

**May 19, 1977**

**Memorandum for Jimmy Carter from Warren  
Christopher, 'US Policy in Korea: Withdrawal of  
Ground Combat Forces'**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Warren Christopher sent papers on measures to sustain deterrence in Korea, summarizing major issues including ground force withdrawal schedule, defense compensation package and Air Force Deployment.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

May 19, 1977

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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

From: Warren Christopher, Acting Secretary *Lc.*Subject: U.S. Policy in Korea: Withdrawal  
of Ground Combat Forces [REDACTED]

In accordance with your request in Presidential Directive NSC 12 we are attaching a number of papers prepared by the East Asian Interagency Group on measures to sustain deterrence in Korea and minimize misunderstanding of our intentions. There have also been transmitted to you the Secretary of Defense's proposed schedule for withdrawal of ground combat forces [REDACTED] from Korea and his recommendations on ROK force requirements arising from the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces.

This memorandum summarizes the major considerations discussed in these papers, and identifies issues which you will wish to consider before General Brown and Under Secretary Habib depart for Korea next week.

Summary of Major IssuesA. Ground Force Withdrawal Schedule:

Under the schedule you set forth, one brigade and its supporting elements will be withdrawn by the end of CY 1978 and a second brigade by the end of June 1980.

[REDACTED]

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SANITIZED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

PER 9/20/97 [REDACTED] RE NLC-96-45

BY [REDACTED] NARS. DATE 11/7/97

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The deferral of a decision on the timing of the final tranche has the advantage of permitting some flexibility in the consultations with President Park and the Japanese. But, we believe it essential that they understand that your decision will be in the context of your publicly stated policy of removing all ground combat forces within a 4-5 year time frame. We would not wish to create unrealistic expectations on the part of the ROK or GOJ that the final withdrawal time is negotiable into the far future. Moreover, an essential element of any successful presentation in Congress for compensatory measures will depend on our commitment to complete ground force withdrawal within the 4-5 year time frame you have publicly stated.

B. Defense Compensation Package:

The Department of Defense has estimated the value of military equipment needed to overcome deficiencies in the ROK Army at \$500-600 million. In making this estimate, DOD focused on ROK ground force requirements generated by the withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces. The equipment levels recommended by DOD would be over and above the present procurement levels contained in the current ROK Force Improvement Plan which we are now supporting with FMS financing at an annual rate of \$275 million.

Approximately \$200-250 million of equipment could (with Congressional authorization and replacement in Service budgets) be transferred from existing 8th Army stocks; the remainder would have to come from other sources. It is not possible to determine a final mix of equipment transferred or additional compensatory actions because this will depend to a considerable degree on our negotiations with the Koreans and our assessment of what Congress will accept.

In addition, DOD feels that because of the loss in deterrence and a need psychologically to reassure the ROK as to its security, we might consider an additional \$200 million to meet other deficiencies in critical ground force capabilities.

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In the military assistance area we will have to emphasize to the Congress that any supplementary assistance beyond levels already requested is to compensate for our troop withdrawals and not for more general purposes of force improvement. We will have to stress the need for Congressional support and the lack of any prospect for reinstitution of a grant MAP program for Korea.

We are uncertain what additional level of support Congress would be willing to authorize. Our efforts to obtain approval of the \$275 million already requested this year have benefitted enormously from arguments that the assistance is necessary at a time of our troop withdrawals. For the same reason we may find considerable support for additional measures, particularly cost-free transfer of existing equipment. We would expect opposition to develop in the face of major new requests and such opposition would probably grow in subsequent years. At a minimum we would envision a compensatory measures package which would include request for authorization to transfer selected 8th Army equipment, continuation of the current level of FMS support for the Korean Force Improvement Plan, and possible consideration of limited additional FMS financing perhaps spread over the 5 year withdrawal period. (This would depend of course on our probing of Congressional attitudes). We feel a package of this sort is not only militarily necessary but will demonstrate the care with which we are withdrawing our ground forces and the strength of our commitment.

C. Command Arrangements:

Operational control over ROK forces is now exercised by the U.S. commander in his capacity as Commander of the UNC. The Koreans have proposed that a combined structure be established in which they would have greater participation in command and control than they do at present. We will have to initiate early negotiations at the military level on establishment of combined command arrangements under a U.S. commander. We would want a combined command to maintain U.S. operational control over Korean forces.

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D. Other Compensatory Steps:

We have attached a series of additional actions that we can consider in terms of exercises and temporary deployments to demonstrate visibly our continuing commitment to ROK security. Most are well within our present capability and policy guidelines. Although no decisions are necessary now, it would be helpful if our emissaries could convey our general intention to take compensatory action in this area.

E. Public Handling of Diplomatic Moves and Public Gestures of Reassurance:

As we move to detailed negotiations with the ROKG we can expect considerable confusion and uncertainty in public discussion of the issue. We will need therefore to emphasize authoritatively and publicly our determination to maintain our basic security commitment; assist the Koreans in achieving a self defense capability; and retain our air and support units in the country as well as continue our naval role. As for our withdrawal plans, we would not want to make anything public until after we complete consultations with the Koreans.

Apart from special arrangements in Korea and Japan we need to conduct a systematic program to keep our major East Asian allies generally informed of our plans, stressing privately and publicly the durability of our basic security commitment.

We do not expect that our decision on the ground force withdrawal will offer significant leverage toward reciprocal diplomatic moves on the part of either North Korea or its two major supporters, Moscow and Peking. However, we think it most important to use existing channels to convey both to the PRC and the USSR our continued security commitment to the ROKG as well as our determination to maintain peace and security on the Korean peninsula. We should urge them to encourage North Korea to a more flexible stance with regard to the South and should urge continued restraint in supplying arms to North Korea. We should be especially careful to counter any suggestion that our ground force withdrawal reflects lessened U.S.

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interest in Northeast Asia and Korea. In that context, in the coming months particularly, we should avoid moves which could be interpreted as backing away from our insistence on full ROK involvement in any negotiations affecting the future of the peninsula.

F. Congressional Consultations:

A major element in our strategy for handling the ground force withdrawal must be close attention to Congress and major consultative efforts to bring the Congressional leadership with us each step along the way. We are already scheduling calls on key Congressional leaders prior to the departure of the emissaries for Seoul. These calls will have as their purpose assuring Congress that we will not enter into any commitments and that we will keep them fully informed of our plans as they develop in the next months. Subsequent to the emissaries' return from Korea and your final decisions with regard to the ground force withdrawal schedule and compensatory measures, we will have to engage in a serious, wide-ranging consultative effort on the Hill to assure acceptance of our position (and to be sure that any projected compensatory measures are in fact realistic).

G. Visit of Presidential Emissaries to Seoul and Tokyo

Many of our final decisions on compensatory measures and other actions are dependent in part upon the results of consultations both in Seoul and on the Hill. Others will depend on further detailed study and negotiations with the Koreans. At the same time it is important that we have general guidance from you for the emissaries. Specifically, we recommend the following:

(a) Ground Force Withdrawal Schedule: We believe your emissaries should be authorized to outline to President Park and Prime Minister Fukuda your general views regarding the withdrawal of the first two tranches. It might also be useful if they could convey to President Park alone your present views about the timing of the final withdrawal, making clear, however, that the complete ground force withdrawal will be within the 4-5 year period you have publicly indicated.

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(b) Compensatory Measures: It is important that the emissaries convey both our determination, within Congressional constraints, to compensate for deficiencies caused by the Second Infantry Division withdrawal as well as temper any unrealistic Korean expectations. Consequently we believe that they should be able to indicate that we will seek continuing Congressional authorization for present levels of FMS (\$275 million) and will also seek Congressional authorization for measures to compensate for the loss of the Second Division's strength; for example, turning over certain Eighth Army equipment to the Koreans.

(c) Combined Command: In addressing the combined command/operational control question, the emissaries should be able to indicate that we are prepared to enter into detailed negotiation on establishment of a combined command with operational control continuing to be held by a U.S. General, who would hold the appropriate rank. With regard to the future of the UN Command itself, they should be able to state that we intend to maintain the UN Command but may have to review that question in the light of international realities later in the 1978-81 period. They would note the importance of Congressional consultations before we could reach any final agreement on any combined command arrangements.

(d) Follow-on Discussions: The two emissaries should be authorized to inform President Park that we would be prepared to begin detailed discussions in Seoul under Ambassador Sneider and General Vessey in mid-June with a view toward completing these negotiations in the context of this year's Seoul Security Consultative Meeting in which Secretary Brown will participate (July-August time frame).

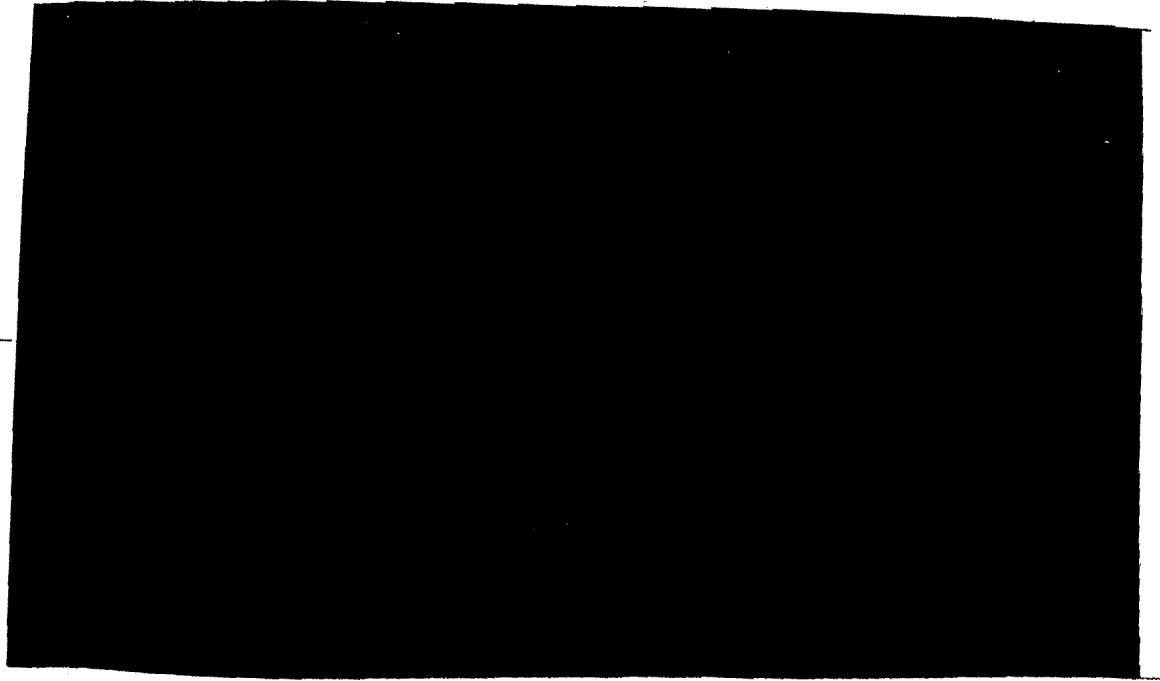
(e) Security Commitment: It is also important that the emissaries be authorized in your name to assure President Park of our continued security commitment and to so indicate publicly. They should also be authorized to confirm to President Park what he already knows, i.e., we intend to maintain our air presence, logistic support and our naval role in the ROK for the foreseeable future.

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Attachments:

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~~SECRET~~ADDITIONAL COMPENSATORY STEPS

Apart from military assistance to Korea, we should consider other actions designed to enhance South Korea's sense of security, to demonstrate our commitment, and to maintain the strength of our deterrent. A number of such possible steps, involving exercises and deployments, are discussed below. They could be begun any time during the troop withdrawal process after consultations with the Koreans and, as appropriate, the Japanese.

Exercises

Within the last year, six significant U.S./ROK exercises were conducted in the vicinity of Korea. These varied in scope from large-scale land, sea, and air exercises to smaller combined marine landing teams conducting amphibious operations along the coast. Exercises of this type should be conducted more frequently to serve as a signal of continuing commitment and as a vehicle for enhancing U.S. and ROK training. For example, we could:

-- Have an additional U.S./ROK amphibious exercise in 1978 (and each year thereafter). It would include about 4,200 Navy and Marine forces.

-- Increase the size and frequency of CONUS-based tactical fighter exercises in Korea.

-- Add a second national level U.S./ROK command post exercise in 1979 (and each year thereafter) to strengthen coordination between the ROK/U.S. military structure and ROKG national ministries/civilian agencies--and increase the proficiency of the ROK battle staff.

-- Add another major Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine training exercise in 1980 (scope: 13,000 men).

Deployments

Additional Air Force deployments could serve to diminish losses in the surveillance, firepower, and maneuver capabilities of the 2nd Infantry. The following options are possible:

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-- Beginning in 1978, temporarily augment air strength by periodically deploying one squadron of tactical fighters from Kadena Air Base, Okinawa and/or Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines into Korea. These temporary augmenting forces would maintain a presence in Korea approximately six months out of every twelve. The estimated additional cost for these deployments would be \$960,000 annually.

-- In 1980, increase the strength of Kunsan Air Base, Korea, assigned fighters by 12 UE, and begin deployment of AWACS (E-3A) aircraft to Kadena Air Base, Japan. AWACS detachment will be fully operational in 1981.

-- Carrier task group operations off the Korean coast and visits to Korean ports by U.S. Navy ships might be increased; however, such increases could affect naval requirements in other parts of the Western Pacific, and could bear upon required naval force levels there.

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~~SECRET~~APPROACH TO CONGRESS ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE

DOD has identified \$500 - \$600 million as the value of the equipment we need to make available to the ROK to reduce the loss to firepower, mobility, and deterrence results from the withdrawal of our ground troops. Part of this requirement -- DOD estimates \$200 - \$250 million -- could be met by turning over to the ROK as we withdraw appropriate equipment items now held by the 2nd Division (or other units of the Eighth Army). FMS assistance, beyond that we have contemplated to assist the Koreans with their Force Improvement Plan, will also be required.

Our approach to Congress will need to be shaped in accord with the following general principles:

-- our requests will have to be fairly close to what we actually hope to achieve. Large cuts by Congress could give the impression that we are unable to compensate for our withdrawals and are therefore putting Korea's security in jeopardy.

-- we probably stand the best chance of eliciting significant amounts of assistance from the Congress in the early stages of the troop withdrawal process, when the impact of our new policy will be greatest. As time passes, Congress's awareness of the need for compensating measures may ebb.

-- the Congress will be most receptive to forms of compensation which appear most directly related to demonstrable deficiencies created by the withdrawal.

With these factors in mind, we believe we should consider presenting the Congress with a single compensatory package at an early stage. As a major component, we should ask Congress to authorize a non-reimbursable transfer to the ROK of appropriate equipment items held by our ground forces as they withdraw. This has the advantage of being clearly related to the troop draw-down, is a one-time action covering the whole period of the withdrawal unlike the FMS authorization which must be voted annually, and can be presented as a means of facilitating the withdrawal. At the same time, however, and to deal with deficiencies which are not compensated for by this transfer of equipment, we should seek FMS credits

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to permit the Koreans to purchase appropriate items. This initial package should not include any proposals concerning war reserve material stockpiles since accumulating adequate reserves will require large-scale outlays, and including this item now in our legislative program would raise the apparent costs by considerable magnitudes.

Apart from this early approach to Congress to compensate for deficiencies associated with our withdrawals, we would intend, over the next four years, to seek annual FMS credits at approximately the \$275 million level we requested for FY-78. These credits would permit the Koreans to proceed with their existing Force Improvement Plan.

In presenting our position to Congress, we would, of course, consider any alternative course of action recommended by Congressional leaders as a more effective means of achieving our objectives.

We will clearly face substantial problems in securing from Congress legislation to help compensate for the withdrawal of our ground forces. Although our troop withdrawal plans have helped us achieve our basic assistance goals for FY-78, the extent to which Congress will be willing to go beyond these levels over the period of the withdrawal process is open to question. We are not optimistic that there will be enough improvement in the Korean human rights situation to overcome Congressional criticism on this score. At the same time, the various investigations into allegations of improper Korean activity in the U.S. will continue to put Korea in a bad light and to make it more difficult for members of Congress to speak out in favor of aid to Seoul.

Whatever specific requests we make of Congress, the Administration will have to mount a major campaign, including visible Presidential involvement, in an effort to push them through. We should begin by briefing key Congressional leaders prior to the visit of General Brown and Under Secretary Habib to Seoul, informing them in general terms of our intentions. We should continue to keep the Congress informed of developments in the withdrawal process, underlining the serious need for compensatory measures not only to make up for Korean defense deficiencies but to demonstrate our commitment and maintain the deterrence.

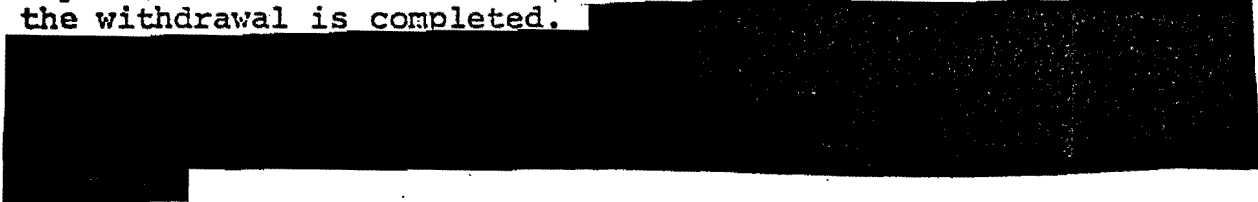
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~~SECRET~~COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS

Since the Korean War, operational control over ROK forces has been exercised by the U.S. Forces Commander in his capacity as Commander of the United Nations Command. In recent years, however, the Koreans have proposed a combined U.S.-ROK structure which would give them a greater share of command responsibility and experience. They are almost certain to press for such a structure in anticipation of our ground force withdrawal and are likely to raise the subject during the emissaries' visit to Seoul.

We would agree that our planned ground force withdrawal makes it essential to enhance ROK command and control capabilities and that this should be accomplished before the withdrawal is completed.



In light of the above considerations, we would favor the creation of a combined U.S.-ROK command under the UNC/USFK Commander. Such a structure would give the Koreans much needed experience in the command function while retaining operational control in the hands of a U.S. officer. Presumably once the ground force withdrawal was completed the ROK would insist on having operational control over its own forces.

We believe that our emissaries should be authorized to tell the Koreans that we would be prepared to move toward such a combined command once the details can be worked out.

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~~SECRET~~PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND DIPLOMATIC MOVESGeneral Themes

Especially because of the confusion and anxiety in Asia and elsewhere over our Korean policy, we will need to emphasize the following themes in our public statements and diplomatic contacts.

- We are able to withdraw our ground troops because of the growing national strength of the Republic of Korea. The South Korean forces are adequate in number to fulfill a ground defense role without the U.S. ground force presence.
- As we withdraw our troops, we will take measures to assist the Republic of Korea in its self-defense efforts.
- Our commitment to the defense of Korea remains firm and we will take whatever actions we consider are necessary to make this clear.
- The removal of our ground troops will be a phased, carefully executed process. Our air presence and support and naval capability will remain.
- Nothing will be done to upset the military balance on the peninsula or to destabilize the situation in Northeast Asia.

Statements Relating to Consultation Plans

While our emissaries are conferring with the Koreans and the Japanese, we can expect a good deal of press probing and, in addition, leaks from Tokyo and Seoul. It will be important during this period to avoid statements that might lead to the conclusion that consultations with the ROK are purely pro forma. Responses to press and other queries should emphasize that fulfillment of the President's intent requires close consultations with the Koreans and discussions with the Japanese and that no specific announcement will be made until after this process has been completed. Departure statements should be equally unspecific, emphasizing the candor and

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fruitfulness of the bilateral exchanges. (A detailed agenda for press guidance, VOA coverage, etc. is in preparation.)

Fuller statements of our intention will be desirable once the mission makes its report. The President could present his plans in broad outline. Thereafter, the Secretary's Asia Society speech will provide an occasion for reiterating our plans and commitments in the broader Asian context. As decisions are reached more detailed public announcements can be made; the Joint Communique at the conclusion of the SCM would provide one such opportunity.

#### Diplomatic Moves

Our diplomatic moves should have two basic objectives: to reassure our friends and allies that our plans will be carefully executed so as not to weaken the deterrent and that our commitment remains firm; and to clarify our intentions to the North Koreans.

We will need to remain in close contact with the Japanese at high levels in Tokyo and Washington, informing them as candidly as possible about our plans as they develop and our ongoing discussions with the South Koreans. We must be particularly careful to discuss with them any augmentation plans that could involve movement through Japan and to assure them of prior consultation in this regard.

Our other principal allies in the Pacific--Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines--should also be kept as fully informed as possible in Washington and their respective capitals. In other Asian capitals and elsewhere, U.S. Ambassadors on appropriate occasions should make sure that our plans and implementing measures are clearly understood. With the Chinese and the Russians we should stress the firmness of our commitment, the advantages we will derive from peace in Korea, and the importance of a clear understanding in Pyongyang of our intent to retain a strong position in the South in close consultation with the ROK.

We should use our Chinese and Soviet channels to stress the firmness of our continuing commitment to ROK security. While we are not optimistic that our withdrawal will pave the way for diplomatic approaches to ease tensions, we should, nevertheless try to exploit them for this purpose. In our discussions with the Soviets and Chinese, apart from stressing our continuing commitment to the South's security, we should point out that our troop withdrawals ideally should be matched

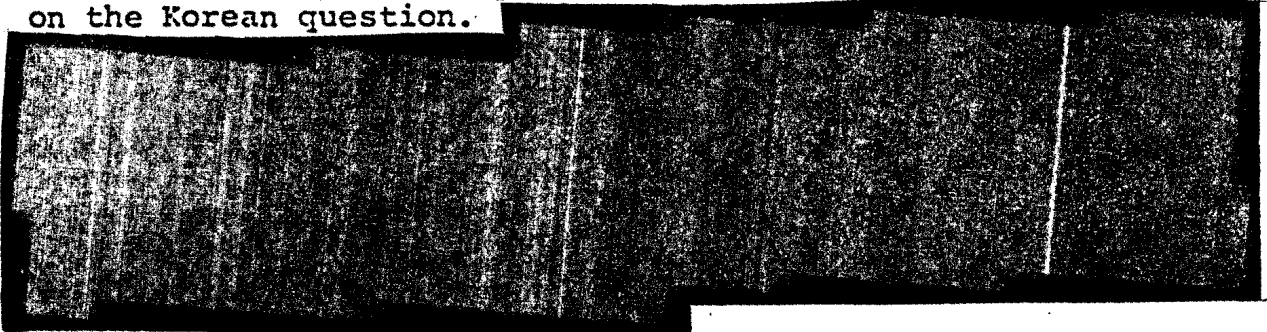
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by tension-reducing steps on the part of Pyongyang. As our plans for withdrawals are made public or as the removals begin, we should consider reiterating at a high level our proposal for four-power talks to seek a more permanent alternative to the Armistice Agreement. A clear idea of the diplomatic possibilities, however, will be possible only after we learn of the reaction of our allies and adversaries to the specifics of our plans and it becomes clearer what sort of atmosphere the withdrawals will create.

Pyongyang has already used the advent of the new Administration and our announced troop withdrawal intentions to press hard for direct U.S.-North Korean contacts. It is likely to continue this approach, possibly giving some indication of flexibility in various areas of its policies on the Korean question.

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