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A Case Study

Persuading a President: Jimmy Carter and American Troops in Korea (U)

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On 23 June 1976, Jimmy Carter, candidate for President of the United States, stepped before a gathering in New York sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association. He was ready to deliver his campaign's major statement on the policies he would pursue around the world if he was elected in November. The carefully prepared speech was vetted by Carter's campaign advisers on foreign policy, led by a Columbia University professor and former State Department official, Zbigniew Brzezinski. The address "foreshadowed many of [Carter's] actions and concerns as President."[1] It included a promise to reverse 26 years of US policy and "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." The mutual defense treaty and commitment of American airpower might stay, but US troops should go home. Carter had first made this promise right after declaring his candidacy, in an interview with *Washington Post* editors in January 1975, and he had kept repeating it.

Though Brzezinski later described the origins of Carter's promise as a "mystery not yet unraveled,"[2] South Korea was not popular in America in 1976. It had been ruled for 15 years by an autocrat, Park Chung Hee, who dealt ruthlessly and, at times, bloodily, with popular dissent. Park had been ruling by martial law since 1972, and his intelligence agency had kidnapped opposition leader Kim Dae Jung. At least Kim was only in prison; other opposition figures had been killed under mysterious circumstances. Carter was determined to put greater emphasis on America's commitment to the protection of human rights, and he sharply criticized the apparent past policy of backing any dictator that promised to fight Communism. So the next sentence in Carter's June 1976 speech, after his promise to withdraw American ground forces from South Korea, condemned the South Korean Government's "repugnant" oppression of internal dissent. To make matters worse, in the fall of 1976, the South Korean Government was directly implicated in a Washington scandal, dubbed "Koreagate" by the press, involving the bribery of members of Congress in order to win favorable treatment for South Korean interests. In the wake of Koreagate, few politicians rose to defend the Seoul regime.

At the end of June 1950, North Korean tanks and troops, guided by Soviet operational plans and acting with the endorsement of both Stalin

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and China's new Communist leader, Mao Zedong, streamed southward across the 38th parallel that had divided the two Korean states. The Truman administration had responded in three ways. Washington committed American ground forces to repel the North Korean attack, backed by a UN resolution. It also ordered its ships to sail between Taiwan and mainland China in order to thwart a feared invasion by China across the Taiwan straits, a commitment later codified into a Mutual Defense Treaty signed with Taiwan. And Washington ordered more military assistance to the French forces in Indochina fighting the nationalist and Communist rebels led by Ho Chi Minh.

As President Carter took office, all three commitments were being undone. America's military commitment in Indochina had been extinguished in 1975, along with the South Vietnamese state. Carter and Brzezinski planned to terminate the Mutual Defense Treaty and break formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to normalize relations with mainland China. Finally, Carter entered office determined to keep his promise to withdraw the 42,000 American troops then deployed in South Korea guarding a cease-fire line that marked the gains of three years of battle against North Korean, Chinese, and some Soviet forces, fighting that had cost more than 33,000 American lives. Though Carter's Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, worried about the campaign promise, Carter had repeated it in a press conference after the election and remained firm. When Vice President Mondale made the first administration visit to East Asia in February 1977, Carter instructed him to only inform the alarmed Japanese of the new President's decision on withdrawing troops, and not to entertain the possibility of reversing the decision. [3] Of course, the White House was not heedless of the continuing danger of an attack from North Korea, still ruled by the same man—Kim Il-sung—who had ordered the 1950 invasion. But the White House judgment turned on a crucial presumption: South Korea could now defend itself without American ground forces. This particular presumption was also an issue that engaged the attention of the intelligence agencies of the US Government.

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Intelligence Estimates on Korea: 1970-77

In 1979, the US Intelligence Community (IC) generally agreed that North and South Korean forces appeared to stand in rough balance, with neither side able to attack the other successfully.[4] This estimate helped the Nixon administration decide to withdraw one-third of the 60,000 US troops then in place in South Korea, as part of the Nixon Doctrine to encourage self-sufficiency in defense in developing nations. Most government intelligence analysts agreed that, based on whatever information they could gather, US troops were not essential to the military balance in Korea. Moreover, the South's higher population was thought to put it in good stead for long-run economic competition with the North, and thus in a good position to defend itself without American help. [5]

That is what the analysts thought, to the extent they considered the situation in Korea. But they had not thought about Korea very much. According to Evelyn Colbert, the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for East Asia [6] from 1974 until March 1977, US intelligence resources in the early 1970s were focused on Vietnam to the exclusion of other Asian nations such as Korea. Few analysts worked on Korea, and those who did had little intelligence data on which to base any judgments. [7] Increasing the collection effort would not make a huge difference because North Korea was perhaps the toughest of all targets for American military intelligence: it was an entirely closed society, defectors and travelers were few and far between, and its Army was known to deploy forces in ways that revealed little to outside observers. [8] Added to all this was a transfer of responsibility for determination of the Korean order of battle [9] from the disbanded Army Pacific Command to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in the mid-1970s, during which some organizational confusion was inevitable. [10]

The result, according to one former senior defense intelligence officer, was that the IC generally took the 1970 estimates and drew a line forward in time at a constant rate of growth in order to arrive at the present year's estimate for North Korean forces. The experts were pretty settled in their conviction that North Korea was not a serious threat. [11] Those who remembered the Korean war would not necessarily contradict this view, because they would recall that the war had destroyed most of the North Korean

Army and in its last years had been fought mainly against the Chinese. Now that Carter and Brzezinski were placing an extraordinarily high priority on normalizing relations with the Chinese, was there any real threat from the anachronistic North Korean regime?

In the intelligence agencies, complacency began to erode in 1974. Economic analysts noticed that substantial amounts of North Korean economic production, such as concrete and steel, could not be accounted for unless they were being used for undetected defense purposes. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the IC shifted some assets from Indochina to assess the situation in North Korea, and the linear projections from a presumed base of past strength which had prevailed for half a decade began to seem low. [12]

At about the same time, John Armstrong, an Army officer with experience in Southeast Asia and credentials as a China specialist, was in the midst of an extensive review of the intelligence information that had formed the basis for US estimates of the North Korean order of battle. Armstrong was assigned in 1974 to the Army's Special Research Detachment (SRD) at the National Security Agency. SRD was an unusual office with direct access to the head of Army intelligence: part of SRD's function was to serve as a think tank of sorts and a place the Army could go for judgments involving intelligence matters. The environment was unstructured; the management encouraged freewheeling explorations and creativity. Direct access to top levels of Army intelligence meant that feedback was quick and meaningful, contributing to high morale, even enthusiasm, among SRD's analysts. [13]

Armstrong was not especially enthusiastic, however, about his initial SRD task. The Army leadership realized that Korea was not receiving much attention from the IC and turned to SRD to determine if problems might exist in current estimates, especially in the military orders of battle. Armstrong knew, like most analysts, that Korea was a backwater for the IC, and he resisted the assignment. But the Army prevailed, and Armstrong embarked on what would eventually become more than three years of "basic, dirty-hands intelligence work."

The nature of SRD allowed Armstrong to focus on one subject intensively for as long as necessary to complete comprehensive analyses. He dug out several years' worth of original source material used in estimating the Korean order of battle. As Armstrong discussed his work with other analysts, he found a general belief that the Korean estimates were poor, but there was little bureaucratic interest in correcting them. Others in the Community were surprised that Armstrong would have the time for so much pure research on a topic of such low priority.

In late 1975, after about one year of concentrated effort, Armstrong, who had by then left the military and become a relatively junior (GS-12) civil servant in the Pentagon, circulated the first installment of his study. He concluded that North Korean tank forces were about 80 percent larger than previously estimated. He also found an entire tank division (about 270 tanks and 100 armored personnel carriers) within 100 kilometers of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas. Armstrong got little initial reaction from those in Washington whom he briefed on his findings, but Army officers in Korea were very interested.

Armstrong then went to the CIA and DIA offices responsible for Korea to propose a joint venture for a one-year project to try to bound the North Korean Army's size, setting plausible maximum and minimum totals. The CIA analysts seemed interested but too pressed by other matters to focus such effort for a sustained period; only a few were looking at Korea. Armstrong went back to the Army and persuaded them to give him the dedicated services of six analysts. This team turned to the area of artillery and, for 14 months, "nailed down every gun in the country." Using Armstrong's method of reviewing all-source information for several years back and examining all sources simultaneously, they worked out an estimate, formerly documented at the regimental level, down to the level of individual gun batteries. Again, the team concluded that North Korea had much greater strength in artillery than previously thought. [14]

In late 1976, Gen. John Vessey assumed command of US and UN forces in Korea. Vessey heard Armstrong's armor estimate presentation in September 1976 before leaving the United States, and he later testified that "this study impressed me with the innovative intelligence techniques which were applied." [15] In January 1977, Vessey, after another Armstrong briefing, sent a message to various leaders in the defense intelligence community calling for heightened efforts in order-of-battle estimates and, more critically at that juncture, on the problem of judging how much warning the United States might have before a possible

North Korean attack.[16] Washington was becoming more receptive. Throughout 1975 and 1976, the general thrust of Armstrong's assessments was confirmed by other intelligence agencies, while more danger signals appeared. North Korean tunnels under the DMZ had been discovered in 1974 and 1975.[17] A CIA study argued that the firepower in North Korean divisions had grown.[18] Assessments of North Korean military strength were revised upward.

According to Colbert, by the end of the Ford administration the IC consensus was that the North Koreans were militarily superior to the South.[19] The generally accepted numbers put North Korea ahead of South Korea in almost all types of equipment: North Korea was thought to lead in tanks by a ratio of 1.5:1, and in artillery and armored personnel carriers by 1.9:1. Only in personnel was South Korea assessed as superior, with 560,000 troops as compared to North Korea's 450,000.[20] More important, the character of North Korean forces appeared more offensively oriented than before, and all these trends had been moving in this direction since 1970.

Carter Tries To Implement His Promise

Carter's promise to withdraw US troops from Korea had been repeated time and again.[21] Carter knew what he had said, and he meant it. The campaign promise began to become policy when it was reiterated during the Carter transition. Vance told his Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, Richard Holbrooke, that the formal policy review could consider different rates of withdrawal, but the option of canceling the withdrawal was not on the table.[22] Carter himself announced in March 1977 that all ground forces were to be withdrawn in four or five years. American tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea would also be withdrawn. It was left to a White House spokesman to add that the withdrawal would be carried out carefully so as not to upset the military balance on the Korean Peninsula.[23]

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In June, the administration reiterated the four-to-five-year timetable for the pullout of American ground combat troops, emphasizing that American airpower and America's security commitments to South Korea would continue. It was also announced that South Korea would be compensated with a package of increased military aid and credits.[24] Defenders of Carter's plan argued that they were just extending the logic and the so-called Nixon Doctrine of letting Asians defend themselves. Also, American troops would no longer be hostages to possible provocative acts by South Korea's Park Chung Hee. An official explained that, "the President cannot evade the choice of going to war or not because our Air Force will still be there. But he will not be forced into committing ground troops without the support of the Congress and the public." Privately, however, a Presidential Review Memorandum on defense planning was arguing that, "Once the US land forces are out of Korea, the United States has transformed its presence in Asia from a land-based posture to an offshore posture. This...provides the United States flexibility to determine at the time whether it should or should not get involved in a local war."[25]

The American move also was a reaction to South Korea's domestic politics. It signaled the erosion of US backing for Park Chung Hee and his repressive policies, thereby conceivably inviting worried South Korean officers to stage a coup.[26]

The IC was certainly aware of the juxtaposition between Carter's pledge and its revised and more worrisome estimates about North Korean military strength. After Carter won the Democratic nomination in 1976, he asked Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) George Bush for CIA briefings on topics of priority. Colbert and her fellow NIOs proposed through Bush that Carter listen to the latest assessments on Korea, but Carter never chose that topic for a briefing. After Carter won the general election, Colbert sent a memo to Ford's outgoing National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft noting the substantial increases in recent estimates of North Korean strength and the upward trends in the North's military capability since 1970; the memo drew no response from transition personnel.[27] Reportedly, on Bush's last day as DCI (weeks into the Carter administration), he sent Carter another memo saying the President was wrong in his judgments on the basis for the withdrawal.[28]

Still, some experts both inside and outside the US Government thought that, with its robust economy, South Korea would be able to make up for US withdrawal by increasing its mili-

tary budget. The drawdown during the Nixon administration had been accompanied by a US pledge to aid in a five-year $1.5 billion modernization of the South Korean armed forces. It was also understood that, coupled with Carter's plan announced in June, there would be a generous military aid package, which was initially set at over $800 million of military equipment and nearly $300 million in arms credits, as well as a promise to increase the US Air Force presence by at least a squadron of 12 F-4 fighters.[29]

Furthermore, of the 42,000 Army personnel in Korea, only about 15,000 were combat soldiers in the US 2d Infantry Division. As compared with South Korea's Army of more than 500,000, the American numbers seemed tiny. With Carter facing budget shortfalls and runaway inflation, removing an Army division from Korea would save money, especially if it was eliminated rather than relocated. Certainly the fear of having the division disbanded may have galvanized Army resistance to the withdrawal plan.[30] The general climate of opinion was more influenced, though, by a widely circulated Congressional Budget Office report confirming an even military balance in Korea, apparently relying on older data.[31] A relevant official at the White House's Office of Management and Budget recalls that in early 1977, even though some estimates discussed a North Korean buildup, intelligence and defense representatives at interagency meetings would not say conclusively that South Korea was unable to stop a North Korean attack north of Seoul without American assistance on the ground. Absent such an assertion, the revised estimates drew only a "so what?" from the budget watchdogs.[32]

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Within the State Department, Vance's deputies were split. Philip Habib, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, felt South Korea was "in a position to pick up more of the action" of its own defense, and the US forces remaining after the withdrawal (aircraft and some Army support troops) would provide a sufficient deterrent. For Habib, though, the withdrawal was "not a fundamental issue," and it attracted little of his time and energy.[33] But at the next level down, Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, worried less about calculations of the military balance than about the overall political context in which the withdrawal would occur. After the collapse of South Vietnam, American confidence was low and its stature as a Pacific power was threatened. Holbrooke (whom some remember as an advocate of withdrawal early in the process who later distanced himself from the decision) saw the major flaw of the withdrawal policy implementation as the failure to anticipate its impact as a symbol to other countries in the region. US policy for the Far East in the Carter years would face numerous challenges, including movement toward normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China, reassurance for Taiwan after that normalization, base negotiations with the Philippines, and shoring up the security relationship with Japan. Holbrooke saw the withdrawal as objectionable to all these countries because it would be perceived as a measure of declining American commitment in the region, when in fact America's interests and opportunities there were potentially greater than ever before.[34]

Brzezinski recalls little support for the withdrawal among the defense and foreign policy community, even in early 1977. Brzezinski himself says he was not consulted before Carter's pledge, and he was initially indifferent to the idea. Once in office, the question in his mind quickly became how to appear to withdraw just enough to meet Carter's commitment without damaging security on the Peninsula.[35] Michael Armacost, who handled Japanese and Korean issues on the NSC staff and later as a deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Carter administration, agrees that most decisionmakers had reservations about the withdrawal at the outset, but none felt strongly enough about the issue to take on the new President's program.[36] Some in the policy community blamed Brzezinski for not actively opposing the withdrawal in interagency meetings; others, including Brzezinski, claim that his support was intended only to protect the President and to find a way to fulfill Carter's pledge in form without damaging the substance of the American presence.[37]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reportedly opposed the withdrawal at first, fearing both its effect on the military balance and the lack of political resolve it might signal to North Korea. The net effect, they reasoned, could be dangerous for deterrence. The JCS favored a much longer phasing out of troops if a withdrawal had to occur. They ultimately supported the four- to five-year withdrawal plan as imposing a "higher but acceptable" risk if accompanied by

substantial US military aid and equipment transfers.[38] But, when asked by Congressmen what military rationale the JCS had been given for the withdrawal by the administration, they consistently answered, "None."[39]

One early, adamant, and consistent opponent of the troop pullout was General Vessey. Vessey was "unalterably opposed" to Carter's decision; he asked to see Secretary of Defense Harold Brown in January 1977, just after Carter's inauguration, to explain the risks he saw inherent in a US withdrawal. Vessey told Brown that the US ground forces were essential to the military balance on the Peninsula and that removing them would be especially damaging to Korean morale as well as to broader American foreign policy objectives in the region. Brown was sufficiently persuaded by Vessey's views, and he arranged for the general to see the President immediately. Carter listened carefully to Vessey and indicated that, contrary to press speculation, no final decision on a withdrawal had been taken. Carter added that no such final decision would be made before he talked with Vessey again. A little over a month later, Carter's announcement that the troop withdrawal was now American policy "came [to Vessey] as a shock."[40]

Vessey recalls hearing from a senior Pentagon civilian official, Morton Abramowitz, that the policy was an announced Presidential decision to be carried out faithfully by the Defense Department. Abramowitz, however, was typical of those who publicly supported the President but privately opposed the withdrawal. He told Mondale, while the Vice President was traveling to Japan in February 1977, that "we can't withdraw." Mondale seemed amused, and he reminded Abramowitz that he and Carter had recently won an election, and they indeed could withdraw American troops if they wished.[41]

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The IC did make the military trends in Korea evident in the intelligence annex to the policy review document for Asia, Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 13. Colbert and other analysts who worked on the annex recall that it concluded North Korea was superior or well ahead in many areas of armament.[42] A later Congressional report noted that the annex "indicated the static balance had shifted in favor of the North."[43] The annex went further than most intelligence estimates in that it explored some areas of what is usually considered "net assessment," pointing to growing doubts about South Korea's ability to repel an attack from the North without US troops; the PRM as a whole, however, toed the administration line and concluded that the South could mount an effective defense just with American air, naval, and logistic support.[44]

Adm. Stansfield Turner, a classmate of Carter's at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, took over as DCI in March 1977. PRM-123 was one of his first problems. Turner knew of the President's commitment to withdrawal, and he initially supported the policy. He gave the annex considerable attention and sent it back to the analysts for several revisions. Turner, new to his role, sought changes to make the annex less oriented toward equipment numbers or "bean counts" and more revealing of true war-fighting capability. For example, Turner recalls that the table on naval equipment included some North Korean ships that were of little combat utility and did not highlight South Korea's real naval strength.[45]

Some annex authors who worked under Turner felt that, when the annex turned into a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), Turner "slashed away at the draft...with offensive, not relevant remarks." Some felt the new DCI was politicizing the intelligence process.[46] Turner attributes these reactions to his own inexperience in supervising the NIEs that would go out with his signature. Moreover, Turner sensed in the CIA an attitude that the withdrawal policy presented dangerous risks. But he felt that, while South Korea "did not have a piece of cake on its hands," the risk of withdrawal was not alarming. To Turner, the policy represented a political decision. Administration decision makers understood the risks involved and had judged them to be acceptable.[47]

Nevertheless, several IC officials believed that intelligence that ran contrary to the withdrawal policy was "not well received" by Carter's early appointees at Defense and State. In one early NSC meeting, the PRM-13 annex, in particular, drew fire from budget officials, who argued that it was "out of order" because it had not been coordinated throughout the IC (the annex was thus upgraded to an NIE). Turner ultimately accepted the basic conclusions of the annex in NIE form, although some elements of military

intelligence added footnotes that challenged Turner's revisions.[48]

Reaction to the Withdrawal Policy: 1977-78

Almost as soon as it was announced, Carter's withdrawal policy ran into public difficulty at home and abroad. South Korea opposed the withdrawal in every available forum. Korea had been badly shaken by the American loss in Vietnam, where Korean troops had also fought. One reporter wrote that, "the spectacle of Americans scrambling off the roof of their Embassy in Saigon (leaving the entire South Korean Embassy staff behind) induced a mood of pessimism unparalleled since the Korean war."[49] Korean officials stressed the trends which American intelligence had noticed indicating the North's buildup, adding that their own intelligence estimates were even more disturbing. They emphasized the deterrent role of the American presence, pointing out the dire consequences of the last American pullout in the late 1940s. They argued that Kim Il Sung clearly intended to reunify the Peninsula on his own terms, using military force if possible (an evaluation shared by some in the American IC), and that the United States would be abandoning a loyal ally with unfavorable, possibly disastrous, strategic results in the region. Some officials hinted darkly that South Korea might have to develop nuclear weapons to compensate for the lack of American troops.[50] Even dissidents such as Kim Dae Jung rallied to the government's side in encouraging the United States to leave ground troops in place. Dissident groups held protests to argue that withdrawal would invite war and increase fears that would make an end to martial law and a turn toward democracy less likely.[51]

Japan had publicly expressed skepticism toward the withdrawal before Carter took office and responded by promising consultations before the policy was finalized. Carter continually stressed that American security commitments would be unchanged by the withdrawal.[52] But the Japanese were offended when Mondale arrived in February 1977 with news of the forthcoming decision. They correctly felt this approach constituted notification rather than the promised consultation.[53] The Japanese had long supported an American troop presence in both their own country and Korea, and they feared that American withdrawal from Korea might be the next stage in a general American drawdown in the region that would open the way for greater Soviet or Chinese influence. Carter and Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda met in Washington in March and issued a joint communiqué agreeing that the withdrawal would "not endanger peace" in Korea and reiterating American determination to maintain security in the region.[54] But, in private, the Japanese continued to express doubts about the withdrawal, while being careful not to attack Carter in public.

The Japanese had an unexpected ally in the People's Republic of China. Kim Il-sung had long tried to play China and the Soviet Union against one another to maximize economic and military assistance. As early as 1975, the Chinese had quietly let American diplomats and visitors know that, propaganda decrying American "imperialism" notwithstanding, they were not unhappy with the American presence in Korea, given its constraining effect on Soviet activity there.[55] The Chinese privately continued to sound this theme after Carter entered office.

In Congress, the reactions to the withdrawal policy were mixed. On the one hand, influential members of the Senate and House opposed the withdrawal. On the other, many in Congress were disinclined to support South Korea in any manner because of the Koreagate influence-peddling scandal. In late 1977, anger at South Korea peaked. Some even speculated that not only would Congress support withdrawal but also that Carter's proposal to compensate South Korea with American weapons and other military aid would not pass.[56] Certain blocs in Congress were more adamant than Carter on human rights, and these favored aid cutoffs and troop reductions in order to punish the Park regime. Opposition to the compensatory aid package linked those who were against any withdrawal (and therefore the compensation for it) and those who were against any aid at all to Park's government in Seoul. Influential members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Armed Forces Committee opposed the withdrawal, including Democratic Senators Nunn and Glenn, and Republican Senators Percy, Baker, and Javits. These men took forceful positions in meetings with administration officials.[57] Senator Percy warned Holbrooke that he would "forge a united Republican opposition to the withdrawals."[58] The Senate as a whole refused to endorse the policy in June 1977 and asked the President to seek Congressional approval for the withdrawal.[59] Senator Glenn in particular traveled and researched the issue extensively in 1977 and prepared a report in cooperation with former Democratic presidential candidate Senator Hubert Humphrey. The report was published in January 1978, shortly

after Humphrey's death, and it emphasized that the shifting military balance in Korea demanded a continued American presence. The Humphrey-Glenn assessment of the military balance was pessimistic:

> *When measured by firepower only, the balance has shifted from rough parity in 1970 to a definite advantage for the North in 1977....[Given the projected 1977-82 Force Improvement Package, including US Army equipment transfers during withdrawal], even if North Korea acquires only enough equipment to modernize its current inventory, it will still have a numerical advantage over South Korea in all key categories except APCs and SAM launchers by 1982. US analysts, however, do not expect North Korean armament to level off. Rather, they anticipate continued buildup in all major categories, except fighter aircraft and antiaircraft guns.* [60]

The House Armed Services Committee conducted its own investigation of the withdrawal question, and the Democratic majority also concluded that "the North Koreans possess the capability of attacking the South with a minimum of warning, and that the US 2nd Infantry Division is needed for an adequate defense." [61]

The public debate was inflamed in May 1977, when General Vessey's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. John Singlaub, told *Washington Post* reporter John Saar that, "If we withdraw our ground forces on the schedule suggested, it will lead to war."[62] Singlaub, chief of staff to General Vessey in Korea, also said that recent intelligence findings revealed a much

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stronger North Korea; he was concerned that administration officials were basing the withdrawal on outdated data.[63] Singlaub was immediately recalled by President Carter, who saw a direct challenge to his authority reminiscent of MacArthur's dealings Truman. Singlaub insisted that his remarks should have been off the record and that he meant no disrespect, and Carter transferred him. But the House committee invited Singlaub to testify, and he repeated his argument, referring to Armstrong's studies and adding that his views were not unique among Army leaders, especially those in the field.[64] Secretary of Defense Brown responded that the withdrawal as planned would not endanger South Korean security.[65]

In midsummer 1977, Carter reacted to the growing criticism by sending Secretary of Defense Brown to Seoul to revise the withdrawal schedule, leaving more troops in place until the last year of the pullout.[66] By April 1978, as the withdrawal was scheduled to begin, Carter, sensing that the compensatory aid package was in deep trouble, announced that only one battalion of the three scheduled to leave Korea in 1978 would come home.[67] Unmoved, the House Armed Services Committee amended the defense budget authorization bill to prohibit any substantial cutback in US Army presence in Korea until a permanent peace settlement replaced the 1953 armistice.[68] Secretary Brown assured Congress that the withdrawal would be carried out only if the military situation in Korea warranted it.[69] This was no change in his position; he had said that the military situation allowed for a withdrawal. But it left a convenient door open for a reversal of the policy if the critics of it inside the administration had become uneasy about the decision to withdraw. According to Evelyn Colbert, who had returned to the State Department from her NIO position in March 1977, the general level of belief in the seriousness of North Korea's military potential rose over this period.[70] In December 1977, the State Department published a report to Congress that accepted the long-term military buildup of North Korea and the North's "sizable advantage" over the South's Army, but the report maintained that South Korean security would not be harmed by the American withdrawal if it were accompanied by military aid.[71] In February 1978, Secretary Brown testified that North Korea was "seen to have a definite advantage in tanks, artillery, and antiaircraft guns and a 2:1 advantage in aircraft."[72] The politically charged quality of the issue, the Singlaub affair, and consistent pressure from Vessey and other military leaders had converged to transform the judgment of North Korean military superiority from a dissident expert's view into the conventional wisdom prevailing through most of the government by early 1978.

The budget arguments, which initially seemed to support the withdrawal, also lost force as it became clear that the 2d Infantry Division would have to be relocated, not disbanded. Also, for officials such as Holbrooke, Armacost, and

Abramowitz, the political costs of the policy in Asia seemed to mount. These three met regularly as members of the "East Asia Informal," together with Donald Gregg of the CIA and others. To this group, the policy was developing in an "ad hoc" fashion, "sprung on our allies" without consideration of its impact on other foreign policy objectives. They thought the withdrawal was "bereft of strategic purpose." While the men were aware of the military trends on the Peninsula, they were less alarmed over the military threat than the political costs abroad. One member of the "Informal" recalled that Vessey's position was "not taken too seriously."[73]

Yet by early 1978, there was "little difference of views among agencies" in the negative evaluation of the policy on political or military grounds, or both. Brzezinski continued to support the withdrawal at some interagency meetings, often the only person to do so. He explains that he was just trying to keep the President from having to override the unanimous view of his advisers.[74] Nathaniel Thayer, who took over as NIO for East Asia after Colbert, recalls thinking that, "Brzezinski did not quite know what to do with the issue. Everyone below was telling him the withdrawal was crazy."[75]

Brzezinski recalls recognizing that there was "very little disagreement within the system that the withdrawal was an unwise idea." Like others, he was reading intelligence reports on the North's military buildup and hearing of the political costs of the policy. Brzezinski, however, sent Carter a memo in December 1977 warning that the US position in Asia seemed to be unraveling and urging Carter to press for "the preservation of the integrity of

“DIA had taken a large cut in analysts due to Vietnam, and Korea had been neglected.”

the Korean troop withdrawal."[76] By 1978, Carter had been forced to retreat from several foreign policy initiatives, including demilitarization of the Indian Ocean and deep cuts in strategic nuclear arms. Carter and Brzezinski had a "frank conversation" over the problems of the withdrawal at least once in 1978. Carter was still determined to salvage the withdrawal over the resistance of the bureaucracy, and Brzezinski continued to seek a formula that would fulfill Carter's campaign pledge.[77]

The Army's 1978 Study

After Armstrong had completed his tank and artillery studies, the next logical step was to work on infantry. For North Korea, this would be an extremely difficult problem. Infantry units had little equipment associated with them, and troops were difficult to count.[78] But the results of the earlier studies suggested that the effort required could be worthwhile. General Vessey certainly agreed. After working through the implications of Armstrong's artillery study, Vessey pressed the deficiencies directly with Air Force Lt. Gen. Eugene Tighe, the new DIA director, when Tighe visited Korea on an orientation tour. After hearing Armstrong's conclusions on the magnitude of the information void, Vessey followed up in January 1978 with a message to Tighe and others in defense intelligence detailing the problems in putting together a good estimate of the North Korean order of battle and suggested that national leaders were "being misinformed by...overly conservative assessments of [North Korean Army] strength," and requesting a major effort to correct the problems. One recipient described the message as a "barnburner."[79] The same month, DIA held a routine conference in preparation for a joint Korea-US intelligence meeting. The conference heard reports of changes in North Korean military dispositions and of increased activity near the DMZ. These patterns, combined with Vessey's message, started a DIA investigation.[80] The Army gave Armstrong more resources to continue his infantry work.[81]

According to General Tighe, DIA's product on North Korea before 1978 was "skimpy and totally inadequate." Tighe, whom some thought to be a strong candidate eventually to become DCI, had firsthand experience as a user of DIA's estimates when he served as J-2 (chief intelligence officer) to Pacific Command from 1972 to 1974. DIA had taken a large cut in analysts due to Vietnam, and Korea had been neglected. Korea was getting analysis as good as that for any other small region, but the work was "very sloppy" and clearly lacked sufficient resources. There were organizational problems throughout the agency as well: Tighe recalls there was "a general resistance to youth and new ways, [with] lots of tired people who were ill-equipped to spread out from the Soviet Union."[82] DIA's reputation among its consumers within the Defense Department was no better. A former member of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) described DIA during this period as a "stodgy bureaucracy. If you wanted innovative work, DIA was the last place you'd go."[83]

DIA, then, recognized the order-of-battle problems pointed out by Vessey, but it was not in a position to respond quickly to correct them. Armstrong and the SRD, however, were already well into a pilot study of North Korean infantry by January 1978, and they pushed ahead with the strong support of Vessey and the Army's own senior intelligence officers in Washington.[84] Moreover, because this was a ground force question in a theater dominated by the Army, there was a certain logic in the Army's taking the lead even though DIA had formal responsibility for estimating the North Korean order of battle. Armstrong continued to develop his methodology of putting all-source analysts together with other specialists to find signatures for infantry units. Given the paucity of clear-cut evidence of numbers and organizational structure in the North's Army, this approach was thought to be highly innovative and uniquely able to solve the difficult problems of assessing North Korea.[85]

Armstrong's team began by focusing on one key region of North Korea to search for infantry, and in May 1978 they published their first dramatic findings. Armstrong claimed to find three divisions and one brigade in this single region that were not part of the US order-of-battle estimate. When Armstrong wrote up these results, he noted his new methodology and suggested that this finding was the "tip of the iceberg." Armstrong briefed his study "all over town" in Washington and created a stir at the middle-management level of the IC.[86] The results, if they were borne out and extended to other regions in the North, could clearly have an impact on Carter's withdrawal efforts and would thus be controversial among policymakers.

About four days after Armstrong sent out his results, he was leaving for the golf course to enjoy his first day off in months when his telephone rang. Admiral Turner, the DCI, wanted to hear Armstrong's briefing the next day. Armstrong immediately jumped well up his chain of command and obtained the approval of the Army's top intelligence officers. After all, the results had been out for nearly a week, so briefing the DCI should not surprise anyone. Besides, the senior national intelligence official wanted the story, and they had to respond.[87] Armstrong briefed Turner the next day, and what followed is a legend in some analytic circles. Turner reportedly saw Defense Secretary Brown that night at a party and asked Brown about the situation in Korea. Brown was surprised, as he had not heard the briefing. The next day at work, Brown supposedly called Tighe to ask why the DIA director had not told Brown of Armstrong's findings and why the Army study was necessary at all if DIA was doing its job on the order of battle.[88]

Armstrong briefed Tighe and his deputy a few days later. Tighe does not recall being angry or surprised by Brown's original questions on the report, but several attendees at the briefing from both the Army and DIA disagree.[89] Tighe asked several questions of Armstrong, seeking proof that the units Armstrong had found were not part of an elaborate shell game of deception (the degree of Tighe's displayed skepticism varies depending on who is retelling the story). In the end, Tighe complimented Armstrong and assured him of complete DIA cooperation.[90] Soon after, Tighe himself briefed the JCS, chaired by Air Force Gen. David Jones, who was quietly fighting the troop withdrawal within the bureaucracy.

Armstrong's Army superiors sensed a truly major intelligence event in the making, and they trusted Armstrong as an extremely hard worker and a creative analyst. Armstrong asked for a team of 30 to 40 analysts to be assembled in Washington; Armstrong would select the team members from the Army's most experienced Korea analysts all over the world. Such a program would require by-name requests for personnel (a prohibited practice in the Army at the time) and would take analysts away from their permanent jobs for nearly five months. The major general in charge of Army intelligence, John Rolya, took Armstrong to explain the plan to the Army Vice Chief of Staff. When the Vice Chief seemed doubtful, the general commented on the seriousness of the situation and on his faith in Armstrong; to make his point clear, he threatened to resign. Although the Vice Chief hinted that the resignation might be accepted, the next day Armstrong was told to start getting his team together.[91]

Armstrong's team worked from June through October, putting in 80-hour weeks in a review of all available material on the North Korean armed forces for several years back, and, in some cases, as far back as the Korean war. Absent an immediate crisis, putting together a 35-person team with such "high-density expertise" on Korea and the willingness to work so intensively for several months was possible only in a military service. DIA and CIA were charged with validating the Army's work, but, even with additional resources from their own agencies, these shops were hard pressed to keep up.[92]

The Army leadership followed Armstrong's progress closely, and General Tighe treated it as "subject number

one" for DIA, though this was a time of growing concern about Soviet worldwide political and military behavior as well as an active period in US-Soviet nuclear arms control negotiations.[93] Tighe also established a Korea Consultative Group to improve Community coordination, which he put under his Army deputy to assuage Army fears of interservice rivalry.[94] But coordination quickly became a problem and analytic arguments were laced with bitter personal rivalry.

Armstrong believed that DIA, embarrassed by his earlier findings, had a stake in discrediting his team. He felt that he had to answer numerous irrelevant questions propagated by DIA for the purpose of slowing, or even damaging, the Army effort and that DIA was misleading the Community in the process. His team was also relatively junior, which raised eyebrows regarding its credibility and forced Armstrong to respond (Armstrong himself had been promoted but was only a GS-13).[95] Others in the Community, watching from outside the Army or DIA, agree that DIA's questions often seemed "idiotic" and perhaps designed to hold up progress, although these could be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the material or to miscommunication.[96] Thayer, the NIO, also sensed some "footdragging" at DIA. He was initially told the validation would take a year and a half. Again, this slowness could be traced either to ill will or to bureaucratic sluggishness.[97]

Although Tighe recalls accepting early on that the order of battle would require substantial upward revisions, others who read DIA products over the summer of 1978 noticed that the agency was slow to incorporate Armstrong's findings. Former members of ONA, part of the civilian-run Office of the Secretary of Defense, saw that, while Armstrong's workers were reporting major troop-level increases, DIA was assuring Pentagon officials the numbers would not change by more than 10 percent.[98] ONA decided to perform its own study on Korea, and the Army numbers seemed to be credible and dangerous (an opinion they passed directly to Secretary Brown). One ONA staffer could not understand how DIA could remain so "skeptical and critical" of Armstrong's study when that study was "more comprehensive than any similar effort [he had] seen."[99]

DIA's perspective was very different. Tighe knew this issue was extremely sensitive politically, and he demanded high standards of evidence in all analysis. According to Alan MacDougall, a senior analyst in DIA's Korea branch, Tighe's policy was to say nothing "unless we could defend it to the death."[100] Lt. Col. Harry Tear, the Army officer who headed the Korea branch and led the DIA validation effort, knew "Tighe did not want this overblown." Tighe insisted on conclusive proof for the new findings and felt that one refutation of any part of the study by a Congressional or White House staffer would endanger the entire effort. Tighe was closely involved in "quality control" of Tear's work and insisted on "the fastest pace possible consistent with accuracy and the need for conclusive proof."[101] According to Alan MacDougall, Tighe determined "to put his imprimatur on any Department of Defense Korea estimate" and felt he "had to assert DIA's primacy" as the legitimate lead organization for defense intelligence.[102]

Like General Tighe, Armstrong anticipated his study would receive severe scrutiny because of Carter's withdrawal commitment, and he planned ways to ensure the accuracy and viability of his findings. He also realized the Army would be viewed highly skeptically as a source of new numbers on Korea, given the institutional interests at stake. Armstrong set out to make his methodology and results "visually impressive to an observer of any experience level."[103] Those who watched Armstrong's team were "amazed" at the extraordinary depth of the study and the lengths to which they went to document their findings.[104] A DIA officer called Armstrong's effort the "most vigorous scutwork" based on "incredible detail."

Nevertheless, working with considerably fewer people, DIA analysts thought that Armstrong was slow to provide the material they needed for their validation. MacDougall felt that Armstrong's work was "sloppy" at times and that Armstrong demanded high standards of others while he allowed himself shortcuts.[105] Tear was skeptical of Armstrong's much-touted methodology of identifying units; Tear thought it "was good for marketing but overly simplistic."[106] Armstrong's method also required its customers to "take a lot on faith," because he was putting together strands of information to connect dispersed units into larger organizational elements. These connections were "not easy to feel or touch."[107] With such doubts in mind and Tighe's instructions to pursue conclusive evidence, the DIA analysts proceeded cautiously on the validation. Armstrong, in turn, took the slow pace as proof that DIA was attempting to undermine his effort.

DIA analysts also felt the Army leadership's interest in the study had as much to do with the potential loss of a four-star command in Korea as with a search for an accurate order of battle. This institutional interest was, they theorized, what really drove the Army's seemingly frenetic pace. Tear, himself an Army officer, found himself caught between his DIA position and the Army; former "green-suit" colleagues refused to acknowledge his presence at meetings.

Everyone interviewed, from the Army, DIA, or elsewhere, agreed that Armstrong was an exceptionally capable analyst with enormous energy and, unusual for an analyst, a flair for showmanship in briefing. He was tremendously self-confident and driven by his work, and he enjoyed strong personal relationships with a number of the Army's top brass and with Vessey in particular. He was also a talented manager of large projects. These qualities were the stuff of his initial successes and his high standing in the Army, and they allowed him to garner such superior resources for his summer 1978 study. But these characteristics were accompanied, in the opinion of some observers, by a low tolerance for views different from his own; one observer described his "fatal flaw" as a "king-sized ego."[108] Armstrong could be "confrontational," leading some senior officials at DIA to avoid dealing with him directly.[109] His willingness to "advertise widely" his products further annoyed some analysts. Stansfield Turner, although he does not remember Armstrong by name, noted in his diary, "My skepticism on this estimate [is] probably from [the] briefer's [having] too much self-assurance and salesmanship."

The coordination procedure became very personal and bitter. Participants at the working level uniformly recall the episode as the "nastiest" in their careers. DIA analysts came to resent deeply what they saw as Armstrong's arrogance, and Armstrong resented their questioning his every conclusion. Accusations of lying and other unethical behavior were traded.[110] MacDougall saw his subordinates begin to seek to disprove Armstrong's work just to cut him down to size. But both sides insist that the upper levels of their own agencies remained aloof from the personality conflicts, yet immersed in the results of the studies. Indeed, Tighe remembers trying to convince some of his analysts that Armstrong's work was in fact a new and better departure from traditional techniques.

It fell to the CIA's Korea office, in its Directorate of Intelligence, to arbitrate disputes, a function that it generally performed effectively. DIA analysts felt the Army had co-opted the CIA team.[111] CIA analysts recall a close but questioning relationship with the Army group. The CIA team also felt that DIA seemed to want the two agencies to join forces against the Army, a situation CIA carefully avoided.

By October, the Army results were in, and they were impressive. According to press and Congressional accounts, Armstrong's team concluded that the real size of the North Korean Army was at least 550,000 to 600,000, perhaps a one-third increase from the previous estimate of 450,000. Armstrong reported these were only the troops they definitely could identify; more were likely present in the North's forces. More important, the number of ground maneuver divisions jumped from 28 to 41. Most crucially, the forces appeared to be deployed nearer the DMZ than previously thought and in such a configuration to suggest offensive intent. Additional tanks and artillery had been found, and the late-1978 estimate on tanks was 35 percent higher than the 1977 estimate while artillery and armored personnel carriers were up by 20 percent (the 1977 figures had partially accommodated Armstrong's earlier findings).[112] Armstrong and others were careful to point out that these increases were the result of steady growth throughout the decade that was only now being detected, not from a sudden surge in North Korean acquisition.

The New Estimates Find an Audience

After his May briefing from Armstrong and as the studies proceeded over the summer of 1978, DCI Turner remained skeptical of the Army's work. Turner felt "skewered" by the new estimate. Only partly aware of the battles taking place at the analytic level between DIA and the Army, he was bothered that no one seemed to be looking critically at Armstrong's method. The whole estimate was based on a series of sequential steps of deduction, and no one was pointing to uncertainties in assumptions about numbers of troops or arms per division. Turner would like to have seen "different estimates of those variables to show this [assessment] was not a point solution and to give some range of possible outcomes. No one understood the [concept of] probabilities or uncertainties." Turner had insisted on the CIA and DIA validation efforts, and he discussed several times with Secretary Brown his concerns that the "double checks...were not very thorough." Turner was also

bothered that he lacked the time he felt he needed to plunge into the material himself.[113]

CIA analysts credit Turner with pushing for a fair, unbiased estimate with all the details accurate; all were aware of the importance of the issue. If Turner felt insufficiently versed in the details of the validation, his analysts recall that he was closely involved and asked specific questions about the evidence for each North Korean unit discovered in the study. During 1978, Turner's skepticism receded as a CIA study confirmed the Army results within 8 to 10 percent, and Turner himself began to brief the new results to national leaders. Brzezinski recalls that Turner came in "with a serious intelligence report with serious implications" for the withdrawal, but Carter showed little reaction.[114]

According to Brzezinski, by late 1978 and early 1979, Carter was less concerned with the details of the Korean military balance than with other troubled foreign policy commitments. He took the intelligence seriously, but only up to a point: the new studies did not reveal an imminent attack. Brzezinski was convinced that a budding strategic relationship with China was the key to creating what he called a Carter Doctrine in Asia.[115] Early 1979 promised a major battle with Congress over the Carter administration's plan to withdraw from the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan and to break off relations with Taipei, a plan that Brzezinski persuaded Carter to place ahead of any other major action on foreign policy in Congress during 1979—even the SALT II US-Soviet arms control treaty (a fateful choice, because SALT II ultimately could not be ratified in 1980, during the Iran hostage crisis and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan).

> **"Only Brzezinski, among the President's senior advisers, continued to favor the withdrawals."**

Carter had long been hearing from both the military and the civilian bureaucracy that the troop withdrawal from Korea was a bad idea, and the pullout had gone through many setbacks and delays. Only 3,500 to 4,000 soldiers had been withdrawn by the end of 1978, and much of that number represented only attrition achieved by not replacing personnel as normal rotations ended.[116] Secretary of State Vance recalled that "Each time Harold Brown and I tried to raise the subject with the President, we found him adamant. Only Brzezinski, among the President's senior advisers, continued to favor the withdrawals. Luckily, the depth of the disagreement within the executive branch never became public, although there were a few flurries."[117]

If the White House was preoccupied or unmoved, military leaders took the new study as further evidence that US troops were needed for deterrence. Vessey and JCS Chairman Gen. David Jones both added the dramatic new numbers to their arguments.[118]

Members of the East Asia Informal, concerned with the political implications of the withdrawal, recall their skepticism on hearing of the Army study. One felt the new numbers might be "hoked up" to help the Army forestall the withdrawal.[119] Another imagined how the study would affect the pullout but saw little change to the "dynamics of the situation." Nevertheless, these men were happy to have the new estimate as another tool with which to fight the withdrawal. Some immediately saw the news as the possible justification for a Carter reversal; the estimate would provide a face-saving means for Carter to account for relaxing his campaign commitment.[120] In public, however, they continued to speak as if the withdrawal were a foregone conclusion. In a December 1978 speech in New York, Holbrooke described the phased pullout plan and spoke glowingly of future US–South Korean relations.[121] Whatever he may have said in the privacy of the East Asia Informal, Holbrooke gave no hint of it in public.

In January 1979, the essential thrust of the Army study was leaked to *The Army Times* and quickly picked up by other major newspapers. The report renewed the public controversy over the withdrawal. They also brought into the open some skepticism that the Army estimate was biased to help preserve the four-star command in Korea, an attitude strengthened by the fact that the relevation came in a newspaper with close but unofficial ties to the Army and with no track record of investigative journalism involving classified data. But insiders noticed the dual signal being emitted when *The New York Times* correspondent could write that, "White House officials said that the study was unlikely to affect the pace of the American withdrawal, but some said privately they were disturbed that Mr. Carter's decision had apparently been made on the basis of inadequate intelligence."[122]

Carter immediately ordered CIA and DIA to examine the study, a project they had already undertaken. The combined results would come together in a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) in the spring of 1979.

Shortly after the *The Army Times* story, Senators Nunn, Glenn, Byrd, and Hart completed a 13-month study of the US defense posture in the Pacific and submitted their report to Senator Stennis, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. This "Pacific Study Group" included the most respected Senate experts on defense from the President's own party and covered a wide spectrum of political leanings. The report included the new numbers on the North Korean Army and flatly recommended halting the troop withdrawal. The report concluded:

> *The reassessment casts grave doubts upon the validity of earlier judgments about the nature and stability of the Korean military balance that formed the basis of the administration's decision in 1977 to withdraw US ground troops from Korea. Moreover, the present plans for withdrawal will cost the United States between $1.5 and 2.5 billion without reducing the probability of immediate US combat involvement in a future Korean conflict.*[123]

The results of the report were reviewed at a White House lunch in the cabinet room with Carter, Secretaries Brown and Vance, and the Senators. Each Senator, including Hart who had earlier been open to the policy, indicated he could not support the withdrawal.[124] Carter thus faced opposition from the military and the bureaucracy and what amounted to a revolt within his own party in Congress.

The results of the SNIE were largely a foregone conclusion.[125] Armstrong's findings were essentially confirmed. Most policymakers agree that the outcome for the policy was also a foregone conclusion, even before the end of 1978. The cumulative reaction of key advisers, Congress, the military, and the bureaucracy left Carter isolated, and the political costs of that isolation made the policy untenable. According to Holbrooke, "If the bean counting had gone the other way, we still would have found a reason to suspend the withdrawal."

But the new assessment was clearly a factor. It made enough of an impression on Secretary of State Vance that he devoted a paragraph to the estimate in his memoirs, concluding that, as a result of the estimate leaking to the press, "the President was not happy, feeling that his hand was being forced," which Vance thought was true.[126] In April 1979, the JCS formally recommended the pullout be "suspended" pending another review of the Korean military balance in 1981.[127] Carter delayed making any final decision.

Carter still did not like hearing of the necessity for suspension as he traveled to Korea in July 1979 after a G-7 economic summit in Tokyo. His advisers recognized the President's sensitivity and sent word to President Park not to raise the issue with Carter in their first meeting. Park ignored the warnings, perhaps feeling that the security of his country took precedence over Carter's reluctance to discuss his Korean policy. Park made the withdrawal his first topic, arguing against it for 45 minutes. Vance recalls feeling "the temperature in the room drop as Park continued. . . . 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."[128] Carter then talked privately with Park on human rights issues and then, back in his limousine, turned on his advisers.

Carter was furious. The motorcade stood stalled for blocks extending from the Ambassador's residence as Carter "unburdened himself" (Vance's phrase). Carter felt isolated, opposed by all his advisers except Brzezinski. He threatened to announce a decision then and there to press ahead with the withdrawal. His advisers tried to calm him. Brown and Vance joined the American Ambassador to Seoul, William Gleysteen, "in pointing out the vast difficulties that we faced in carrying out the policy as originally announced and the benefits that would accrue from its suspension, especially in light of the new intelligence figures."[129]

As Carter rested, Vance and his aides let their Korean hosts know of Carter's anger. That evening, the Carters were entertained by a delightful Korean chorus that included in its repertoire "Sweet Georgia Brown," and Carter was visibly more relaxed.[130] A few weeks later, back in Washington, Carter decided to suspend the troop withdrawals. The written White House statement accepted the JCS recommendation that the withdrawal was suspended until 1981, "when the timing and pace of further troop cuts in Korea [would] be reexamined." In the President's statement, the first of the three reasons offered for the new

decision was "recent studies by the Intelligence Community."[131]

Three months later, in October 1979, Park Chung Hee was assassinated at a private dinner by his own chief of intelligence. America moved an aircraft carrier closer to Korea, signaling the North not to take advantage of the change of power in the South.[132] Thirteen months later, Ronald Reagan was elected President. The 1981 review of the withdrawal suspension passed virtually unnoticed. Reagan subsequently appointed General Vessey to be JCS Chairman.

Ten years after *The Army Times* leaked the results of Armstrong's 1978 study, *The Washington Post* reported in January 1989 that, after extensive review, American intelligence had just raised its estimate of North Korean ground forces from 750,000 to 930,000. The results were attributed to "improved methods of estimation."[133] In 1995, the 2d Infantry Division remained in a South Korea under democratic rule, part of a contingent of more than 33,000 American troops. American tactical nuclear weapons were withdrawn from South Korea in 1992 as part of a global, unilateral initiative from President Bush to retire these anachronistic weapons. Yet the US troop presence endures, even being temporarily reinforced in 1994 during an international crisis triggered by revelations that the North had been conducting a clandestine and illegal program to build nuclear weapons. And Jimmy Carter returned to Korea. But that is another story.

NOTES

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser* 1977-1981 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, rev. ed., 1985), p. 7.
2. Interview with Brzezinski, Washington, DC, 24 February 1989.
3. Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 128.
4. Interview with Evelyn Cobert, Washington, DC, 23 February 1989.
5. *Ibid.*
6. NIOs are the senior intelligence experts in their regional or functional specialties. They arbitrate IC disputes on issues within their areas and act as liaisons between policymakers and analysts.
7. Colbert.
8. Interview with John Armstrong, Washington, DC, 9 February 1989.
9. An order of battle is a systemic tabulation of numbers and locations of personnel and equipment for a given nation or military unit. They are usually divided functionally into ground, naval, and air orders of battle.
10. Interview with Dick Nelson, Washington, DC, 9 February 1989.
11. Interview with former senior DIA official, Washington, DC, 10 February 1989.
12. Colbert interview.
13. Armstrong. SRD had direct access both to the Commander of INTSCOM, the Intelligence and Security Command, and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, or ACSI, the Army's senior intelligence officer in the structure at that time.
14. Armstrong.
15. Testimony of Gen. John Vessey, *Impact of Intelligence Reassessment on Withdrawal of US Troops from Korea*, Hearings, Investigations Subcommittee, House Armed Services Committee, 21 June and 17 July 1979, p. 64.
16. Vessey testimony and interview, Gen. John Vessey, Washington, DC, 21 March 1989.
17. Russell Spurr, "Fingers on the Trigger," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 July 1975, p. 28.
18. Interview with CIA analyst, Washington, DC, 9 February 1989.
19. Colbert.
20. All numbers here taken from testimony of Rep. Les Aspin, *Impact of Intelligence Assessment*, pp. 5-6.
21. US Senate, Humphrey-Glenn Report, *US Troop Withdrawal from the Republic of Korea*, Report to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 9 January 1978.
22. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 128.
23. Richard Halloran, "Carter Sees Pullout From Korea by 1982," *The New York Times*, 10 March 1977, p. 9.
24. *The New York Times*, 6 June 1977.
25. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "PRM-10 and the Korean Pullout," *The Washington Post*, 7 September 1977.
26. Richard Halloran, "A Partial US Pullout from South Korea Now Seems Inevitable," *The New York Times*, 27 February 1977; see also the analysis by Don Oberdorfer in *The Washington Post*, 12 June 1977, p. A15.

27. Colbert.

28. Senior DIA official.

29. *The New York Times*, 23 February 1978; *The Washington Post*, 22 April 1978.

30. Interview with Henry Shaw (senior official at the Office of Management and Budget under Carter), 21 February 1989.

31. *The New York Times*, 19 May 1977, p. A4.

32. Shaw.

33. Interview with Philip Habib, 23 April 1989.

34. Interview with Richard Holbrooke, 13 April 1989.

35. Brzezinski.

36. Interview with Armacost, Washington, DC, 20 March 1989.

37. Brzezinski.

38. *The New York Times*, 14 July 1977, p. 7.

39. Vessey testimony and interview.

40. Vessey.

41. Holbrooke. Confirmed in interview with Morton Abramowitz, Washington, DC, 14 April 1989.

42. Colbert.

43. Humphrey–Glenn Report, p. 20.

44. Colbert.

45. Interviews with Stansfield Turner, 20 February and 3 March 1989.

46. Former senior intelligence official.

47. Turner.

48. Colbert.

49. Spurr, "*Fingers on the Trigger.*"

50. *The Washington Post*. 27 May 1977, p. 1.

51. *The Washington Post*, 27 May 1977, p. 8.

52. *The New York Times*, 10 December 1976.

53. Holbrooke.

54. *The New York Times*, 5 April 1977.

55. Jack Anderson and Les Whitten. *The Washington Post*, 24 February 1976.

56. *The Washington Post*, 26 October 1977.

57. Holbrooke.

58. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 129.

59. *The New York Times*, 18 June 1977, p. 4.

60. Humphrey–Glenn report, p. 47.

61. House Armed Services Committee, Investigations Subcommittee Report, *Review of the Policy Decision to Withdraw United States Ground Forces from Korea*, 26 April 1978, pp. 3, 8-9.

62. *The Washington Post*, 19 May 1977, p. A14.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *The Washington Star*, 25 May 1977, p. 1.

65. *The New York Times*, 23 May 1977.

66. *The New York Times*, 27 July 1977, p. 1.

67. *The New York Times*, 22 April 1978, p. 1.

68. *The New York Times*, 27 April 1978, p. 6.

69. *The New York Times*, 27 July 1978, p.7.

70. Colbert.

71. *The New York Times*, 13 December 1977, p. 4.

72. *The New York Times*, 19 February 1978, p. 3.

73. Abramowitz, Armacost, Holbrooke.

74. Brzezinski.

75. Interview with Thayer, 14 April 1989.

76. Brzezinski to the President, Weekly memo #39, US Position in Asia, 9 December 1977, abstracted in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, Annex II, p. 560.

77. Brzezinski.

78. Armstrong.

79. Vessey testimony; Armstrong.

80. Interview with Gen. Eugene Tighe, San Diego, 31 March 1989.

81. Armstrong.

82. Tighe.

83. Interview with Barry Watts, 10 February 1989.

84. Armstrong; Vessey testimony.

85. Armstrong and others.

86. Armstrong.

87. Armstrong.

88. Several analysts offered consistent versions of this story. Turner does not recall the incident, but he

thinks it plausible. Tighe thinks the party elements are plausible, but he does not recall details.

89. Eyewitness descriptions of Tighe at the briefing, from Army and DIA officials, include "livid", and "clearly hot." Tighe's reaction during and after the briefing was described, again from both Army and DIA sources, as "all hell broke loose."

90. Tighe, Armstrong.

91. Armstrong.

92. Interview with Alan MacDougall, Washington, DC, 9 February 1989.

93. Tighe and interview with Gen. Ed Thompson, Kennebunkport, 27 March 1989.

94. Tighe plays down such rivalry in retrospect, but several analysts recall it was a concern at the time.

95. Armstrong.

96. CIA analyst; Colbert.

97. Thayer.

98. Armstrong; also Nelson; also interview with Andrew Marshall, Washington, DC, 24 February 1989.

99. Nelson.

100. MacDougall.

101. Interview with Harry Tear, 23 April 1989.

102. Senior DIA official.

103. Armstrong.

104. Nelson; CIA analyst.

105. MacDougall.

106. Tear.

107. Turner; senior DIA official.

108. Senior DIA official.

109. Tear, MacDougall.

110. MacDougall.

111. MacDougall.

112. The exact numbers vary among the open reports. These figures are taken from *The New York Times*, 21 January 1979, p. 15. See also *The Army Times*, 8 January 1979, p. 1; *The Washington Post*, 4 January 1979, p. 1; and, most comprehensively, Rep. Aspin's testimony before the HASC Investigations Subcommittee, which gives the final figure as 37 divisions.

113. Turner.

114. Brzezinski.

115. Brzezinski to the President, Weekly memo #75, "Our Asian Policy—or the Making of a Carter Doctrine," 13 October 1978, abstracted in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, Annex II, p. 563. This memo does not mention Korea, or even Japan. Brzezinski's singleminded focus on China prompted Carter, though he was the policy's sponsor, to note on the memo: "Zbig—you have a tendency to exalt PRC issue."

116. *The Washington Post*, 4 January 1979, p. 1.

117. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 129.

118. Holbrooke.

119. Abramowitz, Armacost, Holbrooke.

120. Thayer.

121. *Department of State Bulletin*, February 1979.

122. Richard Burt, "New Study Raises Estimate of North Korean Army Strength," *The New York Times*, 4 January 1979.

123. US Senate, *Report of the Pacific Study Group to the Committee on Armed Services*, 23 January 1979.

124. Holbrooke.

125. CIA analyst; Armstrong. DIA did not complete its review by the time the SNIE was published, but its objections at that point were small.

126. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 129.

127. *The New York Times*, 18 July 1979, p. A4.

128. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 129.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

130. Holbrooke; Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 130.

131. *Department of State Bulletin*, September 1979, p. 37; *The New York Times*, 21 July 1979, p. 3.

132. *The New York Times*, 27 October 1979, p. 1.

133. *The Washington Post*, 26 January 1989, p. A20.