

## ABSTRACT

BROWN, AARON SAVAGE. *The Pains of Withdrawal: Carter and Korea, 1976-1980.* (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell.)

This thesis focuses on President Jimmy Carter's attempt to withdraw American forces from the Korean peninsula. During his presidency (1976-1980), Carter tried unsuccessfully to remove all US ground forces from South Korea. His policy was met with almost immediate resistance from the US Armed Forces in South Korea, Congress, and South Korean leaders. Japanese leaders were ambivalent but highly cautious about such a drastic change on the peninsula.

Using documents from the Jimmy Carter Library, documents from the Digital National Security Archive, various newspapers, interviews, and documents from online archives, I have sought the answers to some fundamental questions. Why did Carter decide to pursue such a controversial objective? Why did it not succeed? Could it have succeeded? Though it is impossible to know exactly what Carter was thinking, I examine some crucial evidence in order to further explain why withdrawal was so difficult and why Carter may have been so attached to the policy. The paper also sheds light on the nature of civil-military relations following the Vietnam War, and the difficulties of withdrawing from occupied territories.

The Pains of Withdrawal: Carter and Korea, 1976-1980

by  
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**DEDICATION**

To Fred R. McAlister

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Aaron Brown was born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina and received his M.A. in History from North Carolina State University in 2011. His research interests include modern US foreign policy, modern US cultural history, and the American South. In his spare time he enjoys music, film, sports, reading, and the outdoors.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Nancy Mitchell for her steady and reliable assistance throughout this process. She has not only made countless corrections (even when I did not think that any more could be made) but also took time out of her busy schedule to assist me when I needed it. I truly appreciate her guidance. Second, I would like to thank the members of my committee – Drs. David Ambaras and Joseph Caddell – for taking the time to read my work and make constructive and applicable comments on my paper. I also thank them for coming to campus for my defense on a morning reserved for vacation. I hope they were able to catch up on some sleep. Third, I would like to thank the members of Dr. Mitchell’s thesis advising group, appropriately dubbed the “Carter Cult,” for their helpful comments. My fellow advisees were never afraid to offer constructive criticism, and I appreciate their candor. Fourth, I would like to thank Brie Pasick for her acceptance of my busy and sometimes reclusive schedule. Never opposed to listening to my rants and reflections on all things Carter and Korea, Brie was there when I needed her most. I truly appreciate her love and support. And, last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering encouragement. David and Mary Beth Brown have always believed in me and what I could accomplish, and I hope that I have not kept them awake too many nights.

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## Introduction

On May 8, 2010, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates delivered a speech at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas. The purpose of his speech was neither to praise Eisenhower's leadership during the Second World War nor his accomplishments as president. Gates wanted to remind the audience and the American people of Eisenhower's warning about what he termed "the military industrial complex," or the establishment of a permanent defense industry, which could seduce the US government to spend so much on weapons systems that it would neglect other essentials such as education and infrastructure.

"Looking back from today's vantage point," Gates said, "what I find so compelling and instructive was the simple fact that when it came to defense matters, under Eisenhower real choices were made, priorities set, and limits enforced. This became increasingly rare in the decades that followed, despite the best efforts of some of my predecessors and other attempts at reform over the years." Gates referenced 9/11 and the resulting surge in defense spending. "The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, opened a gusher of defense spending that nearly doubled the base budget over the last decade, not counting supplemental appropriations for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Which brings us to the situation we face and the choices we have today – as a defense department and as a country. Given America's difficult economic circumstances and parlous fiscal condition, military spending on things large and small can and should expect closer, harsher scrutiny."<sup>1</sup> Gates cautioned that, as the

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1. Robert M. Gates, "Speech: Eisenhower Library (Defense Spending), May 8, 2010." U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1467>.

United States confronts elusive enemies in the struggle to combat terrorism, it should be wary of increased and unnecessary defense spending.

In 1976, presidential candidate Jimmy Carter had made some very similar points.<sup>2</sup> After the Vietnam War, the United States was a demoralized military power in the middle of a growing economic crisis exacerbated by high inflation and an oil embargo imposed by the Arab OPEC nations. The war had cost the country billions of dollars and thousands of lives (along with millions of Vietnamese). Realizing that the United States did not have an endless supply of capital, and eager to balance the budget, candidate Carter proposed cutbacks in defense expenditures. “We have got too many troops overseas, too many support troops for combat troops, twice as many as the Soviet Union,” he told supporters at a 1976 campaign rally in Rapid City, South Dakota.<sup>3</sup> “For every instructor now in the military, we have got less than 2 students. We build too many weapon systems we don’t need.” Indeed, Ford’s 1976 budget’s defense allotment was \$16 billion more than in 1975.<sup>4</sup> Carter wanted to reverse this trend – the steady increase in defense expenditures during peacetime.

Carter’s objective was not shared by everyone. There were some in Washington who believed that the United States confronted a crucial period when it needed to reassert itself militarily after the defeat in Southeast Asia. These individuals, collectively known as neoconservatives, advocated a hardening of defense policy and a tougher stance towards the Soviet Union. Team B, a group of neoconservatives which included Richard Pipes, Paul Nitze,

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2. Jimmy Carter, “Campaign Rally Speech, May 31, 1976, Rapid City, SD” *The Presidential Campaign 1976, Volume One*, Washington, DC: The United States Government Printing Office, 1978, 208.

3. Ibid.

4. Committee on the Budget, United States Senate, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, “Macroeconomic Issues and the Fiscal Year 1976 Budget: Critical Choices in National Defense, Thursday, February 20, 1975,” Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975, 155.

and Paul Wolfowitz, questioned official CIA intelligence estimates regarding Soviet military capabilities and intentions. The Team B report was not subtle in its assertions: “The Russian outlook, where politics and military affairs are concerned, has traditionally been confident and aggressive rather than anxious and defensive. Hence there is no reason to assume that the growth of military might will assuage the Russian appetite for expansion: the opposite proposition is far more plausible – *the stronger they are and feel, the more likely they are to behave aggressively.*”<sup>5</sup> Détente, the overarching diplomatic approach of the Nixon and Ford administrations, emphasized mutual United States- Soviet cooperation and pragmatism. The neoconservative view, a reaction to the policy of détente, stressed increased defense spending in order to counter potential Soviet aggression. The Soviet Union, to Team B and the neoconservatives, was an aggressive and expansionist state. Though Carter’s policies were not directly challenged by neoconservatives in Congress, they became increasingly significant throughout the remainder of the 1970s and exerted considerable influence on the Reagan administration. During Carter’s term, the Cold War rivalry still very much defined geopolitics, and many Americans remained highly suspicious of the Soviets. There was still much concern about where the Soviet Union might spread its tentacles next.

American allies such as Japan and South Korea also paid keen attention to Soviet maneuvers. Concerned that American foreign policy was about to enter a period of isolationism in the late 1970s, the Japanese and South Korean leaders applied pressure on the United States to remain an active force in East Asia. Both the Japanese and South Korean economies were beginning their long and remarkable ascents, and neither country desired

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5. Team B, “Intelligence Community Experiment in Competitive Analysis: Soviet Strategic Objectives, An Alternate View, December, 1976,” The National Archives, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB139/nitze10.pdf>, 19.

confrontation with or interference from potential communist aggressors in North Korea, the People's Republic of China, or the Soviet Union. The Vietnam War was a shocking and demoralizing experience for most Americans, and the thought of returning to war on the Asian mainland was repulsive to many who had lived through the Indochina disaster. However, public support for increased defense expenditures rose from about 10 percent in 1969 to nearly 30 percent in 1976.<sup>6</sup> By 1981, roughly half of Americans felt that the Pentagon needed a bigger budget.

Nonetheless, Carter was determined to balance the budget, and the Pentagon was one of his main targets. A former Navy submarine officer, Carter was well aware of Pentagon budgeting and was deeply concerned about excess military spending. One of his more visible attempts to scale back military expenditures was his ill-fated effort to remove US forces from the Korean peninsula. The American troop presence there, which remains to this day, exists to protect South Korea from an invasion from the North. The troops also have another duty, acknowledged less often, to prevent South Korea from doing anything which would imperil itself and the region. Such moves might include seeking nuclear arms or plotting an invasion of the North.<sup>7</sup>

Carter's legacy is contested. The four years of his presidency were among the most complex and confusing years in modern American history. Not only was the United States reeling from Vietnam and the oil embargo, it also confronted Iranian revolutionaries, rebels

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6. Joseph Carroll, "Perceptions of 'Too Much' Military Spending at 15-Year High," Gallup, March 2, 2007, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26761/perceptions-too-much-military-spending-15year-high.aspx>.

7. CIA Memorandum: The Implications of Withdrawing Nuclear Weapons from Korea, August 11, 1977," [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov)

in Central America, and Soviets in Afghanistan. Carter faced daunting challenges at home and abroad.

Carter also had a reputation for being hard-headed and stubborn, a trait which would manifest itself during the Korea troop withdrawal issue. He had difficulties getting along with those considered “Washington insiders,” both in Congress and in the Pentagon. An engineer by training, Carter paid close attention to the most intricate of details and was often criticized for being aloof and difficult to work with.

Nevertheless, Carter did gain a reputation as a skilled negotiator, and he coordinated two of the most notable agreements in the history of American diplomacy – the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, and the return of the Panama Canal to its home country. Carter orchestrated these negotiations with a nerve rare in most presidents, realizing the potential for Panama to become a point of future contention and understanding Egypt’s valuable role in the Middle East peace process. Carter also finalized the normalization of US relations with the People’s Republic of China, which required his administration to make hard and unpopular choices regarding Taiwan. These diplomatic maneuvers were conducted with great skill and foresight and were among the president’s crowning achievements.

Carter’s attempt to withdraw American forces from Korea was not without prudence, as the president was concerned about the consequences of maintaining so many troops on the peninsula. Beyond the obvious financial strain, the maintenance of US bases in South Korea caused tensions between the American forces and the locals. Chalmers Johnson, in *Blowback*, describes the effects that the bases have on the South Koreans: “Few Americans who have never served in the armed forces overseas have any conception of the nature or

impact of an American base complex, with its massive military facilities, post exchanges, dependents' housing estates, swimming pools, and golf courses, and the associated bars, strip clubs, whorehouses, and venereal disease clinics that they attract...They can extend for miles, dominating localities and in some cases whole nations. In South Korea, for example, huge military camptowns have existed around all the American bases from the time of the Korean War.”<sup>8</sup> According to Air Force veteran William Parsons, stationed in Korea during the Carter years, there was ongoing potential for uproar due to mistreatment of South Korean locals by American soldiers. During Parsons' assignment at Kunsan Air Force Base in 1977, South Korean prostitutes rioted in response to the killing of a sex worker by an American airman.<sup>9</sup> “They united in opposition to the killing, threw rocks and debris at our vehicles, and even tried to attack certain servicemen,” he recalls. The accused airman was swiftly flown back to the United States before the South Korean government could get involved.<sup>10</sup>

Conservative columnist Robert Novak wrote in 2003 that “South Korea has tired of the Americans and the Americans have grown impatient with South Korea,” commenting on a 2002 poll which indicated that South Koreans held a largely unfavorable view of the United States. University of Michigan political scientist Meredith Woo-Cumings, quoting Novak, added that “Perhaps the U.S. should pull the plug on South Korea, bring home its 37,000 troops home, and

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8. Johnson was originally a critic of Carter's withdrawal plan, and wrote a scathing 1978 editorial in *Commentary* expressing his opposition. His main argument was that Carter seemed more concerned about South Korean human rights abuses than North Korean aggression. See Chalmers Johnson, “Carter in Asia: McGovernism without McGovern,” *Commentary*, January 1978, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/carter-in-asia--mcgovernism-without-mcgovern-5916>, Quote from Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000, 35.

9. Interview with William Parsons, Ret. USAF, March 5, 2010.

10. Ibid.

make ungrateful Korea ‘responsible for itself, at long last.’<sup>11</sup> As of today, anti-American sentiment is close to its highest levels.

Carter’s attempt to withdraw American forces from Korea started with a campaign pledge, based initially upon his desire to “trim the fat” in the defense budget. There was also a human rights component to his policy – part of his overall desire to make human rights a priority in American foreign relations. Carter was well aware of South Korean president Park Chung Hee’s authoritarian tendencies, and was he particularly unnerved by his imprisonment of Christian democracy advocates. Carter, never shy about his Christian faith, even tried to convert Park on more than one occasion.

Several factors made Carter’s attempt to withdraw forces extremely difficult. First, military leaders in South Korea, both American and Korean, had been concerned about another North Korean attack ever since the cease-fire of 1953 which ended the brutal Korean War. Since a peace treaty was never implemented, the two halves of the peninsula had maintained a cold truce defined by near constant tension. The Demilitarized Zone along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel was the most heavily fortified border area in the world. The suggestion of removing all American forces from the Korean peninsula naturally stirred up already strong fears of another war. Second, the governments of South Korea and Japan, both staunch American Cold War allies, feared another regional conflict if the US troops exited. The leaders of Japan and South Korea did not doubt that Carter had reasons for removing his forces, but they feared for their security first and foremost. Third, the South Korean citizenry – some concerned more with Park’s repression and

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11. Meredith Woo-Cumings, “South Korean Anti-Americanism,” JPRI Working Paper No. 93, Japan Policy Research Institute at the University of San Francisco Center for the Pacific Rim, July 2003.

others a potential conflict with the North – was wary of such dramatic changes. To those who opposed Park, the American forces were instrumental in keeping a lid on his oppressive tactics. And, fourth, the US Congress was hesitant to provide South Korea with the necessary military aid to compensate for the loss of American manpower. The main reason for this was a scandal known as Koreagate, which broke during the Nixon administration. Koreagate implicated several members of Congress in a series of bribes proposed by some South Korean intelligence officers and businessmen. Congress, shaken by the affair, was loath to approve any further aid to South Korea.

The topic of this paper is withdrawal. Carter's insistence on withdrawing American forces from Korea became a much more convoluted task than he anticipated due to the factors mentioned earlier. Ultimately, the paper indicates how unintended consequences can derail any foreign policy proposal. The thesis also demonstrates the limits of presidential power. It also provides an example of unintended consequences. Through his attempt to withdraw forces from Korea in the late 1970s, Carter aggravated an already unstable state of affairs on the peninsula.

The first chapter focuses on the 1976 campaign and Carter's initial proposal to remove all of the US ground forces from the Korean peninsula by 1981. Though Carter did mention his plan several times over the course of the campaign, his opponent Gerald Ford did not object to or support it. Carter would not face significant opposition to his plan until he actually assumed office in 1977, when some high-ranking officers in charge of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) publicly disagreed with the withdrawal. Several prominent Democratic Senators, including fellow Georgian Sam Nunn, former Air Force pilot and

astronaut John Glenn of Ohio, and former vice president and presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, followed suit with their criticisms.

The second chapter explains Carter's diplomatic efforts in East Asia as he tried to convince South Korean and Japanese leaders to agree to the withdrawal plan. Neither Japan nor South Korea expressed outright support for his proposal, and South Korean President Park Chung Hee was nothing short of hostile to it at times. Carter's desire to complete the normalization of relations with China made the Korea withdrawal even more complicated.

Despite the many factors and opinions involved in the troop withdrawal deliberations, North Korean aggression was the main concern among those who wished to see the troops remain. During Carter's campaign and term, North Korea carried out several provocative acts, including the brutal murder of several American and South Korean servicemen at the Demilitarized Zone. Intelligence also prompted a reevaluation of North Korea's military capabilities, a major factor in the troop withdrawal debate which would ultimately lead to its final demise. The third chapter details the factors which led to the policy's termination.

This thesis is not a study of United States-South Korean relations during the 1970s, as such an analysis would expound upon the Koreagate affair in greater detail and include more discussion regarding South Korea's nuclear ambitions. Secondly, it does not attempt to provide a more insightful understanding of North Korea. Many accomplished historians and journalists, from Bruce Cumings to Bradley Martin, have written extensively about North Korea. These two and others were useful in my research, but I will leave the North Korea expertise to them for the time being. Third, I do not delve deeply into South Korea's relationship with its East Asian neighbors. Such a task would convert this thesis into a book,

even for such a small time period as the late 1970s. And, lastly, I am neither an intelligence nor military expert, and this paper reflects only a basic understanding of these establishments.

However, I hope to make some concrete and valid assertions regarding Carter's attempt to withdraw troops from South Korea. Although Jimmy Carter's attempt to remove these forces from Korea is routinely mentioned in scholarly studies of the Carter administration or US-Korean relations, most dismiss his fervent pursuit of withdrawal from Korea as merely a follow-up to a touted campaign promise. They overlook the fact that Carter did have cogent reasons for wanting to scale back the American troop presence in South Korea. Don Oberdorfer, whose book *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* is one of the most engaging and thoughtful studies of post-war Korea, writes simply that "Nobody, including Carter himself, seems to know precisely how and when he developed his unyielding determination that American forces should be withdrawn from Korea."<sup>12</sup> Douglas Brinkley, whose detailed and lively *The Unfinished Presidency* remains the definitive book on Carter's post-presidency, writes that "Character accounts, in part [for his Korea policy]: a stubborn streak, an inability to admit that he was wrong, and his post-Watergate-fueled insistence that he not renege on a campaign promise."<sup>13</sup> Relegating Carter's Korea policy to one of mere persistence and self-vindication does not tell the entire story. Carter's policy failed, but not because he did not have legitimate reasons for pursuing it.

Others have written intriguing and thought-provoking accounts of Carter's policy toward Korea from firsthand experience. Carter's Ambassador to South Korea, William

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12. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Korea: A Contemporary History*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, 85.

13. Douglas Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House*, New York: Penguin, 1998, 392.

Gleysteen, wrote a detailed memoir entitled *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*. General John K. Singlaub's memoir also contains interesting commentary about his rift with the Carter administration over the troop withdrawals. James Young, an assistant military attaché to Korea during the Carter years provided me with some excellent insight into the withdrawal issue. Young's memoir *Eye on Korea* is a must-read for anyone who wants to know more about the policy. Former airman William Parsons, a keen observer of the political atmosphere that surrounded him, also agreed to share his experiences of being stationed in South Korea during the Carter years.

The majority of my research was done in the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta and online through the Digital National Security Archive. Through these two sources, I uncovered important and intriguing conversations between Carter and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski regarding relations with East Asian allies. I also found plenty of correspondence between Carter and his detractors at home and abroad. The Digital National Security Archives' collection of Korea documents assisted me in further assessing the Carter Library material. If I did not find the necessary document in the Carter archives, I was able to find it in the DNSA. These sources did have their shortcomings, as neither was particularly rich in CIA or State Department material. The United States Government Printing Office's volumes on the Presidential Campaign of 1976 were valuable to my piecing together Carter's initial plans regarding Korea. I was able to find some important Congressional reports in the D.H. Hill Library at North Carolina State University, as well as pertinent information in the *Congressional Record*. And, last but certainly not least, I owe a great deal to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* for

day-to-day detailed accounts of United States- Korean relations in the late 1970s. The *Los Angeles Times*, as one might expect, provided particularly insightful analysis on Pacific affairs. The *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asian Survey* were also helpful.

Since Carter's presidency, South Korea has democratized and experienced explosive growth. However, North Korea remains as isolated as ever and has incurred the indignation of its southern neighbor through its sporadic attacks and development of nuclear materials. The two Koreas are no closer to reuniting than they were during the 1970s, and fears of a renewed war are still prevalent. Drastically changing American foreign policy toward the peninsula during his four years in office, one wonders what the situation there might look like had Carter succeeded in withdrawing US troops from the peninsula.

## Chapter 1: Carter's Plan

### The Ax Murder Incident

On August 18, 1976, five South Korean workers, accompanied by ten American and South Korean security personnel, gathered around a poplar tree in the Joint Security Area at Panmunjom – part of the most heavily fortified border area in the world, the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The Joint Security Area is the only part of the border without barbed wire fences, land mines, and other reinforcements indicative of heightened military tensions. On that day, the South Korean and American work team intended to trim the branches on the poplar tree, which were obstructing the view between two guard posts manned by American and South Korean forces. As the work team began to trim, two North Korean officers with North Korean soldiers confronted them and asked what they were doing. The North Korean Army commander, a notorious veteran named Lieutenant Pak Chul, demanded that the team cease trimming. When the senior American officer, Captain Arthur Bonifas, ignored the order and instructed his crew to continue cutting the tree, Lieutenant Pak sent for reinforcements. About twenty more North Korean soldiers arrived by truck carrying metal pipes and ax handles. The North Korean commander once again demanded that the trimming cease and he threatened to kill the workers if they did not stop. Captain Bonifas, believing that the commander was only bluffing, ordered his men to continue working.<sup>14</sup>

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14. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, 74.

Lieutenant Pak had other plans in mind.<sup>15</sup> He hit Bonifas from behind with a devastating karate chop and knocked him to the ground, where several North Korean soldiers proceeded to beat him death with the ax handles and pipes. The other American officer, Lieutenant Mark Barrett, was also beaten to death. Five American and South Korean enlisted men were injured. The two American deaths were the first fatalities in the Joint Security Area since its establishment at the end of the Korean War.

A CIA briefer informed Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and others at the Washington Special Actions Group, the highest level crisis committee of the Ford administration, that the North Koreans were not planning a general military attack, but that the killings in the DMZ were deliberate and provocative. The group concluded that the killings were “intended to support North Korea’s diplomatic offensive against the US and South Korea...and also to arouse US public opinion about the American troop presence in Korea during the presidential election campaign.”<sup>16</sup> Kissinger was unnerved by the episode. He proclaimed during the meeting that “North Korean blood must be spilled.”<sup>17</sup> The possibility of a wider war was not mentioned at the meeting. Nor was there any discussion of consulting Japanese or South Korean leaders about possible retaliation. Tensions between North and South Korea had rarely been this high since the Korean War.

Despite the brutal nature of the attack, President Ford ultimately decided against military retaliation. Another war on the Korean peninsula would have been a major American military commitment and might have started a conflict with the Soviet Union or China. South Korean

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15. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 75.

16. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 76.

17. Ibid.

leader Park Chung Hee was particularly incensed and was not interested in negotiating with the erratic regime to his North, but he was not eager to escalate to an armed conflict either. He proposed that the United States and South Korea make a joint statement rather than start a war.

On August 21, three days after the killings, a convoy of twenty-three American and South Korean vehicles approached the Joint Security Area. A US engineering team with chain saws and axes began cutting down the tree. A thirty-six man platoon armed with pistols and ax handles, and sixty-four South Korean tae kwon do experts stood guard. Providing cover for this team of soldiers was a U.S. infantry company in twenty utility helicopters, accompanied by seven Cobra attack helicopters. Behind them sat B-52 bombers, along with US F-4 fighters and Korean F-5 fighters. Some armed F-111 bombers waited on the runway at the nearby Osan Air Base. Backup ground forces abounded and the tree was cut down.

### **Korea Policy during the Nixon and Ford Years**

The United States had attempted to withdraw some forces from South Korea earlier in the decade. President Richard Nixon had reduced the troop presence from 60,000 to 40,000 in 1971, rotating most to the war in Vietnam.<sup>18</sup> Nixon's withdrawal was not well-received by South Korea's leadership, particularly after President Park Chung Hee had already sent thousands of South Korean soldiers (16,000 died) to assist the United States in Vietnam. A heated verbal battle ensued over the future of the American troop presence in South Korea, as well as the future of the South Korean presence in Vietnam. Political scientist and historian Chae-Jin Lee's analysis explains the situation best: "Even though the United States made it

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18. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 86.

clear that the continued presence of South Korean forces in Vietnam was not linked to possible US redeployments from South Korea, Park began to withdraw South Korean troops from Vietnam in 1972.”<sup>19</sup> Nixon removed the Seventh Infantry Division from South Korea in 1971 after promising \$1.5 billion in military aid to the country. The troops were promptly removed, but it would take seven years for the aid to be delivered in full. By that time, the United States Congress was embroiled in the Koreagate bribery scandal, and future aid to South Korea seemed almost impossible. During Nixon’s presidency, however, much of the American populace and leadership were more concerned with exiting Southeast Asia. Korea was little more than an afterthought.<sup>20</sup>

Major General Felix Rogers of the US Air Force also proposed to reevaluate the military situation in Panmunjom in 1971. Since the end of hostilities during Korean War, North Korean and American generals had argued repeatedly in meetings in the DMZ, and the South Korean delegates were largely left out of the talks. Rogers’ proposal would have ended this practice, and allowed for more South Korean participation (“Koreans talking to Koreans”).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, such a breakthrough was not achieved due to external factors. The Sino-Soviet split in 1971 further complicated American diplomacy in East Asia, and the retreat from Vietnam in 1973 added extra strain to US-North Korean relations.

By the time Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, the situation in Korea had become more complicated. Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sought to renew relations with China in the early 1970s. In July 1971, China officially rejoined negotiations in Korea after

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19. Chae-Jin Lee, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, 70.

20. Lee, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 70.

21. “Seoul Weighs Shift in Panmunjom Role,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1971.

five years of exclusion on the basis of North Korea's desire to cut ties with China and the Soviet Union in 1966.<sup>22</sup> The renewed Chinese presence forced the United States to view the Korea situation in a different light. Was the Chinese presence a positive thing given the new relationship with the Communist power? Or did China have more interventionist motives?

Another major turning point came in 1973. After nearly a decade of fighting in the jungles of Vietnam, the United States withdrew its military from Southeast Asia. The retreat made the South Korean leadership uneasy about the future of the United States' commitment to its own security. The 1971 troop reductions were one thing, but the thought that the United States might withdraw entirely was another matter. South Korean leader Park Chung Hee, a fierce anticommunist, felt betrayed by the Vietnam pullout – particularly given the fact that his country had sent two divisions of troops to back the American effort. When South Vietnam collapsed in April of 1975, US Ambassador Rich Sneider in Seoul urged Washington to review its policy towards South Korea in light of “declining ROK confidence in the U.S. commitment.”<sup>23</sup> Just as the United States was beginning its search for a new direction in East Asia, North Korean leader Kim Il Sung visited China and made a not-so-subtle comparison to Vietnam in a speech proclaiming that: “If a revolution takes place in South Korea, we, as one and the same nation, will not just look at it with folded arms but will strongly support the South Korean people. If the enemy ignites war recklessly, we shall resolutely answer it with war and completely destroy the aggressors. In this war we will only lose the military demarcation line

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22. Samuel Kim, “China Rejoins Korean Talks after Five Years,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1971.

23. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 64.

and will gain the country's reunification."<sup>24</sup> It was obvious that North Korea felt emboldened by the American pullout.

After the Ax Murder Incident, tensions between the two Koreas were at some of their highest levels since the cease-fire which ended the Korean War twenty-three years earlier. In 1976, before the attack, the US and South Korea had conducted Team Spirit '76, the first of a series of major joint maneuvers east of Seoul.<sup>25</sup> These joint exercises, composed of parachute drops and amphibious landings, put North Korea on high alert. A day before the tree-cutting, North Korea issued a statement accusing the United States and South Korea of preparing for war and seeking to ignite another conflict.<sup>26</sup> On the same day of the killings at the DMZ, North Korean foreign minister Ho Dam warned that "the situation is becoming more urgent in our country, and a war may break out at any moment."<sup>27</sup> Such threats from North Korea have been commonplace since the war ended, but rarely had incidents of such brutal violence occurred. William Parsons, a retired Senior Airman who was stationed at Kunsan Air Force Base from 1976-1977, recalls the unsettling environment that year: "There were easily a dozen times when we went on high alert. We loaded live ammunition almost every time. We had fighters sitting on the end of the runway twice. One time we captured a North Korean spy outside of the base attempting to cut through the fence at the weapons storage area."<sup>28</sup>

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24. Young C. Kim, "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1975," *Asian Survey*, vol. 16, no. 1, Jan. 1976.

25. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 76.

26. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 77.

27. "Two Americans Slain by North Koreans in Clash at DMZ," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1976.

28. Interview with William Parsons, Ret. USAF, March 5, 2010.

## The Campaign

Jimmy Carter faced an uncommonly tense situation on the Korean peninsula as he campaigned for the presidency in 1976. Nonetheless, he had a plan for the future of the United States' role on the peninsula. He spoke of a new direction in American foreign policy as early as 1975, declaring that the United States had pursued counterproductive policies in South Korea and South Vietnam. At a National Democratic Issues Conference in November of that year, Carter said: "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."<sup>29</sup> In an interview with Bill Moyers on May 6, 1976, Carter made his first public reference to his desire to withdraw American forces from South Korea. He made the comment with some hesitation, as he was confronted with the question of what he would do in the event of a North Korean attack on South Korea. "Well, we're already involved there," he said. "And we have a commitment by the Congress, the President, the people and the United Nations in South Korea. I would prefer to withdraw all of our troops and land forces from South Korea over a period of years – 3, 4 years, whatever. But, obviously, we're already committed in Japan. We're committed in Germany."<sup>30</sup> Until this point in Carter's campaign, his foremost foreign policy emphasis was on avoiding more Vietnam-like scenarios. He stressed the importance of not getting involved in the internal politics of other countries rather than scaling back already established military presences. He altered this position in the summer of 1976. At a Foreign Policy Association luncheon in June, Carter stated firmly his plans for the future of the

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29. Jimmy Carter, "National Issues Conference, 1975," *The Presidential Campaign 1976, Volume One*, 78.

30. Carter, "Interview with Bill Moyers on the PBS program, *USA: People and Politics*, May 6, 1975," *The Presidential Campaign, Volume One*, 171.

American presence in South Korea: “I believe that 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 support of our commitment there.”<sup>31</sup> This statement outlined the primary goals of Carter’s policy towards South Korea – gradual withdrawal of American forces, coupled with pressure on the government of South Korean leader Park Chung Hee to curb its human rights abuses, for which it had gained some notoriety.

South Korea had not been an easy ally for the United States to deal with since Park Chung Hee assumed power through a military coup in 1961. Despite his many accomplishments on the economic front, Park was a human rights violator who tortured political dissidents (usually suspected communists) and imprisoned hundreds in deplorable conditions. In March 1976, eighteen opponents of Park’s government had been convicted of attempting to overthrow the government when they issued a manifesto calling for the restoration of democracy.<sup>32</sup> Kim Dae Jung, a prominent activist and later president of South Korea, was sentenced to five years in prison along with scores of other protesters. Carter, who believed that the United States had an obligation to promote human rights worldwide, was not especially fond of Park.

Park’s repression was not the only nagging issue which confronted Carter in South Korea. After the Nixon administration had begun to remove some American forces from the

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31. Carter, “An address on Relations Between the World’s Democracies to the Foreign Policy Association, June 23, 1976,” *The Presidential Campaign Volume One*, 271.

32. Andrew H. Malcolm, “Korean Dissidents Said to Be in Isolated Cells in Spartan Conditions,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1977.

peninsula, a scandal erupted involving a South Korean businessman named Park Tong Sun and as many as ninety members of the U.S. Congress. Park's goal was to ensure American military and economic support for South Korea through forceful and coercive lobbying tactics, including bribery. Only one member of Congress was convicted of taking bribes, but funding South Korea further became politically damaging after such a serious ethical violation. According to Robert Rich, the State Department's director of Korean affairs, "Congress probably could not have passed a bill stating that Korea was a peninsula in Northeast Asia."<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the South Korean economy had developed dramatically under Park Chung Hee's rule. Park remains one of the most popular leaders in South Korean history, mainly for overseeing a dramatic economic turnaround – one which brought millions of Koreans out of poverty from 1961-1980.<sup>34</sup> When Carter assumed office in 1977, the South Korean economy was booming. This fact gave the president another reason to insist that South Korea was ready to stand on its own without so much American assistance.

In 1976, the Brookings Institute, whose meetings Carter regularly attended, issued a report on the national budget stressing the importance of reassessing the United States' defense allocations. It read: "Unless the United States is willing to increase the real amount of resources it devotes to its defense or to undertake a basic reappraisal of its foreign and defense policies, U.S. military forces will be inadequate; the nation will price itself out of its current military strategy. It may therefore be necessary to adjust this strategy in line with competing demands on

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33. Robert G. Rich, Jr., *U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal from Korea: A Case Study in National Security Decision Making*, Executive Seminar, Foreign Service Institute, June 1982.

34. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 98.

the nation's resources.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, economic circumstances in the country at the time of the 1976 election seemed dire to most Americans, and Carter confronted one of the most difficult economic periods in modern American history. Inflation was soaring, gas lines were long, and cities were decaying. The Vietnam War had left the American people with a reluctance to project power abroad, and the Arab OPEC oil embargo of 1973 exacerbated this feeling. According to Carter, one solution to the country's economic woes was to cut back defense expenditures through several proposals. His first pledge was to hack 5-7 billion dollars from the defense budget, thus “trimming the fat,” as he called it, in the Defense Department. His second major proposal was to get rid of what he perceived as military waste, particularly in regard to the number of overseas bases that the United States maintained.<sup>36</sup>

Carter, at one 1976 campaign rally, called the defense establishment “the most wasteful bureaucracy in Washington.”<sup>37</sup> He also mentioned that the United States was building too many weapons systems. Part of his proposed Korea initiative involved the removal of the atomic weapons which the United States maintained in the South. He stated at a press conference in October of 1976: “In South Korea, I think we ought to withdraw all of our atomic weapons. We now have in excess of 600 there. They're quite vulnerable, if there was a drastic military operation in South Korea.”<sup>38</sup>

Some believed that Carter's desire to remove the American forces and atomic weapons from Korea was a pretext for a larger attempt to disengage from Asia once and for

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35. Brian J. Auten, *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of American Defense Policy*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008, 82. Quote from Barry M. Blechman., Edward M. Gramlich, and Robert W. Hartman, *Setting National Priorities: The 1976 Budget*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1975, 137.

36. Auten, *Carter's Conversion*, 85.

37. Carter, “Campaign Rally Speech, May 31, 1976,”*The Presidential Campaign Volume One*, 208.

38. Carter, “Carter Message – Ford Response, October 16, 1976,”*The Presidential Campaign Volume One*, 1020.

all – a final retreat after the Vietnam humiliation. Robert Rich, a State Department Korea specialist, was one. “It is difficult to deny,” he wrote in 1982, “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.”<sup>39</sup> For a country still weary from what seemed like a never ending quagmire in Southeast Asia, the prospect of becoming involved in yet another war in East Asia seemed daunting. A 1976 Harris poll, which Carter used to justify his troop withdrawal decision, indicated that only 14 percent of Americans favored U.S. involvement if North Korea attacked South Korea.<sup>40</sup> Of those polled, 65 percent said they would oppose it. Yet despite these findings, many felt that the United States would be abandoning a key ally if it were to withdraw from South Korea. Carter may have believed that the American troop presence further exacerbated tensions on the peninsula, but a more common perception was that it was there precisely to *prevent* another conflict. According to the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty with Korea, established after the cessation of wartime hostilities, “the United States and the Republic of Korea, in the event of an armed attack in the Pacific area on either country, will act to meet the danger in accordance with their constitutional processes.”<sup>41</sup> According to the Mutual Defense Treaty, any renewed war on the Korean peninsula would involve the United States.

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39. Rich, *U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal From Korea*.

40. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 87.

41. “Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953.” *Yale Law School Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp).

### **President Carter Introduces the Withdrawal Plan**

Carter was elected president in November 1976 and assumed office in January of 1977. One of his first foreign policy initiatives was the removal of American ground forces and (700) atomic weapons from the Republic of Korea. He fully intended on following through with his campaign pledges. On January 26, 1977, Carter issued Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 13 and sent it to the heads of important national security departments and agencies. It called for “reductions in U.S. conventional force levels on the peninsula,” as well as an assessment of “the human rights problem in Korea.”<sup>42</sup> From that moment on, Carter faced an intense backlash from Congress, the military, and allies abroad.

Carter sent Vice President Walter Mondale to Tokyo at the end of January to consult with the Japanese leaders on the withdrawal plan. Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda was tentatively supportive of the plan, but he had major reservations. He expressed his relief that the Vietnam War had not resulted in a “domino effect” scenario in Southeast Asia, but he was still concerned about security issues in that region and Korea.<sup>43</sup> He acknowledged that his country had no right to interfere in negotiations between the United States and South Korea, but he stressed the importance of the United States’ role in the security of its ally. Mondale assured the Prime Minister that the United States would consider Japanese wishes during the withdrawal process, and that South Korea would be duly compensated for the loss of military power. Mondale also mentioned the dire human rights situation in South Korea, specifying the recent imprisonment of Catholic bishops by the Park government. Prime

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42. Jimmy Carter, “Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 13,” January 26, 1977. The Jimmy Carter Library, [www.jimmycarterlibrary.org](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org).

43. Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, Vice President Mondale – Prime Minister Fukuda Conversation II, February 1, 1977, Digital National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>.

Minister Fukuda agreed that the human rights problem was a major concern, but emphasized that the tensions between North and South Korea were of utmost importance. The Prime Minister also stated firmly that the Carter administration should avoid any attempt to link human rights issues with the troop withdrawal proposal. Mondale agreed. The Vice President did not fly to South Korea afterwards to brief President Park on the withdrawal intentions. This raised some eyebrows, including those of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Morton Abramowitz, a holdover from the Ford administration who accompanied Mondale on his trip. “We *can’t* withdraw,” Abramowitz told Mondale, sensing trouble on the horizon. The Vice President casually responded, “Hey, Mort, there’s been an election.”<sup>44</sup> It was a telling statement, as the Carter administration was intensely committed to doing things on its own terms.

On February 15, Carter sent a letter to Park Chung Hee assuring the South Korean president that his country’s security was the first priority for the United States. Carter also mentioned the troop withdrawal proposal and urged Park to improve his human rights stance.<sup>45</sup> South Korean Secretary General Kim Chong-Yom called U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Richard Sneider with Park’s reply. He insisted that there was no human rights problem in South Korea, and that the government had not unlawfully imprisoned or tortured any of its citizens.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the imprisoned bishops, Kim stated that since emergency rule was in effect due to “a semi-state of war” with North Korea, the prisoners were tried under due process of law.

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44. From an interview between Don Oberdorfer and Mort Abramowitz, Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 87.

45. Letter from President Jimmy Carter to President Park Chung Hee, NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, February 15, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

46. Department of State Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, February 26, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

The fact that Christian leaders were one of Park's targeted groups had a great deal to do with Carter's interest in human rights in Seoul. Carter, a devout Christian, was alarmed when he read of the arrests of Catholic priests in Seoul, scrawling "Z.B., We should react!" on a memo to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski containing an article on the subject.<sup>47</sup> Over the next several months the Carter administration received a flurry of letters from Korean activists as well as members of Congress. One Congressman, Representative Donald Frasier (D-Minnesota), wrote in a letter to Vice President Mondale about jailed human rights activist Kim Dae-jung: "I believe that Kim Dae-jung (as well as some of the others) are as courageous and deserving of international support as Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov...In the USSR our leverage is limited – our leverage in Korea is at least 1,000 times greater if we ever decide to use it."<sup>48</sup> Frasier followed up in a letter to Brzezinski stating: "It does seem strange to many that the United States has spoken out several times about problems in Eastern Europe and in the USSR but has said little about Korea (where we presumably have more leverage)."<sup>49</sup> A letter signed by several South Korean activists and family members of imprisoned activists (one of whom was Kim Dae-jung's wife) made its way to Carter's desk, pleading for an American response to Park's injustices: "We are genuinely grateful for the way in which the United States has assisted Korea as an ally for thirty years, protecting Korean freedom, democracy and human rights through military and economic assistance, and especially through the sacrifice of the precious lives of your sons during the Korean War... Yet the shameful fact is that with each passing day, contrary to

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47. "Memo to Zbigniew Brzezinski from President Jimmy Carter," NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F (date unspecified) The Jimmy Carter Library.

48. "Letter from Congressman Donald Frasier to Richard Moe, Chief of Staff in the Office of the Vice President," NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, April 1, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

49. "Letter from Congressman Donald Frasier to Zbigniew Brzezinski," NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, April 11, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

intentions of your assistance, freedom and human rights in Korea are being deprived and trampled under foot.”<sup>50</sup>

President Park was greatly irritated by this letter writing campaign and the mounting pressure from the United States to release political prisoners. He urged Ambassador Sneider to investigate the financing of any North American organization which criticized his human rights policies, convinced that they were receiving North Korean funds.<sup>51</sup> He also criticized the American press, saying that it had unfairly maligned his government. Though Park faced much-deserved internal criticism, he knew the implications of American pressure. The more illegitimate his government seemed in the eyes of its allies, the bolder his opponents would become.

In early March, South Korean foreign minister Park Tong Chin came to Washington to begin conferring with the President on the troop withdrawal matter. Carter’s demands of the South Korean leadership were steep, and he showed no signs of altering his course. A handwritten note from Carter to Brzezinski and Vance on March 5 stated that:

- a) American forces will be withdrawn. Air cover continued.
- b) US-Korean relations as determined by Congress and American people are at an all time low ebb.

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50. “Letter from Families of Prisoners of Conscience in Seoul to President Carter ,” NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, March 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

51. “Cable from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to the White House Concerning Ambassador Sneider’s Meeting with President Park,” NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, Korea, box 43, 2F, April 9, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library.

c) Present military aid support and my reticence on human rights issue will be temporary unless Park voluntarily adopts some open change re political prisoners.<sup>52</sup>

Carter had essentially spelled out his position on the issue. He strongly disagreed with Park's style of governance and human rights record, and wanted little to do with South Korea in its present state. Therefore, it was imperative that South Korea reform itself or the United States would reevaluate its support of the dictatorship. This policy was controversial, particularly because South Korea was such a strong American ally and had sent scores of soldiers to fight alongside the Americans in Vietnam.

### **The Singlaub Affair**

American military leaders in Korea were immediately skeptical of Carter's withdrawal plan. Major General John K. Singlaub, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Command in Korea, told *The Washington Post* in May 1977 that "if U.S. ground troops are withdrawn on the schedule suggested, it will lead to war."<sup>53</sup> Singlaub did have a convincing reason for being dubious – in 1950, the last time American forces had abruptly withdrawn from South Korea, North Korea had invaded (though it was only one of many reasons for the subsequent war). Carter immediately transferred Singlaub to a domestic post, thus giving the impression that the Major General was receiving punishment. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, a supporter of the withdrawal policy, defended Carter's decision to remove Singlaub. He

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52. "Memo from President Carter to Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance, March 5, 1977," The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brz. Matl. Collection, Box 43, 22.

53. John Saar, "Background on the Singlaub Affair," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1977.

remarked on the CBS program “Face the Nation” that military officers had a right to “resign and say anything they want.”<sup>54</sup>

According to his memoir *Hazardous Duty: An American Soldier in the Twentieth Century*, Singlaub considered the *Washington Post* to be unfair in casting him as an outspoken critic of Carter’s plan. Instead, he argues, he was just echoing what other South Korean military leaders had told him (Kim Il Sung would invade if the United States withdrew) and not disparaging the president. He was under the impression that the reporter, John Saar, would respect his wishes to remain anonymous. Singlaub, though, was clearly not comfortable with Carter as Commander in Chief. He claimed that Carter’s pardoning of 10,000 Vietnam War draft dodgers was “clear symbolism to my Korean colleagues that our allies in Asia were not worth defending.”<sup>55</sup> Carter’s very public tussle with Singlaub signaled the difficulties he would have getting the military to support his plan to withdraw troops from South Korea.

Others suspected that Carter was not even interested in military counsel. James Young, an Assistant Military Attaché to South Korea, was under the impression that Carter had limited knowledge of what was at stake. He said that “Carter had very little military advice (regarding Korea) until he actually was elected. Most of his Korea policy was formulated by Jerome

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54. Bernard Weinraub, “Defense Chief Backs Korea Plan, Says Military Must Support It,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 1977.

55. Carter was accused by his opponents of abandoning American allies or betraying American interests several times during his presidency. Notable examples include the controversy over his decision to return the Panama Canal in 1977, and the charges that he “failed to support the Shah of Iran” prior to the hostage crisis in Tehran in 1979. General John K. Singlaub, *Hazardous Duty: An American Soldier in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Summit Books, 1991, 382, 391.

Cohen, a peace activist with an anti-military reputation and no previous military experience to my knowledge.”<sup>56</sup> Cohen, a Harvard law professor and East Asia expert, did serve on Carter’s campaign as a foreign policy advisor and was a staunch critic of Park’s human rights abuses.<sup>57</sup> It is doubtful that *most* of Carter’s Korea policy was formulated by Cohen, though. Since Carter was a Navy submarine officer who spent some time in the Pacific and has professed interest in the area, he was most likely familiar with Korean affairs.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Richard Holbrooke, who would become Carter’s Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, was one of his foreign policy advisers during the campaign. Public perception is important, however. According to Young, “good policy decisions need to be supportable by facts, not simply intuition, and there has to be enough support for those initiatives in the institutions that are responsible for implementing them. Carter had none of the above.” It is likely that Carter considered the South Korea command as simply a part of his overall withdrawal strategy. If his goal were to ultimately remove the forces from the peninsula, why would he listen to the generals? They were part of the bloated bureaucracy that he was trying to diminish.

Singlaub’s removal did not resonate well with the American command in South Korea, particularly because the Korean War was still recent history. Singlaub, a Korean War veteran himself, was a well respected General who had spent many years on the peninsula. As one fellow officer put it, he was “a thoroughly professional soldier.”<sup>59</sup> Though Carter did have every right as Commander in Chief to make the decision he did, he confronted a

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56. Interview with James Young, fmr. Assistant Military Attaché to Korea, October 3, 2010.

57. Jerome A. Cohen, “Putting the Heat on Seoul,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1977.

58. Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010, 280.

59. Richard Halloran, “A Thoroughly Professional Soldier,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 1977.

military establishment in Korea that took immense pride in its duties there. According to Senior Airman William

Parsons, stationed at Kunsan Air Base in 1977, older South Koreans had an “overwhelmingly positive” view of the American forces, as they were the generation that had experienced the war.<sup>60</sup> “An older Korean man once berated a younger man in front of me,” he said, “because he made a disrespectful comment about the American soldiers.” Younger South Koreans had not experienced firsthand the horrors of war, and were focused more on the modern political issues such as Park’s intolerance of opposition. However, in 1977, the war had been over for less than 24 years, and was fresh in the minds of many older Koreans. Families divided during the war remained divided.<sup>61</sup>

Carter faced an uphill battle as soon as he announced his plans to withdraw American forces from the Korean peninsula. Only several months into his presidency, he confronted major questions about his intentions. How would withdrawal affect United States relations with other Asian allies? Would human rights pressure on Park’s government complicate the withdrawal efforts even further? Henry Kamm of the *New York Times* put it bluntly on March 11, 1977: “How to support a nation that genuinely fears an attack from across its border without bolstering its government, which uses the outside threat to enforce repressive domestic policies, is President Carter’s problem in South Korea.”<sup>62</sup>

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60. Interview with William Parsons, Ret. USAF, March 5, 2010.

61. *The Korea JoongAng Daily*, November 21, 2010.

62. Henry Kamm, “Carter and South Korea,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 1977.

## Chapter 2: “The Ripple Effect”

### Matters of Perception

On May 4, 1977, North Korean soldiers ambushed a South Korean foot patrol, killing one man and wounding another in the first violent incident between the two countries since the 1976 ax murder incident.<sup>63</sup> The U.N. swiftly condemned North Korea for the killings, which retorted that the charge was “an out-and-out fabrication by the South Korean puppet clique” to justify keeping U.S. forces in South Korea.<sup>64</sup> Less than two weeks later, North Korean gunboats attacked a South Korean ship in South Korean waters. The South Korean ship was riddled with seventy bullets, and grenades damaged the engine, radio, and steering instruments.<sup>65</sup> As Carter pushed for troop withdrawals, North Korea displayed further aggression.

Nonetheless, the Congressional Budget Committee concluded that Carter’s policy was not wholly misguided. They stated that a troop pullout would save \$2 billion and not alter the military balance on the peninsula.<sup>66</sup> The committee also pointed out that “U.S. ground forces stationed in Korea are there solely for political and deterrence purposes, not as critical resources in defending South Korea against North Korean attack.”<sup>67</sup> If events

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63. “Korean Border Patrol Incident Shatters Peace,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1977.

64. “U.N. Accuses North Korea,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1977.

65. The two attacks were barely mentioned in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Los Angeles Times*. *The Los Angeles Times* afforded the story a small segment. “Two North Korean Boats Reportedly Attack Ship in South’s Waters,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1977.

66. “Troop Pullout in Korea Could Save \$2 Billion, Report Says,” *Reuters*, May 18, 1977.

67. “U.S. Korea Forces Hit,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1977.

unfolding on the Korean peninsula complicated Carter's withdrawal plan, there was evidence that it was still worth considering.

Two weeks later, a team of Pentagon analysts concluded that a troop withdrawal would only slightly increase the likelihood of war. One official asked skeptically: "If you have a 99 percent certainty (of the truce holding) with Americans there and it goes down to 97 percent with them out, have you materially increased the risk?"<sup>68</sup> Newly appointed Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield confirmed his support for the withdrawal policy upon his arrival in Tokyo, stating: "I don't think the United States is in a position to continue to be policeman of the world. We have neither the resources nor the manpower, and in carrying out policies embodying that factor, we have paid a pretty heavy price in blood and treasure."<sup>69</sup>

Carter's relationship with the American military leadership in South Korea was shaky, but he had well founded reasons for challenging their advice, as evidenced by the recent reports. In spite of the situation on the peninsula and the growing skepticism, Carter still had a few supporters. Regarding American allies in East Asia, however, he demonstrated little patience. In fact, throughout most of the withdrawal debacle, Carter acted impervious to South Korean and Japanese wishes that he at least reconsider his plan. From the view of Washington, defending South Korea in peacetime was a financial burden. From the perspectives of the powers in the region, it was an important guarantee.

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68. This assertion was not highly publicized and the Pentagon did not express any further support for the plan. Norman Kempster, "Korea Pullout Risks Slight, Analysts at Pentagon Say," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1977.

69. Sam Jameson, "Mansfield Gives Full Backing to Pullout in Korea," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1977.

In a perceptive *Foreign Affairs* article on the withdrawal policy, East Asia scholar Frank Gibney wrote that “We should consider the ripple effect of a round, shiny pebble from Washington suddenly tossed into a still Asian pond, causing undulations far beyond the point of impact.”<sup>70</sup> Carter’s policy would have ramifications for the whole of East Asia and would not advance far at all without the support of the regional allies.

### **Brown and Habib’s Trip East Asia**

On May 24, 1977, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Philip Habib and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff George S. Brown went to South Korea and Japan to discuss the withdrawal plans. South Korean citizens had strongly expressed their opposition to the withdrawal proposal for various reasons in the previous days.<sup>71</sup> One writer and opposition party leader, Yu Chin O, remarked in a news article that “The United States should not repeat the mistakes it made just before the start of the Korean War 27 years ago.”<sup>72</sup> A prayer group in Seoul the previous Sunday drew 500 Christians, many opposed to Park’s human rights abuses, who sang “Onward Christian Soldiers” and prayed for a reversal of American policy. They viewed the American military presence as a necessary deterrent against Park’s oppressive tactics, which they feared would only worsen if withdrawal were to take place.

Since Carter’s policy involved both withdrawing forces and putting pressure on Park to end his human rights abuses, it worried many South Koreans. For those who were concerned primarily about another conflict between the two Koreas, it seemed like a recipe

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70. Frank Gibney, “The Ripple Effect in Korea,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1977, 161.

71. John Saar, “U.S. Envoys Face Hard Korea Task,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1977.

72. Saar, “U.S. Envoys.”

for instability, thus potentially tempting some of the more rebellious elements in the country and inviting infiltration by the North. For those concerned about Park's human rights record as well as the North Korean threat, the American military presence was a stabilizing force on the peninsula that ensured that neither side acted irrationally. Since the South Korean armed forces were commanded by an American General, Park's aggression was in check.<sup>73</sup>

Carter's policy was therefore met with intense disapproval in South Korea.

Habib complicated matters by agreeing to meet with Kim Kwan Suk, a formerly jailed dissident and critic of Park's government, sending a signal that the United States might not object to a regime change. Soon-to-be Ambassador to South Korea William Gleysteen was critical of Carter's policy and warned against pressing the human rights issue. In his memoir he posits that "President Carter's parallel decision to select Korea as a target country for his administration's focus on human rights was more understandable in terms of the American tradition, but the abrasive, confrontational manner in which human rights were pursued added appreciably to the sense of insecurity and strain over the troop issue."<sup>74</sup> Washington was, some Koreans thought, undermining the legitimacy of the South Korean government itself and encouraging rebellion.

Upon their return, Brown and Habib provided the President with an update. The members of President Park's government, they explained, "would prefer no change in force levels," but "they understand specifically that the United States Second Division and supporting elements are to be withdrawn from Korea in a phased manner within a period of

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73. Website of the United States Forces Korea, <http://www.usfk.mil/usfk/ShowContent.aspx?ID=46&SubcatID=340>.

74. William H. Gleysteen, Jr., *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis*, Washington: Brookings, 1999, 197.

4-5 years.”<sup>75</sup> Habib and Brown also informed the President that “there was clear concern for the risk of instability on the Korean Peninsula unless ‘compensatory actions’ were taken in conjunction with the withdrawal so as to maintain an acceptable balance of military power during and following our ground force withdrawal.” Compensatory actions would include providing tanks, anti-tank weapons, and the necessary training. The two envoys then explained that Congressional support was absolutely crucial for troop withdrawals and arms transfers. A joint U.S./South Korean Command would be formed by the time the initial increment of U.S. ground forces was withdrawn in 1978. In May 1977, the power balance on the Korean Peninsula looked something like this: 635,000 South Korean servicemen versus 468,000 North Koreans, 220 South Korean combat planes versus 600 North Korean.<sup>76</sup> The South Koreans had an advantage with the 40,000 American forces and superior American technology (the North Koreans had Soviet technology), but the North Koreans maintained a stronger Navy. South Korea had an advantage, but a minor one.

Brown and Habib also met with Japanese leaders, who likewise expressed unease when briefed on the subject. The two assured Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda and others that the United States would a) “remain a Pacific power with substantial military capability in a forward position,” b) maintain a firm commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty with South

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75. General George S. Brown, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Philip Habib, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, “Troop Withdrawal from Korea, May 28, 1977” The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brz. Matl. Collection, box 43, 13F. 1.

76. John Saar, “South Korea’s Park Reluctantly Accepts Troop Withdrawal but Requests U.S. Aid,” *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1977.

Korea, and c) withdraw ground forces in a phased manner so as to maintain the military balance. It was clear that the Japanese “preferred maintenance of the status quo.”<sup>77</sup>

## Japan

Other than the fear of another Korean conflict, Japan had a good reason for wanting to maintain the status quo: Japan’s businesses had been pouring into South Korea, comprising 64 percent of Japanese foreign investment. The United States was a distant second at 17 percent.<sup>78</sup> According to historian Walter LaFeber, “Japan saw U.S. military commitments as crucial. They provided the ‘balance of power,’ behind which Japanese overseas investment could march. Tokyo’s defense budgets could meanwhile remain low. Japan, in other words, wanted American bodies but not American banks.”<sup>79</sup>

According to Mike Mansfield, “the U.S.-Japanese relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, by the 1970s, the two countries were rapidly becoming the twin pillars of capitalism, and the Carter administration noticed. Carter and Brzezinski were no strangers to Japan, having served on the Trilateral Commission.

Brzezinski was one of the Commission’s founders and had been its director.<sup>81</sup> The Commission was a group of business people and government leaders from the United States,

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77. General George S. Brown, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Philip Habib, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, “Troop Withdrawal from Korea, May 28, 1977” The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brz. Matl. Collection, box 43, 13F. 4.

78. Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997, 364.

79. LaFeber, *The Clash*, 364. Ford’s “balance of power” doctrine for East Asia comes from his assertion that “The center of political power in the United States has shifted westward. Our Pacific interests and concerns have increased. . . . The first premise is that American strength is basic to any stable balance of power in the Pacific.” President Gerald Ford, “Excerpts from Ford Speech Declaring New Pacific Doctrine,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 1975, 14.

80. Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, 183.

81. LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations*, 364.

Japan, and Western Europe who discussed solution to problems facing these countries. Japan's banks were on the prowl in China and Southeast Asia, and "Japan Inc." was rapidly becoming a force to be reckoned with. In the world of technology, particularly computers, Japan was set to compete directly with the American market. The 1980s would be Japan's decade, and the Japanese already sensed it: the last thing that they needed was regional instability. Carter's policy toward Korea was worrisome for the Japanese as they felt that they were beginning to get a taste of world power status. Ambassador Mansfield sent a cable to Carter: "First, I think there is a feeling in East Asia that the United States is paying insufficient attention to the region in comparison with Western Europe... Perception as much as reality governs international affairs. This is particularly true where Japan is concerned."<sup>82</sup> Though Mansfield, along with Brzezinski, gave tentative support to Carter regarding the troop withdrawals, he argued that the Japanese perspective was one that Washington could not afford to ignore. And what was this perspective specifically? It is difficult to know exactly what the Japanese leaders thought about the troop withdrawal possibility, as Prime Minister Fukuda and his close advisors usually expressed diffident support for the idea instead of outright approval. An expert on United States-Japan relations, Franklin Weinstein has provided useful insight: "There is considerable doubt among the Japanese that Washington has ever really understood their thinking on the Korean question. In particular, they feel, Americans do not sufficiently appreciate the importance of *process* to the Japanese. It is hard to overemphasize the significance which the Japanese attach not merely to the

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82. "Secret Cable from Ambassador Mike Mansfield to the White House," February 16, 1978, The Digital National Security Archive, Collection: Japan and the U.S., 1977-1992, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>.

substance of policies but to the process by which they are developed and implemented.”<sup>83</sup>

Japan valued its relationship with United States and it would not produce a rift over the withdrawal policy, but it insisted on consultation and prudence.

After Habib’s and Brown’s return, the Senate Foreign Assistance and East Asian subcommittees submitted a written joint report to the Committee on Foreign Relations on the trip. It pointed out that “opposition leaders in Korea are as insistent as the Government in their resistance to American troop withdrawals.” It also stated that “the Japanese, for reasons of their own security, would much prefer to have American forces remain in Korea, but they are reluctant to say so too forcefully since the American decision has been made and what remains to be discussed is not the withdrawal itself but its pace and modalities.”<sup>84</sup>

### China

The other two major nations with interests in the security of the Korean Peninsula were the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The Brown-Habib report indicated that the Chinese had not expressed their opinions vocally on the withdrawal issue, but that Beijing preferred the status quo as well.<sup>85</sup> Lest the subcommittee members forget, the report reminded them of Cold War implications. “Here as elsewhere,” it stated, “the key to Chinese policy is fear of the Soviet forces on the northern and western borders of China.

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83. Franklin B. Weinstein, “The United States, Japan, and the Security of Korea,” Franklin B. Weinstein (ed.), *United States-Japan Relations and the Security of East Asia: The Next Decade*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978, 71-72.

84. Foreign Assistance and East Asian Subcommittee Staffs to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, “June 10, 1977, Briefing by General George Brown and Undersecretary of State Phil Habib on U.S. Troop Withdrawals from Korea,” The Jimmy Carter Library, Brz. Matl. Collection, box 43, 16A, 2.

85. Foreign Assistance and East Asian Subcommittee Staffs to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, “June 10, 1977, Briefing by General George Brown and Undersecretary of State Phil Habib on U.S. Troop Withdrawals from Korea.”

A new Korean conflict would unavoidably set China and the United States against each other on behalf of their respective clients, unraveling the de facto Sino-American alignment against the expansion of Soviet power in Asia.” It went on to explain that “Whatever fears Peking may have harbored toward American military power as a direct threat to China evidently ended with our withdrawal from Vietnam...No longer perceived as a threat, American forces in South Korea may now represent to the Chinese a stabilizing influence and a symbol of continuing American interest in the Asian mainland, particularly as against the Soviet Union.”<sup>86</sup> A major goal of Carter’s during his term in office was to complete normalization of relations with China, which commenced under Nixon. Carter, as a young submarine officer, was stationed in Taiwan during the Korean War.<sup>87</sup> He knew firsthand of the tensions that existed between the mainland Chinese and those who had fled Communist rule to Taiwan following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists. He understood that normalization with Beijing meant the removal of all American forces from Taiwan. Much like his South Korea policy, this elicited strong reactions from some conservatives (particularly Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater) skeptical of the newfound friendship with the Chinese. Even some of Carter’s advisors were skeptical of a Taiwan pullout and stressed that such a move would be detrimental to withdrawal efforts in Korea. Defense Secretary Harold Brown remarked in April 1978 that “we should not make uncompensated withdrawals from Taiwan and Korea simultaneously.”<sup>88</sup> Carter’s advisors saw the opening with the mainland as beneficial for both China and the United States, however. In a June 1977 speech at a dinner

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86. Foreign Assistance and East Asian Subcommittee Staffs to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, “June 10, 1977, Briefing by General George Brown and Undersecretary of State Phil Habib on U.S. Troop Withdrawals from Korea.”

87. Jimmy Carter. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982,

88. “Summary Minutes of the April 11, 1978 Meeting on Korea and China,” April 11, 1978, The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, box 43, 2F.

for the Asia Society in New York, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance explained that the United States would remain a Pacific power despite the loss of Vietnam and the Korea pullout.<sup>89</sup> He also said that “We acknowledge the view expressed in the Shanghai Communiqué that there is but one China.” Tellingly, he made no reference to Taiwan.

### **North Korea**

Vance also commented that “We are very prepared to move toward improved relations with North Korea provided North Korea’s allies take steps to improve relations with South Korea.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, improved relations between North and South Korea were a goal of the Carter administration, one which would have to be achieved in order to prevent another conflict in the wake of troop withdrawals. In a memo from Brzezinski to Vance in August 1977, just days before the Secretary of State was to travel to China, the National Security Advisor suggested that a conference be held of the Chinese, South Koreans, North Koreans, and Americans.<sup>91</sup> Though this idea was mentioned several more times, it never did come to fruition.

Though the Carter administration seemed open to encouraging a new North-South dialogue, North Korea did not seem interested in peaceful negotiations. On July 14, 1977, the North Koreans shot down an American helicopter, allegedly in North Korean airspace, killing three crewmen and capturing the fourth<sup>92</sup>. Carter admitted that the American copter was, in fact, flying over North Korean airspace, and that “our primary interest is in having

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89. Norman Kempster, “U.S. is Bound to Full Peking Ties, Vance Says,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1977.

90. Kempster, “U.S. is Bound.”

91. Memorandum for the Secretary of State, “Talks Between North and South Korea,” August 4, 1977, The Jimmy Carter Library, Brz. Matl. Collection, box 43, 7, 1.

92. “Carter Seeks to Soothe North Korea,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1977.

the incident not escalate into a confrontation.” His comments raised some eyebrows in Congress. Rep. Robert Bauman (R-MD) said that the President “seemed to be taking all this very calmly and I don’t myself believe that’s exactly the right approach.”<sup>93</sup>

North Korea’s behavior gave Congress members and others reason to be skeptical of Carter’s policy. In fact, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung, a hardened veteran of the Sino-Japanese conflict during World War II and dedicated communist, desired to spread his ideology south of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. According to Bradley Martin, a journalist and Korea specialist who has spent much time in North Korea, “the Carter troop withdrawal plan was music to Kim Il-sung’s ears.”<sup>94</sup> The North Koreans had already attempted to influence American policy by placing full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* promoting Kim’s *juche* ideology (a combination of totalitarian Communism and Confucian ethic) and advocating various other anti-American/ anti-imperialist causes. One ad expressed North Korean disdain for the U.S. control of the Panama Canal and expressed solidarity with the Panamanian people “in their righteous struggle” to reclaim the prized waterway.<sup>95</sup> Of course, the return of the Canal would be one of Carter’s most laudable accomplishments. Another ad explicitly discussed the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the reunification of the Peninsula. It stated: “U.S. imperialism must desist from its aggressive ambition to rig up ‘two Koreas’ and take hold of south Korea as its permanent colony and military base, and must get out of south Korea... If U.S. troops pull out of south Korea and a democratic figure

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93. Ibid.

94. Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty*, New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004, 138.

95. Advertisement: “Talk of the Respected and Beloved Leader Kim il-Sung with Panamanian Journalists’ Delegation,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 1975.

96. Advertisement: “President Kim il-Sung Talks on Korea’s Reunification,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 1975.

97. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 94.

with national conscience comes into power in south Korea as its people demand, we will firmly guarantee a durable peace in Korea and successfully solve the question of Korea's reunification..."<sup>96</sup> The advertisements indicate Kim's desire to rid the Korean peninsula of American influence and reunify it.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Kim publicly referred to Jimmy Carter as "a man of justice."<sup>97</sup> Carter not only talked about withdrawal; he also lifted the ban on U.S. travel to North Korea and he and Kim engaged in correspondence with its leadership through President Omar Bongo of Gabon, President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, and President Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania. As Douglas Brinkley notes in *The Unfinished Presidency*, "Kim's missives were intended to drive home two points: it was time for the American president to honor his campaign pledge of troop withdrawal, and Korean unification was possible provided South Korean president Park Chung Hee was excluded from negotiations."<sup>98</sup> The latter proposal was, of course, rejected by Carter, but he nonetheless continued to reach out to the isolated regime.

This window of opportunity for talks in 1977 would not last long. By mid-1978, North Korea returned to a hard line stance after the United States and South Korea publicized joint military exercises (named Team Spirit) intended as practice in the event of another war.<sup>99</sup> "Clearly there was a message here for the Koreans, north and south alike," writes Bradley Martin. "The U.S. commitment to South Korean defense stood essentially

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98. Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 390.

99. Martin, *Under the Loving Care*, 139.

unchanged.”<sup>100</sup> By the end of 1978, the North was regularly sending commandos to infiltrate South Korea and building tunnels under the DMZ, practices which it utilized more frequently in the 1980s.

### **Congressional Opposition Mounts**

Even though Carter and members of his administration were confident that they could push through some sort of withdrawal, Congress was becoming increasingly recalcitrant. On July 21, 1977, Defense Secretary Brown briefed Congressional leaders on the issue. Brzezinski wrote to the President that “The reaction...was very chilly. 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...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.”<sup>101</sup>

As far as Congress was concerned, the Carter administration had not been convincing in its arguments for withdrawing forces. Concerns over the defense budget were acknowledged, but matters of security and influence outweighed those of money. Several Senators pointed out that the United States was in danger of losing its status as a world power in East Asia. Others were skeptical of North Korean intentions. Some even suggested that the policy would save no money.<sup>102</sup> Brzezinski admitted that the administration faced a daunting task: “In short, sentiment in favor of troop withdrawal is at best lukewarm and

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100. Ibid.

101. Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Congressional Reactions to our Korean Policy, June 11, 1977” The Jimmy Carter Library, Brz. Matl. Collection, box 43, C, 1.

102. Don Shannon, “No Savings Seen in U.S. Korea Pullout,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1977.

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.”<sup>103</sup> Carter, under growing pressure from Congress, signed into law the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (Fiscal Year 1978) on August 17, 1977. One aspect of the law stated: “(1) United States policy toward Korea should continue to be arrived at by joint decision of the President and Congress; (2) any implementation of the President's policy of phased troop withdrawal from Korea should be consistent with the security interests of South Korea and the interests of the United States in Asia, notably Japan; (3) such policy should involve appropriate consultations between the United States and the governments directly involved; and (4) any implementation of such policy shall be carried out in regular consultation with the Congress.”<sup>104</sup>

Although Congress was growing ever more skeptical, Carter’s advisors busied themselves trying to assure Japanese and South Korean leaders that they need not worry about the future of the region’s security. If Japanese leaders were still opposed to the plan, they did not say so when Secretary Brown visited Tokyo at the end of July. Brown reassured the Fukuda administration that the United States would provide the necessary compensation in aid to the South Koreans before and after the withdrawal. “We don’t have any disagreement at all,” said Japanese Foreign Minister Ichiro Hatoyama.<sup>105</sup> “The first reports were bad and confusing,” said one Japanese defense agency source, referring to the initial shock of learning that the United States might abandon pull out of Korea permanently.

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103. Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Congressional Reactions to our Korean Policy.”

104. “Bill Summary and Status, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress (1977-78), H.R. 6689,” The Library of Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d095:HR06689:@@L&summ2=m&>.

105. John Saar, “Japanese Reassured by Brown on U.S. Korea Pullout,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1977.

“They caused unnecessary doubt and suspicion among both Koreans and Japanese... We became convinced the U.S. is not abandoning Japan. I imagine the Japanese leaders were genuinely convinced the pullout from Korea is just a restructuring of forces and not a change of commitment in Northeast Asia.”<sup>106</sup>

Mike Armacost, visiting South Korea and Japan in September 1977, reached different conclusions. Although he did say that progress had been made in convincing the Japanese leaders, there were still many opponents to withdrawal in Tokyo. “The press people and academics whom I met expressed familiar misgivings about troop withdrawals,” Armacost admitted.<sup>107</sup> The South Koreans were also skeptical, he explained. “They seem unable to shed a defensive mentality. No one I spoke with seemed to have any bright ideas on how to stimulate a resumption of the North-South dialogue. Most seemed primarily fearful that we might put forward initiatives which would serve as a ‘cover’ for direct bilateral U.S. contacts with Pyongyang.”<sup>108</sup>

Brzezinski sent a memo to Carter on September 7, 1977, urging the President to stress to Congress the importance of supplying the South Koreans with a compensatory arms package of roughly \$2 billion. He also acknowledged the difficulties the administration faced in selling the plan in Washington: “Clearly there are hazards in putting a bill forward at this time. The calendar is crowded. The mood on the Hill is sour. Few Congressmen wish to touch this potentially troublesome issue with a ten foot pole.”<sup>109</sup> Regardless, Brzezinski

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106. Saar, “Japanese Reassured.”

107. Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, “Report on my Trip to Korea and Japan,” The Jimmy Carter Library, Brz. Matl. Coll., box 43, number not listed.

108. Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, “Report on my Trip to Korea and Japan.”

109. Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Legislation to Permit Equipment Transfers to Korea: The Need to Get this on the Legislative Calendar,” The Jimmy Carter Library, Brz, Matl. Coll, Box 43, 2B, 1.

wanted Carter to understand that Congress had to go ahead and secure these transfers in order to reassure the South Koreans. “We have told the South Koreans that we will move ahead with the compensatory package,” he wrote. “They expect us to seek legislation this fall.”<sup>110</sup> Brzezinski realized the unpopularity of the subject. He recommended that Carter approach Congress cautiously so as to avoid appearing overzealous. “In effect, not push but consult,” he scrawled at the end of the memo.<sup>111</sup>

As pressure mounted on Carter to further explain his intentions in Korea, Congress was busy assessing the potential effects of the troop withdrawals. Several Senators led the effort to investigate Carter’s plan, weigh the available options, and reach a conclusion about the proposal. They paid particular attention to events that were underway in East Asia, bearing in mind that withdrawing forces from South Korea would have major ramifications for the rest of the region. Senators Hubert H. Humphrey (D-MN), who had served as Vice President under Lyndon Johnson, and John Glenn (D-OH), the astronaut, drafted a detailed report (the first of several) for the Foreign Relations Committee in January 1978. Both Senators had visited East Asia in 1977 to assess the situation.<sup>112</sup>

Senators Glenn and Humphrey were well respected in Washington. Glenn had served in the Air Force during the Korean War, where he earned the nickname “Old Magnet Ass” for his ability to attract and sustain enemy flak.<sup>113</sup> Humphrey was closely associated with the escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam War, but he earned a reputation as an

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110. Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Legislation to Permit Equipment Transfers to Korea: The Need to Get this on the Legislative Calendar.”

111. Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Legislation to Permit Equipment Transfers to Korea: The Need to Get this on the Legislative Calendar.”

112. Sens. Hubert H. Humphrey and John Glenn, “A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 2,” Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978.

113. Peter B. Mersky, *U.S. Marine Corps Aviation – 1912 to the Present*, Annapolis MD: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1983.

effective legislator. He died in 1978, though his work in the months before he passed away was important in shaping the debate on the withdrawal issue. Both Glenn and Humphrey were familiar with conflict in East Asia, and knew how critical the region was to Cold War dynamics. “The President’s decision to withdraw troops from Korea will have a critical impact on the peace and stability of East Asia,” their report read.<sup>114</sup> It concluded that negotiations between North and South Korea had “stalled,” and that North Korea had developed an “impressive offensive capability” over the previous seven years.<sup>115</sup> “The U.S. troop withdrawal,” it stated, “must, therefore, 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.”<sup>116</sup>

According to the report, North Korea had gained a military advantage over the South by 1977. Glenn and Humphrey emphasized the importance of American forces in Korea: “The presence of U.S. ground forces in South Korea helps 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 reactions to incidents. Removal of U.S. ground forces will weaken deterrence and to some degree increase the threat of war.”<sup>117</sup> The threat of a North Korean attack on Seoul was not the only worry – the possibility that Park might strike first was equally alarming. If war were to break out again, the remaining U.S. Air Force units would undoubtedly be involved. One of Carter’s

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114. Humphrey and Glenn, “A Report, 1978.”

115. Ibid

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

proposals was to compensate for U.S. troop withdrawals by beginning to sell South Korea F-16 fighter jets, but the report indicated that this might touch off an arms race. Moreover, the State Department's former Korean affairs director Donald Renard, wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed that "beyond a new arms race, however, an even greater danger exists that the compensation program will build an indigenous and independent arms industry for Park."<sup>118</sup> The report also expressed the concern that South Korea might try to develop its own nuclear weapons if the United States were to withdraw its arsenal.<sup>119</sup> President Park began research for a nuclear weapons program in 1971 after Nixon withdrew the Seventh Infantry Division. An August 1977 CIA report concluded that "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 U.S. intent to forego their use in a future conflict...the South Korean press has suggested that the Park government would be justified in developing its own nuclear weapons if the US nuclear shield were withdrawn."<sup>120</sup> The possibility of a Korean nuclear arms race was certainly alarming. According to another CIA report, "The most important factor in South Korea's future nuclear decisions will be its perception of the reliability of the U.S. security commitment and, conversely, the imminence of the North Korean threat."<sup>121</sup>

Carter and his advisors faced tough choices in East Asia. Congress, already hesitant to provide military support for South Korea after the "Koreagate" bribery affair, further complicated Carter's effort to move forward with his withdrawal proposal. Since an essential

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118. Donald Renard, "U.S. Arms Will Not Guarantee South Korean Security," *The New York Times*, January 8, 1978.

119. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 89.

120. "CIA Memorandum: The Implications of Withdrawing Nuclear Weapons from Korea, August 11, 1977," [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

121. "South Korea: Nuclear Developments and Strategic Decisionmaking, June 1978." [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

part of the proposal was the transfer of military equipment to South Korea to compensate for troop removals, Congress's lack of enthusiasm was problematic. A memo sent to Cyrus Vance, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, and Zbigniew Brzezinski by several of Carter's main Korea advisors outlined the problems that the administration faced in April 1978. "Our Korea policy is at a critical juncture," it read.<sup>122</sup> "If we go through the first withdrawals without the compensation package, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would withhold their support. As long as the Korea issue remains, it will be hard for us to generate broad support for our Asia policy."<sup>123</sup> In an election year, Congress members wanted to avoid controversy. Many in the legislature already risked losing reelection by supporting Carter's decision to return the Panama Canal to its home country.

Mounting pressure from allies and Congress to reevaluate his withdrawal policy had put Carter in a difficult position. Though his idea might have resonated with budget hawks, those who saw grave security implications felt that his plan was reckless. On April 11, 1978, Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, and Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs Richard Holbrooke met with other key officials to discuss some of the strategic difficulties involved. Holbrooke suggested that once the bribery scandal blew over, Congress would be more supportive of troop withdrawals.<sup>124</sup> According to Defense Secretary Brown, the problem was deeper than that. It was one of intricate details, with each maneuver having consequences. "One has to recognize the military consequences of taking out our first combat forces. They guard key mountain passes. When they have been taken out, if adequately armed replacements do not

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122. "Memorandum for Cyrus Vance, Harold Brown, and Zbigniew Brzezinski" from Richard Holbrooke, Morton Abramowitz, Michael Armacost, and Michel Oksenberg, April 4, 1978, The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, box 44.

123. "Memorandum for Cyrus Vance, Harold Brown, and Zbigniew Brzezinski," April 4, 1978.

124. "Memorandum of Conversation: Summary Minutes of the April 11, 1978 Meeting on Korea and China," The Jimmy Carter Library, NSA Brzezinski Matl. Collection, box 44, 11D.

take their place, we will be susceptible to conservative charges in the U.S. that we are threatening the safety of the remaining two brigades. The entire brigade must be removed within a month. We cannot leave a *portion* of the brigade there.”<sup>125</sup> Holbrooke concurred: “That is a key point. If the U.S. arms remain in our possession and cannot be transferred to the Koreans, once our brigade is withdrawn a gap will exist. There is no easy solution to this problem.” Making matters more confusing, an Associated Press-NBC News poll conducted in March 1978 indicated that 61 percent of Americans favored Carter’s plan to gradually remove forces from Korea. But, in the wake of the bribery scandal, 56 percent opposed the arms compensation package.<sup>126</sup> Carter’s opponents were many, but it would be incorrect to say that he did not have supporters.

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125. Ibid.

126. “Poll Shows Public Support for Korea Pullout,” *The Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1978.

### Chapter 3: The Breaking Point

Carter's attempt to withdraw the American military presence from South Korea was becoming more complicated than he had anticipated. With only hesitant support from East Asian allies, skepticism in Congress, and opposition from the military, Carter was ill-prepared to surmount any more obstacles. Three factors, however, would determine the fate of his policy – alarming intelligence indicating increased North Korean military capabilities, the emerging but delicate U.S. relationship with China, and an increasingly unstable environment in South Korea.

#### Alarming Intelligence

A CIA assessment released on May 10, 1978 concluded that “for most Koreans today the restriction of political liberties is not a key issue.” The agency believed that South Korea's impressive economic growth had distracted its people from Park Chung Hee's repressive tactics. “The political calm,” the report added, “reflects in part Seoul's success in controlling critics of the government.”<sup>127</sup> The calm, however, was deceiving. Universities throughout South Korea were havens for thousands of disaffected students, eager for a transition to democracy. It was only a matter of time before the disenchantment would bubble up to the surface.

The CIA's National Foreign Assessment Center also released a disquieting update on North Korean military capabilities. “The static military balance between North and South

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127. Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, “The Political Scene in South Korea, May 10, 1978: An Intelligence Assessment” The Digital National Security Archive, *The United States and the Two Koreas from Nixon to Clinton, 1969-2000*, document 00258, 1.

Korea alone now favors the North by a substantial margin,” it read. “This represents a significant shift from the rough parity that existed eight years ago and results from successful North Korean efforts to acquire large quantities of weapons from the Soviet Union and China, to establish a large domestic arms industry, and to expand and modernize their armed forces.” The North Koreans had achieved a two-to-one advantage in numbers of tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery. The report also predicted that North Korean military manpower would reach South Korea’s level by 1980.<sup>128</sup>

“This conclusion is absurd,” Carter scrawled on the intelligence assessment. Today, Carter maintains that “there were very close ties between military leaders in our two countries (the United States and South Korea), so a lot of pressure (on the policymaking process) also came from the Pentagon and CIA. I was somewhat skeptical of intelligence reports that North Korea had doubled the size of its military within a few years, but had no way to disprove them.”<sup>129</sup> Carter’s complacency towards North Korea’s military strength had already concerned those who witnessed his nonchalant reaction to the downing of the American helicopter two years before.

In May 1978, Washington was unprepared to deal with what was about to unfold in South Korea. President Carter’s troop withdrawal plan was looking ever more doubtful, but the president was still confident that some troops could be removed as long as Congress was cooperative. The CIA assessment regarding North Korean troop levels, however, challenged this effort. If he were to secure arms transfers from the departing soldiers and secure future

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128. Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, “Military Balance on the Korean Peninsula, May 10, 1978: An Intelligence Memorandum” The Digital National Security Archive, document 00259, 1.

129. Carter’s most recent commentary on the Korea policy is available in his diary. Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 280.

commitments to the South Korean military to match North Korean strength the President would need Congressional approval.

Although South Korea exhibited somewhat of a veneer of stability as its 1978 Presidential election approached, it was in fact on the brink of catastrophe. Park's authoritarian rule had alienated many citizens, and there was little confidence in the government's ability to rule democratically. Student protests were met with mass arrests. The CIA failed to understand just how divided South Korean society had become. It would take a stunning turn of events to convince the Carter administration that the country was not as secure or stable as the CIA had reasoned.

### **The Emerging China Question**

Another factor made the possibility of a diminished American military presence on the Korean peninsula more risky: uncertainty about the United States' new relationship with the People's Republic of China. Although the Korea pullout was a controversial subject, it was not the headline grabber that the opening to China was, and it remains an obscure subject in comparison. Even though Nixon began the process of repairing the United States-China relationship, Carter assumed the task of completing the normalization process. Just as the United States and China were working to establish more congenial relations, China grew concerned about stability in the region.

In May 1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski traveled to Beijing and Seoul. Among his goals was to gain a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between South Korea and China, as well as of China's relationship with North Korea. The Carter administration,

which saw the benefits of economic cooperation with China, also understood that the country played a crucial role in the future of American policy towards the Korean peninsula. After his stop in Beijing, Brzezinski engaged in a lengthy discussion with South Korean Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha about the nature of the burgeoning United States-China relationship, the implications of that relationship on the troop withdrawal proposal, and the possibility of talks between North and South Korea. Choi explained to Brzezinski that North Korea was not interested in tripartite talks and that Kim Il-sung wanted nothing more than to drive a wedge between the United States and South Korea.<sup>130</sup> Brzezinski concurred and said that the United States was not interested in direct talks with North Korea alone.

China's relationship with North Korea was a more complicated matter. Brzezinski explained to President Park that a major concern in China was the possibility of losing influence among its neighbors, particularly North Korea. Vietnam had already turned toward Moscow.<sup>131</sup> The Soviets had already made inroads in Afghanistan, and China feared that North Korea could follow that path. A National Intelligence Officer for China wrote that "the Chinese have been and remain in position to effectively counsel restraint on Kim Il-sung. But the development of a (North Korean) domestic arms industry already provides Pyongyang with considerable independence and we doubt that Kim could be deterred if he saw an opportunity for a quick, fait accompli military victory over the South."<sup>132</sup> The NIO added that China and the Soviet Union

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130. Memorandum of Conversation between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Prime Minister Choi Kyu-hah, May 25, 1978, The Digital National Security Archive, document 00263, 1.

131. Memorandum of Conversation between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Park Chung-hee, May 25, 1978, The Digital National Security Archive, document 00262, 2.

132. Memorandum from a National Intelligence Officer in China to CIA Director Stansfield Turner, January 23, 1979, The Digital National Security Archive, document 00282, 1.

wished to see the status quo remain on the Korean peninsula due to their fears of a regional conflict erupting in the event of a renewed Korean war.

This begged the question: If China strengthened its relations with North Korea, would that make it easier or harder for the United States to withdraw its troops from the South? South Korean leaders remained skeptical of American intentions until they received some indication that the United States intended to comply fully with its promise to boost military aid to the South. And, since normalization efforts with the Chinese were still in the works, there was no way of knowing how well these efforts would succeed. The United States seemed to be wandering further into increasingly complicated and thorny territory as it tried to establish a platform for its future role in East Asia. The South Koreans were highly suspicious, the Japanese ambivalent, the Chinese uncertain, and the North Koreans hostile. Andrew Malcolm of the *New York Times* summed up the United States' shaky relationship with its Asian allies: "The soldiers [in South Korea], America's last on the Asian mainland, are seen as a symbol of the United States' commitment to protect the area against a Communist threat. For a few years after northeast Asia recovered from World War II, the United States exercised extraordinary influence throughout both South Korea and Japan. But a growing economic and psychological independence first in Japan and now in a booming South Korea have reduced the direct American influence, though some aspects of a 'big brother relationship' still linger."<sup>133</sup> This lingering reliance on American power manifested itself most visibly in the troop withdrawal issue.

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133. Andrew Malcolm, "U.S. Efforts to Modify Relations With Asian Allies Lead to Strain," *The New York Times*, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1978.

### **Congress in Opposition**

Throughout the rest of 1978, the future of the Korea troop withdrawal plan remained murky at best, with very few in support and an increasing number open hostile towards it. No one stepped forward to champion the policy. The Pacific Study Group, a subcommittee of the Senate Subcommittee on Armed Services, was joined by Sam Nunn, a Democratic Senator from Carter's home state of Georgia who opposed the troop withdrawals. Nunn was known for supporting missile systems that Democrats opposed, advocating a strong military.<sup>134</sup> He, Senator Glenn, Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, and Senator William Cohen of Maine traveled to East Asia in January 1979 to evaluate the trends there.<sup>135</sup> They went to the Philippines, Thailand, China, Japan, and South Korea. Upon their return, Nunn assessed the group's findings, based on their own discussions with allied leaders on intelligence reports. The results did not provide Carter with any relief.

Nunn's report began: "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. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division...Moreover, the present plans for withdrawal will cost the United States between \$1.5-2.5 billion without reducing the probability of immediate U.S. combat involvement in a future Korean conflict."<sup>136</sup> The evidence was damning. In light of the latest intelligence, Nunn warned that North Korea would be a formidable opponent if it were to "achieve

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134. Kevin Sack, "Nunn, Model Southern Democrat, To Retire from Senate Next Year," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1995.

135. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979, iii.

136. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate (96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session) "Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979," 1.

surprise.”<sup>137</sup> If the North Koreans were to surprise the South, they would be able to reach Seoul before facing a significant counterattack. Nunn referred to the recent intelligence in the report. He pointed out that the South was developing adequate defense capabilities, but the CIA projected that they would not be effective until the mid-1980s. “In the meantime,” the Agency reported in a study Nunn cited, “the U.S. military presence in South Korea represents an in-place affirmation of the U.S. commitment to help defend the South and remains a key factor in the balance of deterrence on the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>138</sup> Senator Nunn pointed out that operational reserves in Pyongyang were “capable of exploiting a ‘blitzkrieg’ deep into the ROK.”<sup>139</sup> This was not taken lightly in Washington.

Nunn’s testimony emphasized that withdrawing U.S. forces would not even cut costs. “In fact,” the report stated, “given the administration’s plan to retain and rebase the withdrawn troops and to convert the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division into a mechanized division upon its return to the United States, there will be substantial additional costs.”<sup>140</sup> According to Nunn, the restoration of adequate military power to South Korea would carry a \$1.485-2.370 billion price tag. The costs included the removal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division equipment, the transfer to South Korea of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division equipment, new military construction needed to rebase the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and the mechanization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

Another concern was the ability of the remaining United States Air Force personnel to provide adequate support to the South Koreans in the event of a North Korean attack. “We

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137. Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, “Military Balance on the Korean Peninsula, May 10, 1978,” The Digital National Security Archive, document 00259, 1.

138. Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, “Military Balance on the Korean Peninsula, May 10, 1978,” The Digital National Security Archive, document 00259, 2.

139. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, “Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979,” 3.

140. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, “Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979,” 4.

can envisage,” wrote Nunn, “certain post-withdrawal military scenarios that would make us regret the absence of sizeable U.S. ground combat forces in Korea – including those forces that are now the focus of the withdrawal program.”<sup>141</sup> Once again, the fact that the military balance had shifted in favor of the North Koreans made this point more alarming.

Nunn also emphasized the possibility of a nuclear arms race on the Korean peninsula. He wrote that “it is the judgment of many U.S. officials and Korean experts we talked to that the withdrawal could contribute to an erosion of existing ROK confidence in U.S. reliability and increase Korean pressure to develop nuclear weapons of their own.”<sup>142</sup> Fears of South Korea developing its own nuclear program had existed for a while, but the possibility seemed even nearer in light of the recent intelligence. In addition to the nuclear issue, Nunn reminded Congress that “No Asian ally of the United States has expressed enthusiasm for the withdrawal, and in many Asian capitals concern continues to be privately expressed over its wisdom.”<sup>143</sup> It was especially inconvenient for Carter that one of his more vocal opponents was a Democrat from his home state. The more opposition he received from his own party, the more unlikely success seemed.

### **Park and Carter in Seoul**

As Congress grew more wary of the troop withdrawal initiative, the CIA was trying to make sense of the political atmosphere in South Korea. A June 4, 1979 intelligence assessment read: “President Park Chung Hee’s government has come through another spring

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141. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, “Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979,” 5.

142. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, “Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979,” 5.

143. A Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services, The United States Senate, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, “Korea: The U.S. Troop Withdrawal Program, January 23, 1979,” 6.

– historically the time for increased antigovernment activities in South Korea – without serious trouble or large-scale protests from the country’s dissidents...The failure of the underlying malaise to disrupt domestic tranquility in South Korea so far reflects inherent weaknesses of the dissident movement, including inability of Park’s critics to articulate goals with broad appeal in Korea.”<sup>144</sup> The CIA based this assumption largely on the fact that Kim Dae-jung, the dissident leader, who had been moved from prison to house arrest in 1978, had been unable to garner support for a large-scale movement. Kim still did not retain his rights to protest and dissent, and would not fully regain them until South Korean democratization in the 1980s.<sup>145</sup> The CIA therefore assumed that the likelihood of a rebellion was small.

On June 30, 1979, Carter visited South Korea with Vance, Brown, Brzezinski, and Holbrooke. When Carter arrived in Seoul, President Park praised American efforts to achieve better relations with China, but he expressed concern about tensions between China and the Soviet Union.<sup>146</sup> He also mentioned the Arab OPEC embargo’s effect on South Korea’s economy and the need for more trade with the United States. His main point, however, was that the United States should maintain its forces in South Korea. “The most honest desire of every Korean,” he remarked, “is to avoid a recurrence of war. What is the surest guarantee against the recurrence of war? Continuation of the U.S. presence and an end to withdrawals.”<sup>147</sup> By that time, only one battalion of ground troops, consisting of 674

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144. CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, “The Outlook for President Park and South Korea’s Dissidents: An Intelligence Assessment, June 4, 1979,” The Digital National Security Archive, document 00313, iii.

145. Kim Dae-jung Biography, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2000/dae-jung-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2000/dae-jung-bio.html).

146. Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and President Park, July 3, 1979, The Digital National Security Archive, document 00315, 2.

147. Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and President Park, July 3, 1979, 2.

soldiers, had actually been withdrawn, while twelve more air force F-4 fighters and crews – 900 troops in all – had been sent to boost the existing forces.<sup>148</sup>

Park finally had a chance to confront Carter in person about the troop withdrawals. The American president responded by pointing out that American allies in the Pacific were secure and that the United States would maintain bases in other countries in the region.<sup>149</sup> He also stated that the United States might reconsider its troop withdrawal policy, temporarily reducing the presence by 3,000 instead of the entire 40,000, and taking up the issue of the remaining forces in 1981. This was a major shift, but it fell on deaf ears. Carter stressed the importance of a new dialogue between the North and the South as well, but Park seemed uninterested. “We are dealing with sly and treacherous Communists,” he replied, “and we should not let ourselves be manipulated lest they drive a wedge between us.”<sup>150</sup>

Carter was livid. In his diary, Carter wrote an excerpt from the conversation, when he and President Park were discussing tank levels in North and South Korea. Carter felt that Park was trying to exaggerate the disparity between the two Koreas, just as he was skeptical of the intelligence regarding the North’s capabilities. Carter simply did not accept the recent intelligence estimate and doubted that the South Koreans needed American forces that badly. “I could not understand,” he wrote after the meeting in Seoul, “how a tiny nation like North Korea could surpass so greatly a large and strong South Korea, even with forty thousand American troops and superb air cover, and I was deeply disturbed about this trend... I told President Park that I had come with the sincere intent to work closely and had been taken aback by his adamant demand that U.S. force levels not be changed when the numbers

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148. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 108.

149. Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and President Park, July 3, 1979, 5.

150. Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter and President Park, 5.

involved were only one-half of 1 percent of the total defense forces available to South Korea.” It is telling that Carter showed little consideration for the South Korean president’s point of view. He wanted to remove the forces due to budget constraints, and he believed that removing American forces from Korea would amount to long-term cost savings. He ultimately cared little for what human rights violator Park Chung Hee thought about the matter.<sup>151</sup>

Park was ever more convinced that the United States was turning its back on South Korea. Carter responded by pushing the human rights issue further. After the meeting in Seoul, he wrote that “Everywhere we went we pushed human rights, including with Prime Minister Choi and then with President Park and his daughter – the most important unresolved issue. Only 17 percent of Americans support military action to defend Korea, because of unfavorable publicity about human rights.”<sup>152</sup> There were probably more reasons for the limited support, but Carter was certain that he was correct to pressure Park on his human rights record.

Secretary of State Vance, in his memoirs, recalled the tense atmosphere of the meeting between Park and Carter: “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.”<sup>153</sup> Park, who felt his opinions had been

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151. See Jimmy Carter’s *White House Diary* for the conversation. Carter, *White House Diary*, 338-39.

152. Carter, *White House Diary*, 339.

153. Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, 129.

given short shrift throughout the withdrawal debate, used the opportunity to express his true feelings.

Despite his insistence that he was in the right, Carter had very few cards left to play. His advisors were ever more skeptical of the wisdom of the withdrawal plan in light of the recent intelligence, and Carter had just been chastised by the South Korean president. Newly appointed Ambassador to South Korea William Gleysteen, who was present during the summit, bore the brunt of Carter's indignation as the American leaders exited the Blue House (South Korea's executive office and residence of the president). Gleysteen, in his memoir, describes the situation: "Giving me virtually no context and clearly venting his anger on me, the president asked me why Park, in the face of North Korea's huge buildup, was unwilling to increase his country's defense expenditure at least to the American level of 6 percent of GDP and why Park was so resistant to some real measure of political liberalization."<sup>154</sup> The heated exchange between Carter and Gleysteen was visible to everyone in the vicinity. "This angry debate, in which the president of the United States wagged his finger at me, did not go unnoticed," writes Gleysteen. "It was witnessed by Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha who was waiting to pay a courtesy call, the foreign minister, Dick Holbrooke, Nick Platt (of the National Security Council), Bob Rich, the Korean press, and many others who were huddled around, some fiendishly eager to know what had caused this spectacle lasting almost a half an hour. Limousines stretched behind us down the driveway and into the street. Observing

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154. William Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 48.

the scene, Platt said to Holbrooke, ‘There goes your Korea policy; it’s all being decided there now!’<sup>155</sup>

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155. Ibid.

### **Epilogue: Park's Assassination and the Kwangju Uprising**

With rapidly dwindling support, Carter agreed to postpone his troop withdrawal policy. On July 20, 1979, Brzezinski read to reporters a statement from the president: “Withdrawals [from Korea] of combat elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division will remain in abeyance. The structure and function of the Combined Forces Command will continue as established last year. Between now and the end of 1980 some reductions of personnel in U.S. support units will continue...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.”<sup>156</sup> Carter ultimately succeeded in removing 3,000 ground troops from the peninsula – an insignificant number which stirred no further debate. Along with the troops, 450 of the 700 US atomic weapons were withdrawn. Carter would not get a chance to pursue his objective again, as he was denied reelection in 1980.

After Carter decided to end his quest for troop withdrawals from the Korean peninsula, South Korea entered one of the darkest periods in its (then) thirty years of existence. Though it is incorrect to assert that Carter was directly involved in the events which unfolded in 1979 and 1980, some have contended that his policy towards South Korea contributed its instability. Carter's insistence that Park curb his human rights abuses, along

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156. Jimmy Carter, “United States Troop Withdrawals from the Republic of Korea Statement by the President.” July 20, 1979, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=32622&st=korea&st1=>.

with his continued threats of withdrawal, may have led the South Korean president to react more forcefully to the growing unrest in his country.

Despite the CIA's assurance that the potential for instability in South Korea was not dire, events on the ground suggested otherwise. Park did release a large number of political prisoners in July 1979, a maneuver which many South Koreans greeted with cautious optimism.<sup>157</sup> However, by the fall, Park had lost his patience. He began cracking down on protests throughout the country, and even declared "partial martial law."<sup>158</sup> When Ambassador Gleysteen and Defense Secretary Brown visited Park in early October 1979, they warned him of the costs of such repression. Park defended his administration, but, according to Gleysteen, he "seemed uncharacteristically ambivalent about how to deal with the unrest, probably reflecting sharp disagreement among his key advisers. His ambivalence gave me a peculiar feeling. I had never before seen the president in such a state."<sup>159</sup> Cha Chi Chol, chief of presidential security and an uncompromising hard-liner, was Park's key adviser at this time. The alliance between these two men was unsettling to other South Korean leaders, particularly the director of the Korean CIA, Kim Chae Kyu.

On October 26, 1979, President Park requested Kim Chae Kyu, Cha Chi Chol, and Blue House Secretary General Kim Kye Won to dine with him. During a heated exchange in which Park and Cha accused Kim of being a failure as chief of intelligence, Kim drew a pistol and fired several shots at the two leaders. He ran out of ammunition and drew a

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157. Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 52.

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*

second pistol, resumed his attack, and killed both men. Kim Kye Won escaped unharmed. To this day, Kim's motive has yet to be determined.<sup>160</sup>

Martial law was declared after the murder, and Kim Chae Kyu was quickly identified as the assassin. The Park constitution mandated that Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha would take over temporarily as President. American and South Korean forces were placed on a high degree of alert, and an American aircraft-carrier task force was sent to Korean waters as a show of force to the North. Two Airborne Warning and Surveillance radar planes were stationed to monitor North Korean movements. The State Department announced that the United States would "react strongly in accordance with its treaty obligations to the Republic of Korea to any external attempt to exploit the situation in the Republic of Korea."<sup>161</sup>

A power vacuum now existed in Seoul. Aside from the legitimate fear that North Korea was waiting to pounce across the DMZ, the current crop of South Korean leaders could not agree on how to proceed. Gleysteen sent a cable to Vance immediately after the shooting, stating that "The stunning events of October 26/27 were not revolutionary but they have created circumstances where we cannot comfortably go on making some of the basic assumptions of the past. We are faced with new uncertainty and the need for care in the way we comport ourselves."<sup>162</sup> Indeed, the future of U.S.-South Korean relations looked more uncertain than ever.

In the aftermath of the assassination, it was clear that the South Korean military was hoping to seize control of the country. According to the *New York Times*, ROK military

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160. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 111.

161. *Ibid.*

162. U.S. Embassy Seoul to Department of State, "Initial Reflections on Post-Park Chung Hee Situation in Korea, October 28, 1979, in Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, 203.

leaders had already shifted toward a more hard-line stance under Park: “There is a new generation of hawkish general officers, favored under President Park, who harbor sharper feelings towards the United States, remembering Vietnam rather than the Korean War. They are less tolerant of civilian rule and democracy.”<sup>163</sup> These military officials were looking to see just how committed the United States was to South Korea’s security.

Secretary of State Vance flew to Seoul on November 4 to express his “hopes for political stability.”<sup>164</sup> The day before, pro-democracy activist and former prisoner Kim Dae Jung pleaded for the United States to “do all it can to assure the neutrality of the military here.”<sup>165</sup> Vance did not comment on that matter, and Pentagon sources told reporters that the military was the best institution to see through the transition.<sup>166</sup> Historian Bruce Cumings writes that “in the aftermath of Park’s assassination, the Carter administration did little to support democracy in Korea.”<sup>167</sup> Indeed, during his brief visit, Vance indicated that the United States was willing to support draconian measures. While it might not have been the intention of the administration to openly support repression, it certainly seemed more interested in order than democracy. Vance told Choi Kyu Ha that “the decision to impose partial martial law has assured the world that Korea would keep a civilian government..We

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163. Henry Scott Stokes, “The Coming Battle is Political for S. Korea’s Anxious Army,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1979.

164. Henry Scott Stokes, “U.S. Tie With Seoul Stressed by Vance,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1979.

165. Ibid.

166. Richard Halloran, “U.S. Urges ‘Orderly’ Transition by Korean Military,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 1979.

167. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997, 375.

have also been gratified by the smooth functioning of the combined forces command and our joint military liaison machinery. This is very encouraging.”<sup>168</sup>

The aftermath of the Park assassination was a moment of mass confusion that was easily exploited by a group of hard-line South Korean military leaders led by General Chun Doo Hwan, the head of South Korea’s Defense Security Command. These were some of Park’s most loyal officers, and they had every intention of continuing his iron-fisted rule. Chun was in charge of the assassination investigation, but he was more interested in stretching the limits of his authority. In April 1980, a miners’ revolt in a small town near the east coast provided him with the pretext to make himself head of the Korean CIA while maintaining his post as head of the Defense Security Command.<sup>169</sup> General John Wickham, now Commander of the United States Forces Korea, gave his blessing to the Korean military’s role in deciding the future of the country’s leadership. This included “being watchdogs on political activity that could be de-stabilizing, and in a way making judgments about the eligibility and reliability of political candidates.”<sup>170</sup> Chun was happy to make himself that candidate. As soon as Chun achieved this “coup in all but name,” demonstrators flooded the streets of South Korea’s cities. Seoul saw daily demonstrations of at least 50,000 people. On May 17, 1980, Chun tried to finish his takeover of the government by declaring full martial law. He closed universities, dissolved the legislature, banned all political activity, and arrested thousands of political leaders and dissidents.<sup>171</sup>

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168. Cable: Korea Focus – Secretary’s Discussion With Acting President Choi Kyu-Ha, November 3, 1979, The Digital National Security Archive, document 00325, 1.

169. Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 376.

170. *Asian Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 1980.

171. Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 377.

On May 18, 1980, about 500 protestors took to the streets of Kwangju, a city in the southernmost region of South Korea. Paratroopers landed in the city and began firing at random, killing women, children, and students. One Peace Corps volunteer, David Dolinger, was in Kwangju during the massacre. He described the bloodshed: “The troops used their truncheons to attack the protestors as well as the onlookers and anyone else that they caught. The troops even followed people into stores where they would hit everyone and if they found young men drag them into the streets where they were beaten again and forced on to trucks. The beating appeared to be indiscriminant.”<sup>172</sup> By May 21<sup>st</sup>, hundreds of thousands of local people had driven the soldiers from the city. The death toll was estimated to be around 500.<sup>173</sup>

The Carter administration and the U.S. command in Korea could do little to prevent the atrocities. Intervening would have required a maneuver more intrusive than any since the Korean War. Tim Shorrock, an independent journalist who has written extensively on the Kwangju massacre, has argued that the Carter administration knew in advance of the South Korean military government’s intention to crack down on the demonstrations.<sup>174</sup> Using the 4,000 or so documents he obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, Shorrock has made a convincing case that the administration pushed for stability over human rights. There is no indication, though, that Washington ordered the massacre or suggested that the South Korean military use brute force. In fact, Ambassador Gleysteen was all but certain that the

#### South Korean

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172. Eyewitness Testimony of David Dolinger, *Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School Blog*, <http://518folkschool.blogspot.com/2005/11/eyewitness-testimony-of-david-dolinger.html>.

173. Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 377.

174. For more on Shorrock’s findings, visit his detailed website, [www.timshorrock.com](http://www.timshorrock.com). He explains the documents which point to the administration’s complicity. Since the United States is bound by treaty to support South Korea in the event of major instability, it is highly debatable whether this situation applied.

military would not use force to quell the demonstrations, and warned against it.<sup>175</sup> One particular document, however, may provide more telling insight.

A May 1980 cable sent from the State Department to the American Embassy in Seoul suggests that the South Korean military leaders were in cahoots with certain American officers who had their own agenda in mind. It read: “We have a number of indications that a process is again underway in which the ROK military, when faced with unpleasant policy news from the USG’s authorized representatives, turns to “friends” among the active and retired U.S. military and persuades itself that the compatible responses it thus hears represent the “real” U.S. policy.”<sup>176</sup> Was there a disconnect between Washington and the American command in South Korea? It is possible. The official American embassy statement on the Kwangju affair, released in 1989 and known as the White Paper, states that the Carter administration was not aware of what was going on in Kwangju and did not encourage violence or repression.<sup>177</sup> However, to this day, the United States is viewed with suspicious eyes in South Korea – a direct result of the perceived compliance in the Kwangju assault. As Bruce Cumings points out, “there may not have been an alternative to turning a cold shoulder to the citizens of Kwangju, since for the United States to deny Chun troops or to take the side of Kwangju’s citizens would have been an intervention with no precedent since the 1940s. But American operational control under the United States-South Korean Combined Forces Command made U.S. responsibility inescapable, and the release of frontline troops made hash of Carter’s human rights policies; the United States

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175. Cable from American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, “Korea Focus: Meetings with General Chun and Blue House Secretary General Choi, May 1980,” [www.timshorrock.com](http://www.timshorrock.com). Seoul 05921 May 10

176. Cable from Richard Holbrooke to the American Embassy in Seoul, “Self-Deception by the ROK Military, May 1980,” [www.timshorrock.com](http://www.timshorrock.com).

177. “Backgrounder, The United States Government Statement on the Events in Kwangju, Republic of Korea, in May 1980,” Embassy of the United States, Seoul, Korea, <http://seoul.usembassy.gov/backgroundunder.html>.

paid dearly for both in Korean attitudes thereafter.”<sup>178</sup> Once Carter left office, Chun’s rule became even more draconian. There were widespread reports of ideology-driven “purification camps” and mass purges, ideas that had previously only been associated only with North Korea.

When Carter left office in 1980, South Korea was in disarray. Carter’s attempt to withdraw American forces had been thoroughly foiled, and human rights abuses had grown worse. Ambassador Gleysteen has observed very astutely that “to a disturbing degree, those policies (troop withdrawal and the push for political liberalization) were conceived in ignorance of real conditions and attitudes in Korea. Carter pursued both with reckless zeal, taking neither into consideration when it came to the consequences on the peninsula and in the region. One was completely thwarted, and the other accomplished little that was not later reversed. The high priority given both created inner conflicts between them...Both policies had unintended consequences.”<sup>179</sup> Carter was not directly responsible for the mayhem which engulfed South Korea in 1980. However, it can be argued that his insistence on disrupting the South Korean status quo through his troop withdrawal proposal while maintaining pressure on the Park regime to curb its human rights abuses were simply too burdensome for South Korea’s leaders. Carter failed to grasp the fragility of US-South Korean relations, and thus neglected the potential for unrest in South Korea.

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178. Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 378.

179. Gleysteen, *Massive Entanglement*, 197.

## Conclusion

Jimmy Carter was unable to withdraw all American forces from the Korean peninsula due to several factors. First, he faced considerable opposition from the US military leadership in South Korea and further alienated them when he demoted General Singlaub. From the beginning, Carter seemed unwilling to consult the US command in South Korea, and the US officers in South Korea were hesitant to express outright support for his withdrawal initiative. Second, Carter confronted Japanese and South Korean leaders who were reluctant to help sustain his plan. Prime Minister Fukuda of Japan, concerned primarily with his own country's economic well-being, tentatively accepted the policy but never backed it fully. President Park Chung Hee of South Korea initially complied with Carter but turned increasingly disillusioned with the plan once his own power began to slip from his grasp and US intelligence confirmed his suspicions that North Korea was stronger militarily than many had thought. Third, the United States Congress was hesitant to support military assistance to a South Korean regime it considered a corrupt human rights violator. Withdrawing troops from Korea necessitated an aid package that Congress members were unwilling to support. Confronted with the fallout of the Koreagate bribery scandal, Congress also feared a backlash in the polls if they were to vote for the aid package. And, fourth, Carter's policy was dealt a final blow by US intelligence sources who revealed that the North Korean military was much stronger than was initially believed. Though he did not want to accept these conclusions, Carter had little choice but to postpone his withdrawal plans. He had fewer and fewer supporters the more he pushed for withdrawal.

Though the aforementioned issues were the main contributors to the withdrawal plan's demise, there is another factor which must be considered. By 1979, Carter faced daunting foreign policy challenges. Tasked with establishing normal relations with China, forging the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, and establishing the SALT II Treaty with the Soviet Union, Carter had little time to deal with events in South Korea. When the Iranian Revolution erupted in 1978 and, a year later, 52 Americans were taken hostage at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Korea had become an afterthought. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 occupied the remaining headlines. When events began to unravel in South Korea in 1979, Carter had to deal with these burdensome issues, in addition to the upcoming 1980 election.

Carter's failure to withdraw all 40,000 troops from Korea stemmed from factors ultimately outside of his control. He might have achieved a more advantageous result had he worked more closely with the military commanders in South Korea and trusted intelligence sources, done more to convince Congress of his policy's prudence, and showed more regard for the opinions of the Japanese and South Korean leaders. Had he paid more attention to the intricate process of withdrawal and all of its potential consequences, as the Japanese leaders wished, he may have at least secured the removal of more troops than he was able. His extraction of 3,000 troops seemed to be merely a face-saving measure. However, given the fact that Congress, the military command in South Korea, and US allies in East Asia were so vehemently opposed to the plan, Carter would have had to expend a significant amount of energy convincing them otherwise. Since so many factors and individuals were involved in the withdrawal process, Carter was unable to do but so much to achieve his objective. With

so many issues confronting him in 1979, Carter had little choice but to abandon his withdrawal plan.

Though Carter's policy of withdrawal from Korea was a failure, its political consequences for his administration were relatively minor. He received hardly any criticism during the 1980 election campaign, and it attracts relatively little scrutiny to the present day. In fact, his sentiment about the necessity of scaling back American military commitments is echoed quite frequently. Chalmers Johnson, writing in his 2004 book *Sorrows of Empire*, explains that "South Korean public opinion has shifted radically on the issue of North Korea. The prosperous and well-informed people of the South know that their fellow Koreans – hungry, desperate, oppressed, but well armed – are trapped by the ironies of the end of the Cold War and by the harshness of the Kim Jong-il regime but are also being pushed into an exceedingly dangerous corner by the Americans in their newly proclaimed role as the reigning global military colossus."<sup>180</sup> As the United States has increased its military expenditures and exerted its power globally, South Koreans have become less enthusiastic about the United States as world police. In fact, South Korea's leaders have even expressed their opposition to American military adventures. Roh Moo-hyun, president from 2003-2008, is said to have told then US President George W. Bush that South Korea would rather live with a nuclear North than join the United States in another war.<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, on two occasions, Carter has gone to North Korea as a private citizen to do the bidding of the US government since his presidency. He made his first trip in 1994 to prevent the regime from developing nuclear weapons. On his second trip, in 2010, he negotiated the release of an

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180. Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004, 94.

181. Johnson, *The Sorrows*, 93.

American man imprisoned there. Today he is regarded by many in Washington as a trusted envoy to North Korea.

Despite its status as a democratic and economically prosperous nation, South Korea remains a staunch American ally which depends on the American military presence to help maintain its security. Fears of a major North Korean attack or a regional conflict still remain. Andrew Bacevich, professor of international relations and history at Boston University, commented in August 2010 that “the reorientation toward what I might say is a more modest and less militarized policy would be something that would happen over time in increments, where you would in a sense pull back, if that’s what you want to call it, from those areas where pulling back poses the least risk.” Bacevich went on to stress that South Korea would not be an ideal place from which to disengage: “The classic example is Western Europe. Why the hell do we have to have forces in Germany? We can pull out of Germany. The Europeans can defend themselves. Now, does that then mean that you should also simultaneously pull out of South Korea? No! Different circumstance, different case...probably U.S. forces in Korea actually do at the moment contribute to stability.”<sup>182</sup>

The debate over withdrawing American forces from Korea will continue. Through Carter’s travails, however, one can detect the forces which keep the American military machine entrenched. President Eisenhower’s farewell speech was initially supposed to reference the “military-congressional-industrial complex.” Perhaps he would have kept that terminology had he observed Carter’s efforts to withdraw American forces from the Korean peninsula.

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182. Andrew Feldman, “Interview with Andrew Bacevich, August 26, 2010,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, [http://www.fpif.org/articles/interview\\_with\\_andrew\\_bacevich](http://www.fpif.org/articles/interview_with_andrew_bacevich).

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