

January 26, 1973

**Letter, Ahmet H. Ozbudun to C.V. Narasimhan,
"Ramifications of the ROK Troop Withdrawal from
Viet-Nam"**

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Summary:

Ozbudun sends Narasimhan a report on ramification of the ROK troop withdrawal from Vietnam, UN policy of the ROK, North-South contacts, ROK National Assembly elections, and the old and new constitution of DPRK.

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26 January 1973

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE ROK TROOP WITHDRAWAL
FROM VIET-NAM

Dear Mr. Narasimhan,

Apart from the overall international impact of the impending agreement on Viet-Nam, also acutely felt in the ROK, the agreement naturally carries direct, specific and far-reaching ramifications for the Seoul Government.

As President Park Chung Hee announced in a special statement on 24 January, the agreement will entail inter alia the complete withdrawal, within the short span of 60 days, of the remaining 38,000 Korean troops from Viet-Nam.

Observers at this end believe that ramifications of the withdrawal for the ROK would manifest themselves both "positively" and "negatively" but are not at all sure which side would excel on balance. The ramifications may include the following:

First, it is pointed out on the "positive" side that above all, the bad image intensely suffered by the ROK, even in the eyes of most friendly nations, as a result of its participation in the Viet-Nam conflict, would gradually and largely whither, although probably leaving behind a residue of a controversial legacy. However, this would presumably be in the form of bitter historic memory only, not entailing clear and current criticism of the ROK suffered by it during its actual combat participation in Viet-Nam. Hence, the Government would no longer be criticized, as it was in the world at large, including debates at the UN, since the advent of Korean forces in Viet-Nam in 1965. Moreover, by and large, friendly critics, so to speak, of the Government among UN Member States, which had withheld traditional full support at the General Assembly, might be expected to revert to greater sympathy than what would have been the case had ROK troop withdrawal been further delayed.

Second, and again on the "positive" side, observers feel that as a result of ROK troop withdrawal, presumably with most up-to-date weapons, would help expedite the US modernization programme for Korea. Additional American military equipment as

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might be withdrawn from Viet-Nam and partially diverted to the ROK, would further enhance the aforesaid modernization.

Third, it is felt beyond the foregoing, that the addition of 38,000 battle-seasoned troops to existing ROK armed forces would generally increase the defence capability of Seoul and further discourage any renewed venture by the North. Observers feel that while such venture is quite unlikely at this juncture, it cannot be ruled out altogether, especially in the event of the failure and subsequent abandonment somehow of the Korean dialogue.

On the "negative" side of the picture, observers include the following:

First, and foremost, it is felt that Korean participation in the Viet-Nam conflict had bestowed on the ROK a formidable leverage or bargaining power vis-à-vis its primary ally, the United States. Some recall that the leverage heretofore enabled the Government to extract from Washington a great many concessions which might have been denied were it not for Seoul's "Democles' sword", at times insinuating if not threatening an earlier pull-back of its troops. A few observers however hold that this deprivation of leverage might be off-set and compensated for if full American withdrawal from Indo-China would slow-down the Nixon Doctrine elsewhere in Asia and moreover cause the US to cultivate its bastion in a "natural" area such as the ROK. This argument finds further credence through the growing local opposition to American bases in Japan.

Second, it is believed on the "negative" side, that the ROK economy and development programmes would confront a severe set-back as a result of massive and instant Korean troop withdrawal from Viet-Nam. There is no denial whatsoever that the Korean economy had concrete and heavy financial benefits as a result of the ROK military presence in Viet-Nam. ROK businesses at home and in Viet-Nam had indeed flourished. However, some hold that this colossal financial loss might at least be partially balanced as a result of contemplated Korean participation in the post-war rehabilitation efforts in Viet-Nam. The President indicated such expectation in his aforementioned special statement two days ago. The question remains nevertheless whether ROK role in Vietnamese reconstruction will prove possible and feasible and become a long-term venture. Nor is it clear whether contemplated peaceful

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civilian ROK presence would compensate meaningfully for the vast economic gains recorded during the military presence in Viet-Nam.

Third, the very withdrawal of the formidable number of 38,000 troops within the short span of 60 days, itself entails much difficulty with respect to transport, logistics, relocation and long-term absorption in the Korean economy. Assuming free-of-charge transportation (US paid) aboard American or other foreign vessels and logistic support in this connexion, during the limit of two months, the problem of relocation and eventual absorption for the troops is believed to constitute an arduous task for the ROK. Today, Defence Minister Yu Jae Heung stated at a press conference that the Government would readjust the ceiling of the ROK Armed Forces by 28 March. He said that the ROK planned to discharge about 19,000 from its Forces to meet the ceiling of 600,000 (He added that the Korean pull-back would not affect the presence of US troop strength in the ROK). Notwithstanding this, some circles believe that any hurried readjustment, relocation or discharge of forces may adversely affect the military, social and economic fabric of Korean society. Some feel also that disgruntlement could occur among officers and men in the Armed Forces, particularly those returning from Viet-Nam, who have been accustomed to far better pay and care than standards prevailing at home could afford. Others fear that returning troops might display "trigger-happiness", despite strict discipline, if and when placed at the frontlines, as a result of their Viet-Nam experience.

Subsequent reporting on the foregoing matters may be made as warranted by additional reports and developments.

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OTHER MATTERSUN POLICY OF THE ROK

Further to President Park's New Year's press conference remarks on his Government's UN policy, reported to you in my last letter of 19 January 1973, the Permanent Observer of the ROK to the United Nations stated in Seoul on 23 January that the Government would base its policy at the forthcoming UNGA for deferment of the Korean debate.

While this is deemed to be the overall preference of the ROK, Foreign Minister Kim Yong Shik, in his briefing of the President this morning, stated that the Government would maintain its basic relations with the United Nations and that it would set up measures to cope with the Korean question at the UNGA this year "positively and flexibly". I anticipate to be in a position in the near future to discern whether Permanent Observer Han Pyo Wook's remarks and those of the Foreign Minister are mutually inclusive or whether, in addition to the fundamental policy of deferment, the ROK may be expected actually to formulate "positive" and "flexible" contingency planning on its UN stance.

NORTH-SOUTH CONTACTS

Information on future North-South dialogue on the Red Cross and the Co-ordinating Committee levels is absolutely lacking at this end. This does not mean, however, that the two sides are not currently engaged at least in lower-echelon clandestine or "hot-line" contacts. At any rate, it is felt that new meetings may soon be announced on either or both of the aforesaid levels. In the case of the Co-ordinating Committee, it had been implied at the Seoul session held during the period 30 November-2 December 1972 that the next round may take place in February or March 1973.

Meanwhile, however, there have been reports on proposals by or "on behalf of" the north side for inter-Korean exchanges.

Among these, on 17 January, Chairman Han Duk Su of the Choryon, a pro DPRK organization of Korean residents in Japan, reportedly called for a three-point inter-Korean development programme: for the joint development of north-Korean iron mines and other mineral resources; the use of north Korean technological knowhow and equipment to develop the South Korean irrigation network; and the free operation of South Korean fishing boats in north Korean waters.

Moreover, on 22 January, Vice-Chairman Chong Kwang Sun of the north Korean Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and concurrently Acting Chairman of the DPRK Olympic Committee, reportedly said that he would soon propose to the ROK side the formation of a joint Korean team for the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. He was said to have added that the two sides could directly discuss the matter at a joint meeting, possibly next Spring. It is recalled that an agreement in principle on a unified Olympic team had been reportedly reached at the Munich Olympiad in September 1972.

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There have been other reports of north-south cooperation and exchanges in areas such as trade, and in the further development of Hangul, the Korean alphabet.

It can be significantly stressed that the aforementioned cases have actually been reported in the ROK press, denoting that they would have been omitted by current censorship had the ROK Government been totally disinterested in the proposed north-south collaboration or exchanges.

ROK NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The National Assembly elections will be probably held in late February or early March this year. The incumbent Democratic Republican Party (DRP), the Opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) and the newly formed Democratic Unification Party (which has now split from the NDP) have commenced preparations for participation.

However, because of the restructuring of ROK politics through the Constitutional Amendment, and the resulting loss of considerable power by the National Assembly in favour of a vastly strengthened Presidential system, the forthcoming elections are regarded to be procedural rather than substantive. Moreover, as is known, since one-third of the new Legislature is to be elected upon Presidential nomination, by the National Conference for Unification, and since the opposition is irreparably split, observers expect little from the new Assembly.

In accordance with its mandate, coupled by an anticipated invitation from the Government, UNCURK may decide to observe the elections. Since we are not budgeted to conduct this observation, and if I find no means to meet the costs involved, I may have to request supplementary funds.

THE OLD AND NEW CONSTITUTIONS OF THE D.P.R.K.

..... After considerable difficulty and delay, we were able to acquire the texts of the old and the recently adopted new Constitutions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These are presented herewith for your information.

If I had some time for myself, I would have been happy to submit an extensive comparative analysis of the two texts. However, as a student of comparative government and constitutions, I doubt whether in many cases the wording of a given constitution is altogether relevant to the actually practised system and operation of a State.

The overall impression one gets at first glance is that the fully centralized system of the DPRK appears now to be further tightened. This seems to have been brought about by the new Constitution -- at least in its wording.

However, feelings in certain quarters persist that, in practice,

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the DPRK system might actually witness a gradual decentralization or loosening so as to correspond with the restructuring and centralization of the ROK system, thus enabling the two to achieve some viable proximity. This is deemed essential for meaningful progress in the north-south dialogue and the endeavour to achieve eventual unification.

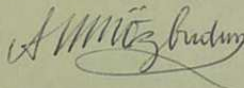
I had referred to this matter in previous correspondence. To recall briefly: Heretofore north and south Korea had been at opposite ends or extremes of a graphic political line ranging from extreme rigidity to excessive looseness. Few believe that long-term unification efforts would bear realism unless, in due course, one loosened and the other tightened correspondingly, enabling the two to meet on the fringes of centre which represents the basin for practicable unification.

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Other relevant matters are contained in our Summary of Developments for this week, presented under separate cover.

With warmest regards,

Sincerely yours,



Ahmet H. Ozbudun
Principal Secretary