the establishment of the CFC was, both as part of the withdrawal process and evolution of the U.S-ROK relationship, Korea policy remained only one of a myriad of other policies the Carter administration had on its plate. As often was the case, Korea was down the list of priorities, overshadowed by more important regional and global issues, and by mid-1978 it was becoming engulfed by a wider shift in the direction of Carter's foreign policy.

[202] Kwak, "The United States-ROK Alliance, 1953-2004: Alliance Institutionalization," 171-172.

Chapter V: The Hardening & The Closure

At the outset, the administration intended to transcend the stark East-West, Cold War framework and initiate what it called "a new phase in US foreign policy." Yet, as Sargent correctly observes, Washington did not yet inhabit a post-Cold War world. Despite all the novel forces in world affairs that Carter and his Trilateral Commission tutors perceived in the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union remained a serious rival, particularly in military affairs. Thus, despite its initial orientation, within a year in office Carter began to adjust his foreign policy. "Having prioritized world order politics, the Carter administration had to diversify its strategy to accommodate issues that its initial concept had marginalized. This required adapting a post-Cold War worldview to the enduring realities of Soviet power." Reacting to a series of events, from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa to East Asia and Latin America, and pushed by National Security Advisor Brzezinski, the administration "revised, diversified and expanded its strategic conception" over several years. The process mirrored Kissinger and Nixon's earlier rethinking of American priorities, except that Kissinger and Nixon had "moved away from a strategic concept centered on the containment of Soviet power…and the Carter administration toward one." The process began in 1978, picked up steam over the course of the year, and by year's end was in full-swing.[1]

The Carter administration's two most notable foreign policy achievements, the Panama Canal Treaties and Camp David Accords, both in 1978, represented parts of Carter's initial vision, namely, a focus on recalibrating North-South relations and settling regional conflicts. Nevertheless, the signs of a shift toward previous conceptions of Cold War thought existed alongside these same achievements. In March of 1978, Carter delivered a major foreign policy

[1] Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 261-262.

address at Wake Forest University. He warned against the "ominous inclination on the part of the Soviet Union to use its military power," with particular emphasis on its activities "in Africa." Carter continued: "We will not allow any other nation to gain military superiority over us," and if Moscow "fail[ed] to demonstrate restrain in missile programs and other force levels or in the projection of Soviet proxy forces into other lands and continents," cooperation would become impossible. Carter's remarks signaled "the beginning of a revival of Cold War anti-Sovietism and a rejection of new internationalism," the latter of which Carter's 1976 campaign had embodied. [2]

Early on, Carter had tilted more toward Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's conviction that Moscow agreed with Washington's desire to reduce international tension. However, in the March address, Carter more overtly adopted National Security Advisor Brezezinsk's view that U.S.-Soviet relations were characterized by competition rather than cooperation. The internal shift occurred alongside a larger one among ordinary Americans. In 1978, public-opinion polls indicated Americans were becoming more supportive of military expenditure and more concerned about the Soviet Union. By year's end, 40 percent of Americans felt the Soviets were stronger than the United States, as against 14 percent who believed otherwise. In June 1978 it was 31 and 18 percent, respectively, and earlier in December 1976, just before Carter's inauguration, 27 and 21 percent, respectively. The administration's pollster, Patrick Caddell, told Carter in May of 1978, "Since foreign policy/defense concerns have been secondary matters in recent years, nothing in our structured quantitative research prepared us for the below surface anxiety and concern over these issues that the open ended interviews revealed." In short, he reported, "the public was moving in a more conservative direction." The shift in public opinion had electoral consequences.[3]

[2] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 117.
[3] Ibid.

In the 1978 midterm election, while the Democrats maintained a majority in both houses, legislators who had downplayed the centrality of U.S.-Soviet relations in favor of human rights and North-South ties, did not fare well. Of the twenty senators who signed the Panama Canal treaties and faced reelection, thirteen either were defeated or did not run. New internationalists and moderates across both parties faced electoral defeat. The most notable example was Rep. Donald Fraser (D-MN), the key proponent of human rights and staunch critic of the Park regime in Seoul. At the same time, conservative and neoconservative Republicans such as Sens. Helms (R-NC), McClure (R-ID), and Thurman (R-SC) held onto their sets and welcomed new additions, such as Alan Simpson of Wyoming and Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire, to their ranks.[4]

While increasing anti-Sovietism may have begun with events in Africa, the hardening of Carter's foreign policy quickly spilled over into other areas. For example, this included a tougher line with Moscow in conventional arms transfer talks, which eventually led to their breakdown, and rejection of normalization with Cuba. More relevant, though, was the effect in East Asia, where the administration moved deliberately toward normalization with Beijing amidst a notable evolution in overall regional policy, one which tracked with the larger evolution above.[5] As examined above, the defeat in Vietnam was partly responsible for Carter's election and the president himself explicitly sought to heal the wounds of the war and address the mistakes that had led to the war to begin with. That meant, Gaddis observed, "separating Asian policy from Soviet-American conflict." Carter himself wrote: "I believed that too many of our international concerns were being defined almost exclusively by the chronic United States-Soviet confrontation

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

mentality."[6] Consequently, when he entered office, Carter did not possess an overarching Asian policy.

Instead, following his tendency to compartmentalize issues, specific policies toward individual countries "were loosely unified by a general desire to deemphasize military considerations, emphasize human rights, and seek reconciliation with past foes." In concrete terms this meant: the Korean troop withdrawal; movement toward normalization with Vietnam; and the need to improve relations with Beijing, yet cautiously so, lest a rapid move toward the PRC jeopardize SALT II negotiations with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, by mid-1978, the originally disconnected polices had either been abandoned or more self-consciously strategically interconnected. Troops remained in South Korea and opposition to the withdrawal had only increased, normalization was no longer sought with Hanoi, and U.S.-Sino normalization was established in a deliberately anti-Soviet manner. Although it had yet to make a full turn, Carter's East Asia policy began to resemble exactly what he had initially set out to avoid, a policy unified around the theme of the containment of the Soviet Union.[7]

The details of U.S.-Sino normalization can be found elsewhere. Of note, though, the anti-Soviet nature of the process was yet another example of Brzezinski's vision slowly challenging and ultimately superseding that of Secretary Vance. By his May visit to Beijing, which Vance had opposed, Brzezinski had begun to take the reins of U.S. China policy, with the assistance of Michael Oksenberg at NSC. From that point, Brzezinski "energetically encouraged and supervised highly secret planning within the Administration and negotiations with the Chinese," resulting in the December 15 announcement that the two former Cold War foes would normalize relation on January 1, 1979, to be followed soon thereafter with a U.S. visit by PRC Vice Premier Deng

[6] Gaddis, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 85.
[7] Ibid, 86.

Xiaoping.[8] So, as important as Secretary Brown's visit in November to inaugurate the establishment of the U.S.-ROK CFC was, high-level administration policy in the region centered on normalization and its consequences. Korea was overshadowed by other imperatives.

However, while Korea policy was overshadowed it was not unaffected. In a context of increasing Soviet Far Eastern deployments and in the wake of normalization, the need for consistency across policy areas increased. Within days of the normalization announcement, former President Nixon sent Carter a letter to that affect, signaling out Korea specifically. In his December 20 letter, Nixon wrote:

> With regard to specific countries, I am most concerned about Korea. I realize that you have announced a decision to withdraw American forces by 1983. I would strongly urge you to reconsider that decision in view of Soviet supported adventurist policies in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and other countries in Africa. If you believe you should not do so, I would suggest that at this time it would be most helpful to increase substantially the budget for military aid to Korea as a symbolic move to put North Korea and others on notice that the action on Taiwan should under no circumstances be interpreted as the beginning of a U.S. withdrawal from other parts of Asia.

Reflecting general concern about a resurgent Soviet threat abroad and about U.S. credibility resulting from the planned abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty between Washington and Taipei and withdrawal of U.S. forces from Taiwan (both conditions of normalization), Nixon counseled holding ground elsewhere. Carter, who read the letter, underlined "I am most concerned about Korea," "to withdraw American forces by 1983," and "to reconsider." How directly it influenced his thinking is unclear. Clearly evident, though, was that regional trends and the general shift in U.S. policy begun in 1978, would only pick up steam as administration moved into its third year in office amidst newly emergent, rolling instabilities.[9]

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[8] Ibid, 88-89; William Chapman, "Most Asian Nations Accept U.S.-China Move; Some Cheer It," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1978.
[9] "Letter from Former President Nixon to President Carter, 20 December 1978," in *The Carter Chill*, 430.

Yet, as much as the hardening of Carter's foreign policy in general reverberated toward Korea policy in particular, developments germane to Korea itself bolstered the trend. Indeed, alongside normalization, December witnessed a notable split or divergence in Carter's withdrawal policy; the end of one phase and the emergence of another. Two days before normalization with Beijing was announced, about 215 combat troops, members of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry, 2nd Division left Osan Airbase for Fort Riley, Kansas, followed by 350 more several days later.[10] Along with support elements, this withdrawal was the first and, as it turned out, only actual removal of U.S. ground combat forces that occurred under Carter.

Simultaneously, that same month, the overall gist of the conclusions of a year-long intelligence study on DPRK forces was leaked in an article in *Army Times*. It showed that Pyongyang possessed larger, more heavily armed, and forward deployed forces than many had previously thought. In truth, the intelligence findings on DPRK were not necessarily new, but, rather, the culmination of a nearly four-year process. Nevertheless, it had gathered steam and newfound importance in light of the widespread opposition to Carter's policy within the U.S. military. Furthermore, it added an additional and highly obstructive wrinkle to a policy process already under tension.

From "basic, dirty-hands intelligence work" to Intelligence Consensus[11]

[10] "South Korean Opposition Outpolls Park's Party," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 1978; see also: "212 U.S. Infantrymen Leave S. Korea in Withdrawal Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1978.

[11] Interview with John Armstrong, Washington D.C., 9 February 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99; the background in this section on the North Korea-related intelligence gathering effort takes heavily (but not exclusively) from Joe Wood's case study. Released in 2012, Wood's study was part of a larger CIA-funded program within the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, on Intelligence and Policy. Under the program, funded and managed by the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence, the Kennedy School conducted seminars and developed case studies that illuminate issues related to the use of intelligence by policymakers. Wood was given wide-ranging access to many of the primary participants involved in the intelligence gathering effort. To my knowledge, no existing account of Carter's withdrawal incorporates his work.

In 1970, the consensus within the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) was that the North Korean and South Korean militaries stood in general parity, neither side able to successfully attack the other. This estimate helped justify Nixon's withdrawal of 7ID in March of 1971. Based on the information they had, most intelligence analysts agreed U.S. forces were not essential to the military balance on the peninsula, and that based on South Korea's larger population and optimistic prospects for economic growth it would soon be able to defend itself without American help. [12] To the extent that Korea garnered any attention, this was the guiding assumption among analysts.

Nevertheless, according to Evelyn Colbert, the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for East Asia from 1974 until march 1977, U.S. intelligence resources in the early 1970s were focused almost exclusively on Vietnam to the exclusion of other nations in the region, including Korea.[13] Few analysts worked on Korea, and they had little data to go on insofar as North Korea presented one of the most opaque and difficult intelligence targets, even under the best of circumstances.[14] Further complicating the quality of intelligence was the fact that in the mid-1970s the responsibility for the determination of the North Korean order of battle had been transferred from the disbanded Army Pacific Command to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), as a result of which some organizational confusion was unavoidable.[15] Consequently, recalled a senior defense intelligence officer, the IC generally took the 1970 estimates and drew a line forward at a constant rate of growth in order to determine the present level of North Korean forces during the mid-1970s. Based on this practice, they did not see Pyongyang as a serious threat.[16] However, these

[12] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, Washington D.C., 23 February, 1989, ibid; see also: Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 26, footnote 1.
[13] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 98; see also: Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 26, footnote 1.
[14] Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 98
[15] Interview with Dick Nelson, Washington, D.C., 10 February 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 98.
[16] Interview with former senior DIA official, Washington, D.C., 10 February 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 98.

assumptions began to change in 1974. As noted above, economic analysts observed substantial amounts of production in North Korea, particularly of concrete and steel, which could not be accounted for unless they were being utilized for as yet undetected defense purposes. Soon after the fall of Saigon in the spring of 1975, the IC began to shift assets back towards Korea, and the formerly linear projections from 1970 began to seem low.[17]

Around the same time in 1974, in a separate effort, an Army officer named John Armstrong was assigned to the Army's Special Research Detachment (SRD) at the National Security Agency. Armstrong, a China specialist with experience in Southeast Asia, was tasked with an extensive review of all intelligence information that formed the basis for estimates of the DPRK order of battle. SRD was an unorthodox office, with direct access to the head of Army intelligence; a sort of freewheeling, internal think tank with an unstructured environment that encouraged creativity and exploration and which because if its direct high-level access, received quick and meaningful feedback. Aware that Korea was receiving little attention form the IC, Army leadership turned to SRD to investigate any problems with the current military estimates. Although Armstrong was initially unenthusiastic about the assignment, he followed orders an began what would become over three years of "basic, dirty-hands intelligence work."[18] At SRD Armstrong was able to intensely focus on one subject as long as necessary to complete comprehensive analysis.

In late 1975, after roughly one year of digging, he circulated the first portion of his work, focused on DPRK tanks. His research showed that the North's tank forces were about 80 percent bigger than previously thought, and also identified an entire tank division of about 270 tanks and 100 armored personnel carriers (APCs) within 100 kilometers of the DMZ. Although his findings found no real audience in Washington, field officers in Korea were quite interested. Armstrong

[17] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99; Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in ibid.
[18] Ibid; Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in ibid, 99.

also took his findings to both the CIA and DIA offices responsible for Korea, proposing a joint, one-year effort to try to bound the North Korean army's overall size, with plausible minimum and maximum totals. Although interested, CIA analysts were too occupied with other areas to commit so much time to Korea, an area on which only a few were focused. Consequently, Armstrong, who had since left the military and become a relatively junior (GS-12) civil servant in the Pentagon, went back to the Army and persuaded them to provide six analysts for the work. Using his method of closely reviewing and simultaneously comparing all source information from several years back, Armstrong and his team turned to DPRK artillery and "nailed down every gun in the country."[19] In late 1976, after 14 months intense analysis, they concluded Pyongyang had far greater artillery than past had estimates indicated.[20]

In September 1976, just before assuming command in Korea, Gen. Vessey heard Armstrong's presentation on DPRK armor estimates. Vessey later admitted that "this study impressed me with the innovative intelligence techniques which were applied."[21] Following yet another briefing from Armstrong in January 1977, Gen. Vessey messaged various officials in the defense intelligence community and called for greater efforts on order-of-battle estimates and the problem of warning times versus tactical surprise vis-à-vis a possible DPRK assault.[22] He also, as described above, met with President Carter in February to warn him against any precipitous withdrawal from the area. Although Carter was determined to move forward with his policy, the rest of Washington "was becoming more receptive" to the warnings. "Throughout 1975 and 1976,

[19] Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99.
[20] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99.
[21] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Impact of Intelligence Reassessments on Withdrawal of U.S. Troops From Korea: Hearings before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., June 21 and July 17, 1979, House, 64. (Hereafter cited as: "Vessey Testimony"); see also: Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99.
[22] Interview with Gen. Vessey, Washington, D.C., 21 March 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 99-100.

the general thrust of Armstrong's assessments was confirmed by other intelligence agencies, while more danger signals appeared," such as recently discovered North Korean tunnels under the DMZ and a CIA study arguing that the firepower of DPRK divisions had increased.[23]

As Evelyn Colbert recalled, by the close of the Ford administration, the consensus within the IC was that North Korea was militarily superior to South Korea in almost all types of equipment: in tanks by a ratio of 1.5:1 and in artillery and APCs by a ratio of 1.9:1. Only in overall number of personnel was South Korea ahead, with 560,000 against 450,000 troops. Nevertheless, DPRK forces also appeared more offensively oriented than in years past, and the various trends above had been moving this way since the start of the decade. The IC was also aware of the divergence between its estimates and President Carter's policy to withdrawal all U.S. ground combat forces. Following his election and during the transition period, President-elect Carter asked then Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), George H.W. Bush, for briefings on topics of priority interest. Although Colbert and other analysts proposed through Bush that Carter listen to the most updated work on Korea, the latter never chose that topic. Colbert herself sent a memo to Ford's outgoing National Security Advisor Brent Scowcrowft, noting the new estimates of DPRK strength and the upwards trends in its military capabilities, but the memo garnered no response from the transition team.[24] Reportedly, on Bush's last day as DCI, which was several weeks into Carter's term and after the president had already issued PRM-13, essentially ordering the bureaucracy to devise a way to implement the withdrawal, Bush sent Carter a memo stating the president was incorrect in his judgements on the basis for withdrawal.[25]

[23] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 100; see also: Interview with CIA analyst, Washington, D.C., 9 February 1989, as cited in Ibid, 100.
[24] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 100.
[25] Interview with former senior DIA official, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 100.

Nonetheless, within the U.S. government there remained a common sentiment that South Korea could manage its own defense, not only due to its economic growth but also because Carter's plan, like Nixon's early withdrawal, would include a massive military assistance package to mitigate the effects. Such opinions were bolstered by a widely-circulated Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report that confirmed an even military balance between the two Koreas, apparently relying on older data for its conclusions. Furthermore, a relevant official in the White House's Office of Management and Budget recalled, there was skepticism among administration officials that Army resistance was borne of institutional concern about losing an independent four-star command and entire division (were 2ID to be disbanded). They remembered that even though some estimates in early 1977 showed a DPRK buildup, intelligence and defense representatives would not say definitely during interagency meetings that South Korea could not stop an attack north of Seoul with American assistance. Without such an assertion, the official said, the new estimates "drew only a 'so what?' from budget watchdogs."[26] Carter was intent to move forward.

Still, intelligence officials worked against the rosier predictions. The intelligence annex to PRM-13, which Colbert and others worked on, concluded DPRK forces were indeed superior to or well ahead of ROK forces in many areas.[27] Sens. Humphrey and Glenn's January 1978 report, based on their regional visits and extensive interviews, noted as much, stating the annex "indicated the static balance had shifted in favor of the North."[28] Rep. Stratton and many of his fellow skeptics on the House Armed Services committee also cited the intelligence in their report and related hearings on Carter's withdrawal policy. Colbert recalled the annex went even further than most assessments insofar as it explored areas of what is considered "net assessment," indicating

[26] Interview with Henry Shaw (senior official at the Office of Management and Budget under Carter), 21 February, 1989, as cited in in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 101.
[27] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102.
[28] Humphrey-Glenn Report I, 20.

increased doubts about Seoul's ability to repulse an assault from the North without U.S. troops. However, overall, the PRM "toed the administration line" that the ROK could effectively defend itself with only U.S. air, naval and logistical support once ground forces were withdrawn.[29]

During this early process, there was some friction between some of the analysts writing the annex and Carter's DCI, Stansfield Turner. For Turner, who replaced Bush in March, PRM-13 was one of his first problems. He knew of Carter's campaign promise on the troop withdrawal and initially supported it. He wanted the intelligence annex to focus less on numbers or "bean counts" and more on actual war-fighting capability.[30] Nevertheless, as one of the intelligence officials remembered, when the annex was turned into a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), Turner "slashed away at the draft…with offensive, not relevant remarks," and seemed to politicize the process.[31] As Turner recalled, he likely elicited such a reaction due to his own inexperience supervising the process. Still, he sensed an existing resistance to the policy within the CIA. Although he said Seoul "did not have a piece of cake on its hands," he remembered that he felt that the withdrawal was a political decision, about which administration decisionmakers understood the risks and judged them manageable.[32] However, Colbert recollected that intelligence running against the withdrawal policy was "not well received" by Carter's early appointees, with some budget officials saying it was "out of order" for not having been coordinated through the IC, which is why the annex was upgraded to an NIE. Ultimately, Turner accepted the basic conclusion of the annex in NIE form (and would later oppose the policy itself), but some

[29] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102; for toeing the administration line, see: Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102.
[30] Interviews with Stansfield Turner, 20 February and 3 March, 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 102.
[31] Interview with former senior intelligence official, as cited in Ibid.
[32] Interviews with Stansfield Turner, as cited in Ibid.

military intelligence officials added their own footnotes challenging Turner's revisions.[33] Nevertheless, as documented above, the policy proceeded apace.

Following his reassessments on DPRK tank and artillery forces, Armstrong continued to push for a more thorough review of North Korea's infantry. The task was extremely difficult in that the troops did not necessarily have equipment associated with them and were also difficult to count, yet the preliminary results of his earlier work indicated it was worth the effort. Gen. Vessey continued to be one of Armstrong's main cheerleaders. Early on, Vessey informed Air Force Lt. Gen. Eugene Tighe, the new director of DIA, about the artillery imbalance. Then, in January 1978, after Armstrong once again pressed Vessey on the lack of information regarding DPRK infantry numbers, the former sent Tighe and others within the defense intelligence community a message.[34] It not only detailed the problems with devising an accurate estimate but also suggested political leaders were "being misinformed by…overly conservative assessments of [North Korean Army] strength."[35] The message was considered a "barnburner" by one recipient.[36] At the same time, DIA held a routine conference in preparation for a joint U.S.-ROK intelligence meeting, and at the conference reports emerged of changes in DPRK military dispositions and increased activity close to the DMZ. All of the above, spurred the Army to give Armstrong more resources to begin his study and also started a separate DIA investigation.[37]

Nevertheless, DIA faced several limitations. As Tighe later recalled, up until 1978 DIA's work on North Korea was "skimpy and totally inadequate." The drain on resources caused by Vietnam and certain organizational obstacles, such as a "general resistance to youth and new ways,

[33] Interview with Evelyn Colbert, as cited in Ibid.
[34] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.
[35] Vessey Testimony.
[36] Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.
[37] Interview with Gen. Eugene Tighe, San Diego, 31 March 1989, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.

[with] lots of tired people who were ill-equipped to spread out from the Soviet Union," undermined DIA's ability to shift gears toward the new task.[38] One former member of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) within the Defense Department described DIA as a: "stodgy bureaucracy. If you wanted innovative work, DIA was the last place you'd go."[39] Thus, while Tighe and DIA were interested, indeed organizationally-speaking DIA had formal responsibility for estimating the DPRK order of battle, it was not in a position to respond quickly. Armstrong and SRD, on the other hand, with the strong support of Vessey and the Army's senior intelligence officer in Washington, were already well into their pilot study of infantry estimates by January 1978.[40] Armstrong focused on one key region, and in May of 1978 published his first dramatic findings, claiming to have discovered three divisions and one brigade in this single region not previously included in U.S. estimates. He claimed his findings were merely the "tip of the iceberg," as he briefed his findings "all over town" and reportedly caused a stir at the middle-level of the IC.[41]

Armstrong's work caught the eye of DCI Turner, who unexpectedly called him a week later with a request for a briefing.[42] Hours after the briefing, Turner pulled Secretary Defense Brown aside at a dinner party and asked him about circumstances in Korea. Brown, who had not heard the briefing, was surprised and apparently called Tighe into his office the next day. He asked the DIA director why he had not told him of the findings as well as why the Army study was necessary if DIA was tasked with such analysis.[43] Within days Tighe received his own briefing from Armstrong. Various Army and DIA participants described Tighe as "livid," "clearly hot,"

[38] Interview with Gen. Eugene Tighe, as cited in Ibid.
[39] Interview with Barry Watts, 10 February, 1989, , as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 105.
[40] Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 106; see also: Vessey Testimony.
[41] Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 106.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 106.

and that "all hell broke loose."[44] Tighe asked tough questions of Armstrong's methods and results, but finally complimented his work and assured him of complete DIA cooperation. Soon afterwards, Tighe informed JCS Chair, Gen. David Jones, about the results of Armstrong's work. Jones was already a part of the EA Informal's quiet fight against the withdrawal within the bureaucracy. The intelligence reassessments shifted into even higher gear.[45]

Armstrong's superiors granted permission for his request for 30-40 additional analysts. The team of about 35, hand-picked analysts, were made up of the Army's most experienced Korea analysts from all over the world, a truly remarkable feat. The team worked 80-hour weeks from June until October, examining all available material on DPRK forces from several years back; in some instances, as far back as the Korean War. As one DIA official observed, such "high-density expertise" on Korea and ability to work intensively for several months straight was only possible in a military service. DIA and CIA, meanwhile, were tasked with validating the Army's work. Even with additional resources the agencies were "hard-pressed to keep up."[46] Still, Gen. Tighe made the validation effort "subject number one," and created the Korea Consultative Group to improve coordination. He also put his Army deputy, Lt Col. Harry Tear in charge in order to prevent inter-service rivalry. Nevertheless, a fair amount of friction still arose due to inter-agency and personal rivalries.[47]

Armstrong felt that DIA slow-walked the verification effort because it was embarrassed that he had upstaged or superseded its responsibilities on North Korea. Various observers tended to agree. Nathanial Thayer, Colbert's replacement as NIO on East Asia, said he sensed some

[44] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 106, footnote 89.
[45] Interview with Gen. Eugene Tighe and Interview with John Armstrong, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 106.
[46] Interview with Alan MacDougall, Washington, D.C., 9 February, 1989, as cited in Ibid, 106.
[47] Interview with Gen. Eugene Tighe, as cited in Ibid, 106-107.

"footdragging" at DIA. Initially, he was told the verification effort would take a full year and half. Such slowness could have been a result of ill will or bureaucratic sluggishness.[48] Meanwhile, former officials at ONA, part of the civilian-run Office of the Secretary of Defense, observed that, while Armstrong's team was reporting major troop-level increases, DIA was telling the Pentagon that number would not change by more than 10 percent. Indeed, ONA performed its own review and determined the Army numbers appeared credible and dangerous, of which they informed Secretary Brown.[49]

For their part, Gen. Tighe and other DIA analysts defended their behavior as prudent rather than obstructionist. Alan MacDougall, a senior analyst in DIA's Korea branch, remembered that Tighe's stance was to say nothing "unless we could defend it to the death."[50] Lt. Col. Tear, head of the Korea branch leading the validation effort, said "Tighe did not want this overblown" and that he was closely involved in the "quality control" of Tear's work, insisting on "the fastest pace possible consistent with accuracy and the need for conclusive proof."[51] Tighe was determined "to put his imprimatur on any Department of Defense Korea estimate," and that he "had to assert DIA's primacy" as the lead organization for defense intelligence.[52] Yet, while the rivalry and skepticism persisted, MacDougall admitted that Armstrong's effort was the "most vigorous scutwork" based on "incredible detail." Tighe, too, tried to convince others that Armstrong's work was indeed a new and better departure from past techniques.[53]

DCI Stansfield Turner also expressed some misgivings about Armstrong's mid-1978 briefing, saying he felt "skewered" by the new estimates. Turner expressed skepticism about the

[48] Interview with Thayer, 14 April, 1989, as cited in Ibid, 107.
[49] Interview with Dick Nelson, Interview with Armstrong, and Interview with Andrew Marshall, Washington, D.C., 24 February, 1989, as cited in Ibid, 107.
[50] Interview with Alan MacDougall, as cited in Ibid, 107.
[51] Interview with Harry Tear, 23 April 1989, as cited in Ibid, 107.
[52] Interview with former senior DIA official, as cited in Ibid, 107.
[53] Interview with Alan MacDougall, as cited in Ibid, 107.

methodology and Armstrong's "self-assurance and salesmanship," and also wished he could have spent more individual time examining the data. Consequently, he, like Tighe at DIA, pushed for a fair, unbiased estimate and remained closely involved in the process. Nevertheless, as the year progressed, Turner's doubts lessened as the CIA confirmed Armstrong's results within 8 to 10 percent. [54] He briefed Carter and his principals on the matter. Brzezinski remembered the DCI came in "with a serious intelligence report with serious implications" for the troop withdrawal. Carter apparently showed little reaction at the time. Brzezinski recalled Carter took the intelligence seriously but only up to a point, as the new studies did not indicate an imminent attack. More importantly, perhaps, Carter was less concerned about the Korean military balance than other more important foreign policy commitments, namely: U.S.-Sino normalization and the approaching battle with Congress over abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan and break in relations with Taipei, gaining approval of the SALT II Treaty in the Senate, and revolution in Iran. Moreover, Carter had been constantly subjected to reservations from the military and civilian bureaucracy about the withdrawal. In that sense, this was merely the latest iteration of a longstanding pattern.[55] Yet, if Carter and Brzezinski were somewhat unaffected or preoccupied by other issues, others such as Gen. Vessey and JCS Chairman Gen. David Jones were quick to incorporate the dramatic new estimates into their arguments against the withdrawal; all the more reason U.S. forces were essential for deterrence.[56]

Furthermore, members of the EA Informal, while skeptical of the new numbers, nevertheless saw in them a tool with which to challenge a policy they long opposed. One member remarked that the new intelligence might have been "hoked up" to help the Army forestall the

[54] Interview with Stansfield Turner, as cited in Ibid, 108-109.
[55] Interview with Brzezinski, as cited in Ibid, 109.
[56] Interview with Richard Holbrooke, as cited in Ibid, 109.

withdrawal. [57] Another saw how the study would influence the pullout, but saw little change to the "dynamics of the situation." Still, the new intelligence was of obvious value. It could provide a ready justification for a "face-saving" reversal; a means for Carter to justify relaxing his campaign promise.[58] Armacost, who in mid-1978 moved from the NSC and took over Abramowitz's spot at Defense, recalled: "When I got over to the Pentagon, the army was working on this. We regarded it as extremely helpful at the time." Speaking about one of the analyst's work, he said: "I was happy to hear what his boys were concluding…I found it helpful." Noting their mixed feelings about the quality of the intelligence alongside its clear instrumental value, Armacost continued: "the combination of professional skepticism and political utility was I think an accurate assessment of how the EA Informal guys reacted to it. I didn't necessarily regard it as the best piece of analysis ever, but it was timely and it was generally helpful and it accorded with our view that you ought to be cautious about these things because people draw larger conclusions from relatively modest withdrawals." Lastly, he reflected: "That's one part of the policy process that's interesting sometimes people use analysis in a very utilitarian way even if they have deep doubts about the quality of the work their using to advance their views."[59] He was not alone.

Abramowitz, another original member of the EA Informal, has similar recollections. Although by mid-1978 he had left Defense to become ambassador in Thailand, he maintained contact with those involved and was privy to the thrust of events. He recalled: "I don't have any view about CIA's findings. I do believe such analyses need considerable scrutiny because they are indeed, at best, good guesswork…I suspect that CIA's analysis was probably correct that the North's forces were larger than we had anticipated; how much larger I would not vouch for. In any

[57] Interview with Abramowitz, Armacost, and Holbrooke, as cited in Ibid, 109.
[58] Interview with Thayer, as cited in Ibid, 109.
[59] Interview with Armacost.

case, the analysis was very useful for the anti-withdrawal forces in Washington. It undermined one of Carter's assumptions upon which he based his decision."[60] Perhaps the most telling remark, though, came from Richard Holbrooke.

Holbrooke, as mentioned, served as the sort of unofficial ringleader of the internal bureaucratic struggle against the withdrawal policy. Indeed, he masked his efforts so effectively that many outside observers criticized him as one of the main progenitors and proponents of a highly questionable policy.[61] However, he had worked diligently to coordinate and coral the various strands of opposition over time. The result, Abramowitz remembered, was that "eventually the bureaucracy came together to oppose the withdrawal decision."[62] Revealingly, when speaking of the new intelligence on North Korea, Holbrooke said: "If the bean counting had gone the other way, we still would have found a reason to suspend the withdrawal."[63] No other remark highlights as much the instrumentality with which the new estimates were received. Yet, considering the degree of skepticism with which the new estimates were met, even by those who welcomed them, the question of the veracity of the intelligence is worth considering.

Indeed, Carter and others expressed severe doubts not just about the seemingly sudden and timely emergence of the intelligence (casting further doubt upon the withdrawal at a vulnerable moment) but also regarding its sources, namely, outspoken opponents of the withdrawal policy. From this perspective, the intelligence appeared, at best, inflated and, at worst, fabricated to defeat the policy. However, there are several factors that work against such an interpretation. First is the fact, outlined above, that the origins of the study preceded Carter's arrival on the scene. While

[60] Interview with Abramowitz, 641.
[61] Michael A. Ledeen, "Carter, Small Group Decided Secretly About China, Korea," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1979.
[62] Interview with Abramowitz, 640.
[63] Interview with Richard Holbrooke, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 110

such a fact does not preclude the possibility the analysis was driven, in part, to preserve an independent, four-star Army command, it does mitigate the possibility it was specifically designed to challenge Carter's policy, at least initially. Second, considering the dearth of resources and attention paid to North Korea due to Vietnam, it makes sense that once a the data was more closely examined, a change in estimates might result. Armstrong asserted the newly detected troop, armor and artillery increases had begun in the early 1970s. Since older estimates had made assumptions based on earlier numbers, not on actual numbers, it was not unlikely that closer examination could result in different estimates. After all, Pyongyang had begun construction of several known tunnels around the same time the larger build-up was purported to have begun. Such actions are consistent with a more militarized North Korean policy. Lastly, later evaluations of the data in the late 1980s, using more advanced technologies and "improved methods of estimation" indicated yet further growth form Armstrong's numbers.[64]

Nonetheless, there is no gainsaying the fact that Armstrong's work was given a new impetus due to the military's opposition to Carter's policy and given firm support by some of the withdrawal policy's most outspoken skeptics, such as Gen. Vessey. Ultimately, though, whether or not the intelligence was accurate or embellished is of secondary importance. In either case, the effect was the same. It was one more challenge to the implementation of Carter's policy, a policy already deeply opposed and facing potentially fatal obstacles. Indeed, were the intelligence deliberately embellished and not entirely accurate, it simply proves the point that opposition to Carter's policy ran quite deep and preexisted the intelligence gathering effort itself, which the preceding narrative shows was undoubtedly true. Furthermore, even if the intelligence was entirely accurate and unbiased, it merely represented the next in a series of rolling obstacles to the policy.

[64] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 111.

Arguably, it did tip the scales against it. However, the well-laid, preexisting opposition to the withdrawal, opposition borne of a series of rationales having little if nothing to do with the North Korean order of battle or inter-Korean military balance, are what prepared the scales for tipping. In the end, the new intelligence, accurate or not (and it was likely more accurate than not), layered onto the extant opposition. Exact numbers aside, perception is what mattered. Unfortunately for Carter, the perception was that an already controversial policy had, by now, become entirely untenable.

As for the new intelligence estimates, Armstrong and his team's results were in by October 1978, and the numbers were in fact quite dramatic. They concluded that the overall size of the DPRK Army was at least 560,000 to 600,000 men, a roughly one-third increase from the earlier estimate of 450,000. This not only made North Korea's infantry the fifth largest in the world, but also larger than the ROK's (560,000), removing yet one more advantage Seoul's was previously thought to have over Pyongyang. Furthermore, Armstrong noted that these were solely those numbers they definitely could identify, and that more were likely present. Aside from total numbers of troops, North Korea's ground maneuver divisions had also grown, from 28 to 41. More importantly, the forces appeared to be deployed closer to the DMZ and in an offensively-oriented configuration. Building on his earlier studies, Armstrong and analysts also increased reporting on North Korean tanks and artillery. The estimate on tanks was 35 percent greater than in 1977, and that on artillery and APCs 20 percent more. As noted, the 1977 numbers themselves had been included in the intelligence annex for PRM-13. As dramatic as the new reports were, Armstrong and others reiterated the numbers did not indicate a sudden surge in North Korean forces, but the consequence of steady growth over the decade just now being uncovered.[65]

[65] Don Oberdorfer, "North Korea's Army Now Ranked Fifth-Largest in World by U.S.," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1979.

Although the IC and bureaucracy were aware of the new numbers in October, they did not become public until their "leak" in a January 1 issue of *Army Times*. The leak was almost certainly an orchestrated bid to cast further doubt on Carter's withdrawal, yet also supported those skeptical of the new intelligence in their view that it was biased in order to preserve the Army's four-star command in Korea. *The Army Times* after all was "a newspaper with close but unofficial ties to the Army and with no track record of investigative journalism involving classified data."[66] Nevertheless, the cat was out of the bag. The mainstream press quickly picked up the story. Although Carter felt blindsided by the new estimates and leak, feeling the IC was sabotaging his policy, he immediately ordered the CIA and DIA to examine the new estimates, a process which, as described above, they had already initiated.[67] Carter still held out the hope that he could safeguard his policy, but fissures were increasingly apparent. As *The New York Times* reported on January 4: "White House officials said that the new intelligence was unlikely to affect pace of the American withdrawal, but some said privately they were disturbed that Mr. Carter's decision had apparently been made on the basis of inadequate intelligence."[68] In short, the consensus in the U.S. government and among informed observers in late 1978 and early 1979 was that the policy's cancellation was now a foregone conclusion. It was not a question of if but when.[69]

Congressional backlash was immediate, intense and unsurprising. On January 3, Reps. Stratton and Beard, both longtime critics, sent a letter to Carter, citing "this new and disturbing information," asking for DIA and CIA assessments, and urging him "to immediately defer any further withdrawal."[70] Indeed, they contended that they had even before then been declaring the

[66] Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 109.
[67] Ibid, 109-110.
[68] Richard Burt, "New Study Raises U.S. Estimate Of North Korean Army Strength," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1979.
[69] William Beecher, "Korean Withdrawal Decision," *Boston Globe*, January 5, 1979; see also: Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 27.
[70] Burt, "New Study Raises U.S. Estimate Of North Korean Army Strength."

warning sides. They wrote: "We respectfully point out, Mr. President, that while this information is reputed to be "new" it corresponds with everything presented to our subcommittee on this subject over the past year and a half, not only from U.S. military officials familiar with the Korean balance of forces, but from responsible officials of allied nations stationed in the Far East, as well. Moreover, these estimates were included in the formal report of our subcommittee trip to Korea and the Far East published last spring." For Stratton and Beard, as well as many others, the new estimates merely confirmed their extant concerns, ones which they had consistently voiced since the policy was first rolled-out. Yet Brzezinski replied without breaking any new ground. He sent them a response merely repeating the same caveats Carter had provided Speaker Tip O'Neill the previous July: ""the President expects the withdrawal program to be carried out in a manner which preserves the military balance and thus protects the security of the ROK. Should circumstances affecting the balance change significantly, we will assess those changes in close consultation with the Congress, the ROK, and our other Asian allies. Our plans will be adjusted if developments so warrant." [71] Of course, for lawmakers those circumstances had arrived.

Nevertheless, if Stratton and Beard's objections were severe, they were also nothing new. More serious for Carter was the solidifying Senate disapproval, particularly among key Democrats. By early 1979, Senators Glenn and Nunn, as the respective heads of the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Pacific Study Group of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, were nearing completion of in-depth reports on Carter's policy. In Sen. Glenn's case, the subcommittee study was an update on the earlier Humphrey and Glenn report. Whereas the latter served as a diplomatic if still firm tugging of the reigns on Carter's policy in early 1978, the former was framed as a full-on objection to it. On the

[71] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Breziznski, through Madeleine Albright, from Nick Platt, "Troop Withdrawals from the ROK -- Congressman Stratton and Beard Letter," 9 January 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 431-434.

other hand, Sen. Nunn and his fellow study group members, Sens. Byrd (D-VA), Garry Hart (D-CO), John Tower (R-TX) and Sen. William Cohen (R-ME) (a more informal participant), had begun their extensive review of the U.S. defense posture in the Asia-Pacific in late 1977, and were finally bringing their analysis to a close in January. The Pacific Study Group was established, in part, due to disapproval or at least skepticism about Carter's Korea withdrawal.

From January 3 to 14, Senators Glenn, Nunn, Hart, and Cohen undertook a trip to East Asia, making stops in the Philippines Thailand, the PRC, Japan and South Korea. Before visiting Seoul, they stopped in Beijing, meeting PRC Vice Premier Deng just days after formal U.S-Sino normalization. The lawmakers expressed concern about the new intelligence on North Korea and probed to what extent Deng could retrain Pyongyang and foster inter-Korean negotiations as part of a larger diplomatic effort among the United States and regional neighbors. They received from Deng much the same response Vance and Brzezinski had: Washington should negotiate directly with Pyongyang and withdraw U.S. forces; Pyongyang only had peaceful intent, as evinced by its recent overtures (examined below); and militarily the South was just as strong as North.[72] Yet it was in South Korea, at the tail end of the trip, where the Senators did their real work. In Seoul, they met with Prime Minister Choi Kyu Hah, who, in addition to citing the new intelligence as evidence of what the South Koreans had been saying all along, warned the senators about increased Soviet naval deployments in the area. Put simply, despite positive diplomatic trends, North Korea was even more threatening than previously thought as was the overall area.[73]

When Glenn, Nunn, and Cohen met with President Park (Senator Hart did not join the Korea leg of the journey), they "handled the troop withdrawal issue with great circumspection,"

[72] "Telegram from the Liaison Office in China to the Department of State, 11 January 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 435-436.
[73] "South Korean Warns That Soviet May Bolster Its Navy in Far East," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1979.

but when they met with Ambassador Gleysteen both before and after the meeting with Park "they were highly critical of President Carter for his failure to accommodate to the reality of new intelligence assessments." Their feelings were "intense," Gleysteen recalled. Their conversation continued as Gleysteen accompanied the senators on their air force plane back to Washington. They continued their criticism of the president for failing to halt the withdrawal, at least until the entire policy could be reviewed in light of the new estimate. Gleysteen said he personally shared their views and hoped Carter would indeed reach the same conclusion, to which Senator Nunn pointedly warned that if Carter failed to act by the time the Senate reconvened later than month, he and his colleagues would "go on the attack with strong public criticism of troop withdrawals." Told explicitly to get the message to the president, Gleysteen met with Secretary Vance straight away upon return to D.C. So too did Senators Nunn and Glenn, who met Vance on January 18, urging the administration to suspend the withdrawal, strengthening their arguments with the Army's new intelligence assessments.[74]

Several days later, while the major newspapers continued to report on growing congressional opposition, Sen. Nunn and his fellow members of the Pacific Study Group met at the White House with President Carter, Secretary of Defense Brown, and Secretary Vance.[75] They previewed the results of their 13-month study (to be released the next day), and each senator, including Senator Hart, who had previously been open to the policy, told Carter they could no longer support the withdrawal. Reportedly, Carter was "very attentive" but remained non-comital regarding his plans.[76] On January 23, the study group released its report and gave a press

[74] Gletsteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 28.
[75] Bernard Weinraub, "Opposition Grows On Korea Pullout," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1979.
[76] George C. Wilson, "Troop Withdrawal From South Korea Too Risky at Present, Senators Say," *The Washington Post*, January 24; see also: Interview with Richard Holbrooke, as cited in Wood, "A Case Study: Persuading a President," 110.

conference, calling on Carter to halt further withdrawals.[77] Guiding the decision, their report firmly stated:

> The withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from the Republic of Korea (ROK) should be discontinued. The new U.S. intelligence reassessment of North Korean military strength leads us to conclude that even planned improvements in South Korean forces will not compensate for withdrawal of the U.S. 2d Infantry Division. The reassessment casts grave doubt upon the validity of earlier judgments about the nature and stability of the Korean military balance that formed the basis of the administration's decision in May 1977 to withdraw US ground troops from Korea. Moreover, the present plans for withdrawal will cost the United States between $1.5 and 2.5 billion without reducing the probability of immediate US combat involvement in a future Korean conflict.[78]

The Washington Post's George Wilson reported that, in addition to opposition to the policy itself, many congressional insiders believed Carter would in fact suspend the withdrawals to avoid a fight with the senators on other matters, in particular over SALT II and issues related to normalization with Beijing and breaking off relations with Taipei.[79] Indeed, though neither the press nor lawmakers knew it at the time, Carter had already commissioned a new, full-scale policy review of the withdrawal policy, PRM-45. He did so the morning of the previous day, when the senators had gathered at the White House.

Soon thereafter, though, Carter bowed to the pressure. On February 9, while fielding questions during a press conference with editors, news directors and U.S. governors, Carter announced: "we are holding in abeyance any further reduction in American troop levels until we can assess the new intelligence data on the buildup of North Korean force levels, the impact of the normalization with China, and the new peace proposal or discussions for peace that have been put

[77] Wilson, "Troop Withdrawal From South Korea Too Risky at Present, Senators Say."
[78] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Korea: The Troop Withdrawal Program: Report of the Pacific Study Group*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., January 23, 1979, Senate, 1. (Hereafter cited as Pacific Study Report)
[79] Wilson, "Troop Withdrawal From South Korea Too Risky at Present, Senators Say."

forward by both the North Korean and the South Korean Governments."[80] For opponents of withdrawal in the House and Senate and among the informed public, the announcement appeared Carter was taking responsible action, just as observers were beginning to believe Congress might have to "spell out conditions for further withdrawal to prevent the administration from rashly pursuing" the policy despite the changed or newly emergent conditions. For them, it spelled the beginning of the end of a flawed policy. Nevertheless, for Carter, the announcement did not yet signal such a fundamental change in policy.[81] His accompanying remarks signaled as much, wherein he acknowledged no rapid moves would be made but that the administration was still "carrying out a basic policy of withdrawing troops from South Korea," citing the need to adjust a 30-year old arrangement and Seoul's remarkable economic growth (both of which had been consistently stated rationales of the policy).[82] Nonetheless, Carter's doggedness aside, the announcement and various issues behind it represented a key turning point.

First and foremost, of course, was the new intelligence assessment and the internal policy review it spurred. As noted, the bureaucracy had been cognizant of developments within the IC for some time and much earlier laid the ground work for the early 1979 policy shift. Speaking about the emergence of new intelligence, one former State Department official remarked: "We had the smoking gun we needed…We worked this continuously with Defense."[83] It was very much a State Department-led effort, particularly a Holbrooke-led one, as the Pentagon "scrupulously abided by their agreement with Holbrooke to leave the running to insiders appointed by Carter."[84]

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[80] Jimmy Carter, "Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Editors and News Directors," The American Presidency Project: Documents: Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States, 1977-1981, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/interview-with-the-president-remarks-and-question-and-answer-session-with-editors-and-9.
[81] Rich, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea," 27-28.
[82] Carter, "Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Editors and News Directors."
[83] Interview with former State Department official, as cited in Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 150-151.
[84] Ibid, 151.

A senior former congressional aide reflected on this arrangement and noted that only one person from Defense consistently passed along information about internal administration deliberations. Aside from the Gen. Singluab flare-up, the military did not exert nearly the informal influence on Capitol Hill as did State. "State was always trying to position itself between DoD and the Hill on the Korea withdrawal issue," another congressional staffer remembered. "Lord knows," he added, "I tried to create a coalition with DOD."[85]

The fact that Holbrooke and the State Department's took the lead on the matter made Brzezinski's position on the withdrawal all the more incongruous. It was inconsistent with his image as the high-level official most responsible for the overall hardening of Carter's foreign policy, and inconsistent with his views about the need to project American resolve. "He was meant to be the tough guy," remembered a former official. "While State was meant to be weak. Here he was looking the weak guy while State looked tough."[86] Carter's national security advisor did not actively assist the opponents of the policy. Unlike Secretaries Brown and Vance, who had long expressed misgivings to Carter as well as their deputies, Brzezinski "waffled rather than taking a firm stance." His behavior may have been partly a result of his animosity toward Holbrooke. The latter was leading the charge against the withdrawal and personal clashes may have resulted in stubbornness; Brzezinski, Packer notes, was Holbrooke's "dedicated enemy."[87] Most likely, though, was the possibility, as noted before, that his main intent was to prevent Carter from being boxed in, something Brzezinski said was behind his unwillingness to directly challenge the president. Nevertheless, he knew full well of the consensus developing among the other principals and the efforts within the bureaucracy the next rung down, and he did nothing to block it.[88]

[85] Interviews with senior former congressional aide and congressional staffer, as cited in Ibid, 152.
[86] Interview with former official, as cited in, Ibid, 154.
[87] Packer, *Our Man*, ch.6, Kindle.
[88] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 154.

Over time, the internal bureaucratic tactics employed by Holbrooke and others began to pay dividends. The main participants included Holbrooke and others at State, Armacost at the Pentagon, and Oksenberg and Nicholas Platt on the NSC (Platt had taken over Armacost's position once the latter moved over to fill Abramowitz role at Defense). By mid-1978, they began to "use all the resources of the bureaucracy to scour out the foundations of the policy," including the normal method of producing "another boring bureaucratic document with a hidden agenda": PRM-45. They collectively called it the "turnaround PRM." Platt at NSC was put in charge of the PRM. As Hayes correctly observes, "The fact that Asia policy was a low priority in the Eurocentric Carter Administration made it easy for a low ranking official like Platt to push the seemingly innocuous decision to conduct PRM-45 through the NSC's Policy Review Committee."[89] Meanwhile, Robert G. Rich Jr., the country director of the Korea Desk at State, actually drafted it over the latter half of 1978 and first half of 1979.

In other words, they began their work well before Carter even issued it. Rich had been the director of the Korea Desk since July of 1977, where he "essentially dealt directly with all the rest of the government on behalf of Korean issues." Rich noted how the "country director" system often became too layered in the bureaucracy. However, due to the trust he had with Holbrooke, he "did not even report through a Deputy Assistant Secretary after Bill Gleysteen moved from the responsibility to become Ambassador to Korea."[90] This was in mid-1978, when the PRM drafting process began. Contrary to the intelligence leaks, the internal review was geared specifically to convince Carter. "You have to bear in mind," one participant said, "that the purpose of all this was to change one man's mind."[91] Consequently, they kept mum about their effort, conducting it

[89] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 155.
[90] Interview with Robert G. Rich, Jr., Korea Desk Officer, Washington, D.C. (1977-1981), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 795.
[91]Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 156.

"without any public leaks so that President Carter would not feel backed into a corner," Rich recalled.[92]

The overall strategy was to construct and draft PRM-45 and, once complete, use it to frame Carter's latter visit to the region. The "bureaucratic logic" was clear. Once constructed, the PRM would be submitted to the NSC's Policy Review Committee (PRC), made up of Carter's principal advisors, Brzezinski, Vance, Brown and DCI Turner. The PRM would then move up to a smaller committee, above the NSC, consisting of just the cabinet-level advisors for final adjudication. "Only then," Hayes wrote, "would the President be consulted on the review," once the matter had been all but settled. The guiding assumption was that Carter would then visit the region and Seoul specifically, consult with allies based on the new review, return home to consult with U.S. lawmakers, and, lastly, announce a policy reversal.[93]

The PRM was conceived as a "three stage rocket," with each stage dependent on the others in a layered fashion. The first or booster stage was the CIA and DIA's SNIEs, building on their review of the Army's new intelligence reassessment, which was already underway. The second, concurrent stage, was the preparation of a large Pentagon study, which was related but more dynamic. It took the static bean counts produced (or confirmed) by the CIA and DIA estimates, and turned the numbers into a more interactive analysis, projecting the relative North-South military balance into the medium-term future, both with and without American forces, and focused on actual wartime scenarios. The Defense study, which one participant recalled the Pentagon wanted to amplify with numerous other issues, was to be included an annex to the PRM. The third and final stage was the PRM itself. It would lay out broader political and geopolitical environment, U.S. interests in Korea and the region, allied perspectives, and the pros and cons of several options

[92] Interview with Robert G. Rich Jr., 796.
[93] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 156.

for the withdrawal policy, from full cancellation to continuing with the original plan. The entire effort spanned about four months and three NSC Policy Review Committee meetings.[94]

In addition to their work in Washington, Rich kept Ambassador Gleysteen and Gen. Vessey informed in Seoul, soliciting their opinions in the process. With a draft of the PRM, Rich flew to Seoul and passed it along to them both. They consulted for "two days over long, working breakfasts after which Vessey and Gleysteen worked on the draft with their staff."[95] In the coming weeks, both Gleysteen and Vessey each sent along their "separate, but similar, recommendations as to what we should do."[96] Unsurprisingly, both recommended suspending the withdrawal policy.

Gleysteen had a multifaceted perspective on the entire matter. Originally, he was Holbrooke's deputy in Washington, a direct participant in the earliest stages of the policy and initial (if not principal) member of the EA Informal. As Rich recalled, Gleysteen and others had been shocked by the unilateral thrust of Carter's policy, lacking as it did any sort of diplomatic *quid pro quo* or thorough consultation with U.S. allies or the bureaucracy. At the time, they had "worked out a mechanism that would mitigate the problem," likely a reference to the backloading and massive military transfer package.[97] Gleysteen himself noted that when he left Washington for his post at the embassy in Seoul he thought no reductions in U.S. combat forces from Korea could be justified any longer. Nevertheless, his anxiety about the withdrawal had: "already eased substantially…Given the facts about North Korean deployments and the way the issue had developed in Washington, I assumed the president would surely…cancel or postpone consideration of any further withdrawals." However, he said the first few months of his tenure: "reinforced my own views about what we should do, giving a new dimension to opinions formed

[94] Ibid, 157.
[95] Ibid, 158.
[96] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 29.
[97] Interview with Robert G. Rich Jr., 794.

in the relatively abstract debates of Washington." This involved talking with a wide-range of U.S and Korean officers and visiting as many units as possible. Gleysteen was also "impressed by the near unanimity of views among key members" of his staff, such as the Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas Stern and Political Counselor William Clark Jr., as well as by Gen. Vessey, whose low-key explanations he listened to "with particular care." In early June, near the end of the process, Gleysteen would return to Washington for the final Policy Review Committee meeting.[98]

Outside the closely guarded internal policy review yet of notable importance to it was the wider international setting at the time. After all, a central element of the PRM was to lay out the regional trends and environment within which the withdrawal was being reconsidered. Carter himself made direct reference to one such development, namely, normalization with Beijing, when he announced that the withdrawal would be put in temporary abeyance. There were others as well and while each possessed its own unique characteristics, taken together they contributed to the general hardening of the administration's foreign policy mentioned above.

On January 16, a day after Brzezinski's reply to Reps. Stratton and Beard's letter on Korea and two days before Sens. Nunn and Glenn urged Vance to suspend the troop withdrawal, the Shah departed Iran for the last time. Although the Islamic Republic was not established until April, for Washington the outcome was clear and parallels troubling. Domestic unrest and ultimately revolution in Iran resulted in the overthrow of a dependable, pro-American government and the loss of a key strategic U.S. ally on the frontline of a resurgent Cold War, as well as key intelligence listening posts along the underbelly of the Soviet Union. Combined with ongoing instability in the Horn of Africa, unrest in Yemen, and a teetering situation within Afghanistan – wherein Soviet influence was increasingly evident – the Iran Revolution led Brzezinski to coin the phrase and

[98] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 27-29.

warn about the spillover effects on the so-called "Arc of Crisis" or what *Time* referred to as the "Crescent of Crisis" in its January 1979 cover story on the issue.[99] Coupled with Washington's concern about another wavering rightwing, anticommunist ally in Nicaragua (beset by a popular leftwing insurgency) and a worsening conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia (seen as a proxy battle between Moscow and Beijing supporting Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge, respectively), the sense of global instability both overshadowed Korea but also reinforced the need for stability there. Indeed, the hardening process was evident in U.S. policies throughout East Asia.

Primary among them was normalization with China. Part of Beijing's motivation for normalizing relations was to formulate an anti-Soviet coalition with Washington. While certainly short of a formal military alliance, Beijing hoped (as did Brzezinski and other officials) to foster strategic relations, including the sale of potential dual use American technologies, official visits by high-level U.S. defense and military officials, and U.S. encouragement of its NATO allies' sale of actual military hardware to the PRC. In this context, Beijing's perception of the worth or reliability of the new relationship was tied to its perception of U.S. credibility or staying power in the region, and the maintenance of U.S. forces in Korea was seen as part of this. Although Beijing's official position remained consistent, namely, that U.S. forces should withdraw and Washington negotiate with North Korea, it was commonly understood among policymakers in Washington that this was merely boilerplate to assuage Pyongyang's nerves and prevent it from leaning towards Moscow. Deng Xiaoping could not say so publicly or even necessarily behind closed doors, but U.S. officials operated under this assumption. After all, Moscow was continuing to bolster its Far

[99] For a relatively detailed examination of the fallout from the Iranian Revolution and these various other regional instabilities, see: Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 151-175; Brzezinski coined the phrase the "Arc of Crisis" to denote the range of countries "along the shores of the Indian Ocean, with fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political chaos could well be filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries," see: Fred Halliday, "The Arc of Crisis and the New Cold War," *MERIP Reports*, no.100/101 (1981): 15 (14-25)

Eastern deployments and increase its influence in the region, which, again, was partly why Beijing pursued normalization.[100]

There was also a fervent neoconservative reaction at home against what they saw as Carter's fecklessness in making concessions to achieve normalization – ending the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan after one year's notice and removing remaining U.S. forces – a signal of weakness or a lack of American dependability. Echoing President Chiang Ching-kuo's sentiment that Washington dishonored its treaty commitments and "cannot be expected to have the confidence of any free nations in the future," Taipei's shrillest friends in the United States, such as Ronald Reagan, said Carter had "abandoned Taiwan to the Red Chinese." According to Sen. Goldwater, Carter's betrayal of Taiwan "calls into question the honor – the very soul – of America's word in the field of foreign relations." In fact, Goldwater and 23 other members of the Senate and House brought suit in the federal courts, arguing Carter's termination of the treaty was unconstitutional with the Senate or entire Congress' consent. Although the Supreme Court ultimately dismissed the case and there was sufficient support in Congress to pass the Taiwan Relations Act, moving away from Taiwan worked against doing so with other allies.[101] Although Carter's withdrawal policy never involved abrogating the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, continuing with the troop removals would have appeared to move in that general direction. Combined with Carter's need for Senate support on SALT II, at that point not at all a guaranteed proposition, furthering ruffling of Congressional feathers by holding fast to the Korea withdrawal policy (which most were already outspokenly against) meant jeopardizing the U.S.-Soviet arms deal, which was one of the president's highest priorities from the moment he entered office.

[100] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 129-141; Gaddis, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 86-90 and 91-95.
[101] For neoconservative and Taiwanese reaction and court battle over the abrogation of the treaty, see: Gaddis, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 90-91.

Seoul, too, cautioned against any overzealous moves at that time. President Park, in a January 31 letter to Carter, said he was concerned "we may fall into an error of overestimating the role of China and of underestimating the impact of diplomatic and military maneuvers of the Soviet Union in our area." He was also concerned that Pyongyang "may find some disadvantage in the current efforts of China to cultivate closer and friendly relations with the United States and other Western powers," and through aggressive or provocative moves attempt to disrupt the process. Put simply, Park stated: "The new developments in this region require our two allies to cooperate and coordinate our policies more closely than ever before." For Seoul, this obviously meant refraining from further withdrawals, but also recognizing "the usefulness in holding a personal meeting between us in the near future as you have suggested." Solidifying the relationship, not undoing it, was the order of the day.[102]

Intertwined with normalization and the hardening of US policy in the region was Washington's relationship with Vietnam and the growing conflict between it and the Khmer Rouge in neighboring Cambodia. Initially the Carter administration had explored potential normalization with Hanoi, yet another move to help close the chapter on the Vietnam War. However, early disagreements sidetracked negotiations, and by late 1978 it was too late. Hanoi had signed a treaty of peace and friendship with Moscow that fall, signaling the further expansion of Soviet influence into Southeast Asia and its possible use of Vietnam's American-built, deep-water naval ports. Washington was no longer interested in settling relations with communist Vietnam, even more so as it would complicate the normalization process with Beijing. Historically an antagonistic relationship, Beijing and Hanoi had fallen out soon after the Vietnam War, partly due to the latter's budding relationship with the Soviets. In the festering conflict between Hanoi and the Khmer

[102] "Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, 31 January 1979,"in *The Carter Chill*, 458-459.

Rouge in neighboring Cambodia, Beijing not only supported the Khmer Rouge but crept toward direct involvement. Vietnam had invaded Cambodia in early 1977 and border skirmished between them intensified in 1978, which Brzezinski characterized "as the first case of a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union." In that case, while fostering relations with Beijing, Washington was not going to support or normalize relations with the Soviet "proxy." Things soon came to a head.[103]

In January, Vietnamese forces invaded and drove Pol Pot from Pnomh Penh, installing their own regime, led by President Heng Samrin. Soon thereafter, during their summit meeting in Washington, PRC Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping informed Carter during a confidential meeting that Chinese forces would soon invade Vietnam to punish it for its invasion of Cambodia. The Carter administration responded with tacit approval, though in its official statement the State Department called for restraint on both sides and the Carter administration pleaded ignorance about having previous knowledge of Chinese intentions. The events were yet another instance of Brzezinki's vision winning out over that of Secretary Vance. These events in Southeast Asia, like the others noted above, was one more instance of instability, which reaffirmed the need for stability elsewhere.[104]

Carter noted as much in a February 18 letter to Park Chung Hee, the same day PRC forces invaded Vietnam. Carter informed Park he had counselled the Chinese "not to respond to the Soviet-supported Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea" by direct military action, as it would simply divert international attention away from the Soviet-supported action and possibly increase rather than decrease the Soviet presence and influence in the region and possibly lead to wider war. In

[103] Gaddis, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 97.
[104] Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 164-166.; on the Brzezinski-Vance conflict, Gaddis wrote: "again Brzezinski tilted actual policy to favor the PRC and send a message to the U.S.S.R. Vance complained that American policy was pushing Vietnam into the arms of the Soviets and suggested that the United States open direct talks with Hanoi concerning the conflict with Cambodia. Brzezinski suggested that the United States ask the Chinese first, and, as expected, Peking voted the idea," see: Gaddis, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 98.

lieu of Chinese restraint, Carter told Park that Washington continued its effort to secure an end to fighting and monitor security developments throughout the region, specifically any "extension of the conflict beyond the Indochina area" to the Korean Peninsula. Carter continued: "As I know you are aware, I have recently instructed that plans for any further withdrawal of United States forces from Korea be held in abeyance until such time as we can complete our analysis of the North Korean buildup of forces. We will of course give careful consideration to any developments arising out of the present conflict that could affect this decision."[105] The message was direct and clear: Washington was attuned to instabilities elsewhere, concerned of their possible (if still unlikely) spillover to Korea, had already adjusted the withdrawal, and would be ready to do so again based on external developments.

The fallout from instability in Southeast Asian also showed just how far the Carter White House has turned away from its earlier principles, particularly in how the hardening of its policy cut directly against Carter's purported adherence to human rights and a new morality in U.S. foreign policy. President Carter, like Ford before him, had strongly spoke out against the horrific atrocities committed by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. Yet due to the hardening of U.S. policy and the aforementioned dynamics surrounding normalization's interconnection with the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, the administration found itself supporting the Khmer Rouge's claim to legitimacy at the United Nations as the sole government of Cambodia. In response to a motion introduced in the U.N. General Assembly by India to seat the government of Heng Samrin, Secretary Vance instructed the U.S. U.N. Mission to vote in the negative. Although Vance told U.S. officials to state the negative American vote in no way indicated "support or recognition…or approval of" the Khmer Rouge's "atrocious practices," supporting the motion would have meant

[105] "Letter from Jimmy Carter to Park Chung Hee, 18 February 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 469-470.

voting on the same side as Hanoi, Havana, and Moscow; a move Washington was not going to make.[106]

The inconsistencies on human rights extended elsewhere, in particular toward ASEAN members states. Whereas over 1977-1978, the Carter administration's ASEAN policy centered on expanding economic ties with ASEAN, starting in 1979 it has shifted toward an emphasis on defense. The result was that U.S. ASEAN policy "minimized or even overlooked human-rights violations."[107] One such blind spot in the region was East Timor, where the Carter administration disregarded Indonesia's brutal suppression of the Timorese nationalist movement because to do otherwise "would not serve our best interests in light of the importance of our relations with Indonesia."[108] A similar trade-off of strategic imperatives and stability over moral principle played out in the Philippines.

President Carter had inherited stalemated negotiations with Manila over U.S. basing rights at the still strategically important Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines. Nevertheless, despite the contentious nature of the negotiations along with President Ferdinand Marcos' well-known human rights abuses, Washington never administered anything more than "a polite tap on the wrist" over Marcos' authoritarian rule nor cut back on military or non-military assistance.[109] Even when quiet diplomatic criticism did occur, it always quickly followed by a reaffirmation of, as Holbrooke put it, the Philippines "strategic importance, not only for our own country but also for nations friendly to the United States in the region," such as South Korea.[110] This included "high-level stroking" and visits, including by Vice President Mondale in

[106] Gaddis, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 97-99.
[107] Ibid, 100.
[108] Ibid, 103.
[109] Ibid, 101.
[110] Ibid.

the Spring of 1978, and culminated in a January 1979 agreement wherein Washington provided $500 million, mainly in the form of modern weaponry, in exchange for unobstructed use of the air and naval bases for the next five years. In April 1979, defending the need for the United States to retain base access, Carter said: "I don't think that our displeasure with [President Marcos' failure in] meeting American-type standards on human rights ought to interfere."[111] Carter may have initially hoped to make human rights the heart and soul of U.S. foreign policy, but quickly discovered truculent realities and mutually overlapping and reinforcing policies stood in the way.

His national security advisor Brzezinski may not have shared his fellow principals' or the bureaucracy's same distaste for Carter's Korea withdrawal policy. However, he was undoubtedly attuned to the various aforementioned instabilities and strategic considerations and the hardening effect they had on overall foreign policy. Indeed, he himself drove much of the hardening process. He both sensed and promoted the need to maintain an image of strength and resolve in the face of such considerations and also how they refracted back towards Korea. In fact, he had explicitly objected to the inclusion of military sales to South Korea (and Iran) in conventional arms talks with the Soviets, due to the uncertainties borne of the withdrawal.[112] His awareness likely helps explain why he did nothing to hinder the bureaucratic groundswell that had formed around and beneath him in opposition to the withdrawal. It is also of note that wider diplomatic considerations and regional instabilities that were part of the ongoing reconsideration of the withdrawal were hardly a secret relegated behind closed doors to the internal review process.

In March 1979, amidst this process, the *New York Times* reported on the formulation of a new policy toward Asia, one that deviated from Carter's earlier more principled and variegated approach to the region. In general, the focus had turned to bolstering the U.S. military presence

[111] Ibid, 102.
[112] "Feud in Administration Said to Endanger Talks on Arms Sales Pact," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1978.

and assistance to allies, which was a direct reversal of earlier visions of drawdown. The *Times* reported that in the wider context of normalization with Beijing, the latter's invasion of Vietnam (within an already destabilized situation), and increasing Sino-Soviet confrontation, administration officials had decided it was necessary to reconsider East Asia strategy. The new aim was to confine or "quarantine" potential conflicts in the region to communist nations, protect U.S. allies, and prevent the impact of such conflicts on U.S. security and economic interests. In fact, the newspaper correctly reported, that even before the recent violence administration officials had decided against further cutbacks in the American presence. Violence in Indochina, it stated, simply reinforced the decision. In practical terms this meant: increasing military assistance to Thailand and other ASEAN members; encouraging Tokyo's air and naval build-up (a process already underway); stopping the withdrawal of one carrier task force from the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet in the Western Pacific; and, the maintenance of U.S. forces in the ROK. Although the internal review process surrounding PRM-45 still remained mostly under wraps, informed observers saw the trends.[113]

Down the Stretch: Opponents Close the Circle & Contradictions Abound

The general hardening of the Carter administration's foreign policy and compromising of moral principle in the area of human rights was not a smooth process. It did not occur quickly nor without glaring contradictions. Even as Carter moved progressively toward Brzezinski's worldview, he did so in fits and starts, more in some areas than others, and just as often paper clipped in incongruous fashion both Brzezinski and Vance's visions in one and the same speech. For observers at home and abroad, there was a sense of confusion as to exactly where Carter and

[113] "U.S. Is Formulating New Policy On Asia," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1979.

his administration stood on a host of issues. This tendency was more pronounced in the case of Korea than most any other.

Carter and certain member of his administration, alongside the internal policy review and sensing the rolling shift away from the earlier vision and principles, tried to hold fast on the issue of human rights and salvage the withdrawal policy. Consequently, Carter sent mixed and often clashing signals, which led to growing criticism from the liberal Left of his own party, a ratcheting up of already intense disapproval from the neoconservative right, and a general uneasiness among the centrists in both parties. Of particular importance, though, was the effect this had in Korea itself. Indeed, Carter's overall approach to Korea, from his withdrawal policy to his rhetoric and policy on human rights, sent mixed and often clashing signals to different groups within Korea. This not only fostered increasing skepticism and displeasure towards Washington among these different groups, but also exacerbated existent tensions between them. While evident from relatively early on in his term, this only increased into 1979. Much of this played out surrounding the planning for a potential summit meeting between Carter and Park in the summer of 1979.

Officials picked up where Ambassador Sneider had left off with his March 1978 telegram pushing U.S. policy toward a more mature partnership. Ambassador Gleysteen and Holbrooke, with Secretary Vance's "guarded approval," pursued a "comprehensive new policy," which Gleysteen remembered, "we informally labelled "normalization" of U.S.-ROK relations." Concerned, like Sneider had been, about "the dangers of eroding goodwill in both countries, we argued that our security and other national interests required a more positive relationship with Korea, that this could be achieved, and that reconciliation might be more successful in our human rights endeavors than continued confrontation." By late 1978, the previous year's strains had begun to ease. The contentious Koreagate investigation had come to a rather ignominious and anti-

climactic close, and the new intelligence estimates of North Korea combined with Congressional (and increasingly unified internal) opposition made it likely the withdrawal would be slowed or even reversed. "The shifting context," wrote Gleysteen, "allowed us to contemplate what would have been unthinkable a year earlier: a Carter-Park summit in 1979 to clear the air and signify the beginning of a less strained, more fruitful era in U.S.-Korea relations." Gleysteen pushed the agenda in Seoul with assistance from Holbrooke in Washington, yet they had to contend with elements in the bureaucracy that remained steadily opposed to any ready embrace of Park.[114]

Put simply, whereas Gleysteen believed a better relationship would improve the prospect for human rights, Patricia Derain, the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, felt improved human rights and removal of the heavy political restrictions in South Korea must come before better relations were established. One wanted to employ the carrot, the other the stick. As noted, when he entered office, Carter was fervent on human rights. He upgraded and expanded the human rights-related bureaucratic machinery that had been created under Ford but underutilize and underprioritized until then, staffed it with motivated and intensely focused individuals, ordered close liaison with sympathetic groups in Congress, and let it be known that human rights concerns would be an important criterion for assessing the performance of administration officials and the quality of U.S. alliances.

Gleysteen observed that as a result of Carter's moves a notable shift occurred, in that the previous tension and arguments between officials and human rights advocates moved from outside to inside the Washington bureaucracy. Nevertheless, many of these officials lacked prior experience in foreign affairs or in-depth knowledge of East Asia or Korea. Derian, like others, often came to their position from an earlier activist role in the civil rights movement, carrying an

[114] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 35.

insist belief in the correctness of their views and a passionate intent to implement them on the international level.[115] Robert Rich remembered similarly that Derian: "had earned her spurs in the American civil rights campaign…and brought to foreign affairs the same highly public, confrontational spirit of condemnation, pushing a policy of public criticism of our friends. Given the stakes involved with security in Northeast Asia in particular, this made it very difficult at times to do business on a respectful basis."[116]

If direct action programs, persistent public pressure, and legal sanction had proven effective in creating tension and overturning segregation throughout the cities and towns of the Jim Crow South, such could prove effective with American allies like South Korea. Derian and her deputies wasted little time making enemies and pushing their agenda: Gleysteen wrote:

> The new human rights hierarchy in the State Department took issue with the judgements, methods, and even the dedication of both our embassy in Seoul and established parts of the Washington bureaucracy. The new people wanted a higher priority for gathering intelligence on human rights and injection of human rights concern into almost all representations made to the Korean government. As leverage against the Korean regime, they favored experimenting with relatively strong sanctions, and at least some of them questioned the overriding nature of our security concerns in Korea. Almost daily, they battered the Korean regime with condemnatory public statements.

Gleysteen and Hobrooke were at odds with Derian and her assistants at State since the beginning of the administration.[117] Others shared their disease with Derian, who they characterized uncharitably as a "zealot for human rights," who felt she really had a mandate to go out and make it "terribly important" for U.S. foreign policy.[118]

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[115] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 31.
[116] Interview with Robert G. Rich Jr., 795.
[117] Ibid, 31-32; for further background on Derian's background and place within the Carter Administration's human rights policy, see: William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 83-119.
[118] Interview with John T. Bennett, Economic Counselor, Seoul (1976), and Thomas Stern, Deputy Chief of Mission, Seoul (1976-1979), in: "Korea: Country Reader," 714.

While serving as Holbrooke's deputy in Washington, he had been tasked as the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs' normal liaison with the human rights group established under Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Gleysteen frequently interacted with the group, as he was responsible for all the East Asian "offenders," specifically the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan and South Korea. The Christopher Group, as it was called, either met under Christopher or the undersecretary of state for political affairs, and usually included Assistant Secretary Derian. Although Gleysteen shared Derian and her assistants' concerns about political repression in Seoul, he felt their views were "naïve," while they considered him "defensive of Asian authoritarianism." According to Gleysteen, the group's meetings left him feeling that he "was the defendant in a court of western law where the judge and jury had already reached a verdict of "guilty."" While he, too, saw the need for progress toward a more pluralistic society in order to foster political stability in an important U.S. ally, he disagreed with them on the "fairness and efficacy" of their proposals.[119]

Regarding fairness, Gleysteen and other career officials within the bureaucracy felt that political appointees like Derian's lack of experience with Korea and other Asian nations caused them to emphasis human rights abuses but discount other the positive developments, particularly evident in the case of Seoul, such as: fostering security, economic progress, equitable distribution of income, education, and relative social mobility of its citizens. At that time, Gleysteen argued, "these accomplishments seemed more important to Korean farmers and workers than the individual political rights sought by Korea's small but growing middle class." Derian and others favored sterner methods to punish the Park government over human rights, which, while short of threatening to pull out militarily or cut access to markets or private financing, included sanctions

[119] Ibid, 32-33; for others reflections on these internal battles see: Interview with Daniel A. O'Donohoue, in: "Korea: Country Reader," 527; John E. Kelley remembered that anytime Derian and the Bureau of Human Rights "got involved in anything in Korea it was a dicey time for us and we didn't really welcome it," see: Interview with John E. Kelley, Political Counselor, Seoul (1975-1978), in: "Korea: Country Reader," 689.

and the "dangerous idea" of attacking President Park personally and publicly or signaling Washington was fundamentally dissatisfied with his rule. Gleysteen questioned the efficacy of such methods. He disagreed with the way Derain downplayed the possibility that such an approach could be seen as threatening the regime's survival or spur a nationalistic reaction or even cause greater instability. [120] Edward Hurwitz, Korea Desk Officer at State, remembered how Derian was viewed as an outsider by more established hands, with "these off-the-wall ideas which were good ideas but inapplicable" when she came to EA meetings.[121]

After all, according to Gleysteen, his assistants in the embassy, and Holbrooke, U.S. comments were "studied with minute care and frequently misconstrued" and could be seen "as lifting the mantle of legitimacy from Park," possibly resulting in a military coup by another military leader "not necessarily more enlightened than Park." Fortunately, from the more established hands' perspective, "despite the battle of words and memos at lower levels," senior members of the administration never pushed for major sanctions. Indeed, as shown above, very early in the administration they stated Seoul was an exception on strategic and national security grounds. So, after a few symbolic actions to little effect, the administration utilized traditional forms of pressure such as diplomatic representations and public criticism of Korea in general but not Park himself. However, Gleysteen acknowledged, it made more use of the latter than any previous administration ever had.[122]

Once ambassador in Seoul, Gleysteen said his relationship with the human rights crowd back in Washington was not as strained, yet he continued to remain unsure of the exact current of attitudes in White House. Nevertheless, with Holbrooke's encouragement and involvement, he

[120] Ibid, 33.
[121] Interview with Hurwitz, 697.
[122] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 33-34

pushed the "normalization" policy and the planning for a Carter-Park summit. He, Holbrooke and Vance explored the possibility of using the evolution of Carter's withdrawal as incentive to make progress on human rights, without making a direct link or "crude bargain." With Vance's permission, on October 25, 1978 Gleysteen broached the idea of a summit in a meeting with the South Korean President. The ambassador touched on "easing the strain caused by Koreagate and the troop withdrawal and then engaging in a long review of our respective positions on human rights." He felt Park, who responded positively, "understood the implicit tradeoff," despite reverting to his standard defense that American political criteria could not directly be applied to Korea due to level of development and the proximity of the North Korean threat. Gleysteen continued to hold occasional meetings with Park, while also, along with his embassy staff, meeting with several important members of his administration that were "understood to be relatively enlightened on the subject," such as Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin, KCIA Director Kim Chae Kyu, and other members of Park's staff at the Blue House.[123]

In November, as noted previously, during his visit to oversee the formal establishment of the CFC, Defense Secretary Brown "move the subject of summitry a notch forward" by delivering an informal invitation from Carter for a possible meeting sometime in 1979.[124] Although discussions had been afoot behind closed doors in Washington and Seoul, it was at this time that some of the first public reporting emerged on a potential summit.[125] The effort picked up steam after that. In March 1979, Holbrooke made his most extended visit yet to Seoul, a month after Carter had announced further troop removals would be held in abeyance in order to review the new intelligence estimates on North Korea and other regional developments. During their meetings

[123] Ibid, 35-36.
[124] Ibid, 36.
[125] Chapman, "Carter Plans To Meet Head Of South Korea."

with Park and his advisors, Holbrooke and Gleysteen "implied, but did not promise, a favorable outcome on troop withdrawals," but were explicit in stating a successful summit would require progress on human rights, suggesting the release of more political prisoners and lifting of EM-9 as concrete examples. Following Holbrooke's visit, the two "pressed hard" to set a concrete date and location for the summit, and Gleysteen was ultimately authorized on April 10 to agree with the ROK government to a state visit to Seoul by Carter to be held in late June following his visit to Tokyo for the G-8 Summit. This had not stopped the Park government from making their own preemptory announcement roughly six weeks earlier, much to the chagrin of political dissidents in Seoul and human rights proponents at State.[126] On February 28, Foreign Minister Park announced plans for President Carter's visit, the possibility of which political opponents such as Kim Dae Jung and Yun Po Sun had decried as a move by the Park regime to try to bolster its flagging support at home.[127]

For officials such as Gleysteen, Holbrooke, Vance and Brzezinski, Seoul had shown sufficient if still mostly limited progress. Despite its obviously unsettling implications, Park showed grudging acceptance of the National Assembly elections in December. Park's DRP lost to the opposition NDP by a margin of 1.1 percent, despite the fact that the ruling party possessed overwhelmingly greater resources in the election.[128] The NDP won 34 percent to the DRP's 32 percent, with particular support in Seoul and Pusan, campaigning for restoration of more democratic freedoms and the repeal of emergency decrees. As the American press reported, the opposition's success came as a blow to Park at a time of a general lessening of Congressional support, the beginning of the troop withdrawal (which at the time of the election had yet to be put

[126] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 36.
[127] Henry Scott-Stokes, "South Korea Nears Another Crossroad," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1979.
[128] Gi-Wook Shin, "Introduction," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18th Uprising in Korea's Past and Present*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), xiii.

in abeyance), and a marked increase in and more sophisticated organization among political dissidents. It was the first parliamentary election in six years, but it had still been held under the emergency decree, which barred criticism of the government and of Park himself. In the wake of the election, the government agreed to release or grant amnesty to over 100 violators of the emergency measures and numerous other prisoners, including Kim Dae Jung.[129]

Nevertheless, Gleysteen and others understood that many of Park's moves were tactical in nature. The EMs were still in place, a substantial fraction of the National Assembly remained handpicked by Park to maintain a ruling party majority, Kim went from jail to restrictive house arrest, and Park himself was sworn into his fifth terms as president, affirming he would continue to uphold "disciplined liberties." Indeed, the U.S. press reported Park's moves were geared, in part, to pave the way for a Carter-Park summit meeting.

The obvious limitation to Park's loosening of the reins notwithstanding, Gleysteen and Holbrooke felt the imperative of moving the relationship along and holding a summit was paramount. Nevertheless, before receiving the final signal to schedule the summit, Gleysteen experienced distinct push back from Washington; "a rash of telegrams" asking whether additional significant gestures of human rights progress could be made or assurances given that more would come at the summit. Coupled with longstanding demands about rescinding EMs and releasing more political prisoners, this included a specific request for the release of poet Kim Chi Ha, whose life sentences had been commuted to twenty years from life, but who remained in jail under Park's harsh anti-communist laws. The ambassador sensed the pushback was "an effort to assuage the

[129] For election details see: "South Korean Opposition Outpolls Park's Party"; see also: "Park Party Trails in Korea Voting," *The New York Times*, December 14, 1978; on the upsurge in activity and more sophisticated tactics of dissidents as well as of the Park government, see: Malcolm, "Park and the Opposition Shift Tactics In Korea": on Park government's release of Kim Dae Jung and other political prisoners, see: William Chapman, "S. Korea to Free Key Dissidents in Broad Amnesty," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1978; see also: "S. Korea to Free Park's Archrival: Kim Dae Jung Among 5,378 Given Amnesty," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1978.

unhappiness of human rights activists when they first learned how much progress had been made toward the summit or, in most cases, when they first became aware that President Carter had many months earlier authorized summit negotiations" to begin.[130] The initial reaction to earlier reports was to oppose the summit *per se*, and once it became clear one would likely be held to shift toward demand for greater reform on Seoul's part. Although tension played out internally in the bureaucracy, many human rights proponents in the informed public and Congress continued to voice their concern. One such informed observer, was the syndicated liberal columnist, Mary McGrory, who used her regular editorial to excoriate the Carter administration for its mixed signals on the pending summit and human rights more broadly.

Representative of many new internationalists on the Democratic Party's Left, McGrory initially embraced the promise of Carter's rhetoric on a new morality in foreign policy. Yet by early 1979, she was disillusioned. In her January 23 column, the same day Senator Glenn's Pacific Study Group released its report and held a press conference calling for a reversal of the withdrawal policy and DCI Stanfield Turner submitted a secret briefing paper to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the new Korean military balance, McGrory drew a parallel between U.S. policy toward Iran and the ROK and the danger and immorality of not speaking out more forcefully against Park's abuses. Instead, she wrote, Carter was "arming them to the teeth." Korean dissidents, with whom McGrory maintained indirect contact, were against Carter visiting Seoul without also meeting their leaders. Moreover, she argued, she, the dissidents, and American missionaries all doubted the recent intelligence reassessment, seeing it as yet another device to maintain a militaristic foreign policy and justification for authoritarian rule. Accurately describing Gleysteen's preferred method, McGrory wrote: "apparently…we will continue to make "private,"

[130] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 36.

not public, human rights protests, and that, as in Iran, we will continue to embrace a "strong," hated leader in the interests of "stability." In other words, he learned nothing from the shah's downfall." Of course, according to officials such as Brzezinski and Holbrooke, Carter did learn something from Iran, just not the lesson McGrory would had in mind.[131]

McGrory was joined in her trenchant critique by certain legislators. Rep. Fraser's electoral defeat in the 1978 midterms removed one of the most outspoken and active new internationalists from Congress, amidst the wider American public's shift away from post-Vietnam anti-militarism back towards a general support for a more muscular foreign policy. Nonetheless, the small but vocal minority of new internationalists remained, with Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA) a forceful example. Dellums was one of the few members on the Stratton Subcommittee who consistently backed Carter's withdrawal policy. He was essentially a lone voice calling into question Stratton and the subcommittee's persistent hearings on the matter and their over-reliance on the U.S. military's perspective. When Stratton released the subcommittee's damning 1978 report, Dellums tacked on his own addendum fundamentally differing with its conclusions. He not only encouraged Carter to complete the withdrawal of 2ID but all remaining U.S. military personnel from Korea, as a first step toward withdrawal from Japan and the rest of the region. In addition to his deep-seated anti-militarist beliefs, Dellums was intensely averse to U.S. support for rightwing authoritarian leaders such as Park Chung Hee.[132] To be fair, Dellums was one of the most uncompromising of new internationalist voices and his views on overall regional disengagement were not at all widely shared, but others did share his and McGrory's criticisms of the Carter administration apparent compromises on human rights and embrace of Park.

[131] Mary McGrory, "Didn't Iran Teach Us About Korea?," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 23, 1979.
[132] Stratton Subcommittee Report, 19-22.

Cognizant of such criticisms, particularly as they were shared by certain officials within the administration and even President Carter himself, Gleysteen treaded carefully in his messages back to Washington while simultaneously holding a firm line. Apparently, he had been told that Carter wanted a significant gesture on the part of the ROK before issuing a formal summit invitation and might even make a meeting conditional upon one. In an early April telegram to Holbrooke at State, Gleysteen opposed placing conditions on the meeting or demanding a pre-summit gesture. He argued the summit was in and of itself the most effective lever to get what they wanted on human rights. He noted Seoul knew full well Washington's desires on the need for progress, but that the Park government saw the "release" of Kim Dae Jung as just such progress. Seoul's own desire not to undermine the summit atmosphere was "constrained by their natural proclivities in dealing" with dissidents. Gleysteen contended not much else could be done. Park and his advisors wanted a summit, yet not so badly they would take actions considered dangerous to the maintenance of political control. Gleysteen highlighted an added complication, which tied into the broader inconsistencies in Carter's human rights agenda. If the administration persisted in a conditional approach or chastised Seoul preceding the meeting, he wrote: "I expect that the government – and once they found out, a majority of the people – would be confused and angry to find we were demanding something of Korea which we have properly downplayed in our Chinese, Soviet, and Middle Eastern summitry." The warning harkened back to Sneider's own earlier messages. As much as it still saw the relationship with Washington as essential to ROK national security, Seoul was less inclined to abide by American lectures or chauvinism.[133]

In his messages and perspective, Gleysteen, similar to Sneider before him, leaned more toward concern for the powers that be than those of the political opposition or dissidents. Yet the

[133] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 37.

latter, like the Park government itself, did not hesitate to express their own reservations about Carter's seemingly unsettled and mixed policy preferences. As chartered in previous chapters, dissidents had been outspoken in their disapproval of the withdrawal since before Carter had even entered office. Gleysteen, too, observed that among the many people who warned him about the policy, the Park regime's "shrillest critics often seemed even more upset than the Korean president himself."[134] Coupled with their concerns about the withdrawal, political dissidents also had become increasingly critical of the Carter administration's inconsistent gestures and half-measures on human rights. As noted, this had become evident early on, grown more so in 1978, and crescendoed in the spring of 1979 in the lead up to the summit.

On the day of his release from jail, Kim Dae Jung noted as much. In addition to immediately criticizing the Park regime as a "dictatorial system," saying he would keep up his activism even if it meant returning to jail, he turned to Carter. He said he though Carter's human rights policy would have been more effective and strong "satisfying the expectations of people under suppressive regimes in the world." Further: "We Koreans never want to see our country become another Vietnam or a Nicaragua or an Iran where democracy has been strangled by the dictators." He continued by saying that while he "admired and respected Mr. Carter and his policy," but that he could offer more "detailed plans" to enforce it. The ROK system, Kim stated, was partly a result of American policy to support dictatorship for the sake of combating communism, quoting Kissinger who had remarked that "security is first and democracy is second in Korea." Kim warned that this dynamic itself could undermine security insofar as a lack of democratic freedoms could cause people to lose loyalty to the nation and their anticommunist consciousness would be diminished. Kim's critique was reflected in McGrory's and others'

[134] Ibid, 28.

editorials back in the United States. As the negotiations between Carter officials and the Park government played out over the next few months and the latter began to utilize the implicit trade-offs involved for its own domestic political advantage, Kim and fellow dissidents became more organized and stringent in their critique of Washington's policy.[135]

In early March, after the ROK government announced Carter would visit Seoul later that year and amidst the controversy over the new intelligence on North Korea, Kim and two other prominent dissidents directly reached out to Carter. On March 5, Kim Dae Jung, Ham Sok Hun, and Yun Po Sun, who days before had established the National Alliance for Democracy and National Unification (part of trend among Park's political opponents and dissidents to adopt a more unified opposition), sent Carter a letter laying out the conflicting feelings. They summed up their admiration for his overall emphasis on human rights but also their concern about how it had been applied to Seoul in combination with what they saw as a misguided withdrawal policy. It was a prescient warning.[136]

Although they welcomed Carter's rhetoric on human rights, they cautioned that him "our Korean people wonder if your concern and position, and that of your government, regarding the institutional and systematic human rights violation which occurs in the Republic of Korea –the ally of your country – is not too mild." The Park regime was carrying out its abuses "in the name of your, and your government's, tacit understanding," and "implying that you and your government approve the existence of the authoritarian regime and the acts of violation of human rights in Korea." They encouraged Carter not to visit Seoul and hold his pending summit with Park until, "comprehensive improvements" were made: EM's rescinded and political prisoners released.

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[135] William Chapman, "Korea Frees Top Opposition Leader," *The Washington Post*, December 27, 1978.
[136] "Korean Dissidents Form Alliance for Democracy," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1979; for Ham, Yun, and Kim's letter, see: "Letter to Jimmy Carter from Ham Sok Hon, Yun Po Sun, and Kim Dae-jung, 5 March 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 479-481.

If not, the "Korean people will be extremely disappointed about your human rights policy, and their trust and friendship toward your country will be deeply injured." Their remarks on the U.S. military forces were even more revelatory.[137]

They laid bare the contradictory way the dissidents and Korean citizens in general viewed the U.S. military presence, and signaled that historically hospitable views could potentially turn hostile. They wrote:

> Further, we believe that the plan to withdraw American troops from Korea should be changed. Regrettably, however, the present regime makes propaganda to the effect that discussions on the change of the plan means support for the dictatorial measures of the Korean government. The American troops in Korea are not merely a force to prevent war here, but should be regarded as having the purpose to protect and foster all the values of freedom and democracy. The existence of American troops in Korea must be duly recognized as a sacred guarantee of freedom and democracy which ensures the human dignity and basic rights of citizens of this land. It must be an integral part of a firm promise, and the fulfillment of that promise, for freedom and democracy – the common goal of our countries. In the discussion about American troops in Korea, regrettably, this point has been neglected, much to the disappointment of the Korean people; and this will deeply affect their trust regarding the existence of the U.S. troops here.[138]

Historically the United States was seen as not only a model of liberal democracy toward which Kim and fellow dissidents aspired, but it also had played an important role in helping to establish certain democratic institutions and practices and educational curricula within Korea. Even more, it had been viewed as a partner in the fight for liberalization or at the very least against overly repressive rule. The U.S. military, mistakenly or not, had been perceived as integral to this. Could these beliefs be turning? As far as Kim, Ham and Yun's letter was concerned, yes, and depending on how Carter handled matters in coming months, quickly so.

It is unclear whether or not President Carter read the letter, but his persistent desire to visit with Kim and the fact the administration responded directly to it indicates he may have.

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

Nevertheless, following Gleysteen and others' doggedness in pushing for an unconditional summit meeting, on April 19 White House press secretary and close Carter aide, Jody Powell, formally announced Carter would visit Seoul immediately after the coming economic summit meeting in Tokyo in late June. Powell said it would present an opportunity for Carter to review with Park his decision to hold in abeyance further troop withdrawals pending further analysis of the new intelligence estimates on North Korea. The same day, Henry Kissinger, echoing a message he had had been making publicly for months and one which the bureaucracy itself was repeating as part of the internal PRM-45 process, said at a news conference: "I believe that at the present moment, in the light of all the uncertainties in the world, the withdrawal of American forces from Korea would be unwise and would give the wrong signal."[139] Nevertheless, the controversy about Carter's pending summit visit as well as the withdrawal policy had hardly abated. In fact, it was on the verge of entering its most high-pitched phase, due partly to the varied reactions of the informed public in the United States and in Seoul and partly to the administration's own continued inconsistent signals.

The same day Powell made the summit announcement, Philip Spector, the NSC's press spokesman, met at the White House with a delegation of top Protestant and Roman Catholic officials. They urged Carter not to visit Seoul and delivered a letter signed by 37 American missionaries serving in South Korea, which said a meeting with Park would be "inappropriate" in light of ongoing human rights abuses.[140] Four days later, McGrory penned another searing piece, criticizing Carter's decision and cataloguing the efforts of various church and missionary groups to obstruct the visit as well as the Park government's pressure on them. Administration apologists,

[139] "Carter Plans to Visit South Korea in June After Tokyo Meeting: Kissinger Sees Halt in Pullout," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1979.
[140] "President Plans to Travel To South Korea in Late June," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1979.

McGrory wrote, argued that Carter's success with Middle Eastern problems (i.e. Camp David), had convinced him to face issues head on and that visiting Park was evidence thereof. It is unlikely she was aware of just how accurate this was, specifically in light of the unexpected diplomatic proposal Carter would pursue just several weeks later (more below). Quoting Michael McIntyre of the North American Coalition for Human Rights in Korea, McGrory wrote that Carter's visit to Seoul was a rerun of Ford's in 1974 and "pure Kissinger revived."[141]

In the same vein, on April 27 the World Council of Churches (WCC) released its annual report, cataloguing the Park government's widespread abuses; from oppression against the church and an economic policy that exploited low wage labor and the poor to lists of hundreds of individuals who had been victimized, arrested on flimsy charges, and, in some cases, tortured. Ninan Koshy, a senior WCC official, said: "If President Carter goes, we feel people should know that the American Administration is legitimizing further a regime that is consistently violating human rights." The WCC had chosen the publication date with the express purpose of dissuading Carter from a summit with Park.[142]

In Seoul, Gleysteen and the embassy staff turned toward the preparatory work for the summit, focused on the language for the joint communique to be issued by Carter and Park and the details of Carter's itinerary, in particular his desire to meet a wide array of Koreans including opposition and dissident figures. Many "mind-numbing meetings" ultimately resulted in a short but balanced statement on the importance of human rights, with Seoul successfully resisting more robust language. Yet the communique's language aside, throughout the process unease persisted among Park and his advisors, in large part due to the mixed signals from Washington. Indeed, even Ambassador Gleysteen, by his own admission one of the architects of the summit constantly

[141] Mary McGrory, "National Security Vs. Human Rights," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 23, 1979.
[142] Ian Guest, "S. Korea attacked on human rights," *The Guardian*, April 27, 1979.

engaged in phone calls, messages and a trip back to Washington, felt out of touch with White House thinking.[143]

On May 7, Holbrooke sent a letter responding to Kim, Ham, and Yun's earlier message to Carter. He wrote that "all major issues, including human rights, will be carefully reviewed for consideration by the two presidents," a message, the *Washington Post* reported, which caused consternation among ROK officials. For his part, Kim said he was eager to see Carter but that he could not welcome him under present political circumstances. [144] Later that month, following Park's release of sixteen students and opposition leaders as an apparent nod to Carter and while U.S. officials were still deciding how and to what extent Carter would address human rights, the administration sent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Mark L. Schneider to Seoul to gather information on alleged human rights violations. The trip occurred in a context of increased criticism from missionaries in the ROK and their allies in the United States who argued Carter needed to take a firmer stand on human rights. Having first opposed the summit, church-related activists had shifted tactics to urge Carter to persuade Park to lift restrictions and for Carter to meet opponents of the South Korean president.[145]

Pressure and criticism from dissidents and Carter's left continued up until the summit itself. A week beforehand, Kim Dae Jung remarked that repression had even increased. "We are suffering from the so-called Carter shock…We expected the human rights situation to improve at least before President Carter's visit, but just the opposite has happened." Yun Po Sun, co-signatory with Kim on the letter to Carter, said while he himself was mostly unharmed, all the younger people

[143] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 38.
[144] William Chapman, "Korean Dissident Urges Carter to Press for Human Rights," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1979.
[145] Richard Halloran, "Aide on Rights Mission to Seoul Before Carter Trip," *The New York Times*, May 27, 1979; see also: see also: "South Korea Frees 16 In a Gesture on Rights Before Visit by Carter," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1979.

who visited him and carried copies of his statements were arrested and abused. Kim Young Sam, too, recently elected president of the opposition NDP, had his house ransacked and government-sanctioned protests at his office because of his effort to foster North-South talks and offer to form a liaison between the NDP and Pyongyang in order to do so.

Dissidents, the press reported, felt the Carter administration had progressively backed away from offering them support, and that Carter's pending visit implied an endorsement of the Park government no matter what rhetoric attended it. On June 29, the day Carter arrived, the *New York Times* reported the Park government had been putting numerous dissidents under house arrest or "restrictive residence," as it was officially termed, including Kim, Yun, and various prominent clergymen and their aides. The dissidents claimed government security guards said it was due to Carter's coming visit, while the embassy reserved itself to stating it did not support anything beyond normal security precautions for a visiting head of state.[146]

Meanwhile criticism continued from Carter's left. Sen. Church pressed Carter to stick with the withdrawal. Seoul possessed the capacity to provide for its own defense, he argued. "It is not, after all, the 51st American state," he told reporters while in Tokyo.[147] Sen. Edward Kennedy also took aim at Carter's apparent slippage on human rights in the run up to the summit. A week after privately sharing his views with the White House, Kennedy gave a lengthy statement on the Senate floor urging Carter to "disassociate the United States form the repressive policies" of the ROK government. It was, Kennedy remarked, "a veritable police state," and U.S. forces committed to South Korea's defense, stood "in constant danger of also supporting the repression of its people," a sentiment not to distant for that in Kim, Ham, and Yun's March letter. While Kennedy conceded that political and civil rights were "much more severely controlled" in North Korea, Washington

[146] William Chapman, "South Korea Reportedly Detains 63 Dissidents," *The Washington Post*, June 29, 1979.
[147] "Sen. Church Sees S. Korea Pullout," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1979.

bore particular responsibility in the South due to its massive material and moral support. Kennedy, who had pressured Carter for the entirety of his term and was reputed to be considering a challenge to Carter in the 1980 Democratic Party primary, called on Carter to: urge Park to take "substantial and irreversible steps" to guarantee rights and restore democracy; state in public and private that the alliance "must be founded in shared ideals and values."; meet with political dissidents, including Kim Dae Jung; ask Park to release all remaining political prisoners, including Kim Chi Ha and 300 others on a list Kennedy himself made public; and ask Park to repeal EM-9.[148]

These voices, from dissidents and their missionary and activist allies to the Democratic Party's new internationalist left, were merely imploring Carter to uphold his original vision. It was a message to which Carter remained wholly receptive. For, despite the hardening and apparent inconsistencies of his administration's foreign policy, Carter felt personally invested in pressing the human rights issue in Korea, and for Gleysteen and his staff, no issue created greater consternation than the potential controversy regarding a Carter-Kim Dae Jung meeting. Indeed, concerns about Kim "suffused preparations for the summit." Gleysteen and his deputy maintained a studied distance from Kim since his December release, feeling it would be counterproductive to do otherwise and firmly pushed back against Carter seeing Kim. They felt such an event would evoke an angry reaction from the Park government, which might actually physically block the encounter. Gleysteen recalled that they were never directly challenged by the White House, but that the issue "continued to simmer in Carter's mind," so much so that Gleysteen learned just days before the summit that the president still had not ruled out meeting Kim. Gleysteen fired off an "intemperate telegram" stating flatly that if Carter did so any chance of a positive summit "would be wiped out…the atmosphere would sour immediately…Park would consider our action a studied

[148] Don Oberdorfer, "Kennedy Urges Carter to Press for Human Rights in Seoul," *The Washington Post*, June 26, 1979.

personal insult…He would clamp down on everything where we seek his assistance, including human rights issues." While admitting it may have been excessive, Gleysteen believed his reaction helped to "hold the line," even as Carter apparently angrily threatened to Secretary Vance that he might cancel some events with Park in favor of a session with Kim.[149]

Tremors over human rights alone were enough to keep relations tense and somewhat uncertain, but this all played out while Carter continued to grasp at maintaining a semblance of his withdrawal policy. Despite the tacit trade-off regarding the evolution of the policy for a positive summit to get relations back on track, the administration, led by Carter, held back giving a definitive signal to Seoul that the policy would be reversed. Gleysteen was never authorized to promise anything specific. Despite his awareness of the groundswell of internal opposition to the policy and his own involvement therein, the ambassador could only ever provide his "personal views" to Park and his advisors that the matter was being reviewed and he was confident in a mutually agreeable outcome, particularly if Park did his part on the summit. According to Gleysteen, such optimism was sufficient until they reached the final stages of negotiating the communique's language, when Carter introduced one more enormous complication: a last-ditch diplomatic proposal to hold trilateral talks with North Korea.[150]

In the third week of May, Gleysteen received a call form Bob Rich, the country director on the Korea desk at State. Rich informed him that Carter wanted to invite the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung to join he and Park for a trilateral summit during his Seoul visit, or if not to arrange a subsequent trilateral meeting in the near future. Carter would be sending Phillip Habib as a special emissary to broach the subject with Park. Ambassador Gleysteen, whose role would be undermined by Habib's visit, reacted with "surprise and anger," telling Rich that such a move would "wipe out

[149] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 39-40.
[150] Ibid, 41.

everything we were attempting to achieve with Park. The attempt at "normalization" would be overwhelmed by a "circus of events" and Park himself would be "shocked and furious." Gleysteen told Rich and Holbrooke he would resign if Carter insisted on the proposal, and asked they tell Secretary Vance of his position.[151]

Holbrooke and Rich shared Gleysteen's concern and while informing others of the ambassador's displeasure, did not brandish his threat around the White House. They did, however, encourage him to contact Vance directly, which he did. He conveyed the same message: the proposal would destroy the repairs they had successfully worked towards and contradict basic U.S. interests in the region. If Habib told Park of the trilateral proposal with or without assurances of the troop withdrawal, it would "stimulate paranoiac South Korean suspicion that we were taking the first steps…toward a Vietnamese solution for Korea; Park would not agree to it, it would poison the summit atmosphere, and "there would be an extremely high risk that without making any advance on the north/south issue, we would find American blaming South Koreans for a problem of American making." The ambassador was not as opposed to proposing a trilateral meeting for some future time, but thought such a proposal should include Carter's assurance that a significant alteration of the troop withdrawal was in store. Such a move could garner the necessary confidence with Park to explore the possibility of making an announcement at the Carter-Park summit for a trilateral meeting at a later date. Gleysteen, Holbrooke and Rich were not along in viewing the seemingly impromptu proposal as a "horrendous" idea.[152]

Deputy Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Michael Armacost felt just as strongly. On May 22 Armacost, who was most focused on the final stages of the PRM-45 review process, within which the overwhelming consensus was to propose the withdrawal policy be

[151] Ibid, 42.
[152] Ibid, 42.

stopped, wrote Secretary Brown a blistering memo. Aramcost thought Carter's trilateral proposal was a "lousy idea," "gimmicky," "substantially a loser," and had "atrocious" timing. The sudden plan and Habib's role as special emissary would make a "mockery" of the policy-making process, elevate form above substance, and neglected the necessity to create real inducements for either Seoul or Pyongyang to enter such talks. Carter's withdrawal policy itself, as Armacost had been saying from the beginning while he was still at the NSC, had undermined such a need by removing significant U.S. leverage. The trilateral idea also forfeited an opportunity to utilize U.S.-Sino normalization to engage Beijing in the process, which was necessary for any real progress. Moreover, Armacost, like others, warned that Park would likely not cooperate given his well-known skepticism of Carter's policies and his deep distrust of Pyongyang. More broadly, the move would cast doubt regarding U.S. goals and steadiness throughout the region. Armacost recommended that Brown speak with Brzezinski and inquire what the White House actually hoped to achieve. He felt the PR folks had "ginned up" the idea as a kind of "TV spectacular" for the summit along the lines of the Camp David talks. Such an approach, Armacost warned, would be "feckless" without prior discussion with Park regarding adjustment to the withdrawal policy as part of a larger, integrated effort to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula and work for "durable North-South peace arrangements," something Armacost and his fellow EA Informal members had said from the start.[153]

It is unclear whether Brown spoke with Brzezinski, but the message certainly reached Michael Oksenberg and Nicholas Platt, Armacost's fellow EA Informal members and Brzezinski's Asia hands on the NSC. Four days after Armacost's memo, the two sent their own to Brzezinski,

[153] "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael H. Armacost, Subject: Habib Mission to Korea, May 22, 1979, Secret," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea, accessed July 15, 2017, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696531-Document-04-Memorandum-for-the-Secretary-of.

arguing for the possibility of reframing the trilateral proposal in broader terms. They hoped to encourage China to exercise behind-the-scenes leverage on Pyongyang to get it to be more flexible during any such talks, which might foster closer dialogue between Seoul and Beijing in exchange for U.S. pressure on Taipei to foster closer relations with Beijing. Brzezinski neither approved nor disapproved the recommendation, but, rather, wrote: "Doubtful line – I am troubled by the [parallel]. What about the summit idea – where does this stand?" He appeared more focused on the original concept of pursuing a trilateral meeting at the summit.[154] Nevertheless, due to its unwelcome reception and the immediate and fierce resistance with which it was met, the idea quickly transformed to the less objectionable option: a joint U.S.-ROK proposal for a trilateral meeting to be held at an as yet undetermined date. Gleysteen recalled how it played out in a "slightly confusing series of events." Holbrooke first messaged saying that State had managed to get revised instructions for Habib, then that Habib's mission had been scrubbed and that Gleysteen would be the messenger and make a presentation to Park before returning to Washington in early June.[155] His instructions came in a May 29 telegram from Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher.

Christopher wrote that President Carter: "would like his forthcoming visit to Korea to result in a joint U.S.-ROK proposal for tripartite summit talks with North Korea to test Pyongyang's willingness to adjust its policies and deal with practical measures for the reduction of tensions in the area." Gleysteen was to meet with Park and inform him of the importance with which Carter viewed his forthcoming discussions. Gleysteen was to consult with him in advance to work out the outlines of a joint proposal that could be announced by both presidents at the summit. Considering the constant doubt surrounding previous discussion of trilateral talks, Gleysteen was to assure Park

[154] "Memorandum From Michel Oksenberg and Nicholas Platt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), 24 May 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 506-507.
[155] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 43.

that Washington understood: "the obstacle to reducing tension had been in Pyongyang, not in Seoul"; that it was the former which had not taken the step they agreed to in 1972 for talks between recognized government authorities; and that Washington would not deal directly with the DPRK without ROK participation and without the ROK as a full and equal partner to any such discussions and both Korean parties' desire for U.S. participation.[156]

President Carter, Christopher wrote, wanted to "seize the diplomatic initiative from Pyongyang and test whether Kim Il-sung is prepared to make the policy adjustments which the changing international framework and Korea's own economic difficulties would seem to dictate." Washington would remain firm in "rebuffing manipulative proposals from North Korea," which would in any way undercut Seoul's positions, but the time appeared right "to stand together in testing North Korean readiness to have a reasonable dialogue with both of us." While Christopher's message presented a more measured proposal with all the necessary caveats, alterations to the document revealed Carter was as yet unwilling to fully concede on the withdrawal policy as the most robust form of reassurance. Originally, Christopher wrote: "You may tell Park that the President understands the linkage between the troop withdrawal issue and ROK's willingness to take diplomatic risks in dealing with North Korea. The President is considering adjustments in the U.S. ground force withdrawal program in response to our current appreciation of North Korean force buildups. The summit in Seoul will afford an opportunity for the two Presidents to establish a personal dialogue and discuss the security issues of prime importance to the Republic of Korea." However, either Christopher or someone else crossed out "linkage" and "troop withdrawal" replacing them with "connection" and "security," respectively. More notably, the entire second

[156] "Telegram to the American Embassy in Seoul, "Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula," 29 May 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 508-509.

sentence was crossed out. In other words, Gleysteen was not to explicitly mention the troop withdrawal was on the table but only obliquely reference it.[157]

The exact cause of Carter's late-stage trilateral proposal remains somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, certain factors help explain where it may have come from. As documented above, the idea of trilateral talks between Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang was not new. It had floated around diplomatic circles and been a topic of discussion between mid- and high-level U.S. and ROK officials for some time. What made this particular proposal different was its unexpected timing and U.S.-led thrust. Carter introduced the proposal at a moment when U.S. and South Korean officials were engaged in delicate, somewhat cantankerous discussions about other troubling bilateral issues. Pushing what would have been an unprecedented meeting on such short notice, with no previous planning or groundwork laid, alongside unresolved tensions was an inopportune move at best. Nevertheless, whether or not it was drawn up by the PR people as a flashy stunt, it did possess a logical connection with ongoing if fitful inter-Korean talks and diplomatic efforts surrounding the peninsula. Carter may have thought he could build upon them.

On January 19, during his New Year's address, President Park had proposed an unconditional resumption of dialogue at any place, any time, or any level between North and South Korea. It was the most expansive proposal he had made during his nearly two decades in office.[158] The offer and Pyongyang's initial response brought some expectations that wider diplomatic developments in the area, such as Japan-Sino and U.S.-Sino normalization, might once again spark progress in inter-Korean relations, as noted by a North Korean source at the time.[159] After all, the

[157] Ibid.
[158] Mike Tharp, "Resuming Talks on Korea Reunification Is Offered by Park Without Preconditions," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 1979.
[159] William Chapman, "S. Korea Accepts N. Korean Bid on Unification Talks," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1979.

earlier North-South Red Cross talks, establishment of the SNCC, and the historic July 4, 1972 Joint Communique between North Korea and South Korea had emerged, in part, due to the broader context of U.S.-Sino Rapprochement and U.S.-Soviet Détente in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, in making his unconditional proposal, Park had other near-term motivations. Much like his June 1978 offer for semi-governmental and economic contacts, which Pyongyang had immediately rejected, Park understood Pyongyang was unlikely to respond favorably or in a manner that deviated from its previous stance. This would result in little to no progress, but not without Seoul having tried. By taking initiative, which Washington had been encouraging, he might garner credit with Carter. Along with his tactical adjustment on human rights, Park felt an earnest gesture toward inter-Korean talks could foster better relations and a summit meeting with Carter. As Park noted in his letter to Carter at the time, in an evolving diplomatic environment coordination between allies would be essential.

However, as quickly as they began the talks fell apart. It was readily apparent neither sides' position had changed. In response to Park's unconditional proposal, on June 23 the North's Central Committee of the Democratic Front of the Reunification of the Fatherland (DFRF) responded positively and offered a four-part proposal for accelerating the reunification process, including the holding of a grand national convention. On January 24, Ambassador Han, the DPRK Permanent Observer to the United Nations, told the UN Secretary General that both sides should revert to the principles and ideas of the joint statement of July 4, 1972, and pursue convocation of "a whole national congress" of both sides, to be attended by representatives of all political parties and public organizations from both sides and should include the President of the ruling party in South Korea (i.e. Park) and other prominent figures in South Korea as well as South Koreans living abroad, to be held in Pyongyang or Seoul in September. Bilateral or ministerial meetings on a working level

to prepare should take place in Pyongyang in June.[160] Seoul's response several days later indicated the obvious fault lines. Seoul, too, affirmed all North-South dialogue should be in accordance with the 1972 joint statement, but that such dialogue must be "conducted by the responsible authorities of both sides" and preliminary meetings should be held even sooner than June as suggested by Pyongyang.[161]

By insisting it would only meet with Park as the head of his political party but not as head of the South Korean government, while also demanding inclusion of all opposition parties and other social groups, North Korea maintained its truculent position that the ROK was not a legitimate state nor Park a legitimate leader. Rather, it would only deal with Park on the societal level; one leader among a wider array of social groups, the legitimacy of which Pyongyang would determine. Furthermore, once preliminary meetings began they rapidly devolved into mutual recriminations. In fact, Pyongyang rejected the SNCC as a mechanism for North-South talks, and instead sent delegates from the aforementioned DFRF, which Seoul said were not responsible authorities. One British telegram, describing the unproductive North-South contacts, noted that it was not lost on Park and his advisors "that it was the DFRF which called for a meeting of all political parties in June 1950 just before the North's invasion of South Korea."[162] So, despite Seoul newspapers inability to resist the "temptation to draw comparison between the advent of spring and an apparent willingness on the part of the South and North Koreans to return to the conference table," there were "very few signs…of a genuine thaw."[163] Carter officials were well aware of the issues involved.

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[160] "Notes on a Meeting Held in the Office of the Secretary General on 24 January 1979 at 5.30 p.m.," in *The Carter Chill*, 437-438.
[161] "Statement by Spokesman for the Government of the Republic of Korea Minister of Culture and Information, Kim Seong Jin, on the Early Resumption of South-North Dialogue, 26 January 1979," in Ibid, 441-443; see also: "2 Koreas Differ on Format for Unification Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1979.
[162] "Korea – Unproductive North-South Contacts," June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 510-513.
[163] "Cable to P.R. Whiteway from W. Morris, "ROK-North Korea Relations," 12 March 1979," in Ibid, 484-485.

Deputy Secretary Christopher had alluded to Pyongyang's truculence in his instructions to Gleysteen. Indeed, on January 28, within a week of the North-South proposals, Secretary Vance himself told Carter that Pyongyang's "insistence on determining which groups and parties from the South are to be present is unrealistic and blocks genuine dialogue."[164] Although there was some additional hope surrounding UNSG Kurt Waldheim's visit to Pyongyang and Seoul in early May, the first time a secretary general had visited either country, his trip merely gave him a closer look at the two sides ultimately incompatible negotiating positions.[165] In this context of yet another stillborn effort to initiate inter-Korean talks, Carter may have seen his last-minute trilateral proposal as a way to kick-start dialogue once again.

Obviously, as indicated, the bureaucracy beneath him and his own principal advisors were much less sanguine about such prospects. Carter may have wanted to test Kim Il Sung's willingness to be flexible, as Deputy Secretary Christopher remarked in his May 29 telegram to Gleysteen, but most did not expect a positive response. Secretary Vance, in a telegram to the embassy in Seoul, wrote: "we do not have any real evidence that Pyongyang would agree to a meeting such as we are discussing, but it is important that the ROK and US seize the initiative and probe the North Korean position."[166] It would appear Carter pushed the matter as a way to reinvigorate a Korea policy under heavy assault; a means to press the reset button and approach Korea in a manner many had said it should have been approached from the beginning. Yet herein lay the problem. Carter's initially disjointed, contradictory and, in ways, unilateral approach towards Korea had created rifts only now being mended. The trilateral proposal, many officials

[164] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Cyrus Vance, "Prospects for Intra-Korean Dialogue," 28 January 1979," ," in Ibid, 444.
[165] Malcolm W. Browne, "Waldheim, Feted Lavishly by North Koreans, Heads for Talks in Seoul," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1979; see also: Malcolm W. Browne, "Waldheim Opens Link Between the Koreas," *The New York Times*, May 6, 1979.
[166] "Telegram from the Secretary of State to the American Embassy in Seoul, "Korea Trilateral--Response to Foreign Ministry Dialogue," 12 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 583-585.

argued, threatened to reopen the same wounds, essentially replaying the uncertainties from which the relationship was just now emerging. It was in this context, on June 4, that Ambassador Gleysteen took his marching orders and met with Park just before returning home to Washington.

Gleysteen presented the proposal to Park as a means to reduce tension with Pyongyang and, if not successful, to at least enhance their international positions. A tripartite meeting, he told Park, would build on the latter's January 19 proposal. Consistent with Christopher's instructions, Gleysteen "could not be definitive on the troop withdrawal issue," but he remembered: "I pushed my instructions to the limit," and stressed the constancy of the U.S. approach to North Korea. Park said he had not given the matter enough thought and would have to review the proposal.[167] The main issues for Park, as Gleysteen and others had forecast in their communication with Washington, were that: Washington and Seoul remain on the same side rather than have the U.S. as intermediary ("ala Camp David"), as otherwise Pyongyang would try "to drive a wedge between the US and ROK"; he saw no current prospect for progress with the North; and "the lack of clarity on US troop withdrawal decision also complicates the diplomatic initiative." In a summary of the meeting sent to Secretary Vance, the U.S. embassy noted they "faced an uphill battle" to convince Park of the utility of the dramatic proposal. Seoul was suspicious that it was an attempt to create the diplomatic or political atmosphere to justify the original troop withdrawal schedule and that it presaged a potential larger policy change by Washington toward Pyongyang.[168]

Park's steady reception of Gelysteen's presentation notwithstanding, ROK Foreign Ministry internal reporting indicated the degree of suspicion Seoul felt. "Such a dramatic

[167] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 43-44.
[168] "Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula," 4 June 1979,"in *The Carter Chill*, 553-556; the summary telegram is consistent with Gleysteen's recollection in his memoir, see: Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 44.

proposal," meaning either a summit meeting or some form of high-level talks among the ROK, the United States, and North Korea during President Carter's visit, would be "valid only when the bond between the United States and the ROK appears firm to everyone." Otherwise, Pyongyang would misjudge "that the proposal is coming from weakness on our side." This might, in turn, "generate the illusion of a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations to the Korean people and weaken their sense of national security" and provide the "pretext for Japan and other countries in the West to improve relations with the North Korean puppets," while other communist countries still refrained from opening contacts with Seoul. This could "potentially lead to the loss of balance in the two Korea's diplomacy in the international arena." In short, from Seoul's view, without an unassailably strong U.S.-ROK relationship, the proposal could have cascading effects both internally, disrupting domestic political order, and internationally. Therefore, the report noted, evidence of Carter's "firm resolve regarding" the "U.S. security commitment to the ROK and deferral of additional withdrawals of American ground troops in Korea will be a precondition for examining the American proposal." However, at that point, U.S. motives remained unclear.[169]

What, the report asked, "are the hidden motives behind the U.S. plan (is it a pretext to withdraw troops?)." It continued: "What are the real intentions behind the U.S. proposal for the three-party talks when they also say there is a slim chance the North Korean puppets will agree to participate? Do they think the three-way talks are just for show domestically and abroad, or are they hoping for real negotiations with the North Korean puppets?" The DPRK position was well-known. Kim Yong Nam, the DPRK's Director of the International Department, had reiterated in as recently as May 9: a demand to replace the armistice with a bilateral U.S.-North Korean peace treaty and negotiations with Washington for the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Instead, the ROK

[169] "Plan of Response to the U.S. Proposal for Three-Way Talks, 7 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 560-562.

would offer several alternative options: 1) a proposal for a North-South summit meeting; 2) consideration of the observer proposal made by the UNSG Waldheim when he visited Pyongyang and Seoul, wherein he would mediate the restart of North-South talks; or 3) if it was determined the joint U.S.-ROK proposal for tripartite talks would help ease tensions and ensure peace, that it also be accompanied by serious consideration for cross-recognition of North and South Korea by the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Japan, as well as joint entry of the two Koreas into the United Nations.[170] The various alternative plans aside (none of which ultimately dodged Pyongyang's unwillingness to meet their conditions), Gleysteen and the embassy were correct in their warnings. Washington faced an uphill battle, particularly as long as the withdrawal issue continued to cast a shadow over the relationship. The ambassador flew back to Washington soon after his meeting with Park, where the highly orchestrated PRM-45 process was reaching its final stages.

While U.S. and ROK officials were engaging in difficult discussions regarding human rights, the exact language in the joint communique, and Carter's sudden diplomatic proposal, the three-stage rocket that was PRM-45 moved its way through the defense, intelligence and foreign policy bureaucracy. The first stage, the CIA and DIA special intelligence estimates, confirmed exactly what their participants new they would: an enhanced North Korean threat. The studies showed that the earlier numbers upon which the withdrawal decision was based were far below the actual strength and composition of the DPRK order of battle. It charted North Kora's strength over time and provided a comparative chart of selected North and South Korean forces. Setting the new, 1979 intelligence estimates against those from 1970, 1974, and 1977, it revealed notable increases, with the estimate of DPRK ground force levels increasing by 150,000 from 1977 to

[170] Ibid.

1979, with similar trends across numbers of divisions and brigades, tanks and assault guns, and APCs. In terms of the North-South comparison, the study painted a similar picture, with Pyongyang possessing and looking to continue enjoying an edge vis-à-vis Seoul in each of the aforementioned categories.[171]

The second stage, the concurrent Pentagon study, enhanced the perception of the threat with an interactive analysis of the raw numbers in terms of actual war-fighting. Russell Murray, Assistant Secretary of Defense of Program Analysis and Evaluation, sent a memo to Secretary Brown outlining the Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation's main findings. Due to the fact that the intelligence re-estimate of DPRK ground force strength indicated North Korean forces were roughly 70 percent stronger than estimated in 1977 (accounting not only for greater overall numbers but more heavily armored and equipped units), the U.S. might have to introduce substantial ground force reinforcements in a war to prevent defeat. This situation would hold until at least 1985, given the current timetable for ROK force improvements. Consequently, the study recommended a substantial delay in the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops, to make strengthening ROK force one of the highest priorities, and that both decisions be linked.[172]

Thus, Murray argued ROK defense spending needed to be increased, based on OSD and CIA economic analysis. However, he acknowledged this ran counter to the opinion of officials at State, the USFK command, and the embassy in Seoul. Murray also suggested the Pentagon needed to rethink its war termination policy for the Korean Peninsula. Whereas it had adopted a more forward-oriented defense in recent years, current understanding held that an allied-counter-

[171] "Charts re Reporting on North Korean Military Strength, June 8, 1979, Top Secret," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea?, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696533-Document-06-Charts-re-Reporting-on-North-Korean.

[172] "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Russell Murray, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Program Analysis & Evaluation, Subject: PRM-45, June 6, 1979, Top Secret," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea?, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696532-Document-05-Memorandum-for-the-Secretary-of.

offensive to a North Korean invasion would stop at the DMZ, weakening deterrence in Murray's view. Instead, the United States should make clear that its reinforcements would have the ability to end any war on terms more favorable to the defense of Seoul than the DMZ, and thus put Pyongyang on notice that the "North would place its own territory at risk if it attacked the South." In short, the Pentagon not only recommended essentially a full stop to Carter's policy but also deliberating bolstering of forces and adoption of a more militaristic approach toward the North.[173]

With both the static CIA and interactive Pentagon studies underpinning it, the third and final stage of the process was overall PRM study itself, which laid out broader political and geopolitical considerations and several policy options for the withdrawal based on the overall review. The final PRC meeting to discuss the PRM as a whole was set for early June. Originally, Carter was supposed to preside over the meeting, but ended up not doing so. Instead, Secretary Vance did, which was an indication, to Gleysteen at least, "that we had seen the end of the withdrawal scheme."[174] Brzezinski stood in for Carter as his chief advisors on national security, another way to prevent a direct showdown between Carter and his principal advisors and their deputies. As noted, he was well aware of the general opposition to the withdrawal and knew full well the consensus at the meeting would be overwhelming for some sort of alteration if not outright reversal of the policy. He continued to work to mitigate such a direct standoff and finesse the process. There is evidence to support this view.

In cases where Carter missed a PRC meeting, Brzezinski would often summarize its contents for the president. In doing so, he would present his own interpretation of the discussion. Indeed, this was one of several points of friction between he and Vance, which over time soured relations between them. Brzezinski's tendency to shield Carter from a final retreat from his

[173] Ibid.
[174] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 29.

withdrawal policy was evident in parts of his summary of the meeting. Initially, Nicholas Platt sent Brzezinski a cover page to the summary on June 8, after the meeting, which remarked that:

> The meeting was a preliminary exchange from which no firm conclusions or recommendations emerged. The most striking feature of the discussion was agreement on the inter-relationship between troop withdrawal policy options and virtually all other issues. Adoption of a withdrawal formula that bolstered Park's confidence in the U.S. commitment would…pressure the ROK on the nature and scope of force improvement expenditures, proceed with diplomatic initiatives toward the North, supply less sophisticated military hardware to the ROK, and even encourage Park to be more responsive on human rights issues. The reverse effect would flow from a decision which cast doubt on our staying power.

However, Brzezinski, in a handwritten note on the cover page, wrote, "this does not reflect what I said." He added: "Option 1 will be maintained with reaffirmation of the defense commitment." Brzezinski apparently did not want listed the inter-relationships between the withdrawal and various other issues nor the statement that a failure to reconsider the withdrawal would cast doubt on Carter's staying power. Moreover, Option 1, as listed in the PRM, was to "continue with the current schedule," meaning to leave the policy unchanged. In other words, a decision to pull back from the original plan was not yet necessary. In light of Brzezinski's objections, the following day Platt sent along a revised version of the cover memo with all but the first sentence still in place: ""The meeting was a preliminary exchange from which no firm conclusions or recommendations emerged." The problem, of course, was that his depiction did not reflect the tenor of the meeting or the overwhelming consensus therein.[175]

On June 6, two days before the PRC meeting was held, Platt sent Brzezinski a memo that previewed the main issues to be discussed and highlighted one of the central takeaways of the PRM, specifically how it differed fundamentally from the original PRM-13 in its assessment of of U.S. forces in South Korea. Platt wrote that the "basic judgement, made in the PRM response,"

[175] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Nick Platt, "Policy Review Committee Meeting on Korea (S)," 8 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 566-568.

and backed by the Pentagon's military annex and CIA's SNIE, stated that "both now and in 1982, it is doubtful that the ROK, even with timely U.S. air, naval, and logistical support, could halt a major North Korean surprise attack north of Seoul." This, Platt wrote Brzezinski, "stands in contrast to the estimate made in 1977 in response to PRM-13 that "South Korea should be able to defend itself against an attack by the North without the involvement of U.S. ground combat forces if adequate and timely air, naval, and logistical support is provided." What had not changed was "the direct role of U.S. ground combat forces in this military assessment: They make little difference in either 1977 or 1979. Their importance is their role in deterrence." The new judgement in 1979 was based on the "larger and more precise intelligence community perception" of North Korea's strength rather than "real changes in military production or deployment." In other words, the data supporting the original assessment was incomplete. Yet, "regardless of whether one is dealing with perceptions or reality, the new judgement places a much higher premium than before on the symbolic deterrent value of the 2nd Division in Korea." Even for those who doubted the veracity of the intelligence, the effect of the perceptual shift was what mattered.[176]

In light of the new judgement, the PRM offered four ground force withdrawal policy options. Each option, Platt wrote, should be judged by how effectively it supported: U.S. credibility as an ally in Asia and to an extent in the rest of the world; the President's credibility as a decision-maker; incentives for greater ROK self-reliance; and incentives for Pyongyang to reduce tensions through diplomatic means. Moreover, all of the options, from no change at all to a full reversal of the policy, would require another reassessment of the military balance and the political situation in 1981, which was the bureaucracy injecting yet another layer of temperance into a policy, which they believed was lacking from the beginning. Platt provided Brzezinski the options as listed in

[176] Ibid, 570-574.

the PRM, a summary of their pros and cons in regard to the aforementioned factors, and commentary on where each respective department and agency stood.[177]

Option 1, as stated above, was to stay the course on the current schedule. To do so, Platt contended, "in spite of the new intelligence estimate would undermine U.S. credibility in Asia and fuel apprehensions in other parts of the world about our steadiness and staying power." His assessment reflected the overwhelming opinion of Carter's principal advisors, their deputies and assistants, and the bureaucracy underneath them. Platt did not mention anyone who favored this path. Option 2 was to stretch out and slow down the current schedule. This option would repeat what Carter had done in April 1978, once again extending the several phases without altering the overall policy. Platt noted this would best serve the several objectives above. "To stretch and slow the current schedule…preserves our credibility in Asia – not dramatically, but adequately," he wrote. Asian political leaders expected some adjustment in the schedule as a result of our intelligence reassessment, and Option 2 would demonstrate Washington was sensitive to the responsibilities imposed by "our new perception of North Korean strength." It involved no basic change in the President's policy, but simply postponement of its completion, would keep Seoul on notice that it could not relax its effort to improve its own force posture, and Pyongyang still would have incentive for a policy of patience and diplomatic action, Platt wrote. He did not mention any particular department or agency that would favor Option 2, mainly because few did. Rather, it was included as a result of Platt's own understanding of Brzezinki's preference (i.e. to provide Carter a full range of options without feeling boxed in) not to mention standard bureaucratic practice, which was to include a spectrum of choices for any complex policy reassessment.[178]

[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

Option 3 was to stretch out and slow down the current schedule, yet make completion of the withdrawal explicitly contingent on the reduction of tensions (i.e. some sort of diplomatic progress) and improvement of the military balance (i.e. completion of the South Korean FIP). This, Platt wrote, would neither undermine U.S. credibility (like Option 1) nor encourage strong reassurance in Seoul or the region. It would also "deprive us of flexibility." He continued: "Our Asian allies would regard the point at which the withdrawals end and the contingencies became operative as a de facto halt in the withdrawals and be reassured in that perception. Others would regard it as an artful cover for the President reversing a previous decision." Brzezinski was unreceptive to the latter logic, at least not yet. The Departments of State and Defense, on the other hand, would likely favor Option 3 (which they did). However, they might "propose a less explicit linkage between final withdrawals, progress toward reduction of tensions, and improvement in the military balance," which, Platt wrote, was a viable fallback. Nevertheless, "any linkage, even a less explicit one, "deprives us of some flexibility and lowers incentives for action by either Korea." Lastly, Option 4 was to suspend further withdrawals; essentially a complete cancellation of the policy. It "would strongly reassure the Asians, but add significantly to an image of inconsistency and vacillation on the President's part, lower ROK incentives for force improvement and encourage hard-liners in Pyongyang." For the Brzezinski this was a nonstarter, but the JCS would support Option 4.[179]

Regarding ongoing diplomatic efforts, Platt noted that all agencies agreed on the need to keep testing the willingness of all parties involved, and that a "decision to adjust the withdrawal schedule plus the restored degree of trust and confidence between Seoul and Washington" achieved by Carter's visit may assist in a deeper degree of consultations on how to approach

[179] Ibid.

Pyongyang. In regard to the military balance, the general sentiment was that "the more we adjust the troop withdrawal schedule, the more we can ask the ROK to increase their own force readiness and the less compensatory action will be required from us." There was a range of opinions, with Defense favoring more pressure on Seoul to increase defense expenditures as a percent of GDP, whereas the embassy country team, USFK commander, and State were more hesitant, arguing that major increases could fuel inflation and militarism in the ROK. Nevertheless, the overriding sentiment was adjusting the schedule would indeed further the president's own stated goal in favor of greater ROK efforts.[180]

Lastly, on the question of timing for consultations and a final decision, the consensus was clear. The president would be briefed on the summary determination of the PRC meeting and he would provide his response. During his visit in Tokyo he would inform Japanese Prime Minister Ohira in general terms the trend of his thinking. In Seoul he would consult in detail with President Park. Then, upon his return to the United States he would formulate a final decision after consultations with Congress. The final decision would be announced in a comprehensive speech on U.S. policy toward Asia. Some, like former Ambassador Sneider, contended the impact of Carter's announcement would be more notable were it delivered in Korea. Platt conceded this was unquestionably true "if dramatics are the principle criteria," but such a course would deprive Carter of a chance to consult with Congress. Although Park and his advisors surely favored such an explicit and dramatic announcement, for both domestic and international purposes, Brzezinski wanted to insure the process provided political cover for Carter. One central criticism of the withdrawal policy, indeed of many of Carter's polices, was the lack of consultation. If he was going to change course, Brzezinski would see to it that it was done with all deliberate speed.

[180] Ibid.

Moreover, the path for consultations and a final decision charted above was the direct result of the bureaucracy's careful planning as it marshalled the process along. Again, the objective was to change one man's mind. The path was clearly laid not only to provide political cover, but also to constrain. The outcome was already known.[181]

The PRC meeting was held on June 8 from 9:00 a.m. to 9:57 a.m. in the White House Situation Room. It was attended by the full slate of key officials. From the State Department were Secretary Vance (Chairman), Assistant Secretary Richard Holbrooke, Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs Leslie Gelb, and Ambassador Gleysteen, who was in Washington for just several days. The Defense Department was led by Secretary Brown, along with Deputy Secretary Charles Duncan, Assistant Secretary of International Security Affairs David McGiffert, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Armacost. The JCS was represented by CJCS Gen, David Jones and Deputy Director of the JCS Joint Staff Lt. Gen. John A. Wickham. Wickham was a month away from taking over as the four-star commander in Korea. DCI Admiral Stanfield Turner represented the CIA. The name of the other CIA official was redacted from the list of participants. The ACDA sent Deputy Director Spurgeon Keeny and Assistant Director Barry Blechman. Blechman, as mentioned previously, had significantly influenced Carter's thinking on Korea during a briefing at the Brookings Institute very early in Carter's candidacy. Finally, Brzezinski represented the White House (i.e. Carter), and Platt was the lone NSC member present. The meeting essentially followed the path laid out by Platt in his preparatory memo to Brzezinski.[182]

After DCI Turner gave an overview of the intelligence reassessments and the several policy options were laid out, the participants offered their positions. Making sure to preserve for Carter at least the semblance of a broad set of options, the summary noted that "No option was foreclosed

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid, 575-578.

in the discussion that followed." After Secretary Vance asked the group whether there was support for continuing the withdrawal as planned, Brzezinski responded that Option 1 "could not be dismissed if accompanied by a strong statement reaffirming our security commitment." His stance is somewhat perplexing insofar as no one shared his view and he knew that no one shared it. Aside from Carter himself, Brzezinski truly was, as various participants recalled, the lone holdout until the end. That said, he did agree that another review in 1981 would convey a useful message.[183]

Aside from Brzezinski: "Other participants felt that continuing the withdrawal as scheduled in the face of the new intelligence estimate would undermine ROK confidence in the US commitment, reduce our leverage with President Park on other issues, and cause a storm of Congressional criticism." As Platt had forecast, Vance, Brown and Gleysteen favored Option 3, expressing both their own views as well as those of their staffs at State, Defense and the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, respectively. ACDA came out firmly for Option 2, not necessarily a surprise considering Barry Blechman's position on the issue; short of holding to the original plan, it was the best option for sticking with a policy he had supported. The JCS, shedding its previously qualified support, supported Option 4, to suspend the withdrawal entirely. Everyone also agreed that whichever option was selected, a 1981 review was necessary.[184]

The discussion on the military balance tracked with Platt's memo, with Gleysteen stressing the limits beyond which Seoul would not want to go in increasing defense spending, for fear of exacerbating inflation at a time of economic "growing pains." Nevertheless, there was general agreement that Washington was justified in pressing for some spending increase as well as making suggestions on the nature of expenditures, namely, for Seoul to concentrate on ground forces rather than submarines, missiles, and aircraft. While Secretary Brown highlighted the administration was

[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.

committed to sell them the F-16, with the timing being the only decision left, Gleysteen noted ROK expectations were indeed high on the issue, but might be tempered if the withdrawal was sufficiently modified. There was no specific discussion on diplomatic initiatives, perhaps reflecting the fact that most the participants saw the trilateral proposal as intemperate and counterproductive. Yet they generally agreed a shift in the withdrawal schedule would bolster Park's confidence and "willingness to cooperate" moving forward. Lastly, the timing of consultations and a final decision was to follow the exact path Platt had sketched above, with an announcement pegged for mid-July.[185]

Gleysteen said of the final National Security Council meeting that he had witnessed the "unanimous recommendation that the president suspend further troop withdrawals."[186] In the strictest sense, this was not entirely accurate. As shown, Brzezinski did his best to preserve the useful fiction that all options remained open, and the group, including Gleysteen, had collectively decided upon several more consultative steps to be taken. Nevertheless, in *de facto* terms, Gleysteen's assessment was accurate. Barring ACDA, which itself still did counsel an alteration in the schedule, the rest of the participants effectively called for its suspension. The JCS did so explicitly, and State and Defense, by predicated the completion of the withdrawal on diplomatic progress and a favorable adjustment in the military balance, in effect did the same. No diplomatic progress was in sight and the military balance would take years to address. Although the recommendations remained internal and the formal process would take the next six weeks to play out, officials involved wasted little time in sending public signals about an imminent change in policy.

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[185] Ibid.
[186] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 44.

Within days of the PRC meeting, opponents of Carter's policy began to leak reports that the president would suspend the withdrawal policy on his trip to the region, and just before Carter left reports emerged that the JCS had formally recommended further withdrawals be called off.[187] Meanwhile, congressional lawmakers, who had continually asserted themselves against the policy, saw the signals and opportunity and ratcheted up their own effort. Earlier in May, the Senate Armed Service Committee, following the recommendation of its Pacific Study Group members, voted to freeze U.S. force levels in Korea. Following suit, on June 22, Sen. Glenn, Chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, issued an update to the earlier Humphrey-Glenn report.

Glenn unequivocally recommended that: "the risks involved in continuing the troop withdrawal demand that we reverse our policy and maintain the 2d Infantry Division in Korea. Indeed, to continue the withdrawal raises exactly those questions of American will and strength that have been so worrisome to Seoul, Tokyo, Bangkok, Jakarta, Canberra, and other allied capitals."[188] The day before Glenn's update, the Stratton Subcommittee, long the bastion of opposition to the withdrawal, opened yet another round of hearings, this time focused on the new intelligence findings. Rep. Les Aspin (D-WI), formerly a supporter of the withdrawal, testified that he had reviewed the intelligence studies and was no longer behind the policy. Nathaniel Thayer, the CIA's specialist on the region who was directly involved in the studies, confirmed as much in his testimony before the subcommittee.[189] Meanwhile, the editorial pages of the country's

[187] George C. Wilson, "Chiefs of Staff Ask Carter To Suspend Korea Pullout," *The Washington Post*, June 25, 1979.
[188] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea: An Update: 1979: A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate by Senator John Glenn 1979*, 96h Cong., 1st sess., Senate, 1. (hereafter cited as the "Glenn Report II").
[189] Terence Hunt, "New Intelligence Studies Confirm Higher Estimates Of North Korean Strength," *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1979.

major newspapers, formerly in support of the withdrawal, began to join the nearly unanimous chorus of voices telling Carter it was time to step back. The circle was closing.[190]

As much as Gleysteen hoped Carter would deal forthrightly with withdrawal issue at the summit or even provide a strong signal beforehand, he was left wanting and also unable to provide his own. Consequently, upon return to Seoul he was given an earful by Park's advisors, who strenuously pushed back against the as yet unsettled issue of a tripartite summit, even the less-controversial idea of issuing a proposal as part of the Carter-Park joint communique aimed at possibly fostering a later three-way meeting with Pyongyang, provided, of course, it was receptive to the offer. Although he did not doubt their displeasure, he surmised Park's advisors took their stance as much to please their president as to voice genuine concern. His instructions from Washington kept things uncertain.[191]

On June 12, Secretary Vance sent a telegram to the embassy about ongoing talks with the ROK Foreign Ministry, remarking: "Trying too carefully to define tripartite talks at this stage does not appear to be productive." The U.S government approached such talks, Vance stated, from the standpoint that: it had military forces on the peninsula and was a signatory to the Armistice; was an ally of the ROK; basic decisions could only be reached through agreement of both North and South Korea; and in a trilateral meeting, Washington and Seoul would collaborate closely on all matters. On the one hand, Vance's message, indicated that initial the impetus to pursue a meeting had lost steam. Yet, on the other hand, it did not provide Gleysteen anything beyond generalities to relay to ROK officials.[192] In a response telegram to Vance, the embassy wrote that Ambassador

[190] "The Sound Course in South Korea." *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1979; see also: "Korea Isn't Germany Yet," *The New York Times*, July 7, 1979.
[191] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 44-45.
[192] "Telegram from the Secretary of State to the American Embassy in Seoul, "Korea Trilateral--Response to Foreign Ministry Dialogue," 12 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 583-585.

Gleysteen had told the foreign minister to drop any though of linking human rights with the trilateral summit. "We said we had our policy on human rights; President Park had his policy, and we would have to do our best in coping with our differences," the telegram stated. It continued, "Obviously we would not conduct ourselves in ways that would complicate our basic relationship, but there was no prospect of our burying the human rights issue in return for proceeding with a diplomatic initiative." However, it added, "Still more clarity was need on USG's position of troop withdrawal policy/security commitment before ROKG can comfortably move forward with any tripartite proposal." [193] The ROK Foreign Ministry's internal communications reflected its persistent uncertainty and need for assurances before moving forward.

In a June 19 draft plan for the ROK's position regarding the trilateral meeting, the determination was made that, as things currently stood, the proposal offered Seoul "more loss than gain." Specifically: "the trilateral meeting could assume the format of the Paris negotiations on the Vietnam issue, effectively taking on the form of talks between the United States and the North Korean puppets, thereby strengthening the diplomatic status of the North Korean puppets and consequently weakening the status of the ROK." Additionally, by raising military matters, the DPRK could push for U.S. withdrawal and force reductions, which was premature. Such discussions "must be preceded by a long-term preparation period for prior consultations with the United States." Thus far, Seoul had been willing to positively consider the proposal because it "came from President Carter himself," yet without complete agreement on certain measures the ROK could not positively consider the proposal further. Such measures included Washington demonstrating firm solidarity between the allies regarding issues of security, politics ("being aware

[193] "Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "Korea Trilateral – Further Discussion with Foreign Minister," 13 June 1979," in Ibid, 586-588.

the Korean domestic politics could be included," meaning human rights), economy and society, and having this reflected in the joint communique.[194]

More specifically, in regard the withdrawal issue, Seoul would prefer that "President Carter could directly and privately guarantee to President Park that no additional troop withdrawal will take place and make an announcement around July 15 (but make it clear that the trilateral meeting is not a condition to be exchanged for the postponement of troop withdrawal)." Also, contrary to Vance's telegram, Seoul wanted prior agreement on all questions related to the agenda and procedure and to proceed with a joint strategy ahead of time, and for both to "publicly declare that the key roles in the trilateral talks are to be played by the two Koreas, and if Korea can assume the leading role from our side and the United States takes an auxiliary position." During actual talks, the two allies should "alternate their turn as chief representative." Lastly, the ROK wanted the trilateral proposal to declare that it was consistent with the spirit of the policies and proposals Park had already announced on June 23, 1978 and January 19, 1979. Seoul was prepared to consult with Washington on the specific methods or pursuing a trilateral "only if the two countries can come to complete agreement" on the above measures. Seoul, while surely concerned, also played its hand to the hilt. Park and his advisors knew full well the limitations of their position, yet also leveraged Washington's own dependence on it as its ally.[195]

Nevertheless, officials back in Washington continued to push for a better sense from Carter that a clearer signal on the withdrawal policy could, in fact, be communicated in the run up to the summit. On June 20, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, David McGiffert, sent Secretary Brown a memo outlining Brown's main talking points and objectives for his foreign policy breakfast with President Carter. The breakfast, which included the

[194] "ROK's Position Regarding the Trilateral Meeting (Draft Plan), 19 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 601-602.
[195] Ibid.

president's principal advisors, was held every Friday morning for the duration of Carter's term. This would be the last one before Carter departed for East Asia. Secretary Brown, McGiffert wrote, would have "to secure President Carter's agreement to pursue a tradeoff" whereby the United States would adjust its troop withdrawal policy and the ROK would enhance is defense efforts, specifically in regard to its ground forces, as discussed at the PRC meeting. Brown expected to meet with ROK Defense Minister Ro on June 28, the day before Carter arrived in Seoul, which was an opportunity to prepare the groundwork for the deal.[196]

Secretary Brown expected the ROK Defense Minister to be receptive to the plan, yet to secure President Park's agreement to it as well as his acquiescence on the proposal for a tripartite meeting, Brown should be permitted to "foreshadow – on a close hold basis – the prospect" for a significant adjustment in the withdrawal plan. McGiffert noted that a key goal for Brown at the breakfast would be to emphasize the linkage among the three major policy issues. At the moment, Park remained cautious, conditioning agreement to the tripartite proposal and defense matters on a number or requirements, such as assurances on no bilateral U.S.-DPRK talks and Carter's personal disclosure of the direction of his thinking on the troop withdrawal decision. Earlier, Brzezinski had altered his summary memo to downplay the interconnection of the several issues. On the contrary, Brown, conveying the instructions the bureaucracy had crafted, reconnected the threads. The message was clear: the issues were intimately connected and a decision needed to be made.[197]

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[196] "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, David E. McGiffert, Subject: Korean Troop Withdrawals - Action Memorandum, June 20, 1979, Secret," The National Security Archive: How Do You Solve a Problem like (South) Korea?, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3696534-Document-07-Memorandum-for-the-Secretary-of.
[197] Ibid.

Ultimately, only Park himself "was confident enough to go along with Carter, calculating that a positive response would work to Korea's advantage on the troop issues." Therefore, about ten days before the summit, around the same time McGiffert sent Brown his memo, Park had the ROK Ambassador to Washington, Kim Young Shik, deliver a mostly favorable reply; a joint U.S.-ROK proposal for a tripartite meeting could be conveyed to Pyongyang. Nonetheless, despite Brown's own effort and the constant reminders for the embassy, Carter held back from providing a clear signal on the withdrawal. Gleysteen remembered that as late as June 26, four days before Carter arrived, he alerted Holbrooke and Vance, both already in Tokyo with the President, that the ROK "failed to understand why we were so reticent on the troop withdrawal issue." No major initiatives could be launched, Park felt, on "a security platform that appeared to him – and to the Korean people – too shaky to withstand North Korean efforts to manipulate the troop withdrawal issue." The issue would not be settled until the summit itself; not until Carter, Park and the accumulated tensions of the relationship reached a final crescendo.[198]

Following the G-7 economic summit in Tokyo, Carter arrived in South Korea on June 29. After a welcoming ceremony at Kimpo Airport and short drive into central Seoul, with hundreds of thousands of flag-waving Korean citizens lining the streets, Carter helicoptered with Gen. Vessey to Camp Casey near the demilitarized zone. With the pressures he faced he at home, Carter's political advisors convinced him to spend one of his two nights in the country fraternizing with the troops he was criticized for trying to withdrawal.[199] Ambassador Gleysteen recalled that while he was pleased not to have been invited on that particular portion of the journey, fog delayed

[198] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 41; various sources, including some of the participants' memoirs, oral history interviews, and secondary accounts, cover the Carter-Park summit in close detail, with each emphasizing a particular angle of the events. The depiction offered here brings together these various accounts, with additional documentary evidence and press accounts, to provide a more thorough account of the summit events.
[199] Terence Smith, "Carter Visits G.I.'s At Korean Border," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1979.

Carter's return to Seoul the next morning, thus preventing Gleysteen from offering a final briefing before Carter and Park met at the Blue House. He had hoped to encourage Carter to open on a positive note, with reassurances on security before broaching more contentious human rights and political issues. Nevertheless, he recalled, most expected a successful summit meeting "following in the grooves of careful, high-level preparation." However, Gleysteen lamented, "fate brought us near disaster." As he and others remember, rather than beginning on a positive, reassuring note, the meeting immediately turned contentious. What Carter and Park's advisors on both sides had feared and tried to protect against, ensued.[200]

Much to Carter's "intense annoyance" Park, who led off the meeting, quickly and abrasively raised the issue of the troop withdrawal. Carter had asked his advisors that they prevent this from happening. He already knew Park's feelings on the matter.[201] He also did not want to be seen to yield to Korean pressure on the spot. In Washington, Holbrooke had warned ROK Ambassador Kim about this, as Gleysteen did Park and his staff in Seoul. However, despite such warnings, Park took the opportunity of his first personal meeting with Carter to immediately begin a "long, schoolmarish lecture" on the threat from Pyongyang and the need to freeze all withdrawals. U.S. forces, Park bluntly told Carter, were not only essential to ROK security but also the security of Japan and East Asia, and to the free-world as a whole.[202] Park's insistence on the tiered, expansive importance of U.S. forces in Korea, as a symbol of U.S. commitment writ large, was the same logic evident in ROK documents preceding Carter's entry into office and overlapped with that employed by Carter's most fervent critics at home. Park's harangue so upset Carter that in the midst of it he wrote a note to Vance stating: "If he continues this I'm gonna

[200] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 46.
[201] Vance, *Hard Choices*, 129.
[202] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 46.

take'm all out."[203] Vance wrote of the moment: "We could almost feel the temperature in the room drop as Park continued, through an interpreter, his assault on the policy. Sitting between the president and Harold Brown, I could feel the contained anger of the president, but there was nothing to be done but let the drama play itself out."[204] Gleysteen, too, noted that Park's "patronizing lecture on Asian security lit a fire within Carter." Sitting next to Harold Brown, Gleysteen said the Defense Secretary whispered to him that he could tell from Carter's face he was furious.[205]

Carter's retort left Park no less perturbed. Carter agreed that U.S. forces in South Korea were tied to broader U.S. security commitments and that the peninsular military balance needed to be maintained, but he would not give Park an explicit assurance the withdrawal would be frozen. Carter, Gleysteen remembered, disingenuously claimed he had only intended to remove "3,000 of the 40,000 troops in 1979" and that Park connecting this action with ROK security was "not accurate." Carter took Park to task for allowing Pyongyang to build a more formidable military force than Seoul's, particularly considering the latter's remarkable economic advantages.[206] Following this fist exchange, which lasted from 11:00 am to 12:20 pm, the atmosphere was notably chilled. During a short break, both the U.S. and ROK delegations remained grouped together with little interchange between them. Minutes later, Carter and Park went to a separate room to continue their personal exchange, accompanied only by Nicholas Platt, as Carter's note taker, and Choe Kwang So, Senior Protocol Secretary and Park's interpreter. The principal advisors on both sides

[203] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 159.
[204] Vance, *Hard Choices*, 129.
[205] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 46
[206] Ibid; see also: ""Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and South Korean President Park, June 30, 1979," 3 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 621-627.

waited for over an hour as the discussion played out. "The wait was excruciating," Gletsteen wrote.[207]

The intensity of the exchange did not abate. As one description has it: "Carter was extremely tense, his jaw snapping and his eyes popping. For his part, Park was snapping his fingers as he was wont to do under pressure."[208] Carter criticized Park for his insistence on a complete freeze in withdrawals. He could not make such a promise. South Korea, Carter reiterated, should increase its own efforts to address the inter-Korean military balance. Park understood that U.S. forces could not stay forever, but he was requesting they remain until the disparity was addressed and, importantly, until Pyongyang changed its policy; it was not only a question of capabilities but also conditions. Nevertheless, considering Pyongyang's rigid position, implicit in Park's stance was the distinct possibility U.S. troops might not stay forever but they would be needed for quite a while yet. Indeed, Park himself once again asked for their indefinite retention. Following more detailed discussion on specific priority areas for the ROK's force improvement efforts (i.e., ground, air, and naval forces) and the potential for removing the 600,000-man ceiling on South Korean ground forces, the two turned to human rights.[209]

Carter followed the same line as he had in his previous public statements and in his personal communication with Park. He remarked that human rights abuses in Seoul resulted in an unflattering image of South Korea in the United States, undermining American public opinion of the U.S. commitment. Carter hoped Park could take certain steps, such as releasing more political prisoners and rescinding EM-9. Nevertheless, Carter displayed a certain "finesse quite absent in

[207] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 47.
[208] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 159.
[209] "Memorandum of Conversation between Jimmy Carter and Park Chung Hee, June 30, 1979," 5 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 632-638.

the earlier discussion."[210] As the record indicates, Carter told Park: "Obviously, I have no desire or ability to influence your decision other than to express my opinion of the tremendous improvements that would occur in U.S. relations if these measures could be taken." Park, too, responded with his own standard defense. The intensity and proximity of the North Korean threat, coupled with South Korea's unique circumstances and level of development, made rapid or systemic changes exceedingly difficult. He could release certain individuals who proper show repentance, but not others, like Kim Dae Jung, who were trying to overthrow the government, Park said. "I hope you understand that we cannot take these measures all at once," Park said. However, he would take Carter's advice under strong consideration.[211] While intense, the Carter-Park meeting ended cordially. However, the drama continued to play out within the American delegation. While leaving the Blue House, Carter signaled for Gleysteen to join him and his principle advisors in the presidential limousine for the ride back to the Ambassador's resident, where Carter was staying.

With Carter, Vance and Brown sitting in the back, across from Brzezinski and Gleysteen facing them in jump seats, the president started in on his ambassador. While wagging his finger and venting his anger, Carter "focused his wrath" on Gleysteen. He pressed him on why Park seemed unwilling to increase defense spending or show more flexibility on loosening internal political controls. After initially hesitating, Gleysteen remembered he felt "a calm realization that the die was already cast." He bluntly told Carter that he, too, disagreed with Park's comportment, but that the South Korean president had expected Carter to assure him of a freeze on the withdrawal, and was upset by Carter's refusal. In light of the new intelligence on North Korea, it

[210] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 47.
[211] "Memorandum of Conversation between Jimmy Carter and Park Chung Hee, June 30, 1979," 5 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 632-638.

was not only in the ROK's interest but also U.S. interest that Carter do so. Moreover, Gleysteen told Carter that South Korea already carried a relatively heavy defense burden for a still-developing country. In fact, Washington itself historically had tried to restrain Seoul from excessive military expenditure out of concern that it would further embolden the ROK military and exacerbate its already well-documented authoritarian tendencies. Carter bristled at Gleysteen's explanation, further criticizing Park's human rights abuses.[212]

For much of the ride, Gleysteen received the brunt of Carter's anger, but as they returned to the Ambassador's residence Vance and Brown began to come to his defense. For nearly 30 minutes, the group sat in the back of the president's limo as it lingered under the portico of the residence, holding up the rest of the motorcade and drawing the puzzled attention of Korean and American onlookers. During the ride, Carter "unburdened himself," wrote Vance. He continued: "He felt isolated, opposed by all of his advisors except Zbig. Gleysteen carried a heavy burden as we sat in the parked car in front of the entrance…Harold and I joined Ambassador Gleysteen in pointing out the vast difficulties that we faced in carrying out the policy as originally announced and the benefits that would accrue from its suspension, especially in light of the new intelligence figures."[213] Inside the car, Carter turned to each of his principal advisors and asked "Do you disagree with my policy?" Each, with the exception of Brzezinski, who remained silent, replied: "Yes Mr. President."[214] Meanwhile, Platt and Holbrooke, the latter of whom had received his own "severe presidential tongue-lashing" from Carter while in Seoul, had followed the limousine in a small car, and were joined by Bob Rich a short distance from the limo, able to see the action but not hear what was being said.[215] Platt remarked to Holbrooke, "There goes your Korea policy; it's

[212] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 47-48.
[213] Vance, *Hard Choices*, 130.
[214] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 160.
[215] Packer, *Our Man*, ch.6, Kindle.

all being decided there now!" Once Carter had taken a poll of his advisors and heard their reservations, Gleysteen flatly asked the president what he would need from Park in exchange for greater clarity on the withdrawal; agreement to increase defense spending up to at least 6 percent of GDP and a significant move on human rights, Carter responded.[216]

Similar to Platt's remark, Secretary Vance recalled that "afternoon, our Korean policy hung in the balance." Gleysteen, Vance, and Holbrooke sprang into action along parallel tracks. Vance and Holbrooke contacted Kim Yong Shik, the ROK Ambassador to Washington with whom they had a strong working relationship, and Gleysteen worked through the Blue House Secretary General, Kim Kyi Won, and Park's interpreter Choe Kwang Su, to request "clarifications" on Park's comments on defense expenditures and human rights. Vance said they conveyed the message that when he saw Carter at the state dinner later that evening, Park "must say certain more positive things to the president in order to avoid a personal rupture so serious that it would leave substantial scars." Above all, Vance stressed to his South Korean interlocutors that: "Park must not continue to press the president for an answer on the troop issue. Rather, the best chance for salvaging the situation lay in Park's showing appreciation for the vast array of positive elements in the Korean-American relationship. The troop issue simply could not be decided in Seoul during the trip; perhaps upon our return to Washington it could be reopened."[217] As examined above, the internal discussions leading up to the summit indicated that such a schedule had been the exact intent of the bureaucracy in Washington all along as well as that of the ROK foreign ministry. Both presidents' intense feelings were one factor potentially derailing well-laid plans. After racing around Seoul and holding several hectic meetings and phone calls, the message appeared to get through. Secretary General Kim called Gleysteen and informed him that Park would like to see

[216] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 48.
[217] Vance, *Hard Choices*, 130.

him and Secretary Vance the next morning, telling them to expect good news. Gleysteen informed all involved that this was an authoritative, favorable response from Park himself.[218]

At the evening's state dinner, as word of the positive shift circulated the atmosphere was far less tense; Vance called it a success. Nevertheless, the evening was not entirely without a difference of opinion. Although both sides worked hard before the summit to craft a mutually agreed-upon and thus relatively tame statement in the joint communique regarding the importance of human rights, Carter used his official toast to offer his own rhetorical flourish. While President Ford said nothing about human rights during his November 1974 visit to Seoul, Carter remarked at the banquet:

> We also believe strongly in the United States that a free society is the key to realizing the full potential for development and growth…There is a growing consensus within the international community about the fundamental value of human rights, individual dignity, political freedom, freedom of the press and the rule of law. The free expression of ideas stimulates innovation and creativity. The right to participate in the political process helps to unite a nation in pursuit of common goals. There is abundant evidence in Korea of the dramatic economic progress a capable and energetic people can achieve by working together. I believe this achievement can be matched by similar progress through the realization of basic human aspirations in political and human rights.

In his own toast, Park remarked that the ROK had "found a democratic system which best suits our circumstances, and which is the most effective in solving our problems." According to Gelysteen, ROK Foreign Minister Park Tong Jin was anxious that Carter's remarks might anger Park. However, by that point, the latter was far more eager to contain rather than highlight signs of disagreement.[219]

Carter's toast was not the only effort made to stress the importance of the issue. Nevertheless, the U.S. delegation's other actions revealed the contradictions and limitations in the

[218] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 48-49.
[219] Sam Jameson and William J. Eaton, "Carter Chides South Korea on Human Rights," *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1979.

Carter administration's human rights policy, due both to its own self-imposed restrictions as well as the ROKG's own actions hemming it in. As planned by both sides and grudgingly accepted by the authorities in Seoul, the day after the Carter-Park meeting, Carter visited the National Assembly. The visit was meant as a nod to the importance of representative institutions, despite the fact that at that time (and since 1972) the assembly had ceased to function as one as a result of the inbuilt electoral controls of the Yushin system. While there, Carter eagerly met with Kim Young Sam and other opposition politicians, with Gleysteen's deputy William Clark's providing a degree of physically blocking to permit him to do so. Gleysteen recalled that he violated the previously agreed upon stipulations by allowing Carter to speak with Kim and his fellow opposition lawmakers for a disproportionate amount of time, during which they spoke frankly with Carter and he took down notes while listening.[220]

In addition to the assembly visit, Carter also met with about a dozen religious leaders and oppositionists at the ambassador's residence, again by prior agreement with the Park government. The private residence would prove less controversial a meeting place, closed from public view. Included in the meeting were Rev. Kim Kwan Suk, secretary general of the Korean National Council of Churches, who in the past had been critical of Carter, as well as Catholic Cardinal Kim Sou Hwan and the evangelist Reverend Billy Kim.[221]

These and other efforts were somewhat noteworthy, not just in how they contrasted with the actions and rhetoric of previous U.S. presidents but also in the studied distance Carter tried to maintain between himself and Park. Opposition elements did take notice. Kim Young Sam approvingly remarked to U.S. correspondents: "We in the opposition have to take note that President Carter decided to visit President Park's house in the dead of night, shaking hands briefly

[220] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 49-50.
[221] Ibid, 39, 50; see also: Sam Jameson, "Outspoken Guest," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1979.

and then disappearing to a U.S. military base." The following day at the official welcoming ceremony in front of an outdoor crowd of 200,000, stood beside Park but "uttered not a word." Moreover, during his toast at the state dinner, Carter praised Korea and its people but provided no individual praise of Park, breaking from all past American Presidents who visited the country. To be sure, these were subtle diplomatic signals, but they were undoubtedly meant to signal a less than ready embrace of Park.[222] More notable, and indeed unprecedented, was the fact that Carter had Secretary Vance present two lists of names of political prisoners he hoped to see freed, one compiled by Amnesty International and the other by missionary sources within South Korea, to the Foreign Minister Park. Reportedly, it was the first time Washington had asked for the release of specific prisoners in such a manner. Still, though, there were obvious and immediate limits to Carter's moves. The ROK government utilized its considerable controls to censor Carter's actions. White House and U.S. embassy officials were well aware such censorship was occurring.[223]

The Park government portrayed the visit as a major triumph. Carter's renewed security commitment to Seoul and the initiative to rekindle talks with North Korea, both in the joint communique, "were painted as victories for the Park regime." It censored from all local media any reference to the fact that Carter passed along the lists of names and also withheld from publication or public mention announcement of the fact that Carter had appealed to Park to abolish EM-9. Any differences over political freedoms and human rights "were treated as a cursory exchange of views." Opposition leaders' comments that the renewed security commitment eliminated the need for emergency controls went unreported, and were only obliquely mentioned in official government criticism of the idea. Kim Seong Jin, the ROK Information Minister, said: "Some

[222] James P. Sterba, "Carter's Visit Hailed in Seoul," *New York Times*, July 3, 1979.
[223] Sam Jameson, "President Asks S. Korea to Free Political Prisoners," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1979; James P. Sterba, "U.S. Presses Seoul To Free Dissidents As Carter Departs," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1979.

people might think now that the U.S. is responsible for South Korean security that we can handle other problems freely. To think that is like fasting several days in anticipation of a neighbor's party." In local headlines, the Carter-Park talks were termed "summit meetings," while Carter's talks with opposition and religious leaders referred to as "hwandam," roughly translated as "shooting the breeze." The majority of South Korean citizens had no ready access to information outside the controlled press, so the Park government controlled the discourse.[224]

Kim Dae Jung, who was confined and guarded in his own home during the weekend, told the *New York Times*: "The people don't know what happened. They were shut out. They wanted to hear an American President they respect say what he believes about freedom. Instead, it was private talks with President Park. And we know that if we depend on the repentance of a dictator, we can never achieve our goal." The Park government used its nearly monopoly power of the press to craft its own narrative of the summit. It presented Carter's apparent support as an affirmation and legitimation of Park's rule, much as Kim and his fellow dissidents warned Carter that it would.[225]

In this sense, Gleysteen gave Carter and the U.S. delegation more credit than they deserved. He wrote that: "Despite the initial setback, Park's positive signal to Carter left us feeling that the president had achieved a fair success on human rights during his visit."[226] Although this was true as far as it went, it could not mask what was evident to most informed observers. Human rights may have been a priority for Carter personally and even to an extent for the administration, but it was clearly secondary to the administration's larger objective. Carter himself did not ultimately act in a manner that would have threatened basic relations or put Park directly on the spot, the way

[224] Sterba, "Carter's Visit Hailed in Seoul."
[225] Ibid.
[226] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 49.

many dissidents hoped that he would have. In the two instances where the South Korean public received an uncensored view of Carter's human rights positions, namely, in his remarks at the state dinner (having been televised) and the language in the joint communique, his criticism was muted. Carter may not have praised Park individually. However, neither did he directly criticize him or overtly urge for the restoration of democracy.[227] Rather, the central objective was to move forward, to seek a "new maturity" in the relationship. To this effect, American officials reported to the U.S. press improvements in the human rights situation, despite notable evidence to the contrary. Even Carter himself praised Park to this effect in their meeting. Human rights aside, U.S. officials openly told the press that Carter's visit had "a higher purpose: to renew the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and to demonstrate to other Asian leaders that American power in the Pacific is more than latent." Instead they meant to convey that it was stable and even growing.[228]

The flare-up between Park and Carter ostensibly involved, in part at least, disagreement over the former's lack of flexibility on human rights. However, for both presidents' advisors, who laid the ground work for the summit, their feverish efforts to patch up differences between the two leaders afterward was borne of their intent to achieve their main goal. They sought clarifications on human rights and defense spending, to be sure, but they did so in an instrumental sense, to keep the normalization or maturation of the relationship on track. Having scrambled and received a positive response through Park's closest advisors, Vance and Holbrooke met with Park at the Blue House and received his assurances that: 1) "the ROKG was ready to increase defense spending the ROKG was ready to increase defense spending up to and beyond 6 percent of GNP, despite inflation and energy concerns," and 2) "on human rights, PCH said he understood Carter's views

[227] Sterba, "Carter's Visit Hailed in Seoul."
[228] James P. Sterba, "Differences With Seoul on Human Rights Put Aside for Carter Visit," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1979.

and would take them into account, and take liberalization measures as rapidly as he could without causing domestic unrest."[229] In turn, sealing the matter was Carter's final courtesy call with Park. Usually viewed as a time-consuming but of diplomatic protocol, Carter's last meeting with Park before leaving "proved quite substantive." After he told Park he was satisfied with the forme's promise on future defense spending, Carter told the South Korean president he could deal "satisfactorily" with military matters upon his return to Washington. In doing so, Carter would keep in mind Park's request that the 2ID and CFC be kept in South Korea. "This was the music Park had been waiting so long to hear," wrote Gleysteen, who was the only American staff member present.[230]

The meeting closed with Carter once again stressing the need for certain steps to improve human rights, with Park noting he would take Carter's advice under consideration as best he could, without providing details on any particular actions he might take. Indicative of Park's relief was his unorthodox behavior once Carter had boarded Air Force One for Camp David. Normally distant and stern in his personal relations, Park turned to Gleysteen, smiled, and gave him a big bear hug; "an act of spontaneity that astounded his attendants."[231] On human rights, the painstakingly negotiated Joint Communique released at the close of the summit included the relatively tame joint statement that in their meetings both "presidents noted the importance to all nations of respect for internationally recognized human rights," and that President Carter "expressed the hope that the process of political growth in the Republic of Korea would continue commensurate with the economic and social growth of the Korean nation."[232] Park followed suit several days after the

[229] "Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "President Park's July 1 Meeting with Secretary Vance," 2 July 1979"," in *The Carter Chill*, 617-620.
[230] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 49.
[231] Ibid, 50.
[232] "Joint Communique Between Jimmy Carter and Park Chung Hee, 1 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 608-615.

summit, when the ROK government announced it would release some 180 political prisoners over the next six months. The move was hardly sufficient for Park's critics or Carter's own personal aspiration for greater systemic change, but it sufficed to move the relationship forward exactly as the majority of officials on both sides desired.

The joint communique embodied the desired outcome in other ways. It contained the standard language, wherein President Carter "reiterated the firm commitment of the United States to render prompt and effective assistance to repel armed attack against the Republic of Korea in accordance with the mutual defense treaty, and affirmed that the United States nuclear umbrella provided additional security for the area." Although not explicitly affirming a change in the troop withdrawal policy, it suggested one, noting: "President Carter expressed his appreciation for the full consultations between the two presidents and their defense ministers on security issues and said that he would be consulting with U.S. Congressional leaders on his return in light of these discussions."[233] In short, the several stage plan, which bureaucratic infighters had laid out over previous months was, after a few summit hiccups, going roughly to plan.

Post-summit reporting indicated the direction the administration was heading. The *New York Times* reported that Secretary Brown had told ROK officials that Washington remained committed to the eventual removal of U.S. troops, even if in the near term Carter decided to continue the freeze on further withdrawals; "the real question is, 'what's the phasing'? The question is, 'when, not whether;'" a senior official said.[234] Meanwhile, Gen. Vessey, who was soon to become Army Vice Chief of Staff and was consistently on record over the previous two years doubting the wisdom of the withdrawal, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the new intelligence assessment of North Korea provided ample justification to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance rather

[233] Ibid.
[234] James P. Sterba, "U.S. Said to Tell Seoul Troops Will Eventually Leave," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1979.

than remove forces.[235] A similar message was passed along to allies. In a post-summit meeting, Secretary Vance reported to Japanese Foreign Minister Sonoda that: "the President and Park talked frankly about U.S. troop withdrawals and the President said he would return to the U.S. and consult with his military and civilian advisors and the congress before making his decision. Contrary to press reports he did not agree to freeze our troop withdrawal. The Secretary estimated that the President would make his decision within the next two to three weeks."[236] Such public and private remarks, in line with those preceding the summit, served to lay the groundwork for Carter's coming decision. Like the JCS and Senate statements officially recommending that Carter freeze further withdrawals, Secretary Brown's statement also noted that withdrawal remained (as it always had) the ultimate goal. The caveat proved the point. A definitive change in policy was afoot. Adding the qualification that withdrawal would still be sought in the future provided Carter a sliver of political cover not to be seen as entirely retreating from his policy. Nonetheless, that was exactly what was happening.

While the main goal of alliance stability and normalization was achieved at the summit, the matter of the trilateral proposal discreetly played out behind the scenes. As mentioned, following the contentious pre-summit back-and-forth, Park had eventually given his assent that a proposal could be made as part of the joint communique. It read: "President Park and President Carter have decided jointly to propose the convening of a meeting of senior official representatives of the South and the North of Korea and the United States to seek means to promote dialogue and reduce tensions in the area," and that "the two presidents have directed the foreign minister and the secretary of state to communicate jointly with the foreign minister of North Korea in this regard

[235] Sam Jameson, "U.S. Commander Urges Larger Forces in Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1979.
[236] "Telegram from the USDel Secretary Aircraft to the Secretary of State, "Secretary's Meeting with Foreign Minister Sonada," 3 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 630-631.

in an appropriate manner."[237] It was in the several hours before the summit, though, that the message was first conveyed to several interested parties, including Japan, China, the Soviet Union and Indonesia.

The latter had formal diplomatic relations with both Koreas, and was chosen as a potential conduit through which to make discreet high-level contact with Pyongyang. On the day Carter's delegation arrived, Secretary Vance sent a telegram from Seoul to the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta seeking the government of Indonesia's good offices to facilitate trilateral discussions. He noted the joint proposal to be made as part of the Joint Communique, and stressed the need for secrecy until its public announcement. U.S. officials were instructed to seek Indonesian assistance in three resects: 1) permission to propose a tripartite meeting be held in Jakarta; 2) prompt transmission that weekend of an informal oral message to the North Korean authorities; and 3) subsequently to transmit formal written messages from the U.S. and ROK to North Korea and in turn conveyance to them of any response from Pyongyang.[238]

Unsurprisingly, considering what Gleysteen called the "slapdash quality" of the proposal, the initial Indonesian response was guarded.[239] The day after Vance's telegram, Jakarta responded with skepticism about the substance and practicality of the sudden proposal. The Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja saw no way his government could "gear itself up to move in the timeframe suggested." They were chairing an important ASEAN meeting at the moment, and no such initiative could be pursued without President Suharto's in-person approval, which could not be secured due to the ASEAN meeting. Moreover, Mochtar doubted Suharto would even agree to "such a significant move on such short notice and for which he is inadequately

[237] "Joint Communique Between Jimmy Carter and Park Chung Hee, 1 July 1979," in Ibid, 608-615.
[238] "Telegram from U.S. Delegation in Seoul to the American Embassy in Jakarta, "Request for Indonesian Good Offices to Facilitate ROK and US Discussions with North Korea," 29 June 1979," in Ibid, 603-605.
[239] Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence, 45.*

prepared." Jakarta had been "caught cold" by the proposal and needed to consider all the ramifications. So far as they knew, Pyongyang was still negative toward contacts with Seoul, so Jakarta had to consider political problems if its "good offices are rejected out of hand by Pyongyang." Despite such reservations, the message was eventually delivered through Indonesia in the name of Secretary Vance and ROK Foreign Minister Park, and reaffirmed publicly in the Joint Communique.[240]

Predictably, no response had come by the time Carter departed Seoul. In the days following the summit, while Washington and Seoul awaited Pyongyang's official reply, the general perception among the informed public matched what was said privately by both U.S. and ROK officials when they first heard of the tripartite proposal. In and of itself, the proposal was not without merit. However, the timing was decidedly inopportune and the move unlikely to succeed. Put simply, it was too little, too late. A July 2 *Washington Post* editorial embodied the sentiment, and was emblematic of the larger critique of Carter's Korea policy. While the editorial commended Carter's effort to begin three-way negotiations, it criticized his administration for waiting so long to do so. Carter's withdrawal policy had put the cart before the horse. It continued:

> Almost everyone now accepts that it was silly and dangerous 1) to move a piece on the Korean chessboard without first consulting Seoul and 2) to take a unilateral military step back without trying first to open negotiations. Mr. Carter has now put the horse back in front of the cart, suspending further withdrawals and opting for talks. The pity is it took him the better part of his current term to do so. He does not have much time or political capital to expend on Korea, but perhaps some exploratory work can be done.[241]

Again, Carter had yet to formally freeze further withdrawals, but the writing was on the wall. The original approach had failed, and with an election on the horizon, time was short. Coupled with

[240] "Telegram from U.S. Delegation in Bali to the American Embassy in Seoul, "Request for Indonesian Good Offices to Facilitate ROK and US Discussions with North Korea," 30 June 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 606-607.
[241] "Korea – The Horse Before the Cart," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1979.

blowback for an assortment of other policy reversals or with political capital already spent, support for a new bold initiative was wanting.

The North Korean response began to emerge just days later. On July 5, a negative response was aired through a North Korean radio broadcast and Rodong Shinmun article, and reported more widely by UPI. In light of the North Korean regime's total control of media, such organs were akin to an official response, yet State Department officials took the announcement "with a pinch of salt" while they awaited formal reply from DPRK officials. They viewed the initial reaction as a necessary DPRK response to the U.S.-ROK Joint Communique as a whole, but expected that: "in due course the private North Korean response will be a counter proposal involving some measure of prior North Korean/United States consultation without South Korean involvement. This the US will reject." U.S. officials "guess is that the North Koreans will eventually agree to the tripartite talks as proposed, on the grounds that from the wider political angle they cannot afford not to."[242] They were not long in waiting.

On June 10 Pyongyang more overtly criticized the tripartite proposal. Both in a private message through the Indonesian government and a public statement by a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesperson released by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Pyongyang called it a scheme to create permanent division on the Korean Peninsula. "The so-called three-way talks are utterly infeasible and do not stand to reason…It is a confused proposal," the spokesperson said. Instead, as expected, the DPRK ministry remarked that the problem of unification must be addressed by the two Koreas alone, without foreign interference. However, "the question of withdrawing the U.S. troops from South Korea and replacing the Korean armistice agreement with a peace agreement is one to be solved between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and

[242] "Telegram 1794 from Washington to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Korea: North/South Talks," 5 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 639.

the United States, the actual parties to the armistice agreement." Washington and Seoul were trying to mix the two questions.[243] The same day, DPRK Permanent Observers at the United Nations, Han Si Hae, discussed his government's rejection with Perez de Cuellar, Under-Secretary General for Special Political Affairs, and gave a press conference to the same effect.

Pulling away the veil on previous attempts to curry rhetorical favor with the Carter Administration, Han said that Carter's recent visit to Seoul "was that of a hypocrite in favour of war." He continued: "It was quite clear from all of this that the pledge by Mr. Carter to bring home American troops from South Korea and also his pledges with regard to human rights in South Korea were shown to be a hoax. It was clear that Mr. Carter advocates division and war, not reunification." Once again, Han denounced the tripartite proposal as mixing two different questions that could not be mixed. "With regard to reunification, only North and South Korea can participate," whereas with "regard to troop withdrawals only North Korea and the United States can participate, since South Korea is not a signatory of the Armistice Agreement." In an attempt to present a reasonable distinction, Han added that, "South Korea could participate in these later talks only when matters directly concerning them arose."[244] For its part the ROK government noted it was "deeply regretful" that Pyongyang responded negatively, with its own Permanent Representative at the United Nations more heatedly remarking to Perez de Cuellar: "whereas North Korea speaks of two separate sets of issues, South Korea regards the two sets of issues as inextricably intertwined. South Korea regarded the North Korean statement as a rejection of the joint Republic of Korea-American proposal. Also, the ROK regarded an observer role for South

[243] "N Korea Rejects Joint Talks With U.S. and S. Korea," *Los Angeles Times*. July 11, 1979; see also: Don Oberdorfer, "North Korea Rebuffs Carter's Bid to Open 3-Country Negotiations," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1979.
[244] "Note for the File, 10 July 1979," *The Carter Chill*, 642-644.

Korea during separate DPRK-American talks as completely unacceptable."[245] In short, the exploratory work had been done and the tripartite proposal was dead on arrival. All that remained was for the bureaucracy in Washington to complete its well-laid plan.

For the mid- and working-level officials at State, Defense and the NSC who diligently drew up and drafted PRM-45 the central focus was clear all along. Carter was to return from his trip to Seoul and the region, hold final consultations with senior lawmakers on Capitol Hill, and announce he would abjure from further withdrawals, with the condition of another review sometime in 1981. The idea was simple: the one man needing final convincing would, by that point, not only be convinced of the need to turn back (which, however begrudgingly, he was), but also to have encased the president within a process which brokered very little if any wiggle room. The stage had been set, and they helped set it. What is more, immediately upon his return Carter's focus was overwhelmed by other issues. Consequently, the process turned even more to their advantage.

As noted, Carter went direct from Seoul to the presidential retreat at Camp David, where he spent the next 11 days conferring with an assortment of political, business, labor and religious leaders as well as educators and ordinary Americans on the burgeoning energy crisis and inflation, the nature of the federal government, and social issues in general. Carter emerged from the retreat to give his famous "crisis of confidence" speech on July 15 (later dubbed and mocked by Reagan and others as the "malaise" speech) in which he took a critical view of the federal government as bloated and inefficient and politics as generally corrupt; the consequence of which was "a loss of unity of purpose for our nation." Contrary to popular belief, his speech was initially quite well-received and led to a notable 11 percent uptick in his poll numbers. However, within two days, Carter himself subverted any political gain by demanding the resignations of much of his cabinet,

[245] "Letter from J. Perez de Cuellar to the Secretary-General, 16 July 1979," in Ibid, 650-652.

"signifying a government meltdown." Carter's numbers quickly sank again as confusion and disarray took over. The general sentiment of a White House adrift only worsened. In this context, with Carter's attention elsewhere, the final bureaucratic process on Korea "was abbreviated." Has Hayes correctly observed: "The wily bureaucrats were not upset to find themselves consulting Congress on Carter's behalf and with his authority without being encumbered by the President himself."[246] The results came swiftly and as expected.

While still at Camp David consulting with a wide swath of interlocutors and hoping to craft a message that might help to revitalize his presidency, Carter received a decision memo from Brzezinski. It represented some of the final internal discussion on the withdrawal policy. In the memo, Brzezinski displayed the same inclination he had all along, namely, to protect Carter and his policy until a final decision simply had to be made. At the same time, Brzezinski's message also demonstrated the degree to which he was conveying a message to the president that had been funneled through and thoroughly vetted by a bureaucracy, which had guided the process along.

"The time has come," Brzezinski wrote, "for a decision on U.S. ground force withdrawals from the ROK." He continued: "The policy review process is complete. You have consulted with President Park and Prime Minister Ohira. Park has begun to respond to the requirements you set during your visit. He has decided to release 180 prisoners detained under Emergency Measure 9 by the end of the year. He has agreed to raise his defense budget above 6 percent of GNP in FY-80…despite acute inflationary pressures. He has accommodated us on the trilateral diplomatic initiatives." More immediately, he noted, Rep. Stratton had continued his pressure campaign and requested that Generals Jones, Vessey and Meyer testify July 17 before the House Armed Service Committee on the issue. Brzezinski implored that: "We will need a decision this weekend and an

[246] Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg*, 161.

announcement if we want to keep out of Congressional hands the initiative to control the issue." He listed four options for Carter, which were elaborated in the PRM and had been somewhat refined since the visit to Seoul.[247]

Option 1 was to continue with the current schedule, but review the issue in 1981, effectively marking no change whatsoever in the withdrawal policy. Option 2, Brzezinski wrote, involved removing two more combat battalions (completing the withdrawal of the first brigade), one I-Hawk battalion and some support personnel (a total of 4300) by end of the 1980, and to announce that the removal of the remaining two combat brigades would be reviewed in 1981. Option 3 was to leave all further combat withdrawals in abeyance and only remove the I-Hawk battalion and roughly 1500 support personnel by end of 1980. In this case, the resumption of further withdrawals would be reviewed in 1981 and would depend particularly upon restoration of the North-South military balance as well as evidence of tangible progress toward a reduction of tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Finally, Option 4 was to suspend all withdrawals with the exception of one I-Hawk battalion (800 men) in 1980 and to review the issue in early 1981.[248]

Brzezinski then ran through the pros and cons of each option before giving his final recommendation. Option 4, which the JCS favored, was the most conservative militarily, represented "the most clear-cut response to the increased DPRK order of battle reassessment," would invoke the most enthusiastic response from Tokyo and Seoul, and "would win wide acclaim from those Senators – Nunn, Glenn, Baker, etc. – who have asserted the strongest interest in the Korean issue and who will have a critical voice in the SALT ratification debate." However, it would also "look most like a reversal of your earlier decision," might relieve pressure on President

[247] "Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawals from the Republic of Korea (S)," 12 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 647-649.
[248] Ibid.

Park to increase defense efforts, and would evoke the strongest reaction from Pyongyang. Option 2 offered a reaffirmation of the general principles of the policy, "but slows implementation." Additionally, it would sustain Pyongyang's interest in averting provocation, and keep some pressure on Park to increase defense efforts. Militarily, the "result of withdrawing two more combat battalions would not amount to much, but it could rekindle doubts in Asia regarding US judgment (credibility), invite possible confrontation with key Senators (whose support is essential to SALT), and incur relocation and re-equipment costs, that should be deferred for both economic and political reasons." Considering the recent flow of events and Carter's difficulties with Congress, this was not an attractive option.[249]

Option 3, noted Brzezinski, would also reaffirm the general principle of the withdrawal policy without further removal of combat units (only the I-Hawk battalion and support personnel). It, too, Brzezinski wrote, would encourage Park to enhance defense efforts and allow completion of the first phase by the end of Carter's first term. The last point was simply not true. The first phase had envisioned removal of one of three full combat brigades. Option 3 would not have permitted withdrawal of the final two battalions of the first brigade. Brzezinski was either mistaken or hoped to slightly dissimulate just how clear a reversal this third option was in practice. Either way, Option 3, by linking the resumption of withdrawals to Pyongyang's willingness to negotiate and to reduced tensions would help put the policy in a larger diplomatic context, strengthen Carter's hand in promoting resumption of the North-South dialogue, and explain the policy persuasively to Congress and American public.[250]

Both Secretary Vance and Brown supported Option 3. Up to that point, Brzezinski wrote, he had supported Option 1. However, in light of the discussions in Seoul and the need for support

[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.

for SALT from Sens. Nunn and Glenn, he now felt that Options 2 or 3 were preferable. Option 3 would go "furthest among those in the Senate," while Option 2 "would look somewhat less like a reversal of your earlier policy." Whichever option Carter chose, it would be important to "touch base with key Congress people before decision is announced, which Vance or Brown could do." Carter, deeply immersed in other matters and facing some of greater pressure of his presidency, checked Option 3 as well as the recommendation to have Vance of Brown consult with Congress. He was washing his hands of a failed policy.[251]

During the next week, Nicholas Platt, Brzezinski's chief Asia hand on the NSC, triangulated with his colleague Holbrooke and Armacost in order to secure their final input as well as that of their superiors at State and Defense, respectively, on the final decision. On July 19, Platt sent Brzezinski a draft statement on the Korea Troop Withdrawal Policy for final approval. Platt wrote: "It is virtually the same text as that supplied by Harold Brown, with a few minor changes by State. The process of Congressional consultations is in train and will be completed by the end of the day. The Korean and Japanese Governments are being notified of the substance of the President's decision and out intention to release it sometime July 20." A hand-written note on the cover page suggested Brzezinski "show to the P tomorrow." It is unclear if Carter read the draft text, but he was certainly aware of the content in the statement. Brzezinski approved the release of the statement, and the next day delivered it himself under Carter's name.[252] Rather than a major speech on Asia, as had been discussed at the final PRC meeting, Brzezinski read the statement to a group of reporters assembled in the White House Briefing Room.

[251] Ibid.
[252] "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Nick Platt, "Announcement on Korean Troop Withdrawal Policy (C)," 19 July 1979," in *The Carter Chill*, 653-656.

The previous February, Brzezinski said, it had been announced the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from Korea would be held in abeyance pending the completion of the reassessment of North Korea's military strength and the implications of recent political developments in the region. The reassessment was complete, and the issues involved had been discussed with key allies in Asia, with principal defense and foreign policy advisers, and with Congressional leaders. Thus, Brzezinski announced: "Circumstances require these further adjustments in the troop withdrawal plan" including: 1) "Withdrawals of combat elements of the 2d Division will remain in abeyance. The structure and function of the Combined Forces Command will continue as established last year"; 2) "Between now and the end of 1980 some reductions of personnel in U.S. support units will continue. This will include one I-Hawk air defense battalion whose transfer to the ROK had been planned since 1976"; and 3) "The timing and pace of withdrawals beyond these will be reexamined in 1981." In that review the United States will pay special attention to the restoration of a satisfactory North-South military balance, and evidence of tangible progress toward a reduction of tensions on the peninsula." The decision was shaped by several considerations.[253]

First, the intelligence reassessment confirmed a stronger North Korea than previously thought. While the inherent economic strength of the ROK and U.S. support would help redress the North-South balance: "Holding further withdrawals of U.S. ground combat units in abeyance will help reinforce deterrence, avoid conveying misleading signals to the North, and provide additional time for the ROK to put its ground defenses in order." President Park recognized the need to augment ROK self-defense efforts and pledged to expand spending to do so. Second: "It

[253] Jimmy Carter, "United States Troop Withdrawals From the Republic of Korea Statement by the President, July 20, 1979," The American Presidency Project: Documents: Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States, 1977-1981, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32622.

is the judgment of the United States that further reductions of our combat elements in Korea should await credible indications that a satisfactory military balance has been restored and a reduction in tension is underway." North Korea's firm rejection of the recent U.S.-ROK tripartite proposal, though well-known, was left unmentioned.[254]

Third, in recent months the United States had normalized relations with China, deepened defense cooperation with Japan, and concurrently witnessed the steady growth of Soviet military power in East Asia and eruption of renewed conflict and uncertainty in Southeast Asia. "Under these circumstances," Brzezinski read, "it is believed that these adjustments in our Korean withdrawal plan—together with the recent stabilization of our base agreement with the Philippines, initiation of defense planning discussions with Japan, and increased support for the security of ASEAN countries—will serve wider U.S. strategic security interests by reassuring our principal allies of our steadiness and our resolve." Brzezinski may have held out on a final decision on the Korea withdrawal, but he was a firm believer in the need to solidify larger U.S. interests.[255] As shown, among Carter's advisors, he led that charge.[256]

In closing, Brzezinski noted, that over time Washington would continue to adjust the features of the U.S. contribution to South Korea's security. At present, though, "these modifications in our withdrawal plans will best assure the maintenance of our security commitment, preserve an adequate deterrent, nurture the resumption of a serious North-South dialogue, and stabilize a favorable U.S. strategic position in East Asia."[257] Nonetheless, the language of abeyance and Brzezinski's several qualifications notwithstanding, most informed

[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.

observers understood that the announcement spelled the end of what many had long perceived to be a precipitous, even impetuous withdrawal policy.

The day following the announcement, the *Washington Post's* Don Oberdorfer tallied the numbers. In total, only 3,670 troops were withdrawn out of the original plan, with roughly 1,000-1,500 more to be withdrawn, consisting of non-combat support personnel and the 800 members of a Hawk missile defense battalion. The latter were part of an earlier plan set in motion under President Ford. The withdrawals had been offset by the addition of 12 U.S. Air Force F4 fighter bombers with 900 men. The result? 30,5000 Army ground troops and 8,100 Air Force personnel and a small number of Marines and Navy men remained in the ROK. The one infantry battalion that was removed was brought home and stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas.[258]

Despite the suspension of further withdrawals, increased U.S.-ROK combined military exercises, military sales, and the institutionalization of the newly formed CFC would continue apace, all of which were pursued, in part, as part of the troop withdrawal plan. Put simply, roughly the same number of U.S. forces remained in South Korea on July 20, 1979 as when Carter entered office. Washington was now arguably more committed to South Korean security, and the relationship had entered a new phase of institutional deepening and maturation.

[258] Don Oberdorfer, "U.S. Troop Pullout In Korea Dropped," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 1979.

Conclusion:

Years after the fact, Francis T. Underhill remembered his first impression upon arriving in Seoul in 1971 to serve as the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) at the U.S. embassy, first under Ambassador Habib and then Ambassador Sneider. "The Koreans were extremely concerned about keeping the relationship with the United States. The thing that struck me on arrival was the degree to which Korean policy resembled a fly in amber. Nothing had changed very much since the armistice in 1953. Our military wanted to stay. The Koreans wanted us to stay. The Japanese would just as soon have us stay. Our relationship hadn't really changed for 20 years," he said.[1] These same factors, which had led to the fly-in-amber-like quality of the U.S. presence and policy, bedeviled Nixon's effort to reduce U.S. forces and would constrain and ultimately undermine Carter's own. The U.S. presence, never meant to be permanent, proved highly resistant to change. When attempted, change, in particular fundamental change, invariably ran up against deeply embedded barriers.

The late Don Oberdorfer, longtime Asia-Pacific diplomatic correspondent for the *Washington Post*, was a keen observer of these events. His book, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, remains one of the most accessible accounts of U.S.-Korea relations in general and Carter's withdrawal program in particular. He wrote:

> In his haste and lack of finesse, an inexperienced president had transformed a general impulse to reduce U.S. military forces in South Korea into a highly controversial policy with which he was personally, and negatively, identified. Many of the American diplomatic and military officials dealing with the issue were not opposed to substantial reductions if pursued in a well-planned fashion, but they were horrified by the preemptory and damaging way the issue was pursued by the Carter White House. By refusing to heed or even hear the objections until he finally

[1] Interview with Francis T. Underhill, Staff Member, Deputy Chief of Mission, Seoul (1971-1974), in: "Korea: Country Reader," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, accessed March 18, 2017, http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/, 478.

> was backed into a corner, Carter undermined his own position. Even a determined president proved unable to decuple the United States from the high-stakes military standoff on the Korean peninsula.[2]

Oberdorfer highlights several salient elements of the Carter withdrawal policy: the existing receptiveness to some form of withdrawal, the seemingly rushed manner by which Carter attempted to implement the policy, and the widespread opposition his approach evoked. Oberdorfer's account, like others, focuses mostly on the fact that Carter's policy was opposed for how it was attempted rather than that it was even attempted at all.

Although this dissertation builds upon these accounts, it proffers an alternative view of Carter's policy and his failure to implement it. It argues that Carter's implementation style did not so much cause as exacerbate already strong opposition to the withdrawal policy. The opposition was borne of deep continuities in the overall structure of the U.S. presence and relationship with Korea. However, arguments based on continuity run into the need to explain what sustains continuity in the face of tremendous change.[3] Indeed, not only was the U.S. presence never meant to be permanent but tremendous changes are what led various administrations to attempt to alter it: changes in the international system, away from early Cold War certainties toward a more complex post-Détente, post-Vietnam and post-colonial international environment; the emergence of new demands on U.S. foreign policy borne of these changes, in a context of dwindling U.S. resources and increasing domestic constraints; and South Korea's own remarkable economic growth and increased ability and desire to take on a greater share of its own defense. What sustained continuity, or, more aptly, prevented Carter from effectuating his withdrawal policy, was the operation of the aforementioned basic patterns in the U.S. presence and U.S.-ROK relationship.

[2] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 108.
[3] Erik Mobrand, *Top-Down Democracy in South Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 11.

Historicizing these patterns is crucial to explaining such continuity. It is also is consistent with the argument for path dependence that underpins this project. As examined in the introduction, the basic patterns were so firmly rooted in the historical foundations of the relationship, namely, the critical juncture (and confluence) of the Korean War and the strategic and ideological imperatives of U.S. hegemony in the early Cold War, that despite remarkable changes in Korea and the external environment they maintained their salience over time. They were not only reconstituted alongside the evolution of the relationship, but also strengthened and reapplied in shifting strategic contexts.

Oberdorfer and others' argument that troop withdrawal was possible and palatable if done in a more deliberate fashion is not without merit. As the above account demonstrates, Carter's idea was hardly novel. Successive U.S. administrations had implemented force reductions and continued to plan for more before Carter even hit the scene. When Carter campaigned on the idea, there was a fair amount of support or at least tentative acquiescence to the idea. Although opposition coalesced and eventually became insurmountable, initially there was ambivalence due to the fact that withdrawal was, as always, the ultimate goal. Nevertheless, as it happened, once it was actually pursued (Carter's own impetuous methods notwithstanding), many of the participants involved in the process ran up against the basic patterns and, in turn, employed their logics in their arguments against the policy.

Thomas Stern, the DCM in the U.S. Embassy from 1976 to 1979, and John T. Bennett, the Economic Counselor there in 1976, recounted the dynamic above during a joint interview years later. They witnessed and indeed were part of the movement from a certain openness to the withdrawal towards greater opposition. In the embassy, much like in the State Department, there was a degree of receptivity to withdrawal, if a fair amount of uncertainty regarding how Carter

intended to move forward. For many, old justifications for the force presence appeared outdated or anachronistic. Stern remembered that the "proposition to withdraw troops was one that was worthy of exploration and discussion," and that much of the Pentagon and local command's opposition was due to "practical realities" such as the costs of withdrawal and the threat they might possibly lose the division if they could not find it a home. Bennett's thinking, similar to Holbrooke's in the *New York Times Magazine* piece he wrote before joining Carter's campaign, "was that obviously…the domino theory was not a very persuasive argument." Nevertheless, once pushed toward actual implementation, things got sticky.[4]

Stern laid out the broader thinking underpinning the whole structure, one which had been established during the earlier critical juncture but that held its own innate force shorn of the initial historical conditions surrounding its creation. He stated:

> The strategic theory is that South Korea is pivotal to the defense of Japan, which is pivotal to the defense of the United States. It is a house of cards; if one falls, all of them fall. We have heard the same thesis for other geographic areas. It was not always clear to me that this is a good illustration or a sound theory, but that is what it has always been, and continues up to today to be the American perception of the Northeast Asia triangle. South Korea is the pivotal aspect to that because the Japanese only have a very limited military capacity, particularly on the ground, and are therefore not able to defend themselves with what they have. Everybody has to rely on the South Koreans.

He might have reframed the final point as: everyone relied on the South Koreans, who, in turn, relied on the United States. It was, Bennett reflected, following Stern's point, less about the early Cold War domino theory and communist spillover (which had outlived its usefulness), and more about Northeast Asia itself as a strategic "chess board," due to its immutable geography and close confluence of multiple great powers.[5]

[4] Interview with Bennett and Stern, in: "Korea: Country Reader," 714-715.
[5] Ibid, 715.

The peninsula and U.S. forces therein helped maintain "a very strong position on the chess board," and "that is what we would have lost had we begun changing the power relationships in the area." It was not that the removal of forces would immediately lead to war (although both conceded this could not be discounted) but that, like World War I, "one thing led to another, and to another, and to another" and pretty soon instability leads to war. Listening to Ambassador Sneider and others at the embassy, Bennett absorbed this message. It "was part also of the evolution or emergence of a kind of consensus" at that time.[6]

As explored in the foregoing chapters, this was a view some officials held strongly and explicitly from the very outset of Carter's term and one which other officials, such as Holbrooke, quickly adopted once they grappled with the realities of implementing the withdrawal. Such a consensus strengthened over time and, in conjunction with newly emergent factors such as the new intelligence estimates on North Korea and hardening of Carter's foreign policy in general, scuttled Carter's plans and led to a more unambiguous invocation and reaffirmation of the basic patterns in the relationship.

To be sure, the central claim of this project is that these patterns made the U.S.-ROK relationship, in particular the longstanding U.S. military force presence, highly resistant to change, not, however, that no change occurred at all. In fact, Carter's withdrawal policy, by challenging its underpinnings in a more fundamental and direct fashion than previous administrations had, forced a certain evolution in the relationship, or, more accurately, quickened an evolution already underway. Simply put, his policy was both a catalyst to as well as a reflection of a shifting relationship. Indeed, by providing a fine-grained tracing of the process this project is able to

[6] Ibid.

identify such changes and cull from them certain contingent yet patterned outcomes or logics, which maintain distinct relevance across both time and shifting strategic contexts.

First, because the U.S.-ROK relationship is derivative of broader interests, changes in the international or regional environment cause a shift in U.S. policymakers' perception of and policy toward its ROK ally. However, for those same officials, any changes at the local level cannot be too significant or permitted to occur too quickly that they negatively refract outward, destabilizing ultimately more important interests.

Second, there is also a distinct concern about how withdrawal could reverberate on the peninsula. This has led to an inherently contradictory process at the bilateral level. When U.S. officials change their policy toward the ROK, often involving the reduction of U.S. forces and their southern realignment, it raises concern regarding the credibility of the U.S. commitment. Concomitant to these shifts is U.S. pressure on the ROK to take on greater responsibility in terms of operational decision-making, defense missions, and military capabilities. Therefore, these local changes provide both the incentive and capability for South Korea to adopt more independent policies.

Such policies may run from a more aggressive orientation and reaction toward North Korean provocations or to development of the ROK's own nuclear deterrent. However, this runs counter to the U.S. desire to maintain a degree of control, and requires a delicate balance. It also threatens to send an unclear signal to Pyongyang, potentially leading to aggressive or provocative probing on North Korea's part. Importantly, at no point has the U.S. seriously considered abrogating the alliance wholesale, so it remains treaty-bound to a situation over which it maintains less relative influence.

Third, this same process of local change and restructuring has been channeled through the deepening of the alliance as a security institution. Such deepening is manifest in the development of a more formalized institutional structure, more specialized division of labor between the allies, and more interoperable and sophisticated defense cooperation. Somewhat contradictorily, institutional deepening of the alliance, though running alongside burden transfer, often brings an even tighter linkage between the United States and ROK. Fourth, shifts in U.S. policy toward the ROK reverberate internally, sparking or exacerbating domestic contestation. Although direct U.S. occupation ended in 1948, the U.S. has maintained an outsized influence in the South Korean body politic.

During the final 18 months of Carter's term, the changes resulting from his abortive withdrawal policy interacted with the basic patterns in the relationship in complex and lasting ways. In a context of growing economic difficulties, domestic political unrest, and state crackdown, Park Chung Hee was assassinated by Kim Chae Kyu, the head of the KCIA. After his demise, U.S. officials pursued one central objective above all else: stability. Accordingly, in the days following Park's death, the United States sent a series of signals to prevent against any opportunistic provocations on the part of Pyongyang. It deployed an aircraft carrier to the Korean coast, increased airborne surveillance of the North, and sent messages to Pyongyang not to test the situation. For U.S. policymakers, events within the ROK could not be allowed to spark volatility between North and South Korea or larger regional instability.[7]

U.S. officials were also aware that they had to approach Seoul with new realities in mind. "We should keep in mind that the Korea of 1979 is not the Korea of the early '60s when we were able to bully the early Park regime into constitutional reforms," Ambassador Gleysteen wrote in

[7] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 111.

one of his first messages after the assassination.[8] In the bigger picture, as Holbrooke wrote in a secret, not-for-distribution telegram to Ambassador Gleysteen, attitudes in Washington were: "dominated by the Iranian crisis, and, needless to say, nobody wants another Iran"; meaning, "American action which would in any way appear to unravel a situation and lead to chaos or instability in a key American ally." Dissident elements had to understand that while the Washington favored lifting of martial law in principle, "we do not favor challenges to martial law at this delicate time." Moreover, dissidents "should not automatically count on the same degree of America support now that they might have had a few months ago." Put simply, the priority was the maintenance of law and order, led by the existing power elite, and the restraint of opposition politicians and political dissidents who might destabilize the situation.[9] In the minds of U.S. officials, multiple concerns were interwoven, from broader international and regional instabilities, to peninsular deterrence and U.S. control, to domestic order.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December merely reinforced a process well underway in Korea. On December 12, Generals Chun Do Hwan and Roh Tae Woo along with their fellow members of the *Hanahoe* military clique began their rolling coup, gradually and systematically taking control of the institutions and technology of state power. Holbrooke had identified a coup and the preservation of the *Yushin* system as one of several potential "evils" that might follow Park's assassination, in part because of the threat a coup posed to military command unity and preparedness. Nevertheless, of the possible evils they faced, Holbrooke and others saw "chaos," by which they meant an overly zealous push by dissident elements for rapid political

[8] As quoted in Ibid, 110.
[9] "NODIS Holbrooke – "Nobody wants another Iran" – Dec. 3 1979," Money Doesn't Talk, It Swears: Kwangju Declassified/PDFs of key documents, accessed, August, 10, 2016, http://timshorrock.com/wp-content/uploads/NODIS-Holbrooke-Nobody-wants-another-Iran-Dec.-3-1979.pdf.

reform, as the worst one. It might lead to all the others.[10] Carter himself directly warned the acting ROK president in a latter about the need to preserve American OPCON and the "serious implications" of breaching it.[11] Nevertheless, the American position was clear, it was "not trying to reverse the events" of December 12.[12]

Stability, even if ensured by a new iteration of authoritarian rule and U.S. acquiescence thereto, was acceptable. It was a default position, one which fit neatly within the grooves laid down during the earlier critical founding juncture of the relationship. The consequences, though, were tragic and lasting. The details of the Kwangju Uprising and Massacre are not covered here. They may be found elsewhere.[13] However, the events in Kwangju and U.S. complicity therein became the lodestar of the democracy movement and, as Kim, Ham, and Yun had warned in their 1978 letter to Carter, deeply affected the Korean people's trust regarding the presence and role of U.S. forces. South Koreans, for reasons real and perceived, saw their democratic aspirations subordinated to the imperatives of an authoritarian dictatorship and U.S. geostrategic stability, with OPCON as the connecting thread.

The key point, which other scholars have made, is that because of its hegemonic presence within the South Korean body politic, and its inherently contradictory goals, any act by Washington, either action or inaction, would by definition have been an act of intervention. Yet, taking the events as they occurred, the result was that the newly created military command architecture, which represented a more equitable and less hierarchical U.S.-ROK relationship and

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[10] "State FOIA#1 – November 1979 – Secretary of State Vance meets South Korean Foreign Minister after the Park Assassination," Money Doesn't Talk, It Swears: Kwangju Declassified/PDFs of key documents, accessed August, 10, 2016, http://timshorrock.com/wp-content/uploads/korea-foia-_1-nov-1979.pdf

[11] "CHEROKEE FILES Carter letter January 1980," Money Doesn't Talk, It Swears: Kwangju Declassified/PDFs of key documents, accessed August 10, 2016, http://timshorrock.com/wp-content/uploads/CHEROKEE-FILES-Carter-letter-January-1980.pdf

[12] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 122.

[13] Shin, "Introduction," in *Contentious Kwangju*, xiv-xvii; see also: Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 2007).

a more assertive South Korea within it, also became a powerful symbol for newly emergent anti-American sentiments among the Korean people; one which simultaneously represented a still subordinate relationship vis-à-vis Washington as well as a target for an increasingly assertive Korean nationalism.[14]

If Carter (unlike some of his advisors and subordinates) proved somewhat tentative in his approach toward Chun, his successor Ronald Reagan possessed no such reservations.[15] Driven by the Kirkpatrick Doctrine and its injunction to jettison human rights criticisms and instead embrace rightwing, anticommunist and often authoritarian U.S. allies, Reagan quickly welcomed Chun as the first foreign leader to visit the White House during his term of office. Despite Reagan officials' full awareness that Chun, like his predecessor, merely preserved democratic forms while maintaining authoritarian rule, Reagan's ready embrace of Chun was expressly intended to draw a distinction between himself and Carter. Richard Allen, Reagan's NSA, wrote in a preparatory memo:

> In broader terms, your meeting with Chun sends a powerful message to all of Asia. Whereas President Carter's first message to Asia was his intention to reduce troop strength in Korea, your first signal to the region is that you are cognizant of the vital interests of the Free World in Asia, and that consistent American strength and support are necessary if we are to make the Pacific Basin a stable and secure area where growing prosperity can be enjoyed by all.

Furthermore, Allen noted, "Chun's ability to meet with you validates and legitimizes his leadership in Korea as no other single even could."[16] In short, Reagan and his advisors quickly reaffirmed

[14] Lee, *The Making of the* Minjung, 119-122.
[15] Reagan's thinking on statecraft was formed over a decade before, specifically during his earlier attempt at the presidency in 1968. At that time, he came to view the U.S. commitment to Korea as indelibly intertwined with its commitment to other region allies such as Taiwan and Vietnam, not to mention broader questions of American prestige, and, as recent scholarship shows, was strongly influenced in his thinking by former President Dwight Eisenhower. Reagan's thinking was essentially a reconstitution of early Cold War certainties in a new, late Cold War era. For the earlier formation of Reagan's views, See: Gene Kopelson, *Reagan's 1968 Dress Rehearsal: Ike, RKF, and Reagan's Emergence as a World Statesman* (Los Angeles: Figuero Press, 2016).
[16] "Document 1: Memorandum, Richard Allen to President Reagan, January 29, 1981, Subject: President Chun of Korea, with attached cover memorandum, Donald Gregg to Allen, same date [MDR Regan Library]," The National

support for basic patterns in the relationship, if in a new context. They moved to enhance Chun's domestic legitimacy; solidify relative U.S. control over South Korea's external actions; and strengthen U.S., South Korean, and Japanese war-fighting capabilities as part of the administration's intensified anti-Soviet policy. Administration officials believed hierarchical relations between the allies, and coercive relations within South Korea served U.S. strategic and political economy imperatives best. As a result, U.S. officials in both Washington and Seoul placed little substantive emphasis on the need for democratic reform or human rights in South Korea.

However, much like Carter and previous administrations before, Reagan also faced transformative changes that altered U.S. Korea policy. Nevertheless, rather than a fundamental shift in the U.S. approach to Korea, it signified a shifting strategy aimed at meeting stable, abiding U.S. imperatives. The evolution of the Reagan administration's policy was driven by changes in South Korea and the larger international context. Inside South Korea, U.S. officials responded to a broader, well organized, and increasingly anti-American political opposition as well as shifting calculations among regime elites. Internationally, Reagan officials witnessed the successive reform and liberalization of several rightwing dictatorships in Latin America and, most importantly, the Philippines. These events influenced thinking within the administration and U.S. policymaking circles regarding the consonance between democracy and longstanding security and political economy imperatives. The shift in policy was largely an accommodation to events that were out of U.S. control, due to which the "elective affinity" between authoritarianism and U.S.

Security Archive: Seeing human rights in the "proper manner": The Reagan-Chun Summit of February 1981, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB306/doc01.pdf.

hegemony unraveled.[17] Instead, internal dynamics indicated that the maintenance of security and movement toward democratic rule were beginning to run along parallel tracks.[18]

In addition, U.S. officials believed that the relaxation of Cold War tensions in the second half of the 1980s gave Washington an opportunity to redirect its focus from security issues to trade and economics. South Korea's remarkable economic growth and emergent transnational elites inclined toward greater political and economic liberalization added new layers to its longstanding strategic importance. To be sure, security remained at the core of U.S.-South Korean relations. Yet by the late 1980s, the means to achieve it and context within which to do so had evolved: where previously authoritarian politics and coercive internal rule were seen to best serve U.S. security and political economic hegemony, democracy and more consensual politics now achieved the same end.[19]

With the sudden and transformative end of the Cold War, once again the impetus arose to alter U.S. Korea policy and the U.S. military presence. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, plans emerged concerning the restructuring and drawdown of Cold War era forward deployments. These plans included the Nunn-Warner Amendment, the East Asia Strategic Initiative (EASI), and the Base Force and Bottom up Review under the Bush and Clinton Administrations, respectively. They had direct implications for U.S. forces in Korea. For example, the Nunn-Warner Amendment, among other changes, called for a reduction in the USFK. Following this, the EASI established a more concrete ten-year plan during which U.S. forces in

[17] William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.
[18] Clint Work, "Stable Imperatives, Shifting Strategies: Reagan and Democracy Promotion in South Korea," in *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War and the Transition to Democracy Promotion*, ed. W.M. Schmidt and Robert Pee (Palgrave, 2019), 231-251.
[19] Ibid.

East Asia would be reduced and modernized over three, successive phases.[20] As part of the process of local change, the ROK took back peacetime OPCON, meaning the day-to-day operational control of its military. Seoul notably increased defense expenditures and also began to handle more of its own military operations, specifically small-scale actions including a North Korea submarine infiltration in the East Sea in 1996 and two naval conflicts off Yeonpyeong-do Island in 1999 and 2002. However, if major hostilities broke out, wartime OPCON remained under the American commander.[21] Nevertheless, following the initial phase of the above EASI, these plans were put on hold. While the first North Korean nuclear crises provided one reason, the delay was justified by reference to other longstanding rationales regarding stability, economic growth, and the requisite need for preeminent U.S. power to assure them both. Nevertheless, the 1994 United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, otherwise known as the Nye Report, represented the shift back to the past.

Nye postulated that for "the security and prosperity of today to be maintained for the next 20 years, the United States must remain engaged in Asia," including the continued stationing of 100,000 troops and strengthening of bilateral alliances, and that the U.S. "interests in the region are mutually reinforcing: security and growth make it more likely that human rights will be honored and democracy will emerge." Most tellingly, Nye went so far as to equate U.S. military power with the oxygen the East Asia region needed to breathe. He wrote: "Security is like oxygen…You do not tend to notice it until you begin to lose it. The American security presence has helped provide this 'oxygen' for East Asian development." In essence, the strategy signaled

[20] Clint Work, "Changing Context, Persistent Frames: The United States and The Absence of Multilateral Institutions in Post-Cold War East Asia," *Asian International Studies Review,* 17, no.2 (June 2016): 88.
[21] Jae-Ik Song, "A Study on Variables of the ROK-US Alliance and the Korean Forces Operational Control Authority: Focused on the Linkage of International and Domestic Politics," *Pacific Science Review* 15, no.2 (2013): 45.

that despite the enormous changes that had occurred in the region during and after the Cold War, Washington would continue to operate under familiar assumptions.[22]

In the words of Chalmers Johnson, the Pentagon's "Ossified Strategy," had "declared that nothing essential has changed in East Asia and that U.S. policy should be to freeze relations in the Pacific indefinitely."[23] Nevertheless, Johnson may have overstated the case insofar as U.S. strategists did, in fact, begin to alter their thinking as a result of new realities. The aforementioned national security strategies and basing studies indicated that the nature of the security environment was evolving, from one of conventional, state-based threats to one marked by intra-state breakdown, non-state actors, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Consonant with this shift was a movement from the Cold War era "consolidated defense in depth" to an "expeditionary defense in depth," a shift from large, defensively oriented forward deployments, to more regionally focused, responsive, and mobile force deployments.[24]

This reached its apogee, following the September 11th terrorist attacks, in the Bush Administration's 2004 Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR). While state-based threats remained, the administration focused on a diverse set of challenges, including asymmetric threats and the use of WMD by rogue states or non-state actors. According to the GDPR, "the most important characteristic of the security environment was uncertainty and that the United States needed to develop a flexible forward presence that would enable it to project power wherever threats might emerge."[25] This required a combination of preexisting forward deployed troops and military bases, as well as the use of relationships, security cooperation activities, and the ability to quickly move forces forward. Again, this had consequences for Korea. In a context of the ongoing

[22] Chalmers Johnson and E.B. Keehn, "The Pentagon's Ossified Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no.4 (1995):104.
[23] Ibid, 103.
[24] Stacie Pettyjohn, *U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783-2011* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012) 84.
[25] Ibid, 87.

closure and consolidation of USFK bases, the Bush Administration developed plans for force reductions, certain mission transfers to the ROK military, and the more southernly redeployment of USFK personnel. This fit with the USFK base relocation and consolidation plan and was consonant with the notion of greater flexibility for the remaining U.S. forces (i.e. the notion of flexibility, again, was in vogue under Nixon and Carter).

These force reductions and relocation plans overlapped with the second of two consecutive progressive South Korean administrations, led by President Roh Moo Hyun. Roh, arguably the most unorthodox of any ROK president, had served as a lawyer for labor and democracy activists during the Chun Do Hwan dictatorship. In 2002, he campaigned on a populist platform, containing elements of anti-American sentiment prevalent among some of his more leftwing supporters. Nevertheless, his campaign also coincided with massive candlelight protests throughout the country against the U.S. military presence caused by the tragic death of two schoolchildren accidentally crushed by an American military vehicle near to town of Yangju in June 2002. Roh's formative background combined with the political currents of the time and within the larger U.S. strategic shift above, once again created the possibility for real changes in the U.S.-ROK relationship and U.S. force presence.

In particular, President Roh passionately and persistently spoke about the need for Seoul to take back full wartime OPCON from the Americans. In doing so, he employed the discourse of sovereignty and independence prevalent among dissident circles harkening back to the events in Kwangju. Roh stated: "Korea is the sole country that does not have complete…(OPCON) of its own troops. The country is the 11th-largest economic powerhouse and has the sixth-largest military forces but it does not have wartime OPCON. OPCON is the basis of self-reliant national defense. The point is that self-reliant national defense is the essence of sovereignty for any

nation."[26] He framed the return of full OPCON as a means to "overcoming the nation's psychological dependence on the United States."[27] Some in the Roh administration and elements among the South Korean left also perceived U.S. base relocations and the GDPR's talk of strategic flexibility (not to mention the Bush Administration's militaristic Global War on Terror) as opening the possibility for a more aggressive and unilateral U.S. policy toward North Korea (one of the three states on Bush's Axis of Evil), as USFK forces would no longer be situated in near-frontline positions. They also worried about the possible deployment of USFK forces to out-or-area conflicts (i.e. Taiwan) thus entrapping the ROK into a direct U.S.-China confrontation they hoped to avoid.

On the contrary, delaying OPCON transition became a quest for conservative South Korean lawmakers and retired military officials. For them, South Korean sovereignty could not be viewed independent of but rather affirmed within the U.S.-ROK alliance. For conservatives, Roh's mentality and the OPCON policy were seen as prelude to the dissolution of the alliance and withdrawal of U.S. forces. This would create unprecedented realities, for which, they argued, South Korea was unprepared. As a result, the retention of the U.S.-led CFC was essential to maintaining the alliance and, by extension, South Korean security. The domestic political contestation surrounding the OPCON issue revealed the stark degree to which the U.S. presence still deeply infused partisan political divides within South Korea, despite (and likely because of) democratization and democratic consolidation.

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[26] Bruce Klingner, "Backgrounder: The U.S. and South Korea Should Focus on Improving Alliance Capabilities Rather Than the OPCON Transition," The Heritage Foundation, August 7, 2014, https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/the-us-and-south-korea-should-focus-improving-alliance-capabilities-rather, 3.

[27] Terence Roehrig, "Restructuring the U.S. Military Presence in Korea: Implications for Korean Security and the U.S.-ROK Alliance," *KEI: Academic Paper Series*, 2, no.1 (January 2007): 30, http://www.keia.org/publication/restructuring-us-military-presence-korea-implications-korean-security-and-us-rok-allianc.

Generally speaking, South Korean progressives supported more open diplomatic engagement with North Korea and a more autonomous policy toward the United States, whereas conservatives remained deeply skeptical of engagement, maintained a hardline stance toward Pyongyang, and emphasize the overriding importance of unity within the U.S.-ROK alliance as the ultimate protection from a still threatening North Korea. Indeed, during the ten years of progressive rule (1998-2008), these clashing attitudes toward North Korea and the United States took on their greatest political and electoral salience. These issues, coupled with the always important question of regionalism, were the main factors distinguishing political parties.[28]

Nevertheless, such divisions should not be overstated. Under Roh, Seoul deployed roughly 3,500 ROK military personnel to the widely unpopular U.S. war in Iraq and Roh himself eagerly pushed negotiations for completion of the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), both of which were seen as abject betrayals to his leftwing supporters. Indeed, at one point early in his administrations, such groups blocked Roh's entrance to a memorial ceremony in Kwangju, outraged by what they saw as his kowtowing to Washington.[29] Nevertheless, such qualifications prove the larger point. As noted in the introduction, the basic patterns are sticky and official policy and thinking are mediated in decisive ways by them. They were constituted in a specific critical juncture. However, they maintained their salience in path dependent fashion after that initial context and conditions evolved. The U.S.-ROK relationship has always strongly influenced domestic politics within South Korea. It does not determine agency, but it does

[28] Jiyoon Kim, "The Party System in Korea and Identity Politics," in *New Challenges for Maturing Democracies in Korea and Taiwan*, ed. Larry Diamond and Gi-Wook Shin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 71-105.
[29] For a description of the somewhat contentious yet ultimately cooperative U.S.-ROK relations during this period, see: Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 230-261.

constrain it, and it reverberates in complicated ways between and also within the main political blocs within the country.

Despite Roh's push for OPCON transfer and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld apparent desire to move forward with it, neither the U.S. foreign policy establishment nor conservative parties within South Korea were similarly ready. Not only were there abiding concerns about Seoul's actual ability to take on full wartime OPCON, in terms of the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) as well as the command and control capabilities necessary to do so, but the burgeoning North Korean nuclear and missile program and the proverbial rise of China provided plenty of justification not to rush OPCON transfer or reduce forces any further. After an initial reduction from about 36,000 to 28,500, further removals were halted in the mid-2000s. Furthermore, under the successive conservative administrations of the Lee Myung Bak (2008-2012) and Park Geun Hye (2013-2017), OPCON transfer once again was kicked down the road.

In June 2010, following the second North Korean nuclear test in April 2009 and the sinking of the ROK naval corvette *Cheonan* in March 2010, Lee was able to get U.S. President Barack Obama to agree to a delay the original transfer date. The new date was moved from 2012 to December 2015. The Yeonpyeong Island shelling in November later the same year appeared to strengthen the decision. Similar to the historical events described above, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates counseled restraint on the part of the South Koreans in their response to the North Korean shelling. Gates noted: "South Korea's original plans for retaliation were, we thought, disproportionately aggressive, involving both aircraft and artillery…We were worried the exchanges could escalate dangerously." In the days following, Gates, President Barack Obama,

and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made numerous calls to their South Korean counterparts to cool things down.[30] As in the past, the U.S. desire to assert relative control held firm.

After North Korea's long-range missile test in December 2012 and third nuclear test in February 2013, South Korean officials began speaking of the need for another delay. During his visit to Seoul in April 2014, President Obama once again stated the deadline could be reconsidered. In October 2014, the decision was made to indefinitely delay OPCON transfer altogether.[31] Importantly, similar to previous iterations of alliance restructuring, there began a distinct process of institutional deepening. U.S. and ROK officials sought to refine the division of labor between them and created multiple new working groups or committees to deal with changing circumstances, new challenges, and expanded missions.

Nevertheless, aside from domestic and bilateral considerations, the indefinite delay and the pull back from further force removals, was driven above all else by longstanding U.S. imperatives of preponderance amidst a shifting external environment (i.e. China's rise) and a process of emergent threat (i.e. North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities). President Obama's so-called pivot or strategic rebalance to Asia represented the reconstitution of existent patterns and mentalities in a shifting strategic context.

Similar to earlier policy statements, such as the 1994 Nye Report and 2004 GDPR, President Obama's 2011 remarks before the Australian Parliament echoed the language and rationales underpinning the imperatives of U.S. preponderance: first, there was the imperative of free-market, economic expansion and its direct relevance to stability at home; second, security was

[30] Clint Work and Daniel A. Pinkston, "New Realities, Old Fears: Escalation on the Korean Peninsula," *The Diplomat*, January 28, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/new-realities-old-fears-escalation-on-the-korean-peninsula/.
[31] Seok-min Oh, Work, "S. Korea, U.S. delay transfer of wartime troop control," *Yonhap News*, October 24, 2014, https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20141023004751315.

necessary for prosperity and peace, and an enhanced U.S. military presence and use of alliances was necessary to achieve that security; and, third, there was invocation of the special American role as both the representative of and leader for the promotion of universal rights and human dignity.[32] In her 2013 address, "America's Future in Asia," Obama's then NSA Susan Rice reinforced these themes, stating that the U.S. rebalance would lay the foundations for: "enhancing security, expanding prosperity, fostering democratic values, and advancing human dignity."[33] In regard to the ultimate military backstop that upheld the structure, Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy stated it more clearly. U.S. military power "must remain dominant in every domain," U.S. power was "indispensable," and the U.S. had the "opportunity – and obligation – to lead the way in reinforcing, shaping, and where appropriate, creating" the patterns of interaction in the international system.[34]

It is critical to reiterate a point made in the introduction, namely, that the U.S. drive for preponderant power embodied in its global basing system, including its Korean presence, consisted of dual dimensions. This included the aforementioned containment dimension, but also a hegemonic or relations-of-domination dimension. On the one hand, the U.S. was engaged in a contest of power against the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the relations-of-domination element entailed unequal, hierarchical relations of power "among the political communities that pursued or were driven to pursue a specific path of progress within the binary structure of the global order."[35] For Washington., this meant controlling the movement of resources in order to secure

[32] Barack Obama, "Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament," The White House, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament.
[33] Susan Rice, "Remarks As Prepared for Delivery by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice," The White House, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice.
[34] The White House, "Fact Sheet: The 2015 National Security Strategy," February 6, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/06/fact-sheet-2015-national-security-strategy.
[35] Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, 2.

supremacy against any challenge from its own allies as well setting very clear boundaries to their actions.

This relations-of-domination dimension of U.S. preponderance not only propelled the Cold War system, but also outlived its dissolution and that of containment itself. In this vein, the Cold War was "merely a sub-plot" within the larger history of American global domination.[36] Similarly, as Anderson observes: "the exigencies of the struggle against communism, all-consuming as these became, were only one, if protracted, phase within a larger and wider arc of American power-projection, which has outlived them by half as many years again."[37] In other words, the U.S. drive toward global preponderance may have blossomed in the context of a bipolar confrontation, yet it contained its own internal thrust, which has since extended beyond the historical conjuncture of the Cold War.

For the historian and contemporary analyst alike, U.S. military forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula ultimately must be situated within this larger historical and ideological U.S. drive to gain and maintain preponderance. Furthermore, it is within this same structure that the basic patterns of the U.S.-ROK relationship are embedded, and within which, despite the remarkable transformations that have occurred on and around the Korean Peninsula, they remain highly resistant to change.

In closing, then, a question naturally arises. What would be necessary for such basic patterns no longer to obstruct the removal of U.S. forces? The obvious answer is time and the further evolution of the U.S.-ROK relationship, as a result of which the patterns lose their salience or new developments so fundamentally alter the peninsular or regional environment that change

[36] Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xiii.
[37] Anderson, "Imperium," 34.

becomes ineluctable. After all, the relationship and U.S. presence are historical creations. All such creations have a beginning and an end. Nevertheless, this answer is unsatisfying. The passage of time and evolution of the relationship and changes in the external environment spurred Carter's withdrawal policy to begin with, yet were not so significant that he was able to effectuate his policy. What specifically, then, would need to change?

First, the U.S. presence in and commitment to South Korea would need to become explicitly delinked from larger regional imperatives and the broader perception of U.S. credibility, both from the perspective of U.S. policymakers and U.S. allies. Aside from President Trump's cursory and flippant rhetoric, there is no evidence of such delinking at the time of writing. In fact, there is substantial evidence to the contrary.

Second, there would need to be a notable untethering of the U.S. role as the hierarchical guarantor of South Korea's external sovereignty or security. In particular, U.S. forces would have to be seen as no longer necessary to deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and that removal of remaining U.S. forces would no longer be perceived as overly destabilizing to the peninsula's security architecture. In conjunction with this, indeed as a necessary condition of it, Seoul would need to overcome its dependence on U.S. forces for certain capabilities that the ROK government itself sees as essential to its own fundamental national security. Currently, there is some evidence to support such a proposition insofar as the ROK military is presently more capable than ever before, yet by its own admission it depends of the U.S. for certain high-level ISR technologies, first-class weapons systems that add enormous firepower, and ultimately, a nuclear deterrent which it does not itself possess.[38]

[38] Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evoliution of the South Korea-United States Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 153.

Third, and finally, on the domestic level, the U.S.-ROK relationship would need to so decrease in importance that it was no longer a salient factor in domestic politics. Recent research does indicate, particularly in the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections, that attitudes toward North Korea and the United States have faded as definitive issues, being gradually replaced by domestic economic and social concerns, such as job creation, wealth redistribution, and political corruption.[39] Nevertheless, as long as the U.S. force presence is seen as essential for ROK security, it is exceedingly difficult to disentangle the second and third conditions above; except, that is, if there emerges an overwhelming political groundswell among the South Korean public for abrogating the alliance wholesale. This is not impossible, yet, as things currently stand, it is highly unlikely.

When Carter's policy was put in abeyance in July of 1979 it was with the caveat that troop withdrawal from Korea was only being temporarily put on hold. Eventual force removals remained Washington's implicit policy. The policy would be reviewed once the North-South military balance was satisfactorily addressed, a more sustainable inter-Korean and diplomatic settlement was found on the Korean Peninsula, and a more stable regional environment was created. This has remained a sort of background working assumption for nearly the entire lifespan of the U.S.-ROK relationship. It bears mention though, that such conditions often work at distinctly cross purposes.

In practice, achieving a favorable North-South military balance means enhancing South Korean and allied military capabilities to such an extent that Pyongyang's ability to threaten Seoul is effectively nullified. However, the very process of enhancement itself pushes Pyongyang to double-down on its own efforts, merely ratcheting up the level of confrontation and the destructiveness of the weaponry involved. We are at the point now where Pyongyang not only still

[39] Kim, "The Party System in Korea and Identity Politics."

poses a threat to Seoul, but, in theory, has the capacity to threaten the mainland United States with nuclear-deployed ICBMs. Despite the degradation of North Korea's conventional forces, with its asymmetrical chemical, biological and nuclear capabilities it poses a more distinct threat than ever before.

Such heightened confrontation both complicates a diplomatic solution, but also might spur those involved to reinvigorate their efforts to find one. However, it also opens space for a more severe fissure between Seoul and Washington than ever before. The reduction of tensions and a diplomatic settlement has always been a condition for an ultimate U.S. troop withdrawal. U.S. troops could not go until a settlement was reached. However, if the South Korean government and people come to a different conclusion, namely, that the U.S. presence itself is the main barrier to such a settlement, the logic becomes reversed. No settlement will be reached until the Americans go. In the final accounting, and in the face of deeply embedded U.S. strategic and ideological imperatives, such an ultimate act of Korean agency is what may be required for U.S. forces to leave the Korean Peninsula. The outcome of such a decision would be immensely uncertain, but one thing is clear. The Korean people would finally begin to determine their own fate.

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