

President Carter's Visit to South Korea - Proposal for Tripartite Talks rejected by North Korea

President Carter paid an official visit to Seoul from June 29 to July 1, 1979, during which he had talks with President Park. In addition to US troop withdrawals and relations with North Korea, the questions discussed included human rights in South Korea.

President Carter asked President Park to abolish the emergency decree forbidding criticism of the Government and to release dissidents who had been placed under house arrest during his visit, and Mr Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State, who accompanied him, presented two lists of over 100 political prisoners and requested their release. President Carter also met Mr Kim Young Sam, the opposition leader, and 12 religious leaders, including the Rev. Kim Kwan Suk, general secretary of the National Council of Churches and a prominent critic of the Government. References by the news media to President Carter's appeals on behalf of political prisoners were banned by the South Korea censorship [A total of 86 political dissidents were subsequently release on July 17 on the occasion of South Korea's Constitution Day. For previous related developments see 29795 A.].

In a joint communiqué issued on July 1, the two Presidents proposed tripartite talks between North and South Korea and the United States and the admission of both North and South Korea to the UN.

"President Carter," the communiqué stated, "assured President Park that the United States will continue to support the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Korea to maintain peace and stability in Korea and sustain economic and social development. The two Presidents... agreed that the continued security of the Republic of Korea is pivotal to the preservation of peace and stability in the North-East Asian region... President Carter reiterated the firm commitment of the United States to render prompt and effective assistance to repel armed attack against the Republic of Korea in accordance with the [1953] Mutual Defence Treaty, [see page 13080] and affirmed that the US nuclear umbrella provided additional security for the area

"President Carter reaffirmed the deep interest of the United States in preventing any destabilization of the peninsula or region, and assured President Park in connexion with the question of further withdrawal of American ground combat forces from Korea that the United States will continue to maintain an American military presence in the Republic of Korea to ensure peace and security... President Carter assured President Park that the United States will continue to make available for sale to Korea appropriate weapons systems and defence industry technology necessary for enhancing Korea's ability to deter or defeat aggression and for the development of appropriate defence industries in the Republic of Korea.

"President Park and President Carter have decided jointly to propose the convening of a meeting of senior official representatives of the South and the North of Korea and the United States to seek means to promote dialogue and reduce tensions in the area. In order to promote this effort and to prepare for the meeting which it is hoped can be arranged, the two Presidents have directed the [South Korea] Foreign Minister and the [US] Secretary of State to communicate jointly with the Foreign Minister of North Korea in this regard in an appropriate manner. The two Presidents agreed that any arrangement that would reduce tension and establish lasting peace leading ultimately to the peaceful unification of the Korean people should result from dialogue between the two responsible authorities of both the South and North of Korea.

"President Carter stated that if and when North Korea's principal allies are prepared to expand relationships with the Republic of Korea, the United States is prepared to take similar steps with North Korea.... The two Presidents shared the view that the admission of both the South and the North of Korea to the UN as an interim measure pending their eventual unification would provide authorities of both Korean parties with broader opportunities for dialogue aimed at the resolution of their differences.

"The two Presidents noted the importance to all nations of respect for internationally recognized human rights. President Carter expressed the hope that the process of political growth in the Republic of Korea would continue commensurate with the economic and social growth of the Korean nation. In this connexion, President Park explained his view on this matter together with the current unique circumstances confronting the Republic of Korea.

Mr Vance told a press conference on July 1 that North Korea had been notified of the proposal for tripartite negotiations through a third country (stated by South Korea officials to be Indonesia, which had diplomatic relations with both North and South Korea). The Soviet Union and China had also been notified, and would be asked to use their influence to persuade North Korea to accept the initiative. Mr Vance said that President Carter had not yet made up his mind on the question of further troop withdrawals, and would base his decision on the facts, on his discussions with President Park and on consultations with his military advisers and Congress.

A South Korea Foreign Ministry spokesman said on July 1 that the proposed talks should be between senior officials, and that non-official delegates should be excluded. The North and South Korea authorities should play the leading role, and if the dialogue between them were put on track the United States would then withdraw. He also stated that President Carter had promised President Park the continued presence of US troops in Korea, which could be interpreted as meaning that the withdrawal of US troops would be suspended [For subsequent US announcement, see above.].

The first North Korean reaction to the communiqué came in an article in *Nodong Sinmun*, which declared on July 3 that "the question of the reunification of our country is an internal affair of our nation, and one to be solved by the Koreans themselves without outside interference". It denounced the proposals for simultaneous entry of North and South Korea into the UN and the establishment of relations between the United States and the North and between North Korea's allies and the South as "another wicked trick to legalize two Koreas", and accused the United States of "attempting to seize South Korea permanently as its colony and military base".

A North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said on July 10 that the tripartite talks plan was "utterly unfeasible", as reunification was a matter to be discussed only between North and South Korea, and that US involvement would be "interference in our internal affairs". North Korea would talk with the United States, but only on the withdrawal of US troops and replacing the 1953 armistice agreement with a peace treaty, and South Korea would be permitted to participate in the talks only as an observer. A South Korea Foreign Ministry spokesman said on the same day that South Korea did not regard this response as official, and that the doors remained open for North Korea to comply positively with the US-South Korea proposal.

The Chinese Foreign Minister, Mr Huang Hua, said at a banquet given by the North Korean ambassador in Peking on July 11 that "the [North] Korean Government's stand is absolutely correct and its proposal is reasonable and constructive".

North Korea's rejection of the proposal for tripartite talks was relayed to Indonesia (as the diplomatic intermediary) over the weekend of July 14–15.

Only comparatively minor incidents occurred in and near the demilitarized zone in 1977 and 1978, the most serious being the shooting down of a US helicopter which flew over North Korean territory.

A South Korea soldier was shot dead and another wounded in the demilitarized zone on May 4, 1977, the incident being attributed by the UN Command to armed North Korean agents. At a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission on May 9, in reply to a strong protest by the UN Command, the North Korean representatives described the incident as a "fabrication".

A US military helicopter which flew apparently by mistake over North Korean territory on July 14 landed after a warning shot had been fired; it then took off again, however, and was shot down, three of the crew being killed and the fourth wounded and taken prisoner. The North Korean authorities handed him over two days later, together with the bodies of his companions, but refused to return the wreckage of the helicopter. In the last such incident, when a US helicopter was shot down on Aug. 17, 1969, the crew had not been released until the following December.

After two South Korea airmen had landed in North Korea on Oct. 12 the Northern authorities announced that they had defected, whilst the South Korea Defence Ministry maintained that they had crossed the border by mistake. The North Korean radio announced on Oct. 21 that a Southern lieutenant-colonel and a private had also defected on the previous day, although a South Korea statement, on the other hand, alleged that they had been abducted inside the demilitarized zone. At a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission on Oct. 26 the North Korean delegates rejected a request for the two soldiers' repatriation. The South Korea opposition New Democratic Party demanded the Defence Minister's resignation on Oct. 21 because of "the recent outbreak of troubles in the armed forces", without explaining the nature of the troubles.

The South Korea authorities alleged on April 28, 1978, that a North Korean "spy boat" had been sunk after an exchange of fire in which a South Korea sailor was killed. The North Korean delegates rejected a complaint by the UN Command at a Military Armistice Commission meeting on May 11, describing the incident as a "fabrication". On May 20 the South Korea authorities claimed that another "spy boat" had been sunk on the previous day and eight "agents" aboard it captured; the North Korean radio, however, said that the boat was a fishing boat which was adrift because of engine trouble. The South Korea Defence Ministry described it on June 7, not as a "spy boat", but as a "military vessel" which had lost its course because of dense fog, and announced that it had decided to return the crew, the eight men being handed over on June 13.

The UN Command announced on Oct. 27 that a tunnel under the demilitarized zone had been discovered, and accused North Korea of constructing it for offensive military purposes. (For the discovery of two similar tunnels in 1974-75 see 27273 A.) At a Military Armistice Commission meeting on the same day the North Korean delegates denied all knowledge of the tunnel, and described it as "a farce. aimed at justifying the US troops' occupation of South Korea".

No serious incidents occurred during the first half of 1979. At meetings of the Military Armistice Commission on March 22 and June 26 the Northern delegation accused the Southern forces of numerous violations of the armistice agreement, but produced no evidence of any casualties or damage.

On July 22, 1979, however, the South Korea Navy announced that on the previous day it had intercepted and sunk an "armed North Korean spy-boat" off Tongyoung (some 210 miles south-east of Seoul); five North Koreans and two South Koreans were stated to have lost their lives.

A decree adopted by the North Korean Government on June 21, 1977, which came into effect on Aug. 1 of that year [see page 28906], stated that the North Korean economic zone extended 200 miles from the coast in the Sea of Japan and to the half-way line between North Korea and China in the Yellow Sea, and that all foreign vessels were excluded. from fishing and other economic activities in this zone without previous permission.

Mr Min Kwan Shik, South Korea co-chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee, said on July 22 that his Government could not accept the North Korean declaration of a 200-mile fishing zone, and that if South Korea fishing operations in the vicinity of the military demarcation line were hampered the Government would "take the necessary actions to protect our fishermen". He proposed that a full meeting of the committee should be convened at an early date to settle these questions and that the North-South "hot line" should be immediately restored. No answer to these proposals was received from North Korea.

The North Korean Supreme Command announced on Aug. 1 1977, that the military boundary extended up to 50 miles from the shore in the Yellow Sea and up to 200 miles in the Sea of Japan; that foreign military vessels and aircraft were prohibited within this boundary; and that foreign civil shipping and aircraft, apart from fishing boats, might operate within it only by prior agreement. Mr Kim Seong Jin, the South Korea Minister of Culture and Information, said on the same day that South Korea could not recognize the economic zone and military boundary, which

would change the armistice system and threatened to endanger fishing operations and navigation near the truce line. The Japanese Government also refused to accept the military boundary, on the ground that no such boundary was recognized under international law.-(New-review, Seoul - New York Times - International Herald Tribune - Times - Daily Telegraph - Guardian - Le Monde - US Information Service and International Communication Agency -BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) *Prev. rep. 28227 A; South Korea Internal Development, 29795 A; South Korea Japanese Agreement on Continental Shelf and Fishing Limits 23396 A, 28564 A)*

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