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CIA/RP /77-10210 M

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11 August 1977

**MEMORANDUM**

**SUBJECT: The Implications of Withdrawing Nuclear Weapons  
From Korea**

1. Pyongyang is concerned by US nuclear weapons and has been most outspoken both in denouncing their presence in South Korea and in acknowledging their destructive potential. In order to gain sympathy and support in the third world, Pyongyang persistently portrays the US nuclear presence as a symbol of big power chauvinism and US disregard for non-Western populations. Even so, North Korea's extensive coverage of US nuclear weapons clearly reflects fear of their possible use, and one of its priority objectives is their complete removal from Korea.

2. Pyongyang's previous experience and geopolitical circumstances suggest that it might view airdropped weapons as a greater threat than ground weapons:

- The penetration of US forces deep into North Korea in late 1950 led to Chinese intervention and Pyongyang's ultimate survival;
- Subsequently, during the Vietnam war, the US conducted an air but not a ground war in North Vietnam, and the PRC did not intervene.

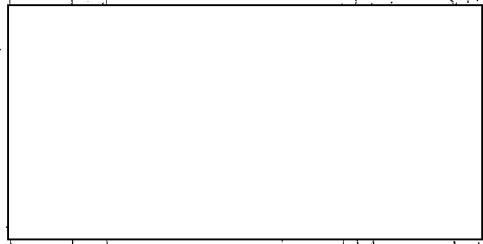
3. Pyongyang may calculate that the US would remain within the latter parameters in a future Korean conflict in order to forestall Chinese intervention. If so, the North probably reasons that ground nuclear weapons would be used against its forces fighting in the South or near the DMZ;

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air delivered weapons, on the other hand, could be used not only in the vicinity of the battlefield but on military and industrial installations throughout the North.

4. Pyongyang will probably view the withdrawal of ground weapons as a logical and perhaps necessary corollary to the withdrawal of US ground forces. However, the withdrawal of all air delivered weapons as well will probably lead the North to question whether the US would reintroduce any nuclear weapons in the event of conflict. Pyongyang is unlikely to arrive at an easy answer:

-- Total withdrawal of the weapons is certainly a step in the right direction from the North's point of view and might lead the US to avoid using them in a future conflict as it did during the Vietnam war;

-- On the other hand, the North fully recognizes that US nuclear weapons will remain in the general area following their withdrawal from Korea, and is also aware of US statements of intent to use them if necessary.

5. Having almost fatally miscalculated the US response in 1950, Pyongyang is likely to weigh the withdrawal of nuclear weapons with some residual caution. On balance, it will probably view the issue of US nuclear intentions as more ambiguous, but will be unable to dismiss the question.

6. Following a nuclear weapons withdrawal, perceptions of Washington's broader resolve will figure importantly in the North's calculations of the possible use of US nuclear weapons as well as of the overall US deterrent. In this respect, US policies toward both Korea and other regions of potential conflict will be important factors.

7. For its part, the South strongly desires the retention of a US nuclear presence in Korea. More clearly than Pyongyang, Seoul will read the total withdrawal of nuclear weapons as evidence of US intent to forego their use in a future conflict. In an obvious effort to head off a complete nuclear withdrawal, the South Korean press has suggested that the Pak government would be justified in developing its own nuclear weapons if the US nuclear shield were withdrawn.

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8. Seoul undertook such a program in 1974 because of doubts about the reliability of the overall US security commitment, rather than the narrower issue of the US nuclear presence. It suspended the program late last year for both technical and political reasons:

- Seoul's technical prospects were seriously diminished by its decision--under heavy US pressure--to cancel a contract for a French-designed reprocessing plant;
- Subsequently, President Pak probably saw some political value in suspending the program in order to set a positive tone in relations with the new US administration.

9. The key element in Seoul's thinking about its nuclear weapons option will continue to be its overall relationship with the US. It will want to weigh carefully the possible gains of resuming a weapons program against the risks of losing the considerable support it still needs from the US. A sharp rupture in US-South Korean relations over the nuclear issue could jeopardize Seoul's access to credits for military sales, sour bilateral economic relations, and perhaps stimulate sentiment in the US for increasing the pace of troop withdrawals.

10. In making these calculations Seoul will be influenced by security conditions on the Korean peninsula. The timing and modalities of the US ground force withdrawal obviously will have a major impact on Seoul's perceptions. A reduction in the credibility of the US alliance as seen from Seoul or a renewal of North Korean aggressive tactics could lead President Pak to resume the weapons program. In any event, the withdrawal of all US nuclear weapons will clearly strengthen Pak's determination to move toward military self-reliance, a course he has been following since the early 1970's.

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Deputy Director for Intelligence

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