

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~

July 5, 1979

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.

President Carter

Nicholas Platt, Staff Member, NSC
(Note Taker)Korea

President Park Chung Hee

Ch'oe Kwang-Su, Senior Protocol Secretary, Office of the President (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME
AND PLACE:Saturday, June 30, 1979; 12:23 - 1:30 PM
The Blue House, Seoul, Korea

President Carter: (Briefing the Note Taker on the circumstances of the conversation before the Note Taker entered the room: I told President Park that I had come with the sincere intent to work closely and had been taken aback by the adamant demand the U.S. force levels could not be changed at all when the numbers involved represented only about 1/2 of 1% of the total defense forces available to South Korea. I asked him why the great disparity in military capability between North Korea and South Korea when the South Korean economic capacity was so great. President Park responded that the North Korean force buildup had not begun until after we announced our withdrawal policy in 1977. I told him that that information was not accurate, according to our own intelligence sources and that it would be impossible to build up so significantly in such a brief span of time. I asked him what he could do to increase his forces, if he and I could work harmoniously on force levels. He has just given his answer and the interpreter is about to put it into English.)

President Park: I understand that U.S. forces cannot stay in Korea forever. They must be withdrawn someday, but the North Koreans are superior to us now and there has been no change in their policy. The most important thing that we can do is to prevent miscalculation. What I am asking you for is that no further withdrawal of U.S. forces take place until the disparity between North Korea and South Korea is changed and until North Korea changes its policy. What I want to say is that they should stay for the time being.

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Review on June 30, 2009

Extended by: Z. Brzezinski

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President Carter: I can't promise that we will freeze force levels. I will work jointly with you, however, on force levels. What is the intention of your country to eliminate the disparity not only in force levels as they exist, but also in the rate of the buildup of force levels.

President Park: Even before it became known that North Korea had substantially built up its power, we had a Force Improvement Plan. The first phase will end in 1981. We have implemented every point of this plan. Our intent was that our forces should achieve parity by the end of the first phase if the North Koreans did not augment their own forces. As you know, the North Korean Communists did build up their forces. As a result, we should have another phase of the Force Improvement Plan. As you know, we levied a series of defense taxes four years ago to expire in five years. I believe now that we will have to extend the taxes another five years after they expire next year. We will go ahead with our Force Improvement Plan regardless of whether further withdrawal of U.S. forces occurs or not, but I honestly desire that until North Korea changes its policy that the mainstay of the Second Division remain in South Korea and the Combined Forces Command continue to function. The force levels, whether in the 100's or in the 1000's, is your prerogative to decide as President.

President Carter: Would the second phase of the Forces Improvement Plan (FIP) be designed to match the North Koreans.

President Park: If the North Koreans do not make substantial increases of their own, our forces will match theirs.

President Carter: Are you prepared to accept this disparity?

President Park: We would make further efforts.

President Carter: Are you not in that condition now, Mr. President?

President Park: As time goes by, our economic capabilities will grow, and the total financial means of the Government will grow. By the end of the second stage of the FIP we might be able to accelerate our program.

President Carter: This is obviously a decision for you to make, President Park. We spend 6% of GNP; you spend about 5% of GNP on military requirements, while North Korea spends about 20% on defensive and offensive capabilities. It is of concern to me that you would want five or six more years to match the North Korean buildup.

President Park: We would start making further efforts as our own strength grows. It doesn't mean we would start increasing spending five or six years later. We plan to spend 6% of our GNP. Last year a number of supplementary budgets were passed which reduced the percentage of defense spending somewhat. Our plan is to spend between 6 and 6.5% of GNP on defense. That percentage five years from now would be much higher than due to growth in the economy.

President Carter: Let me pursue one more question, Mr. President. I still see the prospect that the North Korean advantage will continue to increase if your expenditures are maintained at 6% of GNP and I am wondering if you are willing to accept this situation?

President Park: We cannot tell for sure what percentage of GNP North Korea is now spending on defense. The common estimate is 20%. But their economy is much smaller. Six per cent of our GNP equals 20% of theirs. It will be difficult for them to maintain expenditures at 20% of GNP.

President Carter: I don't want to argue, Mr. President, but if 6% of the South Korean GNP is as much as 20% of North Korea's, how have North Korean forces built up so much more rapidly than yours? Our intelligence information is that aid from the Soviet Union and China to North Korea has been very small in recent years.

President Park: The North Koreans have a totally different economic, social and political structure than ourselves. If we spent 20% of our GNP on defense, there would be immediate riots. The North Koreans can do this, but we cannot.

President Carter: I fully realize that South Korea cannot spend 20% of its GNP on defense. My need is to see how the Republic of Korea, with U.S. forces levels either stable or not, could reduce the disparity with the North. The disparity could continue indefinitely, and might even get worse. U.S. troops could never be withdrawn.

President Park: It is only an assumption that the North Koreans are spending 20% of GNP. However, it is our purpose to strengthen defense to the best of our ability. We cannot, however, do this at the expense of the structure of society and the standard of living of the people. Nevertheless, we plan to do our best.

At the moment, North Korea is superior to us in some categories of equipment, particularly tanks and airplanes. But even if

they attack, the people of South Korea would fight to the end. They have no place to go. They would win. Our primary objective, however, is to deter an outbreak of war. The presence of U.S. forces deters war and prevents miscalculation. Even though we reach parity, a continuation of the stationing of U.S. forces will still be the best way to deter attack. Though disparity exists in our equipment, the quality of our forces is better. As I said before, we will not lose, but we would prefer that a war not start in the first place.

President Carter: As you increase your military strength, where do you see your increases most needed? In ground forces or some other element of the force structure?

President Park: Although priorities are difficult to define, we give priority to ground forces. We are inferior in the air, but we can expect immediate assistance from the U.S. should we be attacked. Our priorities are ground forces, air forces, and the navy, in that order.

President Carter: Do you have present plans to build up your ground forces?

President Park: Yes.

President Carter: In personnel levels?

President Park: At the moment we do not plan to increase the number of standing ground forces. We have an agreement with the United States signed in 1954, which freezes the level at 600,000. We want to improve the equipment and upgrade the capability of our homeland reserve divisions. We also want to improve our armour and fire power. We have three million members of the ready reserve which can be mobilized in a short time. They need better equipment.

President Carter: Do you want to maintain a limit of 600,000 or do you want it removed?

President Park: Of course, if we need to increase the number of ground forces, we would consult with you. The 600,000 man ceiling was set in the past because the forces were maintained by U.S. grant aid and there had to be some limit. Now, we receive no grant aid so if we saw a need to increase levels, we would consult with you. However, at the moment, we would prefer to concentrate on equipment. The North Koreans, for example, have over 2,000 tanks. We have about 850.

President Carter: Our impression was that you had 1050.

President Park: The number may have changed slightly.

President Carter: General Vessey told me this morning that you have more than 1,000.

President Park: That may be true. Mr. President, we don't think the number of men should increase to match the North Koreans, but that we should increase the quality of our equipment, particularly tanks, anti-tank weapons like TOWs and aircraft with anti-tank capabilities. We are trying also to utilize the terrain to block the enemy. We are building fortifications and ditches.

President Carter: My understanding is that you are particularly concerned about the presence of the Second Division and the Combined Forces Command. Do you also want the U.S. to maintain its protective nuclear umbrella as well?

President Park: Yes.

President Carter: If we decide to modify or reduce other force levels you would like adequate notification and consultations?

President Park: Yes.

President Carter: Let me raise another issue that concerns me human rights. I have studied the question of human rights in South Korea with great attention in an effort to understand your position as best I can. I know that you have to maintain the stability of your society and your government. My belief is that the people of your country are deeply dedicated to freedom and democratic procedures of government. The most serious problem that exists in the attitude of U.S. citizens toward your country is in the human rights area. A few situations here have been greatly exaggerated in our press and throughout our nation. To you these things are not so significant, but in our country they color the entire attitude. We have observed and appreciated the release by you of some students and political activists in recent months. In fairness, they were also highly publicized in the U.S. My own wish would be that you could rescind Emergency Measure 9 and release as many prisoners you hold as possible. Obviously, I have no desire or ability to influence your decision other than to express my opinion of the tremendous improvements that would occur in U.S. relations if these measures could be taken. It may not be possible for you to take such action, but if you could it would permit you and me to wipe out the unpleasant picture of your country that

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Americans have. It is a shame that one of our strongest and most valued allies, and one of the finest nations on earth, should be regarded critically in the U.S. because of this one issue. Perhaps you could explain to me your reason for the situation and what might be done.

President Park: I have great admiration for your human rights policy throughout the world and the spirit behind it. I would like to suggest, however, that you cannot apply the same yardstick to all countries. Every country has unique circumstances. You cannot apply the same yardstick to countries whose security is threatened as to countries whose security is not. You went to the front line area, Mr. President, and drove back to Seoul. Our capital is only 25 miles from the DMZ. Right across the DMZ hundreds of thousands of soldiers are poised. We have suffered a tragic war. We must deal with the situation whether we like it or not, otherwise we might fall into the same situation as the Vietnamese. Some time ago several members of Congress came to call on me. I told them that if dozens of Soviet divisions were deployed at Baltimore, the U.S. Government could not permit its people to enjoy the same freedoms they do now. If these Soviets dug tunnels and sent commando units into the District of Columbia, then U.S. freedoms would be more limited. We support the human rights policy. Respect for human rights is also our concern. I want as much freedom for our people as possible. But the survival of 37 million people is at stake, and some restraint is required. Some reporters in the American press say that I wield dictatorial powers. As you have observed I am applying limited restraints. If we lifted EM-9 and released prisoners, the effect on our relationship would be favorable, and I would be able to meet with you in a much lighter frame of mind. But people are trying to overturn this government, and we cannot let that that happen. We have released those who showed repentance and will release more. I hope you will understand that we cannot take these measures all at once.

President Carter: Is it your response that you would have to continue to impose EM-9?

President Park: I hope you will understand, but it is difficult to rescind EM-9 at this point. Of course, we don't intend to maintain it indefinitely. I will heed your advice and do more in that direction, but I cannot take these measures at this time. If I took these measures, I would be praised in America and people would say they were taken in consultation with you.

President Carter: This is all I have, Mr. President. Is there anything more that you would like to raise?

President Park: I understand your concern in this regard and will do my best.

President Carter: What I want is to remove all problems that exist between us. I respect your responsibilities. I don't want to attempt to impose my will on your own. Only you can judge the importance of these measures.



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