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U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea: A Case Study in National Security Decision Making

A Case Study by Robert G. Rich

Obtained under the
Freedom of Information Act
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A Case Study in National Security Decision Making

Robert G. Rich

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PREFACE

In the presidential campaign of 1976, Jimmy Carter pledged to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces from the Korean peninsula. The issue engaged his administration for the entire four years of his tenure, resulting in two full-scale policy reviews, debates and arguments with friends and allies in Asia, controversy and shifting moods in Congress, and significant internal activity within the Executive Branch. By the end of the administration, the withdrawal program had come to a complete halt, and U.S. forces had been reduced by only about 3,000 spaces, or from 42,000 to about 39,000. The new Reagan administration then formally took withdrawal off of the agenda in its first month in the White House.

This report is not an attempt to provide a definitive history of this episode. Many of the military facts which contributed to the debates, as well as confidential exchanges of views with other governments, remain properly classified at this juncture. Neither is this an effort to cast blame or credit, or to report on who did what to whom. I have attempted instead to focus on decision-making processes and factors. What were the forces, the viewpoints, the currents and counter currents which appear to have affected stances or conclusions at different times? Were decision processes different at different stages of the controversy? Did this affect the nature and cogency of the inputs and views which were brought to bear?

I wish to express my appreciation to a number of the senior actors within the U.S. Government's unfolding drama on troop withdrawal who have been willing candidly to discuss with me their perceptions of the influences and factors at work at different stages. I was not able to interview nearly all of those who might usefully be able to share insights on this subject, but those who did discuss their experience offered a range of perceptions and knowledge. In accordance with my commitment to those interviewed, they shall remain anonymous. No views are attributed directly to any person in this report except where that attribution is drawn from the public record. Interviews were utilized primarily to aid in understanding the interplay of forces at work in order that reliance on only the visible published material did not mislead the analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Korea has long had strategic importance quite out of proportion to its size. China and Japan were competitors for influence for centuries, and Russia entered the contest as well at the end of the last century. The armistice line between North and South Korea is the flashpoint of Asia and one of the more dangerous places in the world where hostilities involving three nuclear armed powers could conceivably occur. While Korea was historically a buffer, its current strategic significance arises from the interaction of the four major powers. To some degree each shares a common goal of avoiding hostility because of the incalculable cost of another Korean war and acute dangers to national interests. Meanwhile, each half of the divided Korean nation has become a newly industrializing power of middle rank. The totally divergent economic and social systems as well as their respective interaction with the international community represent the two ideological cold war divisions of the world after WWII. Astride the narrow waist of this peninsula on the edge of northern Asia today face the fourth and fifth largest armed forces in the world, heavily equipped with modern weapons. The North continues to reject any accommodation to the status quo of a Korea divided at this time and has rejected any meaningful dialogue or interchange between North and South. Pyongyang seeks reunification of the peninsula as soon as possible under its hegemony and on its terms. As one asset in that goal it has fielded powerful armed forces equipped and deployed for assault. These forces have a significant capability for use if the situation should be deemed attractive.

By May of 1975, potential candidate Carter was already talking about withdrawing U.S. forces from the Republic of Korea if he became president. Only later did this become refined to refer only to U.S. "ground combat forces."

During campaign year 1976, Carter frequently referred to his hope to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces, although often he also spoke of full and necessary consultations with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The Korea withdrawal plank, however, never sparked sufficient attention in the political campaign for President Ford to challenge or debate the issue. Neither did it arise in the formal televised debates.

Following inauguration, nevertheless, President Carter moved quickly to give flesh to the bones of his campaign rhetoric. Before mid-Spring, both foreign govern-

ments and the U.S. national security establishment had learned that withdrawal was not just a proposal, but a policy which was essentially fixed.

The remainder of 1977 was consumed with the process of trying to make withdrawal "work" as a realistic policy to serve American interests, while also trying to dampen the many fires of concern and doubt ignited in the capitals of Asia

By 1978, Congressional problems had begun to place some brake on the withdrawal process. The House of Representatives was essentially paralyzed on all things Korean as a result of the influence buying scandals popularly known as "Koreagate," and thus necessary implementing legislation could not move, even though it had been in the House that the calls for withdrawal (and even disassociation) from the ROK had been most vociferous. In the Senate, longer term concerns for the American interest and questions about the underlying wisdom of the withdrawal policy were deepening. Serious efforts emerged either to slow down the withdrawals or to ensure that the President had adequately thought through the consequences and prepared sufficiently for them.

This phase on the Hill merged by mid-1978 with what I refer to as the "new information" phase. Essentially, this was new information about the nature of the North Korean military buildup and its capabilities. In what became the only "textbook" case in decision making of the entire period, new information led to deeper study of the problem, followed by new policy studies, cabinet-level consideration, consultations with allies, consultation with key Senators and Congressmen, and, finally, a new decision. That decision, in late July 1979, essentially brought the troop withdrawal program to a halt.

In the sections below, each of these phases will be examined for the political environment and the forces and influences which seem to have affected the course of the decisions and actions taken. The discussion is divided as follows:

- I. The Campaign Year -- 1976
- II. Decision and Implementation --1977
- III. Opposition to Withdrawal Grows --
1978-79
- IV. New Developments
- V. Policy Studies and New Decisions --
1979

VI. Tumultuous Inter-regnum -- 1980

VII. A New Administration & a New Policy
1981

ISSUES FOR ANALYSIS

The factors of the Korean withdrawal case are by no means unique. They illustrate problems of decision-making and analysis in the complex arena of foreign and security affairs within the political system of the American republic as it has evolved by the 1980's. A great many cross currents come into play. Motivations for policy become mixed, multiple justifications may indeed be self-contradictory, yet each relevant portion of the policy constituency holds onto its preferred goal and interpretation.

At least the following issues of public policy formulation are worthy of reflection as events are outlined in the following pages:

1. Is a specific action in the foreign policy arena (as opposed to an initiative to negotiate or to meet with someone) a desirable commitment in a political campaign, when the candidate, even if victorious, will be unable to control the reactions or counter-actions of foreign players in the equation?

2. Are such specific pledges in a campaign wise in the foreign policy/national security arena if the subject is one on which much essential military data are necessarily classified and not yet fully available to the candidate?

3. In an era of apparently short presidential incumbencies and frequent turnovers of the "party" in power, can better means be evolved for increasing the continuity and bipartisanship of major foreign policy commitments and directions?

4. Does the increasing politicization of the upper ranks of the State Department and more rapid discard of the most experienced Foreign Service professionals reduce critically the continuity of policy perspective and the availability of sound questioning at levels where it can be heard in a new administration?

7 = { 5. Do institutional rivalries and perceptual stereotyping seriously degrade policy formulation and implementation between the major departments of the Executive Branch, the White House, and the Hill?

6. Are there any realistic checks and balances on rushing into initiatives which have been enunciated as "campaign pledges," particularly by a new President? Should there be? Should a President be expected to subject a major new foreign policy initiative to rigorous analysis and advice from his Cabinet and their staffs?

7. Is there any realistic way to diminish the ready dismissal by a new administration of questions from the senior career professionals? Can there be an alternative to the quick put-down that "they" obviously are loyal to the previous administration and not to be trusted? Political aides who came to the Presidential entourage through the campaign period are likely to resist any expression of doubt that the new President's or the nation's best interests would really be best served by some adjustment in something that was formulated as a campaign promise.

8. In presenting options to a new administration, should the Departments consciously avoid options which seem to challenge directly the new President's known preconceptions or rhetoric, whatever the history of the issue?

9. What are the appropriate limits of either: a) speaking out and resigning in policy protest (a la Singlaub); or b) "trying to make it work" and surviving to fight another day? Where do effectiveness and honorable service lie in such instances?

10. Can we react with more sophistication to the Hill than sometimes seems the case? Does each loud noise require executive panic? Do not at times the two separate houses provide a more useful contrast by their very natures than is sometimes accorded in short-range analysis? For example, in the Korea episode, the House of Representatives was much quicker than the Senate to seize upon and reflect a mood of disillusionment in the United States with our Korean ally, and also to transfer to Korea the post-Vietnam American public feelings about avoiding any involvement in another war in Asia. Furthermore, the House, with its two-year election cycle, was quickly both panicked and paralyzed by the "Koreagate" scandal. While the House was thus reflecting vividly the immediate phenomena of the daily press headlines and popular perceptions, the Senate was the lead body in expressing concern for the longer view: "Were fundamental U.S. national interests at stake? Would war be more or less likely if the trends in place continued?" Do these contrasts reflect institutional differences in the two houses? If so, can the insights provided by each be used in a more sophisticated manner by the Executive Branch?

11. Is a time of considerable and unmanageable public stress between the U.S. and another power a wise time to launch a major shift in policy vis a vis that power which will require careful tuning, congressional cooperation, and the understanding of allies and potential adversaries?

I. THE CAMPAIGN YEAR --1976

Fathers claiming paternity for Carter's early ideas about withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea have been more conspicuous by their absence than by their visibility in recent years. Nevertheless, the ideas and inputs themselves are fairly discernable. The most important, in retrospect, seem to have been the following, listed in what in my judgment are the descending order of significance:

1. The post-Vietnam desire to avoid involvement again in war in Asia; reduce U.S. commitments.

2. Disassociation of the United States from a Government in Seoul which was increasingly viewed as an ally with whom it was not very respectable to be associated.

3. The perceived need to bolster U.S. strength in Europe to face the Soviet Union.

4. Save money.

Post Vietnam Reduction in Commitment

In 1976 the post-Vietnam mood was still strong upon the country; media and editorial assumptions strongly leaned against any commitments which could again engage us in warfare on the "mainland" of Asia. The new waves of freshman congressmen entering in 1974 and 1976 also brought these biases with them to a considerable degree. The traditional security and foreign policy "establishment" was still largely in disarray and licking its wounds after the Vietnam debacle.

The August 1976 "tree cutting incident" at the Joint Security Area of Panmunjom on the Korean DMZ resulted in the brutal murder of two American officers and sensitized Americans to how quickly they could again become involved. U.S. forces were there as a tripwire, it was argued, but what were we doing in 1976 somewhere where someone else could trip the wire and involve us in fighting which even

some key Republican Congressmen felt the American public simply would not support? Senator McGovern in a September 15 speech to the Senate reflected this mood when he said:

The tree cutting incident proved that U.S. forces sent to Korea a generation ago "could trip this generation into another war in the wrong place at the wrong time."

McGovern went on to call for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Korea and the avoidance of further identifications with that "disreputable tyrant."

Once the Carter administration came into office, it strongly reaffirmed fundamental U.S. commitments in Asia and denied any overall American "withdrawal" from the Western Pacific or the downgrading of our interests there. However much administration leaders themselves came to believe these commitments (and I believe they did), it is difficult to deny that an important hidden agenda at the time of the genesis of the troop withdrawal policy was the reduction of commitments and the reduction of the prospect that we would again fight a war on the rim of the Western Pacific. Asian leaders were hardly naive when they expressed such concerns or wondered at the credibility of expecting U.S. ground forces to be sent back if necessary to fight in Korea once they were withdrawn.

It appears to have been the obvious post-Vietnam political mood of disengagement in the United States which had led to the indiscreet and improper Korean actions to try to bolster influence in the U.S. Congress, actions which backfired at a critical time to injure rather than abet fundamental Korean security interests and American support. The ROK had already seen the U.S. withdraw the 7th Infantry Division unilaterally in 1971 and the faltering and stretch out of the promised military assistance compensatory measures. The 2nd Infantry Division now represented the important final component of the visible U.S. commitment to respond on the ground if necessary to a renewed North Korean aggression which would so destabilize and change the political and strategic map of North Asia. Now the Americans were talking as if these strategic factors hardly existed, and as if the American boys should be brought home from a far-away and rather exotic involvement where everyone might just get hurt. Besides, the "gooks" couldn't be trusted. "Didn't everyone watch M*A*S*H?" One can hardly fault the Koreans for their deep concerns and the stakes of national existence which they perceived in the balance. Their misperceptions of what was acceptable in the American political context, however, were grave and costly.

Disassociate From a Disreputable Ally?

For a populist candidate running against the establishment even of his own party, Korea in 1976 was almost a natural target of disapprobation, and therefore for U.S. disassociation. A steady drumbeat of news articles emerged either from congressional investigations and hearings or from reporters in Korea who seemed never to talk to anyone but full-time critics of the government.

By many yardsticks in use, Park Chung-hee had led an unusually effective and responsible government for a developing country in the sixties and seventies, particularly one with a critical security threat on the doorstep of its industrial and political heartland. Nevertheless, a fully responsive and open political system still eluded the Koreans, who had not yet by Western standards sufficiently made the transition from traditional, hierarchical and authoritarian patterns of political leadership to those practices of unrestricted dissent and frequent democratic transfer of power considered respectable in the modern world.

Policy ideas which seem to emerge full-blown from the brow outside the government are, I suspect, rarely quite so original. Within the U.S. Government, discussion of further troop withdrawals from Korea was hardly a new idea. There was never any conception that U.S. forces were to remain permanently on the peninsula, so inevitably there was discussion of the timing and conditions precedent for further American force reductions. Since President Park Chung-hee had manipulated a change in the ROK constitution in 1972 to provide virtually for his lifetime tenure, there had been some senior professionals who had held major responsibilities for U.S.-Korean relations who believed that means must be found to distance the United States somewhat from the Park government and reduce the extent of our military involvement and identification if this could be accomplished in a manner which did not undermine security and stability in the area. These views, however, were conceived mostly in terms of reducing the U.S. ground forces to brigade size or using withdrawals as a negotiating lever or quid pro quo for significant and stabilizing concessions by North Korea.

Removed from the internal policy debate arena, however, perceptions of the ROK Government and of the appropriate U.S. responses thereto took on much more simplistic garments and black and white colors. Korean political rhetoric is considerably more confrontational and condemnatory than is true of the American tradition, and extreme charges and counter-charges are the common political coin. When translated into American perceptions

without the cultural context, it sounds terrible indeed. This was a situation heightened by the longpracticed Korean opposition tendency to try to manipulate the foreign power center in a triangular route to affect the action of domestic governing authorities. (We're only the latest in line after the Chinese and Japanese.) All of these mechanisms had reached a tense pitch by 1976, as Koreans tried to engage American guilt mechanisms and to produce internal Korean change via Peoria.

Upon this ready-made publicity stage there soon emerged a player. The International Organizations Subcommittee had traditionally been the catchall stepchild of the House Foreign Relations Committee (HFAC) structure, since it did not have major visible areas of direct endeavor as did all the other subcommittees, which either dealt with regions (e.g. Asia, Africa, Latin America) or such tangibles as mutual security. Congressman Fraser of Minneapolis soon changed this and found that human rights (in other countries) and Korean shortcomings made for good headlines and increasing publicity. Multiple hearings and reports on Korea beginning in early 1976 led to the full-scale investigations which were authorized in early 1977.

Denunciations of the ROK emanating from Congress, and calls for changes of U.S. policies in Korea provided a counterpoint throughout 1976, almost exclusively originating from the Democrats. In addition to Fraser subcommittee hearings and reports, some examples are:

March 1976: Senator Cranston calls for a reexamination of the U.S. alliance with the ROK;

April 1976: In a letter to Ford sponsored by Congressman Fraser and Senator Kennedy, 119 senators and congressmen allege "continuing suppression" in Korea and warn that continuing U.S. military support may make the United States an accomplice to repression."

Oct. 1976: In a letter to ROK President Park sponsored by Fraser and Cranston, 154 senators and congressmen accused Park of "disrespect for human rights" which had "seriously eroded" U.S. relations with the ROK and undermined the determination of both to resist aggression.

In fact, the South Korean determination to resist North Korean aggression was quite strong, but certainly the American determination was becoming somewhat questionable on the basis of such pronouncements.

1976 also saw a distinct congressional nudge toward U.S. troop withdrawal from Korea. During the mark-up of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976 the HFAC inserted a provision which passed into law calling for a report from the President by September 30, and at least once during each of the next five years, reviewing the progress of the Republic of Korea in modernizing its armed forces and achieving military self-sufficiency; the role of the United States in mutual security efforts in Korea; and the prospects for or implementation of phased reduction of U.S. armed forces in Korea. This legislation which was passed in the Ford administration thus by implication set U.S. withdrawals as a goal and called upon the executive to report prospects and progress annually. (1)

This congressional activity of course only highlighted other activity outside the Congress. United Church Women made prayer for human rights in South Korea a major theme for the American participation in the World Day of Prayer in March. The New York Times editorialized (March 12) that Spain and Korea were vivid examples of American military support "no matter how discredited or totalitarian their regimes."

News leaked out by mid-1976 of an FBI investigation into possible acceptance by Congressmen of bribes from Korean agents. Separately, both Gulf Oil and McDonnell Douglas were being tarred with having made illegal political contributions and kickbacks in Korea, with the implication of having been led astray by wily Asian ways. Might not Carter, with no personal background of either the issues or the Korean government and society, genuinely have felt he should cut American involvement in this far-away place where a commitment had seemingly outlasted its era as well as its acceptability to the American people?

Bolster Strength in Europe

In a mammoth election-year study of national issues, Brookings Institution contributors had begun to focus seriously on the defense deficiencies which had emerged from the "disinvestment" period of the Vietnam war and its aftermath. Particular concern emerged for how the U.S. could bolster its forces in NATO, where there had been no significant improvement in some years. There are persistent reports that some of the "Europeanists" who caught the President's ear in this dialogue suggested that one "quick fix," in view of the President-elect's public commitment to reduce defense spending, was to shift the 2nd Division to Europe or at least back to the United States with a mission of European reinforcement.

This opened a debate on the disposition of the 2nd Division which was still not resolved right up until 1979 when withdrawals from Korea were halted. At various times in 1977-79, there were published proposals/plans to re-deploy the 2nd Division to Georgia, New York, Texas, or split between New Jersey and Massachusetts. Each politician who scented the possibility of having the division in his district fought strongly for such an outcome. Needless to say, there was no political consensus. Parallel to the battle over the potential spoils was the internal dialogue over the mission to which the division would be configured and dedicated. At the beginning, the Europeanists had the innings, reflective of this component in the early Carter commitment to withdrawal. Soon, however, it became apparent that if the division were not still available for reinforcement deployment to Asia in an emergency then the political damage and implications of its withdrawal from Korea would be multiplied across the spectrum of our friends around the Pacific. Various alternatives evolved, such as flexible commitment (available to go East or West), or commitment primarily to Asian contingencies. These thorny issues remained unresolved at the end, testimony in part to the inadequately thought out policies at the outset.

Save Money?

I tend to conclude that saving money was a fairly minor component in Carter's early decision, if it figured at all. At least before he became more fully acquainted with the issues, however, it must have been a part of the appeal. He was pledged to cut defense costs. Why not bring home the troops and cut this big drain of money? In the popular media and public consciousness, at least, the illusion of considerable American taxpayer money to be saved did persist for a long time. In 1977 the Congressional Budget Office issued a report which predicted that up to \$2.1 billion could be saved over five years. Few seemed to remember the fine print which predicted this saving only if the 2nd Division and all of its support elements were completely disbanded and removed from the U.S. force structure. Although reduction to cadre size and re-equipping for rapid deployment appears to have been at least one option considered, I find no evidence that complete dissolution of the division was ever seriously contemplated. It would undoubtedly have been strongly resisted by the Department of Defense.

Over almost thirty years the 2nd Division had been progressively configured and equipped to fight the battle of the Korean peninsula. Re-equipping it either for the European theater or for rapid deployment anywhere would

have been a major new financial investment, even without the later decision to turn over much of the major weaponry and maneuverability resources of the division to the ROK as U.S. forces withdrew. Subsequent analysis also demonstrated that the Division's beddown facilities and exercise areas were far less expensive in Korea (where the ROK contributed significantly and willingly to such facilities) than they could be duplicated in the continental United States, exclusive of the considerable support activity now supplied at Korean wage rates which would have to be replaced at U.S. wage levels. Return of the 2nd Division to the United States would not save the taxpayer money. It would cost him considerably and continue to cost more. Nevertheless, the opposite implication continued to turn up in public discussion of the withdrawal as long as the issue was alive.

Counter-Currents

By the time candidate Carter was President-elect Carter, some counter-currents can be perceived on defense issues and troop withdrawal, but they were essentially lost in the background clutter at the time. The Brookings study had begun to focus concern again on the state of America's defense establishment, a concern which became administration policy half way into the four-year term. The post-Vietnam repercussions had already peaked just as a President was about to enter the White House heavily influenced by those repercussions.

After steadily growing support each year for several years through 1975 for Senator Mansfield's proposal to cut back overseas deployments of U.S. troops everywhere, the mood in the Senate had so shifted that in 1976 Mansfield did not even introduce his resolution, confining himself to a reiteration of his views in his farewell speech to the Senate in December. Moreover, 1976 was also the first year for some time that the Congress did not cut the administration's defense budget -- despite a \$14 billion increase over the previous year.

II. DECISION AND IMPLEMENTATION -- 1977-78

When Carter was inaugurated January 20, the State Department was geared to work on policy proposals which could lead to some withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from Korea. Candidate Carter's statements had not always been consistent, sometime implying he had already made a firm decision on withdrawal; at other times suggesting he intended to engage in a dialogue with allies and potential foes which could lead to withdrawal. However, given the tendency of the State Department professionals to see

withdrawal as a bargaining chip which, as a minimum, should be used to extract concessions from North Korea in order to help stabilize the dangerous situation on the peninsula, and the assumption that dialogue with appropriate parties would be necessary, there was a tendency to regard the more unequivocal statements by the candidate as campaign rhetoric rather than real politic. This tendency had its resonance in the press as well. A New York Times editorial in September 1976, which spoke approvingly of Carter's proposal to withdraw troops, stressed also that Carter had "emphasized prior talks ... and presumably agreement with the Soviet Union to assure the security of South Korea."

A senior participant has described the State Department as "stunned" only four days after inaugural to find that the new President did not want to study the options, but that he wanted to proceed unilaterally with withdrawal -- astounded also by the procedure: a unilateral step rather than a negotiable instrument used as a bargaining chip.

Under State leadership the Executive Branch was tasked with an urgent, full-scale policy review for the President. This was concluded in March and known as Policy Review Memorandum #13 (PRM-13). Much of this document remains highly classified, but the reader who wishes to go into the substance of the issues more fully will find a good discussion in the "Humphrey-Glenn Report"³ from which I have drawn heavily for this section.

Almost immediately after the inaugural, Vice President Mondale flew to Tokyo to reassure the Japanese that the new administration was not going to abandon Asia. The usual platitudes were exchanged, and the Japanese were careful not to embarrass their new guest (who also brought an invitation for the Prime Minister to come soon to Washington on an official visit). However, Japanese disquiet over Carter's desire to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea was apparent. Recent US-Japan summit communique had stressed the importance of Korean security. The 1975 Miki-Ford communique, for example, called Korean security "essential" to peace in North Asia.

The most significant thing about Mondale's trip in the Korean context, however, was the rebuff of ROK efforts to have Mondale also visit Korea. It was, after all, their national security which was most completely at stake in Carter's proposals. The rebuff was symptomatic of a Carter attitude toward the ROK which seems to have persisted for some time -- as if he really did not want to deal with them, and really wished they would just go away.

Concluding from the military analysis of the situation on the peninsula that a gradual U.S. ground force withdrawal was a tolerable risk, State set out to ensure that the PRM policy review focussed essentially on means to carry out the President's policy, while including options which would allow for testing the water and making changes as time went on if circumstances dictated. There were some within the military who strongly wanted to advocate directly a policy of no withdrawals, and sought to have such an option included and defended in the PRM. Those guiding the studies, however, concluded that such an option would be viewed by the President as a challenge and disloyal, particularly since the military evidence was equivocal. Therefore, the direct alternative to the President's announced intention was excluded from the final options analyzed. The focus was on intermediate options which would apparently protect American interests.

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Nevertheless, this episode left scars among some in the military, scars which had their repercussions several years later after a new administration came to office. A senior career official in the Defense Department who at the time was viewed by the Carter administration as "one of the Cassandras" inside the administration on troop withdrawal (because he stressed the dangers of precipitous unilateral action), nevertheless played the loyal role of helping to enforce discipline in the PRM-13 process and worked diligently later to try to make the withdrawal policy work. Some opponents of withdrawal who were not well placed to appreciate the full role this official played later anonymously charged him with having been the "architect" of the Carter troop withdrawal program. The charges and innuendos, which seem to have had no basis in fact, led to the abrupt end of what had become a brilliant diplomatic career for this official, who had already served several different administrations loyally and conscientiously in high positions while trying to ensure that professional advice and competence had its day in court. The episode illustrates how difficult it has become for the senior career professional to be accepted for what is his or her special contribution: the ability to provide continuity and non-partisan loyalty to the administration in power and its objectives while ensuring adequate expert advice and the hard testing of new initiatives before overly rash implementation.

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There are unconfirmed reports that, when PRM-13 was reviewed by the President, most of his top advisors urged beginning with a small withdrawal of U.S. forces and then making further withdrawal contingent upon some conditions of stability on the peninsula. This would clearly have been an effort to salvage some negotiating advantage from the withdrawals and to achieve results which would protect

This was an option in PRM-13 ?

major U.S. interests in the area. Nevertheless, the President chose to proceed with a unilateral option, not only beginning immediate withdrawals, but committing himself to completion of the ground force withdrawals in four or five years.

When the ROK Foreign Minister arrived in Washington to see the President on March 10, he bore an official request from his government that withdrawal of U.S. forces be contingent on achieving some form of non-aggression commitment from North Korea. The President's reply to the Foreign Minister was underscored when the President informed the press publicly in a press conference earlier in the day that he would complete the withdrawals in four or five years (at least in the view of the New York Times this was the first time Carter in office had been specific about a timetable). He added, of course, that there would be "full consultation" with the Republic of Korea.

By the end of March 1977, only two months after inaugural, the President's decision had taken shape and was fairly well defined publicly: a) all U.S. ground combat forces would be withdrawn from the Korean peninsula in phased withdrawals to be completed by 1981 or 1982; b) the ROK should be able to defend itself as long as timely and adequate U.S. naval, air and logistic support were available; c) U.S. Air Force units and some headquarters and logistics personnel would remain in the ROK; and d) U.S. naval units would continue to be available to support resistance to any aggression.

No real consultations had been held with any Asian ally, let alone Korea; no major strategic or national advantage to the United States had been clearly enunciated or postulated; no extraction of advantage or concessions from those who threatened the stability of Northeast Asia and therefore vital U.S. interests had been obtained; but the Americans had decided that it was "time to go," and had persuaded themselves that it probably wouldn't lead to disaster. Those within the administration that feared otherwise hoped the time fuse on the withdrawal process was sufficiently long so that, if concerns did prove to be real, there would be time for policy adjustments before the U.S. had gone too far.

Not all concerned members of the U.S. Government rallied to the effort to make the new President's policy effective and workable while preserving security on the Korean peninsula. The principal non-conformist was Major General John Singlaub, USA, the Chief of Staff of the UN Command in Korea. General Singlaub spoke out publicly in February opposing the President's withdrawal policy. His candid remarks led to his prompt recall from Korea by the President and reassignment to Fort McPherson, Georgia. By

mid-1977, General Singlaub had again attracted attention through outspoken public comments, however, and he soon retired from the Army. After retirement, Singlaub became quite active on the lecture circuit within the United States, where he typically discussed the Korean issues and warned that the Carter troop withdrawal program could lead to renewed Communist aggression in Northeast Asia.

Singlaub was certainly not the only careerist, either military or civilian, who was concerned about potential down-stream consequences. Most, however, such as Singlaub's commanding officer, UNC Commander General John Vessey, USA, loyally sought to carry out the President's program in a manner which would best preserve American interests, and to make the program one which had the best possible chance of enhancing those interests.

It is hard to judge at this juncture just what the effect was of Singlaub's crusade around the United States after his retirement. It may have hastened the backlash against the withdrawal program. More likely, it may at least have increased the prospect that the withdrawal program, even in its greatly changed and matured form by 1980, would be viewed in partisan and absolute terms by a new Republican administration as something to be "reversed" rather than adapted or modified. In Washington, Singlaub was something of an embarrassment or ignored completely by those working on the Korea problems in the vineyards of 1977-79, but his activity reopens the old question of whether it is effective and desirable for a career officer publicly to take issue with a policy and resign on principle. The only uniqueness in the Singlaub episode was his apparent surprise that the President took issue with his outspoken remarks, or that they led eventually to his need to resign from the Service. Most in a similar situation have clearly perceived that one cannot have it both ways: either work conscientiously to implement the President's policies or get out of the kitchen (or vineyard) and take one's opposition to the public as a private citizen as part of a resignation over principle.

Consultations

Even close allies do not consult anymore than they have to, and there are clear difficulties for a government as complex internally as the U.S. Government meaningfully also to extend the pre-decision making dialogue to other governments. Harlan Cleveland, in writing about "the Golden Rule of Consultation,"⁴ has pointed out, however, that when a subject touches the vital interests of an ally, allies must in their own interests "consult for real." In the Korean instance there was not only the momentum of a new administration's desire to "carry out a

campaign commitment," but there appears to have been a reluctance to consult also because it was clear that the principal consultees would disagree with the proposed U.S. policy. Cleveland notes that "by consulting with others before reaching a decision, a government also forces itself to think harder."⁵ In the American system, however, a new administration normally does not welcome being asked to "think harder" about a matter which is a "campaign promise." Unfortunately, without consultation the opposition of the major ally would still be present, the nerves would be rubbed raw, and new suspicions added to the existing policy disagreement.

Having unilaterally embarked on what was universally viewed across Asia as a major policy action affecting not only the stability of the region but future U.S. reliability and involvement, the U.S.G. was faced throughout 1977 and 1978 with the necessity for major diplomatic efforts to reassure friends and allies in Asia (and even the Chinese) regarding American constancy and honorable intentions. It was an uphill battle. As the New York Times stated on March 10, 1977:

"...conversations with administration officials and with key congressmen and their aides ... suggests that the American commitment to South Korea will inevitably diminish, with the administration and Congress moving roughly in the same direction. ... the net result is that political and military support for South Korea is expected to diminish."

The Humphrey-Glenn Report notes widespread skepticism throughout Asia regarding American reassurances in the face of a unilateral decision to withdraw ground forces from South Korea. How long would our Air Force remain? Were we reducing our commitment to the Asian balance of power? Across the Pacific, almost every American action now tended to be interpreted as evidence of a withdrawal from the area. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew told reporters in August that the troop withdrawal decision had "profound long-term consequences for the security of the northeast and probably the rest of Asia. ... it is a specific threat to nations which believe in the capitalist system." Lee told ASEAN leaders on August 4 that, for the U.S., the security considerations in Asia of the last two decades seemed "no longer relevant."

Most public statements by Asian leaders were less blunt than Lee's, and most tried to contribute to stability by echoing Americans' official reassurances. Off the record, however, both public and private Americans were

getting an earful of concern, dismay and insecurity from Korea to Australia. Writing on the OpEd page of the New York Times on July 2, Harvard professor Dr. Donald Zagoria noted the reduced credibility across Asia that the U.S. would return and fight if necessary once it had withdrawn. He stated that almost the entire defense and foreign policy establishment in Japan opposed withdrawal, and argued that U.S. actions could lead to a chain reaction search for nuclear weapons capability across North Asia.

Zagoria was not the only writer who began to worry about the events which could be triggered ultimately by the U.S. decision if it were carried to its announced conclusion. Would it lead to the creation of an unwanted political and military vacuum in the area? Would this lead to major shifts in Japanese, Chinese or Soviet postures? And, of course, there was always North Korea. Surprisingly, little was being said in the public debate those days about the obvious and most acute threat to the stability of the region.

Implementation

If consultation with allies was essentially lacking prior to the decision to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces, meaningful consultations did take place in mid-1977 with the ROK and to some degree with other Asian friends and allies on the modalities and details of the withdrawals as well as compensatory steps to be taken. Out of these consultations emerged a program which was viewed in both the Departments of State and Defense and by the ROK and Japan as potentially a viable means to proceed. The essential elements of the fleshed out program were:

-- Back loading of the withdrawal plan. 6,000 U.S. personnel would be withdrawn in 1978, including three battalions of the 2nd Division. Total withdrawal would be phased over 4 to 5 years, with much of the core combat capability of the 2nd Division retained until the final withdrawal phases. (At the end of 1978 the authorized force level -- all services -- would have declined from 42,000 to 36,000.)

-- The United States would retain its Air Force units in the ROK as well as certain US Army headquarters, logistic, communications and intelligence personnel to facilitate combined operations to repel aggression and the redeployment of U.S. ground combat

forces if required. A small number of personnel would also continue to man the Joint Security Area at Panmunjom in the DMZ in accordance with UN Command responsibilities under the armistice.

-- The U.S. would augment its Air Forces in Korea by adding an additional squadron of F-4 aircraft.

-- In order to offset the effect of the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces, the USG undertook to transfer to the ROK at no cost much of the armaments, transport assets and other equipment of the U.S. forces as they were withdrawn from Korea.

-- Establishment of a bilateral ROK-US Combined Forces Command (in addition to the existing UN Command) as a transitional structure to phase the top ROK military command into the strategic planning for the defense of the peninsula.

-- Step up joint exercises; provide military sales credits; transfer technology; assist development of ROK defense industries, etc.

These were significant steps, and the withdrawal program thus acquired the shape of an operationally viable effort with major compensatory features. Those still significantly concerned about the program were disturbed essentially by the unequivocal nature of the program (i.e. it would allegedly run its course on a fixed timetable regardless of external events), and the failure to extract any concessions from North Korea.

Essential to the above program was the plan to turn over an estimated \$300 million worth of equipment to the ROK as the various components of the 2nd Division left Korea. This was designed to minimize the degree to which the U.S. withdrawals would reduce the combat capabilities of the forces which would defend against any North Korean attack. Most military analysts saw this as an almost essential component of a stable withdrawal. It was also a centerpiece of the ROK Government's effort to reassure the Korean public that national disaster would not follow shortly after U.S. withdrawals were completed. Hopefully, it also would provide some deterrence to the North.

Unlike the other critical aspects of the withdrawal package (e.g. phasing, air force augmentation, command arrangements), the turnover of the military equipment to the ROK required Congressional approval and action. Although few would have worried in July 1977 that the Congress might place brakes on troop withdrawals, the program was now given a clear Congressional handle which was much easier to wield than any blunt challenge to the Commander-in-Chief over his deployment of forces.

In June, at least a month before the fleshed-out package program had been worked out in consultations with the ROK, the Senate had fired the first congressional shot across the bow at what many viewed as Carter's headlong determination to withdraw U.S. forces. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee had added a statement of support for the President's withdrawal decisions to the State Department appropriation bill. Following vigorous floor debate, in which conservatives from both parties reflected some strong opposition to withdrawal, the committee's language of support was struck from the bill and language inserted stipulating that all policy decisions concerning Korea must be "taken jointly" by the President and the Congress. It further directed that any troop withdrawals should be carried out consistent with the security interests of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, and with maintaining stable relations among countries of Asia.

The Era of Investigations

1977 and much of 1978 became the era of Korea investigations on the Hill. It was an unprecedented avalanche which almost seemed like "follow the leader," or "let's all get a piece of the action." Before the end of 1977, four full-blown congressional investigations of Korean activities or relations were in progress, plus FBI and IRS investigations.

These investigations and their hearings, pronouncements, reports, commentary, and blustering dominated the news of Korea. They produced a situation in which, through pure saturation of effort and resources, it was extremely difficult for the Executive Branch to move forward on constructive resolution of the major pending issues. For the Congress it led to almost complete paralysis on anything with a "Korea" label. It was recently said after a bruising budget debate that the Congress could not have even passed the ten commandments. By the Spring of 1978, the Congress probably could not have passed a bill stating that Korea was a peninsula in Northeast Asia.

It is beyond the scope of this report to delineate these investigative episodes in detail or to review their results. However, they were so dominant a part of the Washington scene for many months that they inevitably had profound implications for all US-Korea issues.

The granddaddy investigation grew out of the hearings of the Fraser Subcommittee of the HFAC in 1976. By the beginning of 1977, Fraser had won authorization to "conduct a full and complete investigation and study of ... all aspects of the political, military, intelligence, economic, educational and informational relationships between the Republic of Korea and ... the United States." The special investigation soon zeroed in on the Koreans as culprits for many things, although they do not seem to have been accused of manipulating the weather. This investigation was essentially open-ended and limited only by the imagination and zeal of Fraser and the special investigative staff of more than twenty. It lasted two full years and produced a foot-long shelf of fine-print documents and reports.

Concurrently, there was the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's year-long investigation of the "Activities of 'Friendly' Foreign Intelligence Services in the United States." You guessed it: Korea was chosen as the case study subject.

Most critical to the institutions of Congress itself were the FBI and IRS investigations concerned with possible Korean influence-buying on the Hill, along with the resulting full-scale special investigations mounted by the Senate Ethics Committee and the House Ethics Committee⁶ (each with special professional staffs recruited for the investigations). Publicity early in the investigations led most Americans to believe that a public scandal of truly horrifying proportions might be emerging. The "Koreagate" tag stuck, and headlines screamed that more than 90 Senators and Representatives might be guilty. Although the eventual conclusions did not support such sweeping charges, the atmosphere which developed on the Hill in late 1977 and early 1978 almost tarred everyone guilty by association until proved innocent, a devastating situation for politicians as the 1978 election approached. This made it virtually impossible to move legislation which would have authorized the government to proceed with measures to maintain a safe measure of military stability on the Korean peninsula by turning over American equipment as U.S. GI's withdrew.

The problems were somewhat compounded in 1978 when the House Ethics Committee, in an effort to deal with the public's disbelief and skepticism, hired Leon Jaworski as a "special investigator." Bringing to this exercise in

international negotiation the tough, public tactics which had made him a household figure during the Watergate period, Jaworski added to the paralysis of Congress a near paralysis in the ability of the ROK and U.S. Governments to continue working with each other on issues of mutual concern and grave importance.

PART III. OPPOSITION TO WITHDRAWAL GROWS: 1978-79

As 1977 wound down, the hope that a special bill could get through Congress authorizing the transfer of equipment to the ROK in connection with the phased U.S. withdrawals faded to zero. The "Koreagate" climate made legislative action virtually impossible.

By the beginning of 1978 some profound doubts about the withdrawal program itself were being heard from the Senate. Senator Javits, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, issued a report in December 1977 of his study mission to North Asia in November and December. Javits stressed both Japanese and Korean unease at the Carter withdrawal decision and called upon the Congress to take a de novo look at the entire withdrawal idea in a deliberate fashion, weighing "the whole strategic and diplomatic equation in Northern Asia and the Western Pacific." Javits further suggested that the Congress might condition its approval of the equipment transfers desired by the Executive on requirement for negotiation of some quid pro quo from the North Koreans, Soviets, and Chinese.

Even more influential was a major report on U.S. Troop Withdrawal From the Republic of Korea⁷ issued jointly by Democrats John Glenn and Hubert Humphrey January 8, 1978. This was a posthumous report insofar as Humphrey was concerned, but he was known to have worked on it right up until his death and wanted it to bear his name. This was an 85-page analysis of almost all of the issues related to troop withdrawal from Korea and U.S. interests in Northeast Asia. Among its key conclusions were:

"The President's decision to withdraw troops from Korea will have a critical impact on the peace and stability of East Asia. Indeed, 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."

"The military balance between the North and South Korean forces has shifted from rough parity in 1970 to a definite advantage for the North in 1977."

"The offensive posture, self-sufficiency and firepower advantages of North Korean forces are the most destabilizing factors on the Korean peninsula."

"The presence of U.S. ground forces in South Korea helps to stabilize the military situation in three ways: it provides considerable firepower; it provides for an automatic U.S. response that serves as an important deterrent; and the United States is able to orchestrate truce-keeping operations and restrain any overly zealous South Korean reaction to incidents."

Loyal senior Democrats as they were, however, Glenn and Humphrey sought not to challenge the President's policy directly. The report concluded that:

"Removal of U.S. ground forces ... will weaken deterrence and to some degree increase the threat of war. But, with adequate assistance and time, the U.S. 2nd Division's defense function can be replaced by ROK forces. ... Without appropriate diplomatic measures to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula, U.S. ground force withdrawal could result in a less stable situation on the peninsula four years hence. The United States will gain the option not to become involved in another ground war in Asia; but with the United States maintaining its commitment, U.S. Naval and Air Force personnel would undoubtedly be involved if war broke out."

In their recommendations to Congress, Humphrey and Glenn took note of the chaotic situation produced by the bribery scandal investigations and urged that long-term U.S. political alignments in the whole of East Asia not be jeopardized for the short-term objectives of the scandal investigation. In view of the adverse military equation on

the peninsula, they urged that each phase of U.S. troop withdrawal be approached most cautiously and that a detailed Presidential report should be required in advance of each withdrawal phase, detailing assessments of the military balance, the adequacy of U.S. military assistance, the impact of withdrawals, U.S. reinforcement capability, and the progress of efforts to reduce tensions.

Well into the month of April, 1978, it became clear that no Korea equipment transfer legislation would soon emerge from Capital Hill, where the stage was completely captured by the scandal investigations of the two ethics committees and the activities of Special Investigator Leon Jaworski. Time was running out to be able to carry out the planned 1978 withdrawals on schedule because of the need for lead time to provide the training and arrangements to transfer weapons and equipment on an orderly and effective basis to ROK units.

It soon became infeasible to proceed with the withdrawal schedule without authorization for the equipment transfers as U.S. forces departed. This would have considerably exacerbated doubts and concerns in Asia as well as create further problems with Congress. President Carter thus announced on April 21 that the first (1978) withdrawal phase of 6,000 soldiers would be stretched over both 1978 and 1979. Only 3,400 men would be withdrawn late in 1978, including only one combat battalion of 800 men (instead of three battalions). This stretch out recognized the essentiality of congressional approval of the transfer package if the withdrawals were to be successfully implemented.

It was late in the year before the International Security Act of 1978 was finally passed by the Congress, incorporating within it a section authorizing cost-free transfer of arms and equipment to the ROK from U.S. forces as they withdrew from Korea.

Both the SFRC and the HFAC had inserted detailed and pointed requirements for the President to report analytically to the Congress well in advance of implementation of each withdrawal phase. The Senate version was almost identical with that recommended at the beginning of the year in the Humphrey-Glenn Report. In the conference both Senate and House reporting requirements were retained in the final legislation although their thrust and purpose were clearly almost the same.

Passage of the International Security Act of 1978 was somewhat difficult in both houses, and the Korea section was hotly debated. In both instances administration officials maintained a worried vigilance outside the main chamber and worked with congressional allies to avoid a direct challenge to the President's withdrawal policy.

In the autumn of 1976 it would have taken a very savvy seer to have forecast that two years later the new Democratic President would have serious trouble with the Congress over his policy to withdraw U.S. ground troops from Korea. Nevertheless, in both houses, but with particular strength in the Senate, the major part of the floor debate was critical of the unilateral withdrawal program and called for slowdown, attachment of conditions, extraction of quids pro quo, etc. In the Senate it became difficult to avoid the insertion of language in the bill which would either express direct disagreement with withdrawal or impose specific conditions on the President's action.

While State Department lawyers thought a successful case could be made that the President had a right, as Commander-in-Chief, to deploy or redeploy the armed services as he saw fit, whatever the Congress said, no one relished that kind of Constitutional showdown test. Thus, it was viewed as an administration victory when the Senate bill was passed only with strong language calling for the President to submit detailed advance analyses to the Congress before each incremental withdrawal phase. If the Congressional gauntlet had not quite been thrown down, nevertheless, the Executive-Congressional relationship regarding withdrawal was clearly a new one after the 1973 International Security Act debates and votes. A caution light was now blinking brightly.

In 1978, and again in 1980, Potomac Associates, with the collaboration of the Gallup polling organization, surveyed the attitudes of Americans on U.S.-Korean relations. Although only 32 percent polled in 1978 said the U.S. should come to the defense of the ROK if it was attacked, 54 percent felt we should keep American troops in Korea at least at the present level without reductions. Thus, while Americans were reluctant to contemplate fighting again, they seemed to feel that the deterrence of American forces in Korea had worked and should not be tampered with. This poll was taken when, during the preceding months such newspapers as the Washington Post and the New York Times were usually carrying ten or twelve stories and editorials a week on Korea -- almost all negative. It was almost as if the press was in a follow-the-leader hysteria of attacking all things Korean. Yet, out there in the heartland a majority of Americans still said U.S. troops should stay.

IV. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Still largely behind the scenes, something else very important had been happening during 1978 while Congressional investigations held the center stage. Early in

the year some remarkable anomalies had turned up in the scheduled periodic "bean count" of major North Korean armor by the U.S. intelligence services. There was no logical way in which the quantity of equipment noted could be accounted for by the force structure or "order of battle" in the U.S. intelligence estimates which had been used in reaching current judgments on the military situation on the Korean peninsula and the viability of U.S. force withdrawals.

These anomalies led the Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) and the CIA in the Spring of 1978 to undertake a major intelligence review of North Korean military capabilities. Experts were pulled in from Europe and elsewhere to form a team to review the thousands of bits of data in the files from all sources and also to guide the additional collection effort needed. It became the first comprehensive effort on the Korea problem since before the Vietnam war, when intelligence assets had been heavily drawn to the Indochina problems. The task was prodigious. The expert team worked long hours, usually at least for six-day weeks over many months. By late summer 1978, the major conclusions began to emerge and were briefed on a preliminary basis to key officials in the Government with direct responsibilities for Korean problems. In December, the broad conclusions of what was emerging from the raw data leaked in an article in the Army Times and was subsequently referred to in general terms in the Department of State's report to Congress on Korea at the end of the year.

It had become apparent that the North Korean army was both significantly larger and significantly more heavily armed than had previously been estimated. The North Korean military build-up, which appears to have been launched around 1970 at great cost and the internal sacrifice of around 20 percent of GNP to the military, had grown at a much faster pace than previous information had indicated. There was no claim of any abrupt discontinuity in the North Korean effort. U.S. intelligence, both because of the inherently very great difficulty of the North Korea intelligence problem, and because of inadequate manpower resources devoted to routine collation and analysis of what was available, had simply underestimated the intensity of the buildup. The North Korean effort for almost a decade had truly been of tremendous proportions, producing a quite significantly enhanced military capability designed for only one thing: to unify the peninsula by force if necessary on North Korea's terms and under its hegemony.

V. NEW POLICY STUDIES AND A NEW DECISION

By early 1979 the White House had commissioned a new full-scale policy study, within the Government, of the Korea troop withdrawal questions and related issues concerning tensions on the peninsula and U.S. policies in Northeast Asia. Known as PRM-45, the studies were again led by the State Department with the full participation of the Defense Department and CIA, plus others as required.

also initiated in May?

Unlike the situation in early 1977, when the last full policy review had been conducted, early 1979 was fraught with multiplying and vocal congressional opposition to the withdrawal policy. Public knowledge of even the rough thrust of the 1978 intelligence disclosures about North Korean forces was leading to increased debate. In this environment, the new policy review was launched in almost complete secrecy. All of the President's key advisors on this problem felt it important that the government be able to work quietly to bring the fullest and most competent analyses and options to the President before he began to feel politically boxed in on this issue. No President reacts well to being boxed in, particularly publicly, and particularly if it involves some change in a cherished policy with which he is personally identified. If it had been known generally in Washington that a full policy review study was underway, this would have considerably increased the temperature of debate and heightened the direct political pressures on the President. With such pressures already at a barely tolerable level, it was hoped to keep the steam on the issue down at least until the President was in a position to review the best information and advice that could be assembled.

The result of this process was the one classic decision-making episode in the entire Korea troop withdrawal scenario. It may be outlined as follows:

1. New information raises questions about the facts on which previous policy decisions were predicated. (Feb 1978)
2. A major intelligence analysis and collection effort is undertaken to explain the anomalies. (March 1978)
3. Studies reveal significant new information about North Korean military capabilities and the pace of expansion. (late 1978)

4. A full-scale set of policy studies (PRM-45) is conducted in light of the new information in order to integrate it into the dynamic problems involving security in Northeast Asia and to re-examine the military and diplomatic options available to the United States to protect the vital interests of itself and its allies. (Spring 1979)

5. The Cabinet's Policy Review Committee (PRC) meets and reviews PRM-45 policy options and makes recommendations to the President. (June 7)

6. President Carter travels to Japan and Korea and consults with the leaders of both governments in the light of the policy options he is weighing. (late June - July 1)

7. Consultations are conducted with key congressional leaders. (July)

8. The President's decision is made and announced. (July 20)

Or: Puzzling information + verification and elaboration of new info + study and dynamic interpretation + new policy studies and options + cabinet-level review + consultation with allies + consultation with Congress = new decision.

This classic set of steps to a decision exists relatively rarely in the real foreign policy world. That it did occur in this instance was real. However, it obviously was not completely that simple. Pressures, personalities, and the inter-play of strong wills obviously continued and were the counter-point to the procedural developments. Yet, as far as can be perceived, facts did drive analysis, which in turn did drive options, which in turn did drive decisions.

On February 9, 1979, the President announced that he was holding further withdrawals "in abeyance" until the new intelligence data could be fully analyzed. This eased the immediate pressure on the President somewhat by demonstrating "responsible action" to those on the Hill who were beginning to believe that the Congress would have to spell out conditions for further withdrawals to prevent the administration from rashly pursuing its set timetable regardless of what many feared was a changed (or newly revealed) set of external circumstances. The February 9 announcement clearly was not a change of policy, however,

and the President left the implication that he was simply awaiting clarification of the military facts (thus still shielding knowledge that a full-scale policy review was underway in the Executive Branch).

In early June, 1979, Senator Glenn issued a follow-up report to the influential Humphrey-Glenn report of January 1978. Glenn was not only a major Democratic Senator, he was a key supporter of the President's foreign policy initiatives on the Hill and the Chairman of the Asian Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Abandoning the somewhat restrained tugging on the reins of the past, Glenn in the 1979 report to Congress came down firmly for reversing policy and halting the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea. He said:

... it is my judgment, based on this new information, that the risks involved in continuing the troop withdrawal demand that we reverse policy and maintain the 2nd 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."

The Senator's "Recommendation #1" was for "stopping U.S. troop withdrawals indefinitely. Any resumption of the withdrawals should be tied directly to actions by the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea [North Korea] which display acceptance of the status quo pending a peaceful resolution of the Korean issue, and progress in Seoul's force improvement program."

PRM-45, which reported to the President on the results of the studies and review, remains classified. However, it is understood that it did discuss in depth the dangerous implications of the significantly enhanced North Korean military capability. Also, it is believed that the concern for deterrence received considerably more attention than it had in the 1977 review. After all, if North Korea again misjudged the situation as in 1950 and launched today a far more powerful aggression against South Korea, the United States would already have been dealt a major blow to its interests.

For some time, North Korean efforts abroad had been directed single-mindedly toward achieving one or both of two major objectives: a) get U.S. military forces out of the ROK and to the extent possible drive a wedge between the ROK and its American ally; and b) undermine internal stability in the ROK and create a situation which hope-

who else
involved in
PRM 45.

DOP
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fully might lead to a breakdown of the social order and military coherence. Then in the 1970's it had created a major aggressive capability which was now available for use if the conditions it sought could be created and thus make use of the new capability a practical national option.

Deterrence had worked, however, for over 25 years. South Koreans, whether government or opposition, deeply wanted U.S. forces to remain on the peninsula until North Korean policies changed to accommodation, peaceful coexistence, and dialogue. With the capabilities which the North Korean forces were now understood to have, the stakes in avoiding the outbreak of a war, and in avoiding any reasonable chance of a miscalculation by the potential aggressor, were great indeed. In the two years since the Carter administration had come to office, its own interaction with the world and dialogues with world leaders had also deepened the appreciation of the effect abroad of perceptions of American constancy, as well as the major continuing stake in peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

One aspect of the President's trip to Korea offers a glimpse of his personal reaction to the circumstances which virtually gave him no responsible alternative other than to make some major alteration in his program to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces from South Korea. In Seoul, the President sought and won a public commitment from ROK President Park to increase Korea's own defense spending as a portion of GNP, although the ROK was already devoting a greater share of its wealth to defense than was the United States, and, as a still-poor developing nation was not finding the burden an easy one.

Between 1970 and 1978 Korean GNP grew at a compound annual rate of more than ten percent in real terms, and the share of expanding output going to defense rose over the same period from 4.0 to 6.0 percent. In 1978 dollars, defense spending had risen from \$300 million in 1970 to \$2.6 billion in 1978. The U.S. grant military assistance program (MAP) had ended during the Ford administration, and U.S. military assistance was mostly in the form of FMS credits at the going bank rate of interest. Rapid economic growth and accelerated defense expenditures, however, had left some sectors of Korean society lagging seriously behind. The ROK Government was seeking by 1979 to balance defense requirements against other important programs of industrial development, housing, education and health. For these reasons, and because of the need also for political stability, most analysts had not felt that it was desirable to ask the ROK further to expand its defense spending significantly beyond the GNP growth rate. Nevertheless, although it is unclear what audience he had most in mind,

it seems President Carter felt he had to demonstrate that the Koreans themselves were prepared to do even more if the United States was to change its mind and agree to stay and help deter aggression.

On July 20, 1979, a little over two weeks after the President's return from Asia, National Security Advisor Brzezinski announced the President's decision to reporters at the White House. The essential elements were:

Withdrawals of combat elements of the 2nd Division would remain in abeyance; and the timing and pace of further withdrawals would be re-examined in 1981. That future review would 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.

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. Although some tidying up was provided for, all important withdrawals were now completely held in abeyance at least for two years, or until after the conclusions of a 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). Furthermore, although the pronouncement avoided making a positive assessment to resume withdrawals in 1981 completely contingent on restoration of a satisfactory military balance or tangible progress in the reduction of tensions (which would clearly require North Korean actions), the clear and strong linkage which had long been sought by many, both within the Executive Branch and the Congress, was there.

Even after the later transfer to the ROK of another I-HAWK air defense battalion, which had been planned originally quite separate from the troop withdrawal plan, and adding the augmentation of 12 U.S. Air Force F-4 aircraft and their personnel, the total reduction from 1976 to 1980 was only about 3,000 personnel spaces, including the withdrawal of the personnel of only one combat battalion of the 2nd Division (but not its firepower assets).

VI. A TUMULTUOUS INTER-REGNUM

In November 1979, President Park Chung-hee was assassinated. The eighteen months of political transition that followed were variously bumpy, chaotic, and unsettling. Nevertheless, with confidence significantly restored

throughout the area in the staying power of the American deterrence, a major steadying element was present which clearly deterred what otherwise might have been viewed in Pyongyang as a tempting period for North Korean adventurism.

However, relations between Korean leaders and President Carter were neither easy nor close, partly as a result of the strains of the troop withdrawal period. When Americans became concerned in 1980 that a prominent opposition politician in Korea who had been sentenced to death might be executed, the Carter administration found the elements of mutual confidence and trust between Seoul and Washington inadequate to assure a lenient outcome.

VII. A NEW ADMINISTRATION AND A NEW POLICY -- 1981

After the election of Ronald Reagan, the President-elect privately signalled to the ROK leadership his intent to ensure that US-ROK relations were restored to a sound footing which would assure mutual security in Northeast Asia. It is assumed by most observers that he also let it be known that an execution of a prominent opposition politician in Seoul would unnecessarily complicate his new administration's efforts to restore fully a mutually constructive relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea. Although all parties concerned have firmly denied direct linkage, President Chun did commute the politician's death sentence, and President Reagan then invited Chun to be the first Head of State to visit Washington in the new administration. Certainly the new initiatives, which were in both U.S. and ROK interests, would not have been possible had the execution taken place. Awareness of the desire of the new American President to place relations again on a solid footing would have been sufficient for Chun to make his own judgment on what was necessary. In this instance, President Reagan's inclination completely to abandon in principle, as well as fact, the policy of withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from Korea appears to have served multiple policy interests.

The joint communique issued by the two presidents on February 2, 1981, in Washington included the following language:

"President Reagan assured President Chun that the United States has no plans to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces from the Korean peninsula."

A new President had decided to remove from the agenda a problem which had bedeviled his predecessor for four years. One President had himself placed the issue on his government's agenda. The next obviously had other priorities. Many questions remain. Would it have eventually been wiser to keep the withdrawal option in principle, so that if a later reduction of U.S. forces does seem feasible it would not be necessary to revive the issue completely in a black or white context? Was not, on the other hand, the new President wise to remove an unprofitable issue from his new administration's agenda, in the process gaining something in mutual confidence with an important ally and avoiding having to plunge into the 1981 policy review of withdrawal prospects scheduled by Carter? Were there not more urgent things on which a new administration preferred to focus both its energies and public attention? Did Carter, an outsider to Washington, simply misread the shrill anti-ROK mood on the surface in the media and Congress in 1975 and 1976 as demanding even a potential abandonment of U.S. responsibilities for stability in North-east Asia?

In retrospect, checks and balances within the government did bring deep reflection and analysis to the problems posed by the commitment of U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula. However, these processes are demonstrably weak at the beginning of a new administration by the party which was previously out of power. The absence of any very reliable vetting of a "campaign promise" should perhaps make candidates somewhat wary of making specific pre-election pledges in the foreign affairs arena, an arena where the United States will not be able to control all players, and where misperceptions of American intentions can lead to grave challenges to our interests. At times, such caution could spell the difference between security or aggression, between order or chaos.

Footnotes

1. The resulting series of State Department "Reports on Korea," submitted annually to the Congress for the years 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1980, provide a basic and authoritative record of forces on the peninsula, U.S. security assistance, ROK military modernization efforts, and implementation of the Carter withdrawal program. Although the legislation called for five reports after 1976, there has apparently never been any report submitted for the last year, 1981. The apparent absence of any follow-up from the Hill to demand the report is symbolic of how completely Korea troop withdrawal had receded from the Washington agenda by 1982.

2. Henry Owen and Charles Schultz, eds., Setting National Priorities: the Next Ten Years, Brookings Institution, 1976.

3. U.S. Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea; Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, by Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and John Glenn; Government Printing Office, dated January 9, 1978

4. Cleveland, Harlan: The Transatlantic Bargain, 1970, Harper & Row, p.20.

5. IBID, p. 26

6. The formal titles of these two committees were The Select Committee on Ethics of the United States Senate, and the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct of the United States House of Representatives. In this report, however, I have used the common colloquial appellation of "Ethics Committee" of the House or Senate respectively.

7. Humphrey & Glenn, Op.Cit

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The microfilmed files of New York Times and Washington Post for the period 1976 through 1979 formed an important part of the research for this report. Where direct quotes have been used, the newspaper is identified by name and date in the text.

The second major source was a series of off the record interviews with knowledgeable participants in many of the events described.

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