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Doctoral Thesis

**Was the “China Factor” Working?
U.S. Policies Towards Vietnam, North Korea and China
in the Late 1970s**

**중국팩터가 작동했는가?
1970년대 후반 베트남, 북한과 중국에 대한 미국의 정책**

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2019년 8월

서울대학교 국제대학원

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ABSTRACT

Was the “China Factor” Working? U.S. Policies Towards Vietnam, North Korea and China in the Late 1970s

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This dissertation investigates U.S. policies towards Communist countries in Asia in the late 1970s, focusing on Vietnam and North Korea with the “China factor” as background for U.S. grand strategy. It focuses on the American and Communist sides’ attempts and failure to achieve recognition and normalization.

This study first describes the changing diplomatic strategies of two U.S. administrations of late-Ford and Carter regarding relations with Vietnam and North Korea. It then sheds light on various mechanisms that led each side to either reject or encourage an improvement of bilateral contacts, among which Sino-American normalization and the “China factor” at work during the later half of the Carter administration played a critical role. The research aims at going beyond the one-way approach from the point of view of the great powers by using first-hand materials from Vietnam and other former Socialist countries to illuminate how these actors perceived and reacted to such policies.

The fall of Saigon and the subsequent unification of Vietnam in 1975 fostered the U.S. to go beyond their previous preoccupation with military alliances and U.S. commitments. Now that the three Communist regimes of China, North Korea and Vietnam had emerged and come to influence the whole region, the U.S. found it crucial to place a greater emphasis on economic and diplomatic relationships with adversary nations as instruments in maintaining regional stability. In this context, however, the Ford administration conducted a hostile policy towards Vietnam and North Korea, while hesitated to put forward Sino-American normalization.

As soon as he became President, Carter was quick to initiate and implement plans in approaching three Asian Communist regimes. In the case of Vietnam, Carter sent a special delegation to Hanoi to open path for normalization negotiations. Follows Leonard Woodcock's visit, three rounds of negotiations in Paris ended without results due to the aid issue – U.S. obligation in paying war reparations. In North Korea, Carter suggested diplomatic contacts with North Korea and called for the resumption of inter-Korean dialogue or the establishment of three-way talks among the U.S., North Korea and South Korea. For China, the stalemate around Taiwan and the Soviet Union made normalization negotiations unproductive at the beginning. However, with a greater influence of the National Security Council over the Carter administration's foreign policy decisions, talks achieved a turning point follows National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's visit to China in May 1978.

Thereafter U.S. diplomatic directions regarding Vietnam and North Korea were changed to fit to the Chinese's ears. Sino-American diplomatic normalization, a big success of the Carter presidency, turned out to be an obstacle for Carter's initiatives in not only Vietnam but also North Korea. Once giving in to the hardliners in his Cabinet to top Peking on his deck, Carter lost much of his original sense of initiative and failed to reconcile with both Hanoi and Pyongyang. Washington's decision to place Peking as the top

priority from mid-1978 to early 1979, thus, directly ended U.S. diplomatic efforts towards Hanoi and indirectly affected its on-going diplomatic attempts regarding Pyongyang.

This research concludes that apart from a set of important reasons that was partly discovered in the existed literature, including a combination of staffs with contentious ideas within the Carter administration, and the sudden change in the international context starting from late 1978, it was the U.S. inability to apprehend the historical experiences and ongoing dynamics among Vietnam-China-Korea that led to the ultimate failure of engagement policy with both Vietnam and North Korea. This process happened simultaneously with a diplomatic competition among three Asian Communist states in winning American attention and in the long-term, obtaining the improvement of relations with the U.S.

Key words: Carter, Vietnam, North Korea, China, Communist, U.S.-Asian relations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Following his visit to Havana, President Obama's May 2016 visit to Hanoi signified another breakthrough in U.S. relations with one of the major remaining Communist states in the world. The youth of Vietnam were inspired by his actions to believe that the future is open and Vietnam may no longer cower in fear from Chinese aggressions, especially its behaviors on the South China Sea, which the Vietnamese call the "East Sea" (*biển Đông*).

Nevertheless, Obama's "strategic patience" for North Korea frustrated many whose expectations went as far as a possible direct talk between Washington and Pyongyang to break a two decade-long standoff over its nuclear program.¹ After the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s fifth nuclear test in September 2016, experts frankly criticized the Obama administration's North Korea policy, called it a failure and urged for a bold change in U.S. policy towards Pyongyang, some kind of the "switching course" that enabled the Obama administration to strike an agreement with the Iranians.²

"Bold changes" finally came together with the new owner of the White House. When Donald Trump won the election in the surprise of many American voters and inaugurated in January 2017, almost no one could expect that he would soon meet the young North Korean leader Kim Jong Un just around one year later. And merely eight months after the so-called "summit

¹ Scott Snyder. 2013. "US Policy Toward North Korea," *SERI Quarterly*. 99-104.

² Daniel DePetris. 2016. *Enough Strategic Patience: Time for a New US North Korea Policy*. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/enough-strategic-patience-time-for-a-new-us-north-korea-policy/>

meeting of the century” in Singapore in June 2018, leaders of the two countries met again in Hanoi, Vietnam, to a great fanfare. By choosing Vietnam, one of DPRK’s blood allies and socialist brothers, as a summit location, Washington apparently wanted to show North Korea what the Communist nation can gain if it abandons its nuclear weapons development and cooperate with South Korea and the U.S. instead.³ Yet again despite much hopes and expectations, negotiations fell short without any agreement.

Such rather recent developments have ignited a reassessment of U.S. foreign policies and interactions with the former adversaries, especially in the context of the Asia-Pacific region, which has just been expanded to the so-called “Indo-Pacific” strategic area.⁴ Attentions have been particularly paid to the process of the twenty years of Washington-Hanoi normalization negotiations (1975-1995) as well as Vietnam’s so-called *đổi mới* economic reform launched in 1986 as potential “lesson” and a “role model” for Pyongyang.⁵ There also raised the question of U.S. policy change that only comes along with administration change, and the theory of “presidential politics,” that bold actions could only be made by the bold Presidents.

Throughout the process, there emerged the role of South Korean Moon Jae-in Government as the mediator between North Korea and the U.S.,⁶ reiterating the formula of Seoul-Washington-Pyongyang trilateral meeting. Yet what seemed to be even more critical and complex was China’s role in the whole scene. With the on-going U.S.-China trade war, signals of Chinese intervention in U.S. denuclearization talks with North Korea have been

³ Hannah Beech. 2019. *Cozy up to U.S., Vietnam Tells North Korea. Look What It Did for Us.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/world/asia/trump-kim-vietnam-summit-north-korea-relations.html>

⁴ The United State Pacific Command (USPACOM) was renamed to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) on May 30, 2018, in recognition of the United States’ alliance with India as a counter-alliance to contain the rise of China.

⁵ 박태균. 2019. “남·북·미와 피로 얽힌 베트남, 평화시대 여는 장소 될까”, 『한겨레』 http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/international/international_general/882386.html?fbclid=IwAR1yD9q-8CU3omCVVh2slZY6y7QVjgpK2livMkfNdo3kaeTaW1wAWTDXBEQ

⁶ 이근. 2019. “아슬아슬한 중재외교”, 『경한신문』 http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201903072034005&code=990308

profuse. This included DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's three visits to Beijing within 2018 and an additional China visit ahead of his second summit with President Trump, and Chinese President Xi Jinping's acceptance of the invitation to visit North Korea in 2019 in commemorating the 70th anniversary of bilateral ties between the two Communist states.⁷

With dramatic changes have been going on in the regional diplomacy in general and the geopolitical situation surround the Korean Peninsula in particular during the two most recent American administrations, there arises the need to trace back the history of diplomatic interactions between the U.S. and former adversary nations of North Korea, Vietnam and China, to draw from the past lessons for the present and the future. Whereas one could easily name "Nixon" and "Kissinger" as the key actors in U.S. success in the opening of China in 1972, "Bill Clinton," "John McCain" and "John Kerry" are the names immediately appear in one's mind when talking about American normalization with Vietnam, which finally happened in July 1995. In the case of North Korea, many would cite Bill Clinton as the first U.S. President who attempted to strike a nuclear deal with Pyongyang by signing the 1994 Agreed Framework.

However, Nixon was not the American president that concluded the seven-year Sino-American normalization negotiations, nor Bill Clinton the first one who put forth the initiatives of seeking reconciliation with Vietnam and North Korea. In reality, it is not well known that the first U.S. normalization initiatives with Asian Communist states were undertaken not in the early 1990s when the Berlin Wall collapsed and Bill Clinton, a Democrat, came to the White House, but started as early as the later of half of the 1970s, merely two years after the fall of Saigon. It is true that, still, such bold ideas and efforts were promoted under the administration of a Democrat president, and even a Washington outsider whose background boasted few foreign policy and political credentials. This research aims at highlighting the unattended

⁷ Ankit Panda. 2019. *When Will Xi Jinping Travel to North Korea?*
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/when-will-xi-jinping-travel-to-north-korea/>

presidency of Jimmy Carter to show American very first attempts to reconcile with three Asian Communist countries, which indeed formulated not only the basics of the negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hanoi and Washington that lasted for twenty years, but also the basic patterns that are still observed in the U.S. nuclear talks with Pyongyang nowadays.

1. Research Purpose

This dissertation investigates U.S. policies towards Communist countries in Asia in the late 1970s, focusing on Vietnam and North Korea with the “China factor” as background for U.S. grand strategy. It focuses on the American and Communist sides’ attempts and failure to achieve recognition and normalization. This study first describes the changing diplomatic strategies of two U.S. administrations of late-Ford and Carter regarding relations with Vietnam and North Korea. It then sheds light on various mechanisms that led each side to either reject or encourage an improvement of bilateral contacts, among which Sino-American normalization and the “China factor” at work during the later half of the Carter administration played a critical role. The research aims at going beyond the one-way approach from the point of view of the great powers by using first-hand materials from Vietnam and other (former) Socialist countries to illuminate how these actors perceived and reacted to such policies. There are two main goals of the research that should be prioritized for clarification.

First of all, by taking full advantage of declassified diplomatic and policy documents, this research focuses on the Carter presidency (and to some extent the Ford administration) to fill up a critical gap within the scholarship of U.S. foreign policy towards Asia throughout the Cold War, which has just been mainly dealt with the Nixon and Reagan eras. To this study’s point of view, any thorough examination of the origin of American trade relations with the People’s Republic of China, or the obstacles in U.S.-Vietnamese

negotiations of diplomatic normalization during the Reagan administration cannot be done without tracing back the policies taken and the dynamics happened during the Carter era. The same logic applies to a deep discussion of a tripartite or quadripartite framework in resolving the Korean issue up until today.

Though relatively short (three years for Ford's and four years for Carter's term), the late 1970s was essential to understand nowadays East Asian geopolitics, either Northeast Asian or Southeast Asian region. This is not only because 2019 marks the 40th anniversary of both the liberation of Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge genocide and the outbreak of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war, but also due to the above-mentioned drastic changes in U.S.-DPRK relations recently.

Secondly, rather than following the general trend of studying U.S. relations with allies and the nation building process in the countries under strong U.S. influence, this research focuses on Washington's efforts to open contacts then seeking reconciliation and normalization with East Asian Communist regimes. Although being known collectively through the concept of the "Bamboo Curtain"⁸ as a counterbalance to the "Iron Curtain" in Europe, the diplomatic interactions between the U.S. and the Communist regimes in Asia, as well as the synergies among Asian Communist states themselves along the Cold War have yet attracted the attention of scholars. Despite numerous works accounting for how the U.S. had entered, fought, and exited the Vietnam quagmire, and how Washington succeeded in opening up China, a collective attempt to systematically examine the dynamics within the "Asian Communist bloc"⁹ in the Cold War period has not yet been found. This research thus wishes to fill this gap in the historiography of both U.S. foreign

⁸ The most prominent works dedicated for this concept are Priscilla Roberts eds. 2006. *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World Beyond Asia*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, and Michael Lumbers. 2008. *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China during the Johnson Years*. New York: Manchester University Press.

⁹ This is to compare to how the "Eastern Europe bloc" is widely perceived.

policy in Asia and Asian Communism follows the end of the Vietnam War, which is considered as signaling the ending stage of the prolonged Cold War.

Based on excessive archival research, including American presidential libraries, diplomatic and security archives both online or offline at various locations in the United States and Asia, this study seeks to maintain a balance in explaining the mutual interactions between the U.S. and three Asian Communist countries through a back-and-forth approach. That is, corresponding reactions and policies by three Communist regimes are equally accounted for and are at times strongly emphasized using the primary documents from Communist sources. This very point of view from the Asian Communists is what truly fell short in the academics and scholarship on the Cold War in general and the post-Vietnam War period in particular due to the lack of primary materials.

Accordingly, Chapter 1 opens with the basic perceptions of diplomatic normalization in international affairs both in the old time and the modern days. It then provides an excessive literature review of the scholarship on the Ford and Carter administrations' foreign policy and the dynamics within the Communist world in Asia in the late 1970s, with a closer look at the three regimes of Vietnam, North Korea and China. Moreover, a detail explanation on the methodology and sources being used is highly needed to underline the contribution of the research to the literature of Cold War history, country study, or U.S.-Asian relations.

Chapter 2, which covers the historical background of the whole research, tries to draw up what happened in Asia after the fall of the Saigon Government in April 1975. This does not only include the Ford administration's hostile policies towards Vietnam and North Korea and a reaffirmation of Sino-American rapprochement, but also each Communist regime's pursuit of their respective foreign policies in a post-Vietnam context. Moreover, the fundamental concepts and conditions for U.S. reconciliations with Vietnam, North Korea and China are briefly introduced. For instances,

Articles 21 and 8 (b) of the Paris Peace Accords, the notion of “cross-recognition” of the two Koreas, or Chinese fear of an “American appeasement” and “Soviet encirclement” in Asia. This chapter also outlines the pattern of U.S. policies regarding each case study as implications for important observations that are put forth in the following chapters. The transition from the presidency of Ford to Carter and the President-elect’s initial worldview and Asian policy concludes the chapter.

Chapter 3 dissects U.S. efforts in reconciling with three Communist regimes in Asia during Carter’s first year in office of the presidency. Different from the previous chapter, here the two flows of information from the U.S. and Communist countries’ sides are analyzed altogether to clearly show the back-and-forth effect. U.S. diplomatic interactions with each case study of Vietnam, North Korea and China are presented according to the chronology of events happened in 1977 until April 1978, just prior to the turning point of U.S. policies towards Asian Communist countries.

Chapter 4 is dedicated for Communist countries’ reactions and calculations vis-à-vis the Carter administration, which is what unfound in the literature. The chapter tries to start each case by describing Hanoi, Pyongyang and Peking’s perceptions of the new American President, which account for their later developments. It then brings to light the calculations and tactics, either cooperating or refusing cooperation, balancing or brinkmanship, that each Asian Communist regimes took forth in their interactions with Washington.

Chapter 5 minutely depicts the significant change in Carter’s initial attempts to normalize with Vietnam and engage North Korea, beginning with National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s historic visit to Peking in May 1978. It is a crucial milestone for U.S. foreign policy throughout the Carter era in general and for this study in particular. Since the core argument of the whole research is the “China factor” at work in U.S. interactions with both Vietnam and North Korea, in this key chapter the three case studies are

interpreted collectively to show the cause-and-effect characteristics. It then wraps up with the Carter administration's decisions in terminating its diplomatic efforts with both Hanoi and Pyongyang.

In Chapter 6, which presents the overall assessment of the research, the author deeply analyzes the complex mechanisms that contributed to the final failure in mutual contacts between the U.S. and Vietnam, the U.S. and North Korea, including the inappropriate steps taken by the Vietnamese and North Korean side, as well as the "China factor." By synchronizing the different causes of mutual interactions, the chapter draws significant findings that challenge several arguments stated in the existed studies, especially those on the Vietnam case. The chapter then goes deeply into another fresh finding of this research as a whole, i.e. the fierce diplomatic competition among the three Communist regimes, which resulted in their military conflicts in early 1979 – the peak of the crisis within Asian Communist "bloc." North Korea-Vietnam interactions in the late 1970s-early 1980s is particularly highlighted using declassified documents.

Last but not least, the concluding Chapter 7 reaffirms the main points raised throughout the research and gives further comments on the Carter administration's failure in seeking reconciliation with Vietnam and North Korea. There are also remarks on the break of Asian Communist solidarity in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, which seriously harmed not only Vietnamese relations with China, but also Hanoi-Pyongyang comradeship at the ending stage of the Cold War. A slight reference to the current situation of the denuclearization negotiations between Kim Jong Un's North Korea and Donald Trump's United States is also drawn, suggesting further thoughts on this issue.

2. Literature Review

The need to normalize relations between countries is self-explained. World peace depends on good relations among all countries, including professional negotiations by diplomats to resolve conflicts when they escalate.¹⁰ There is no certainty that two nations can resolve their disputes by just talking about them. But without effective communications and some form of dialogue, the odds are high that may open pathways to war. As Winston Churchill put it: “When relations are most difficult, that is the time diplomacy is most needed.”¹¹ In other words, diplomatic recognition and normal relations among countries is widely considered a common sense and also regulated in international law.

Warren Christopher, who served as Deputy Secretary of State under President Jimmy Carter and played a key role in resolving topical issues such as the Iranian hostage crisis, the Sino-American relations negotiation, the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty, and later actively promoted the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations during the Clinton presidency, in a speech titled “Normalization of Diplomatic Relations” at Occidental College in June 1977 explained the need of the normalization of U.S. relations with other governments:

We believe that diplomatic relations helps us to discharge our basic duty to protect the interests of our government and our citizens. By keeping open a channel of communication with other countries, we best serve our long-range objective of encouraging the growth of democratic institutions.

We do not look at the normalization of relations as an end in itself. Rather, diplomatic relations, once established and maintained, enable us to communicate with other governments directly, to state our views and listen to

¹⁰ Michal Haas. 2018b. *United States Diplomacy with North Korea and Vietnam: Explaining Failure and Success*. Peter Lang. 4.

¹¹ Kenneth W. Thompson. 1987. *Winston Churchill's World View: Statesmanship and Power*. LSU Press. 280.

theirs, to avoid misunderstandings and to exert influence. In short, they help us to accomplish more than we can without them.¹²

Generally speaking, normal relations between states in international relations involve reciprocal establishment of embassies and consulates, commercial and social relations, and a “routine handling of communications and conflicts between governments through ordinary channels of diplomacy.”¹³ When non-recognition exists, two countries can establish “Interests Sections” or “Liaison Offices” either independently or within the embassy of a friendly state in the capital of the other. For example, Sweden now serves as the contact point between the DPRK and the U.S. The basic steps towards an establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations usually include:

- 1) Exchange of diplomats
- 2) Establishment of Liaison Office, or Interests Section, or Permanent Representative’s Office
- 3) Establishment of Consular, Consul General and Embassy.¹⁴

Against the backdrop, this dissertation examines the case of U.S. interactions with three main Asian Communist countries (Vietnam, North Korea and China), in the context of the later half of the 1970s. By employing historical approach and bringing in the dynamics within the Asian Communist bloc, the research elucidates American interactions with this part of the world follows its experience of war and defeat in Vietnam.

2.1. The Ford and Carter Administrations’ Foreign Policy towards three Asian Communist Countries

¹² The Department of State. Warren Christopher. Speech at Occidental College, “Normalization of Diplomatic Relations,” June 11, 1977. University of Minnesota Library. Government Publications Division.

¹³ Haas. 2018. 4.

¹⁴ Eileen Denza. 2014. *Diplomatic Law: Commentary on the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (4th Edition). Oxford Commentaries on International Law. Available online at <http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law/9780198703969.001.0001/law-9780198703969-chapter-4>

The historical background of the whole research was post-Vietnam War Asia. Gerald Ford, who took over from Nixon a nation fragmented by Watergate and deeply wounded by the Vietnam experience, promised that finally it was “a time to heal” (Ford 1979). As pointed out by a recent scholar, of all of the Cold War presidents, Gerald Ford is the one whose time in office has been least explored by historians (Gawthorpe 2009: 697). John Robert Greene wrote in his book dedicated to Ford and his administration that the task of understanding and analyzing the Ford presidency was only beginning (Greene 1995: xiii). Often been seen and treated as a simple “adjunct” to the Nixon years, there has not been much work done on the foreign policy of the Ford era. More recent monographs by Yanek Mieczkowski (2005) and Andrew Downer Crain (2009) help filling this gap, yet the part on Asia has always been a major inadequacy in the many attempts in explaining U.S. foreign policy of different administrations.

Tackling this shortage, Gawthorpe (2009) provides an excellent observation of how the Ford administration reacted to a changed situation in the Asia-Pacific after the fall of Saigon. It argues that changes in regional politics forced the administration to adapt to a situation in which allies began to look to the Communist countries for friendship and to reconsider having American forces on their soil. Gawthorpe illustrates this situation by examining the two crisis situation in the region – the 1975 *Mayaguez* seizure and the 1976 Axe Murder incident (Gawthorpe 2009: 704-714) – which is helpful for this research’s arguments of the Ford administration’s frequent linkage of the situations in Southeast and Northeast Asian regions in its understanding of international relations in Asia after Vietnam.

Other than these studies, this research has to refer to works account for U.S. foreign policy along the Cold War that incorporated the Ford presidency (as well as the Carter administration), including that by John Lewis Gaddis (2005), Richard A. Melanson (2005), and Inderjeet Parmar (2011). While these studies take the Nixon era as the starting point of their examination,

others begin with the fall of Saigon, which is of great help for this research, as they tend to emphasize post-Vietnam War scenario and thus focus more on the Ford and Carter administrations. These include works by Trevor B. McCrisken (2003), Edwin Martini (2007), Robert D. Schulzinger (2008), Marvin L. Kalb (2011) and Johannes Kadura (2016). Thanks to the studies that specifically dealt with U.S. foreign policy the 1970s, including that by Daniel J. Sargent (2015), this research attains a firm historical background before embarking on its attempt to account for the Carter administration's policies.

Due to Ford's hostile policies towards Vietnam and North Korea and his inability to strike a deal with the PRC, American first attempts to reconcile with (former) adversary nations in Asia after the debacle in Vietnam began with Jimmy Carter. Although much has been written on the foreign policy of the U.S. during the Carter era in general (Van Slyck 1981; Smith 1986; Moens 1990; Strong 2000; Sneh 2008; Mitchel 2016), scholars of the Carter presidency focus mainly on domestic politics (Skidmore 1996; Kaufman 2008), or American interactions with the Soviet Union (Garthoff 1994; Westad 1997). Betty Glad (2009) was the first to highlight Carter's advisors' decisive role in the decision making process during his administration, which in fact turning him into "an outsider in the White House,"¹⁵ an argument quite applicable for this research.

U.S.-China relations in the late 1970s drew the attention of a great number of scholars, who dedicated their works to comprise Washington-Peking interactions through books (Gates & Geelhoed 1986) and some book chapters (Harding 1992: 67-106; Mann 1998, Ford era: 56-77, Carter era: 78-114; Tyler 1999, Ford era: 181-226, Carter era: 227-286; Tucker 2001, Ford era: 226-320, Carter era: 321-349; Sutter 2010: 78-81; Cohen 2010: 195-210; Wang 2014, Ford era: 92-96, Carter era: 97-113; Green 2017: 363-386; Brazinsky 2018: 335-345).

¹⁵ Book title by Betty Glad. 2009. *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. London: Cornell University.

Moreover, experts of modern China worldwide surely view Sino-American normalization of diplomatic relations as a vital subject in order to understand the decade of the transformation of China as well as U.S. overall efforts in opening the Communist country. As a result, several titles are found in the literature regarding such a breakthrough in the two countries relations, notably Robert S. Ross (1995) and John H. Holdridge (1997) excellent books, and a more recent edition by Kirby, Ross and Li (2005). Nevertheless, due to restrictions in accessing Chinese central and local archives, except from chapters from the 2005 edition that are contributed by some Chinese scholars, most of these studies could not really bring in and spell out the point of view from China.

Regarding the Korean Peninsular, Carter's troop withdrawal plan and its consequences on U.S.-ROK relations received much attention among South Korean scholars, including Ok Taehwan (1990, 1998), 전호환 (2008), 박원곤 (2008, 2009), 김지환 (2010); 조관행(2011, 2015, 2016); 유훈 (2012); 엄정식 (2012 a, b). However, little interest on the other side of the story – U.S. engagement attempts toward the DPRK during the Carter era – has been found in the literature.

Several comparative studies of the foreign policy systems and unification policies of South and North Korea, such as that of Yang Sung Chul (1981), Koh Byung Chul (1984) and Kim Hakjoon (1987) cover the Carter administration period. However, as these studies were published in the 1980s and based roughly on periodical research, many assessments are found outdated, especially those on the calculations of the actors involved. It should be noted that, the late 1970s is essential to understand nowadays Northeast Asian geopolitics, due to the fact that it was during this critical period the concepts such as “tripartite talks” or “four-party negotiations” in resolving the Korean issue and in engaging North Korea were for the first time officially endorsed by the related governments.

In order to tackle this critical shortcoming, recent studies by South Korean scholars look deeply into the issue of trilateral talks framework (3 자회담) throughout the Carter presidency by using advanced archival research. First of all, 엄정식 (2013) examines the perceptions and calculations of the Park Chung Hee administration during the process that led to the proposal of tripartite talks in July 1979. The author critically points out that the South Korean Government focused on strategic interests out of this proposal, such as the talks' characteristics, the delay of troop withdrawal plan, and the maintenance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. President Park particularly sought to turn the U.S. into a supporter, rather than an intermediary during such three-way talks. In the end his Government accepted this U.S. proposal in order to grasp certain conditions that possibly contributed to a delay in troops withdrawal. According to this author, President Park's acceptance of trilateral talks was also to save Carter's face (엄정식 2013: 255), making this proposal an outcome of an American President's visit to South Korea, which further strengthened bilateral relations.

As such, 엄정식 sees the Carter administration's proposal of tripartite talks as to facilitate U.S. policy towards the South (of troop withdrawal), not the North (of an opening of contacts and dialogue). This is indeed a popular understanding in the literature on the Carter administration's overall security and foreign policy towards the Korean peninsula. North Korea's calculations and decision in rejecting the Carter-Park proposal in July 1979, as a result, is completely missing in this research.

The first attempt to compensate for such inadequacy is found in a journal article by 홍석률 (2016). North Korea's attempt to contact the U.S. and to explore the possibility of holding trilateral talks throughout 1977-1978 is briefly examined (37-40). However, this research provides a rather brief and incomplete reference to President Carter's initiative of opening dialogue with North Korea. To this dissertation's point of view, Carter's very interest in North Korea was based on his broader pacific and Wilsonian ideas about U.S

foreign policy after the Vietnam debacle. It was his personal belief in how American administrations should deal with former adversary nations that ignited the initial attempts to respond positively to the North, not necessarily his intention to create favorable conditions for implementing the policy of ground forces withdrawal, which 홍석률 agrees with.

The drawbacks exposed from the above two articles are apparently solved by 이완범 (2017b)'s informative book. This is indeed the only full-scale research work so far specifically dedicated for the trilateral framework regarding the Korean peninsula throughout the Carter era. Taking multilateral framework as the core in his research, the author thoroughly examine the many attempts to set up either three, four or six-party talks on the Korean question not only within the Carter administration but also his post-presidency period. These included the attempts initiated not only by the Americans but various statesmen in the Socialist bloc and prominent individuals in different societies.

Nonetheless, despite a highly detail account of all of the actors, efforts, process and results of the many frameworks proposed in the period of 1977-1979, the two most critical questions that this dissertation hopes to find the answer are not found in this book: Why did Carter care about North Korea? And why did North Korea reject his proposal in July 1979? Firstly, similar to previous studies, the book spends just a few pages on the origin of Carter's interest in opening contacts with North Korea (250-257).¹⁶ Secondly, it does not provide any assumption as regards to Pyongyang's rejection of such a good opportunity for contacts and even reconciliation with the United States.

Apart from these highly updated and valuable works, this research finds an irreplaceable source of information through the landmark studies of

¹⁶ 4 장, “10. 카터의 북한 접촉 라인은 어디일까?” 이완범. 2017b. 『카터 시대의 남북한: 동맹의 위기와 민족의 갈등』 성남: 한국학중앙연구원출판부.

Lee Chae-Jin (2006) and Don Orberdorfer (2014), which expound U.S. interactions with the two Koreas since the outbreak of the Korean War.

Whereas the academic focus was placed on Carter's troop withdrawal plan in the case of Korea, for Vietnam, it was the Missing in Action (MIAs) accounting of American men served in the Vietnam War that drew much attention both historically and academically. Numerous titles are found, but Bill Hendon and Elizabeth A. Stewart (2007: 127-212) and Michael J. Allen (2009: 137-178) minutely depicted the Ford and Carter administrations' efforts to solve this thorny problem.

Meanwhile, Steven Hurst (1996) and Cecile Menétrey-Monchau (2006) are the most prominent in covering U.S. interactions with Vietnam during the presidencies of Ford and Carter. However, due to the limitation of access to Vietnamese sources, both Menétrey-Monchau and Hurst, as well as other scholars who studied the topic since much earlier used mostly American materials, which left many questions unanswered, especially those regarding Vietnamese positions and calculations. In addition, Hurst and Menétrey-Monchau belong to what this research calls the "blaming Vietnam" group of scholars, who attribute most of the failure of American-Vietnamese normalization of relations in the late 1970s to Hanoi's wrong policies and decisions, stemming from either its ideological considerations, or its expansionist ambition in Indochina. Such viewpoints are born out the group's misunderstanding of post-war Vietnam's foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis the U.S., whom this dissertation disagrees with and so tries to uncover the other factors that contributed to the failure of bilateral contacts. More on this school of academics will be touched upon throughout the dissertation.

Fortunately, a relatively more recent and fresh research came from Amanda Demmer (2017), who wrote her PhD dissertation on the twenty years of U.S.-Vietnam relations from the Vietnam War's end until the official normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995. Yet Demmer focuses mainly on the humanitarian issue, leading her approach to be more bottom-up rather than

top-down. In any cases, there has been so far no research on the same topic using Vietnamese Government documents.

Most importantly, none of the above mentioned studies links the Carter administration's efforts in China, North Korea and Vietnam altogether, despite a huge pool of research on U.S. foreign policy in the Carter era in all aspects and regions. In their memoirs, President Carter, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance spent just a few pages on Korea and even less than that on Vietnam. Declassified materials reveal that the Carter administration regularly took into account each of these Asian Communist states' reactions before moving forward with any of them, and the regimes in three Communist countries also carefully watched for the other(s) when contacting the U.S. This critical drawback is the motivation behind the research's decision to look at the three case studies in a comparative manner to uncover new findings, particularly from the dynamics within the Asian Communist bloc.

2.3. Vietnam-North Korea-China in the late 1970s

Much effort has been invested in trying to make sense of the dynamics among the Communist regimes in Asia during the Cold War. Yet most of the literature found on this topic dealt with bilateral relations rather than multilateral interactions among the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the North Koreans. Also, due to the fact that great power politics constructed the core of Cold War international relations, previous studies mostly take China as the pillar in order to link to North Korea and Vietnam.

Historically speaking, China's strength in Asia was absolute. Vietnam and North Korea were particularly in a position of having no choice but to take the most out of their bandwagoning policies vis-à-vis China due to their geographical borders with the power (박태균 2015: 69). Thus, throughout their centuries of tribute and *bang giao* – 邦交 – 방교 or international relations with

China, both Vietnam and Korea were not always in comfortable relationships with the superior power (유인선 2012: 제 1~2 부). This kind of “willing speech but unwilling heart” relationship was maintained and further stimulated between the Communist China under Mao Zedong and Communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh and the DPRK under Kim Il Sung. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) in particular was faced with a Communist big brother who contributed largely to Hanoi’s military victories in the First and the Second Indochina War (the Vietnam War), yet was unwilling to accept a strong, unified Vietnam right at its Southern doorstep and even worse, Hanoi’s efforts to tighten their comradeship with the Soviets to balance out the Chinese influence (Zhai 2000; 박태균 2015: 70-75).

Among a handful number of scholars who have attempted to acknowledge “the breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese relations”¹⁷ up to the peak of their conflicts in 1979, some look deeply into the historical roots of the problem. Notably among such historians are William Duiker (1986), Steven J. Hood (1992), Anne Gilks (1992), Yu Insun (2011), 유인선 (2012: 432-459) and 오정환 (2017: 415-425). Political scientists also contribute to the scene, including Robert S. Ross (1998) and particularly Brantly Womack (2006: 186-200). In his outstanding work, Womack develops the theory of asymmetry relationship to account for China-Vietnam relations, that the larger power has rarely been able to dominate the smaller one. He concludes that the situation between 1975-1979 represents the most dangerous time for asymmetric relations, and systemic misperception finally led to “winless war” between the two countries (Womack 2006: 188).

Meanwhile, more recent studies prefer a direct, thorough investigation into the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war itself, which certainly involve military historians such as Edward C. O’Dowd (2007) and Zhang Xiaoming

¹⁷ Book title by Anne Gilks. 1992. *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Relations*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies.

(2005, 2015). Ethnic element or the overseas Chinese in Vietnam (Chang 1982; Carino 1985) and economic factors (Path 2012) are also counted in.

The first attempt to go beyond bilateral relationships to seek a broader explanation of the dynamics between Vietnam and China during the Cold War is Priscilla Roberts's edited book *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World Beyond Asia* (2006). There are three chapters of this book that highly worth the attention. While Luu Doanh Huynh tries to clarify Vietnamese perspectives on the Communist powers, Stephen J. Morris brings the view from Moscow in and Zhihua Shen emphasizes Sino-U.S. reconciliation that affected China's Vietnam policy. Meanwhile, Sino-Soviet rivalry was the main focus of Nicholas Khoo (2011) in his depiction of the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. To Khoo, the end of an "indestructible friendship"¹⁸ between Vietnam and China in 1979 was all due to Soviet resurgence and its increased strategic deployments in the Russian Far East (Khoo 2011: 103-136).

While Peking-Hanoi relations drew much attention of the academia, a similar situation is not found in the North Korea case, either its interactions with China or contacts with Vietnam. Three important works by Hakjoon Kim (1985), Lee Chae-Jin (1996) and 최명혜 (2009) remarkably assist any attempt to understand Pyongyang-Peking relationship along the Cold War. Still, the dynamics of the later half of the 1970s are somewhat unattended. Moreover, mainly focused on the "misunderstood friendship"¹⁹ between Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung, Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia (2018)'s excellent and highly updated examination stopped at the year 1975 when Chairman Mao passed away. Even an outstanding work uncovering the "inconvenient" Chinese-

¹⁸ Chapter title, "5. The End of an "Indestructible Relationship": Soviet Resurgence and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance, 1975-1979." Nicolas Khoo. 2011. *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Soviet Alliance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹⁹ Book title by Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia. 2018. *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1940-1976*. West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

North Korean alliance²⁰ done by 최명해 (2009) spends just a few pages on the late 1970s period (pages 318-324), compares to how the other eras are minutely dissected. This is possibly out of either a lack of materials, or a low allocation of attention or interest. For post-Maoist Chinese leadership's interactions with North Korea, this research depends on works that unveil Pyongyang's foreign policy throughout the Cold War.

The absence of scholarly works on Vietnam-North Korea relations in the late 1970s raises the question of whether Hanoi-Pyongyang contacts abruptly ended together with the Vietnam War's end? In reality, the post-1975 context in Asia gradually divided the Communist regimes there into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese camps, hurting the long-standing comradeship between the Vietnamese and the North Koreans, as disclosed later in this research.

Historically speaking, post-1975 Vietnam became the center of attention, particularly when placing the country in the regional and local context of Southeast Asia and Indochina. Of the many questions arose after the fall of Saigon, there was the question of Vietnam's foreign and military policy after almost thirty years of inland war. How did Vietnam perceive its position in world politics after beating the mighty USA? Was it Vietnamese ambitions of hegemony in Indochina that destroyed the relatively peaceful and cooperative atmosphere that prevailed Southeast Asia after 1975? In other words, was it Vietnam's expansionism that dragged the region into even more wars in 1978-1979?

These issues are lively debated in the academia. Many blamed the shortsighted conduct of foreign policy of Hanoi (Nguyen 1982; Huy Đức 2013; Vu 2016), even seeing it as “a prisoner of Communist ideology” (Nguyen 2006: 120). Others blamed Vietnamese “nationalism” in its wrong treatment of the Hoa ethnic community that irritated the Chinese leadership (Path 2011 b). A more moderate viewpoint came from specialists of Southeast Asian

²⁰ 최명해. 2009. 『중국-북한 동맹관계: 불편한 동거의 역사』 서울: 오름.

international relations such as Amitav Acharya (2012) and Shaun Narine (2002),²¹ or historians such as Odd Arne Westad (2006) and Christopher Goscha (2006).²² Some scholars provide different points of view by focusing on economic policy (Vo 1990; Ngo 1991; Thrift 2007) and the process of socialist development in the South (Marr and White eds. 1988; Ngo 2006).

The understanding of post-1975 Vietnam requires an investigation into yet “the war after the war.”²³ Unresolved border conflicts between Vietnam-Cambodia and Vietnam-China combined to become what is widely known today as “the Third Indochina War.” Fortunately, the literature on this topic is rich and diverse, beginning with the four classics of David W. P. Elliott (eds. 1981), Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley (1984), Nayan Chanda (1986) and Elizabeth Becker (1987). Later works by Nguyen Vo Thu Huong (1990) and Stephen J. Morris (1999) looked deeper into Khmer-Viet interactions in history. An updated and valuable version of these early attempts is the edited volume by Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (2006), in which each contributor provides their own explanations of the conflicts from a wide range of different angles. Apart from these, the efforts by Southeast Asia experts (Ciorciari 2010; Southgate 2015; Ang 2018) and Soviet specialists (Pike 1987) help expanding the scope of observation.

It is widely agreed that the Third Indochina War is an exceedingly complex and painful experience, which was connected to the deep, far-reaching history among the nations of China-Vietnam-Cambodia, the dramatic changes in the regional geopolitics follows the Vietnam War’s end, and the

²¹ Acharya argues that Vietnam’s diplomatic failure was the one to blame for tensed situation in the region. Narine believes historical issues to play the greater role in Vietnamese decision to invade Cambodia.

²² Both of these scholars praise one important result of the Vietnamese invasion: the overthrow of the genocide Khmer Rouge. For example, Westad thinks that “Even though Vietnam failed in much of its foreign policy in the aftermath of reunification, its immediate role in the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge does not belong among those failures.” (Westad 2006: 10) Meanwhile, Goscha comments: “While I do not think the Vietnamese Communists intervened in late 1978 to save the Khmer people from genocide, there is no doubt that they put an end to the CPK’s butchery when other countries did nothing.” (Goscha 2006: 175).

²³ Title of Nayan Chanda’s landmark work. Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brothers Enemy: The War after The War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

overall Cold War structure among the great powers of the Soviet Union, China and the United States. Of the three Indochina Wars, the Third one has the most direct and enormous impacts to the formation of regional order and political realities in the nowadays Asia-Pacific. However, due to the fact that the direct war participants were ironically the once comrades-in-arms, and following the secretive summit in Chengdu – 成都 (*Thành Đô*) in September 1990 in which Vietnam and China negotiated to normalization their relations (유인선 2012: 469-474), the developments happened between 1978-1979 were silenced by respective Governments. Yet the old wounds of war remain among the veterans and the ethnic minority groups living alongside China-Vietnam-Cambodia borderlands.

On the foreign policy of North Korea, a country case that remain unaccounted for compares to how international relations of Vietnam and China are excessively studied and analyzed, this research firstly has to rely on the early works that cover both North and South Korea (Yang 1981; Koh 1984; Kim 1986), which included the late 1970s in their examination. The landmark work by 김학준 (1995) and more recent studies specifically about North Korean politics and foreign relations based on archival research are essential to understand the country's interactions with the outside world in the late 1970s, including that by Yongho Kim (2010), Narushige Michishita (2010), Andrei Lankov (2013), Charles Armstrong (2013) and Hakjoon Kim (2015). Nevertheless, one of the key arguments of this search – the fierce diplomatic race at the international stage that Pyongyang launched after the fall of Saigon – could not be found in these studies.

Fortunately, the dynamics within inter-Korean relations around this time was thoroughly disclosed through two important studies by Ria Chae (2015), which covers the situation of the early 1970s, and 신종대 (2013), which explains the context of the late 1980s. Although they do not directly tackle the late 1970s, the lessons drawn from the previous and the successive

times are evidently crucial for an examination of North Korean relations with the world.

In her work, Chae points out that from the early to mid-1970s, the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula was internalized by the Seoul and Pyongyang regimes and thereby obtained a life of its own. By examining the typical interactions between the United States and the Soviet Union, Chae sees the relationship between the two Koreas to acquire the characteristics of the Cold War between the superpowers. Seoul and Pyongyang *de facto* recognized each other's existence and established contact for the first time. At the same time, the two engaged in an economic and political competition without being incited to do so by their patrons. The competition for diplomatic recognition and propaganda rivalry between South and North Korea particularly at the United Nations reached a scale not seen in any other period, and the inter-Korean arms race also surpassed its intensity in any other time since the Korean War, notably reflected through the Axe Murders incident. Through this process, Chae argues, the Cold War was institutionalized in Korea, as shown in the continuous cycles of short rapprochement and long confrontation repeated thereafter. The Cold War on the Korean Peninsula, therefore, was able to persist despite the end of the Cold War between the great powers.

Meanwhile, the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games was a unique occasion that shows the contrasting results of inter-Korean competition during the Cold War (신중대 2013). Whereas Seoul attempted to elevate its status in the international arena, including the improvement of its relations with the Socialist states, Pyongyang realized such political and diplomatic implications of the Games. As a result, North Korea sought to sabotage and even thwart the sports event, countering South Korea's success in organizing the Games by developing nuclear weapons. In this fresh study, Seoul's bold strategy of using the Olympic Games to induce the opening of Pyongyang was proven a heavy loss, further pushed the North into international isolation and reclusion (신중대 2013: 95-96).

Although inter-Korean diplomatic competition in the context of the Cold War was unveiled through these scholarly works, Pyongyang's complex standpoints and competition vis-à-vis its Socialist comrades remained unanswered. This research hopes to be able to partly discover such internal dynamics within the same Asian Communist "bloc."

Regarding "China without Mao,"²⁴ study from the early stage by Immanuel C. Y. Hsu (1983) and Samuel S. Kim (1984) was remarkably advanced by excellent works that depict the life and legacy of China's boldest strategist – Deng Xiaoping. Ezra F. Vogel in his book evaluated that no one in the twentieth century had a greater long-term impact on world history than the Chinese Vice Premier (Vogel 2013). Due to his absolute control of Chinese foreign policies in the late 1970s, this research depends much on Vogel's monograph of Deng, as well as that by Maurice Meisner (1996), in accounting for the calculations and decisions put forth by China.

Yet again, despite the above rich literature on each case studies and their interactions, none of them tries to link Vietnam, North Korea and China altogether in a united, systematic research, either during the examined period or any other timespan. From this research's understanding, it is necessary to break the widely perceived regional division of Northeast and Southeast Asia, as the interactions between North Korea-China, China-Vietnam and Vietnam-North Korea, as well as the interactions among the regimes of Hanoi-Pyongyang-Peking overcame or surpassed such geographical hard-boundaries.

In short, this research is the first to include the Carter administration's policies toward three Communist nations in Asia. Despite being known collectively through the concept called the "Bamboo Curtain," the interactions among Asian Communist states have in fact not attracted the attention of scholars. Moreover, never before have these three Communist countries been researched in a comparative manner. The author wishes to fill this gap in the

²⁴ Title of Immanuel C. Y. Hsu's landmark work. Immanuel C. Y. Hsu. 1983. *China without Mao: the Search for a New Order*. Oxford University Press.

historiography of both U.S. foreign policy and Asian Communism in the late 1970s – a critical moment of the prolonged Cold War.

3. Methodology and Sources

This research was based excessively on archival research and primary sources to be able to provide new evidences and to construct firm arguments. The author cites all the sources where a certain document was found, which would be more convenient for tracking and checking. In several cases, it is within the author's intention to put the Communist sources first, followed by the U.S. sources in accounting for American points of view, and vice versus, in order to show the mutual effects of communications and perceptions. Yet at all times this is done by crosschecking the sources and confirming the information on both sides.

Regarding the primary sources, from the U.S. side, this research first and foremost makes full use of the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series, including two volumes from the 1969-1976 period (Volume XVIII: China; Volume E-12: Documents on East and Southeast Asia) and two volumes of the 1977-1980 period (Volume XIII: China; Volume XXII: Southeast Asia and the Pacific).

As the volumes on Korea from both of the above periods have not been declassified, the Woodrow Wilson Center's huge publication "The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979"²⁵ is of great help for the research. This is an excellent collection of archival documents on inter-Korean, U.S.-ROK and DPRK-Communist bloc relations between 1976-1979, which consists of selected documents from the archives in the United States, South Korea, (East) Germany, Romania, Hungary, Australia, the United Kingdom, the former Yugoslavia, and the United Nations.

²⁵ Available for download at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-carter-chill-us-rok-dprk-trilateral-relations-1976-1979>

The author then takes advantage of various online primary sources that is accessible in South Korea, including:

- The National Archives Access to Archival Databases (AAD)
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp>
- The State Department E-Reading Room
<https://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx#>
- The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Electronic Reading Room
<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/>

However, the fact is that a large amount of documents are not available online, and two important online sources can only be assessed from a U.S.-based institution. For this reason, direct visits to various institutions in the United States and an affiliation with an American university are unavoidable. The author therefore spent seven-month research stay (November 2016-May 2017) as a visiting researcher at the Department of History, the George Washington University, during which she paid visits to:

- The Carter Presidential Library (CPL), Atlanta

The key documents including the White House Central Files (WHCF), the National Security Advisor (NSA) Files and most importantly the Remote Archives Capture (RAC) documents only available to see and print out from two specialized computers within the building.

- The Ford Presidential Library (FLP), Ann Arbor

While most of the boxes on Vietnam and Korea at FLP are unavailable online, the documents related to China are digitalized on its Digitalized Library, available for download at <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/China.asp>

- The National Archives II (NARA II), College Park

The aim of the visit is to collect the CIA Records Search Tool (CREST) documents – the CIA secret materials that can only be seen and printed out

from two specialized computers, which are called the “CREST machines” and located within the NARA’s main reading room.

- The Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, DC

The author downloaded numerous hearings of both the Senate and the House of Representatives needed for the research from specialized computers within the Library.

- Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit

The aim of the visit was to collect the *Leonard Woodcock Papers* (<http://reuther.wayne.edu/node/13596>), which has been declassified since November 2016 at the Wayne State University’s Walter P. Reuther Library, with the hope to be the first to use these documents for a research. Leonard Woodcock was one of the most important figures during the Carter presidency regarding the attempts to normalize U.S. relations with both Vietnam and the People’s Republic of China, serving as the head of the March 1977 Presidential Commission’s visit to Hanoi to pave the way for normalization talks, and the last Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in China and first U.S. Ambassador to China (February 1979-February 1981).

- The Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis

The aim of the visit is to collect the Vice President *Walter Mondale Papers* (<http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00697.xml>), which also has just been declassified in January 2017 at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society. The Vice President was in charge of the Indochinese refugees, one of the key issues in U.S.-Vietnam relations in the late 1970s-early 1980s. His visit to China in the fall of 1979 played an important role in strengthening the newly established Sino-American relations.

Thanks to the affiliation with the George Washington University, the author was able to access the below two important online sources:

- Digital National Security Archive (DNSA)
<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/digital-national-security-archive>

The National Security Archive is in fact belonged to and located within the George Washington University.

- U.S. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS)
<https://www.gale.com/c/us-declassified-documents-online>
Distributed by the Gale Group.

The DNSA and DDRS are digitalized versions of the documents retrieved from the presidential libraries, the NARA, the CIA and other sources, which are highly useful in cases of missing documents during direct visits.

From the Vietnamese side, the author made full use of her nationality to get access to the National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III) in Hanoi to obtain the Collection of the Prime Minister's Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), the most essential source for any research that deals with Vietnamese foreign affairs. There the author collected several important Folders, including those that have not been touched upon and published by any other scholars, especially Folder 10392 on the Woodcock Presidential Commission's visit to Hanoi in March 1977.

The same tactic was applied to the visits to the National Library of Vietnam (Thư viện Quốc gia Việt Nam), where she collected various Vietnamese Government's official publications between 1975-1984 released by Truth Publisher (Nhà xuất bản Sự thật), Information and Theory Publisher (Nhà xuất bản Thông tin Lý luận), Foreign Languages Publishing House, and Vietnam Courier. Moreover, Vietnamese Communist Party's daily organ *Nhân Dân* (The People), the issues between 1975-1980, are thoroughly collected and examined. The author, however, uses these propaganda sources with great care, not to producing biased point of view.

For the North Korean side, the research tried to find documents related to the DPRK in its interactions with the United States from the South Korean Foreign Ministry Archives (외교문서), the National Institute of Korean History (국사편찬위원회) and the Park Chung Hee Presidential Library

(박정희 대통령기념도서관), yet without much success. As a result, it has to lean on periodicals, including the Worker's Party's organ *Rodong Sinmun* (로동신문) and its English version *The Pyongyang Times*.

The author also tries to look at North Korea via Vietnam, based on Vietnamese Government documents and *Nhân Dân* (The People). Moreover, the author also study North Korea through other former Socialist countries of the Eastern bloc (Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, East Germany), using the Woodrow Wilson Center North Korea International Documentation Project (NKIDP)'s publications, and the Wilson Center Digital Archive. Some of the excellent collections available for download on this Digital Archive include "China-North Korea Relations,"²⁶ "Inter-Korean Relations,"²⁷ "Inter-Korean Dialogue 1977-1980,"²⁸ "The Two Koreas and the Third World,"²⁹ and "Korea at the United Nations,"³⁰ documents dated between 1975-1980.

Last but not least, this research focuses on the unused materials available from various sources. Despite a good amount of declassified materials on U.S. policies and interactions with China, the Korean peninsular and Vietnam in the late 1970s, there are few scholars attempt to examine and conduct research on the cases of Vietnam and North Korea. This is probably because, due to Carter's final failure in improving U.S. relations with Hanoi and Pyongyang, the research interest is rather weak and Vietnam and North Korea-related materials are thus relatively neglected in the academia. Moreover, in explaining "failure," scholars so far blamed either one side or the other. The reality, the author believes, was much more complicated. Therefore, the author makes full use of the *FRUS* collections, the Wilson Center North Korea International Documentation Project (NKIDP)'s publications, the Wilson Center Digital Archive, documents related to Vietnam, North Korea and China.

²⁶ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/115/china-north-korea-relations/14>

²⁷ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/103/inter-korean-relations/17>

²⁸ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/129/inter-korean-dialogue-1977-1980>

²⁹ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/146/the-two-koreas-and-the-third-world/2>

³⁰ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/130/korea-at-the-united-nations/6>

CHAPTER 2

THE FORD ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARDS ASIAN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AFTER VIETNAM (MAY 1975-1976)

Follows the end of the United States' long war in Vietnam, many significant changes happened in Asia that signified further regional conflicts – hot spots of the prolonged Cold War. Ironically, the fall of Saigon in April 1975 brought about more negative changes in the relationships between Communist states than between the U.S. and its Asian allies. This was due to not only the deepening of the Sino-Soviet split but also the growing rift within the Indochina bloc, which finally broke out into a border war between the newly unified Vietnam and Cambodia in 1977-1978, and a year later, Sino-Vietnamese border war. In Northeast Asia, the fear of “another Vietnam” scenario resulted in moves towards increased authoritarianism on the whole Korean peninsula by both the governments of Kim Il Sung in the North and Park Chung Hee in the South.

The developments of Sino-American rapprochement and the Vietnam War's end fostered the U.S. to go beyond their previous preoccupation with military alliances and U.S. commitments. Now that the three Communist regimes of China, Vietnam and North Korea had emerged and come to influence the whole region, the U.S. found it crucial to place a greater emphasis on economic and diplomatic relationships with potential adversary nations as instruments in maintaining regional security. How did the post-Vietnam administrations in Washington adjust U.S. Asia policies to fit with

the new strategic context, and were they succeeded in dealing with Communist regimes in Asia?

Gerald Ford, who inaugurated eighteen months after the Paris Peace Accords was signed, was hoping that his country could move beyond the domestic and international divisions caused by the Vietnam War once the battles were ended. However, the humiliating fall of South Vietnam and American hasty evacuation from Saigon created a “haunting legacy”³¹ that it took longer than anyone could expect for the United States to heal. In 1975, there was little enthusiasm in a war and scandal-worn Washington for innovative policy towards the Asia-Pacific. As this chapter attempts to demonstrate, disappointed and angry American officials tried to economically and diplomatically isolate Vietnam, while at the same time sought to manifest U.S. military power upon any threat, including that made by the North Koreans. Also, the fear of criticism as being “soft on Communism” urged the Ford administration to slow down Sino-American rapprochement, which had been launched for more than three years. Though unwillingly, Washington first and foremost had to find ways to deal with its former enemy in war who now proudly emerged in peace – Hanoi.

1. The Ford Administration’s Policies towards Communist Countries in Asia

1.1. Bitterness over Vietnam

American attention toward Vietnam faded rapidly with the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops in early 1973. The U.S. thus did not have sufficient appreciation for the significance of Vietnam’s victory in 1975 and the subsequent reunification of that country. A deeper reason is that no country likes to dwell on the situations that expound the limits of its power. Although

³¹ Book title by Marvin L. Kalb. 2011. *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

became obsessed with their own traumatic experience of the defeat in Vietnam, a “collective amnesia”³² happened throughout the country that made the Americans be far less interested in the implications of Hanoi’s victory. As a scholar puts it, in the middle of the 1970s, “in America the word *Vietnam* referred to the American war there, not to the country.”³³

For the United States, dealing with Vietnam carried all the burdens of a disastrous war and diplomatic betrayal. Following Hanoi’s successful military reunification of Vietnam in April 1975, the primary issue in Washington’s Vietnam policy was to gain the fullest possible accounting of the fate of more than 2,300 servicemen missing from the war years – the “Missing In Actions” or MIAs question. There were persistent rumors that live American POWS – military prisoners – were still being held captive in secret camps in Vietnam and Laos. The National League of Families, representing the relatives of missing servicemen, was actively pressing both Americans and Vietnamese leaders for resolution of these matters. Its efforts were supported by many of the mainstream veteran groups.

The first direct contact between Hanoi and Washington after the Vietnam War occurred in July 1975 at the U.S Embassy in Paris between Đỗ Thanh, the Vietnamese Liaison officer, and Mark Pratt,³⁴ on the issue of MIA. The American side requested the repatriation of the remains of some U.S. pilots that were shot down in the Northern part of Vietnam. During the next meeting in September, the Vietnamese side agreed to return the bodies of three U.S. Air Force pilots. Yet not until December that Vietnam allowed a U.S. Congressional delegation headed by Chairman of the House Select Committee

³² Elizabeth Becker. 1986. *When the War was Over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and its People*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 364.

³³ Brantly Womack. 2006. *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*, Cambridge University Press. 186.

³⁴ Mark S. Pratt, at that time a member of U.S. Delegation to International Conference on Vietnam in Paris, France. A full testimony of Pratt on his diplomatic life was conducted by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training for their Foreign Affairs Oral History Project on October 21, 1999, which detailed his five years of posting in Paris throughout the Vietnamese-U.S. normalization negotiations.

<https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Pratt,%20Mark%20S.toc.pdf> 117-135.

on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia G. V. ‘Sonny’ Montgomery to enter Hanoi to obtain these remains. They stayed for two days for meetings with Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng and Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền.³⁵ The Vietnamese officials informed the Congressional delegation that Hanoi would fully carry out their responsibilities regarding the search for MIA’s and repatriations of remains, but the U.S. also had an obligation to help “heal the wounds of war.”³⁶

On March 26, 1976, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sent a diplomatic note to Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh, thanking Hanoi for welcoming the Montgomery delegation and saying Washington was willing to open discussion on the establishment of a “new relationship.” In Kissinger’s words, “I believe that the interests of peace and security will benefit from placing the past behind us and developing the basis for a new relationship between our two countries.”³⁷ Trinh replied, defining the MIA accounting and American “postwar reconstruction” as the two pending issues between the two sides.³⁸ Based on how these two issues were solved, Hanoi would normalize its diplomatic relations with Washington in the spirit of Article 22 of the Paris Peace Accords:

Article 22

The ending of the war, the restoration of peace in Viet-Nam, and the strict implementation of this Agreement will create conditions for establishing a new, equal and mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam on the basis of respect for each other’s independence and sovereignty, and non-interference in each other’s

³⁵ “MIA Committee Reports on Hanoi Conference,” December 24, 1975. White House Central Files, Subject Files, FO 8, Box 40, Folder “1/1/76-1/25/76 (Executive),” Ford Presidential Library (FPL). Also ND 8-1, Box 9, Folder “Casualties 12/1/75-12/31/75 (Executive),” FPL.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Note from U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to DRV Minister for Foreign Affairs Nguyen Duy Trinh (March 26, 1976), in Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy after the Capture of Saigon, 1975-1979*. McFarland & Company. London, UK: Routledge. Appendix 3. 247.

³⁸ Note of DRV Minister for Foreign Affairs Nguyen Duy Trinh to U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (April 10, 1976), Ibid. 248.

internal affairs. At the same time this will ensure stable peace in Viet-Nam and contribute to the preservation of lasting peace in Indochina and Southeast Asia.³⁹

Almost at the same time President Ford turned down U.S. Congress' petition for a six-month halt of trade embargo on Vietnam, the State Department in May sent a diplomatic note reaffirming the willingness to enter into discussions with Hanoi. However, it stated that Vietnamese objective of opening talks "on the basis of the selective application of past agreements" would not be fruitful.⁴⁰ Moreover, Washington saw the MIA issue as a "humanitarian concern," rather than an article regulated in the Paris Accords. Vietnam should provide a "full accounting," and real progress towards normalization could only come when this issue "substantially resolved."⁴¹

In the responding note,⁴² the Vietnamese side for the first time laid out what became its key argument in the early normalization talks with Washington, especially throughout the Woodcock Commission's visit to Hanoi under the instructions of Ford's successor Jimmy Carter, which will be deeply analyzed in the next chapter. Hanoi decided to pick up Article 8 (b) of the Paris Peace Accords and use it as an important bargaining item:

Article 8

(b) The parties shall help each other to get information about those military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties missing in action, to determine the location and take care of the graves of the dead so as to facilitate the exhumation and repatriation of the remains, and to take any

³⁹ "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, Signed in Paris and Entered into Force January 17, 1973." Mount Holyoke College, TIAS 7542 (24 UST 4-23), <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam/treaty.htm>

⁴⁰ Note of the U.S. State Department to the DRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs (May 8, 1976) in Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. Appendix 3. 248.

⁴¹ Ibid. 249.

⁴² Note of the DRV Foreign Ministry to the U.S. State Department (June 19, 1976). Ibid. 249-250.

such other measures as may be required to get information about those still considered missing in action.⁴³

Its argument was that, since Washington demanded Hanoi to implement Article 8 (b) on MIA accounting of the agreement as a condition for normalization, Vietnam would in turn request the U.S. Government to fulfill its pledges of American obligation to pay war reparations which was stipulated in Article 21 of the same document:

Article 21

The United States anticipates that this Agreement will usher in an era of reconciliation with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as with all the peoples of Indochina. In pursuance of its traditional policy, the United States will contribute to healing the wounds of war to postwar reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and throughout Indochina.⁴⁴

From this moment on, “Article 21” became Vietnam’s justification for demanding aid from the U.S., even up until mid-1977 when talks turned cold in Paris with the American negotiators. The State Department reemphasized the “basic humanitarian issue” of MIAs and stated bluntly that “the United States does not consider that it has an obligation to provide reconstruction assistance to Vietnam”⁴⁵ in the last diplomatic note, also the last attempt by the Ford administration regarding contacts with Hanoi. Over the next six months Ford’s emphasis on MIAs would increase as electoral pressure grew, giving rise to doubts as to his genuine concern for the issue.⁴⁶

If the Vietnamese entertained any hope that the Ford administration would agree with their interpretation of American obligations, they were

⁴³ “Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, Signed in Paris and Entered into Force January 17, 1973.” Mount Holyoke College, TIAS 7542 (24 UST 4-23), <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam/treaty.htm>

⁴⁴ Ibid. Underline added by the author.

⁴⁵ Note of the U.S. State Department to the DRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs (May 8, 1976). in Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. Appendix 3, 250.

⁴⁶ See a detailed recount about how Ford took advantage of the MIA issue regarding Vietnam in winning more votes in the 1976 election in Menétrey-Monchau, Cécile. 2006a. 51-76.

sorely disappointed. On April 16, 1976, Vietnamese Communist Party's daily organ *Nhân Dân* (The People) published Nixon's 1973 letter stating American contribution to the postwar reconstruction of North Vietnam. Kissinger denied the existence of such letter and declared, not unreasonably, that the Ho Chi Minh Campaign that conquered South Vietnam had made null and void the Paris Peace Accords – an argument that would be picked up later by the Carter administration. A Vietnam expert indeed pointed out the irony that although the U.S. lost the war, it retained a powerful position in the world order, allowing the vanquished unprecedented influence over the fate of the victors.⁴⁷

As a matter of fact, when peace came in 1975, instead of abrogating the Category Z (wartime) embargo against North Vietnam, the U.S. promptly extended it to South Vietnam and Cambodia while freezing all their assets – in effect continuing to treat these nations as belligerents. Strong embargo led Vietnam to the only path available – the Soviet Union. When Moscow could not maintain aid for Hanoi as it did during wartime due to economic difficulties, the Vietnamese leaders were frustrated. Former Minister of Trade Lê Văn Triết recounted one episode when he received phone calls at one o'clock in the morning from a high-ranking official demanding an immediate dismiss of Vietnamese Counselor for Trade at the Soviet Union, out of his “failure in securing irons, fertilizers, pesticides and food from Moscow.”⁴⁸

As a result, several important chances at reconciliation were lost, when a proposed trip for American oil executives to visit Hanoi in February 1976 was canceled,⁴⁹ and private humanitarian agencies were subjected to a restrictive export-licensing regime. Another sticking point was the U.S.’

⁴⁷ Edwin A. Martini. 2007. *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

⁴⁸ Interview with *Tuổi Trẻ* (Youth) for the Special Corner “20 Years of Vietnamese-U.S. Relations, Now We Know.” <https://tuoitre.vn/20-nam-quan-he-viet-my-chuyen-bay-gio-moi-ke-771960.htm>

⁴⁹ “Hồ sơ xét duyệt đoàn ra, đoàn vào cho Bộ Ngoại giao năm 1976” (Immigration Approval Records for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). March 22-December 12, 1976. Folder 9843, Collection of the Prime Minister's Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III). Hereafter “CPMO.” In a restrictive immigration-licensing country under strong embargo, Hanoi's interactions with the outside world can be observed just by tracking these Immigration Approval Records throughout the years.

repeated vetoing of Vietnam's entry into the United Nations (UN), even against overwhelming General Assembly votes to reconsider.

By summer 1975 South and North Vietnam respectively submitted their application for membership to the United Nations as two independent states. Vetoing the admission of the Vietnams would be an embarrassment to the Americans. The solution to this dilemma arose when, on July 29, barely two weeks after the two Vietnamese applications, South Korea notified UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim that Seoul wished to renew its previous application, dormant since the Soviet Union vetoed it in 1949.⁵⁰ Washington immediately seized the opportunity. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Daniel Moynihan in an immediate telegram to Henry Kissinger proposed to link the Vietnamese applications to that of South Korea and predicted that "there is probably not now a sufficient number of votes available even to get the South Korean application inscribed on the [Security] Council agenda."⁵¹ If the South Korean application were rejected, as Moynihan suspected that it would, the United States would use this pretext to veto the Vietnamese admissions.

This was a hard choice for both Moynihan and Kissinger. The next telegram after Kissinger's approval of the Vietnam-Korea linkage scenario reveals U.S. backstage scheme yet with no less torment. Moynihan first reported his plan to the Secretary of State:

First we will see the Russians and tell them that if they can't support South Korea's application, we believe the best solution for the moment would be for the Vietnams to leave their applications standing, but not to press for early consideration. In the meantime it was recommended that you tell [Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei] Gromyko what we are doing here, and the importance you attach to this matter. It is hard to imagine that you will prevail,

⁵⁰ See the full episode of U.S. plot in linking Vietnam and Korea's applications in Men trety-Monchau. 2006a. 32-51.

⁵¹ Telegram from Daniel Moynihan to Kissinger dated July 1975. "Admission of Vietnam to the United Nations," NSC Institutional Files: Selected Documents (1973) 1974-1977, Boxes 24, FPL.

but then you have done some unimaginable things with the Russians in the past.⁵²

The U.S. Ambassador expected “devastatingly negative reactions” as Washington might receive no support from friends. As clearly stated in this telegram, Japan was the first to say no. Australian Ambassador pleaded with American officials not to do it, saying it would destroy U.S. position on universality. Moynihan admitted that Washington “would be seen to act either illegally or indefensibly or both.”⁵³ He further reminded Kissinger of not only the legal violation of such act:

The International Court of Justice in 1947 held that no state is juridically entitled to make the kind of linkage we would in fact demanding. In that year we proposed the elimination of the veto in voting on membership applications. In 1949 [U.S. delegate to the UNGA] John Sherman Cooper announced that we, at all events, would never veto a membership application. This would then be the first time we shall have done so.⁵⁴

but also the tremendous risks that might accompany:

To veto the Vietnamese would signal all out war with the Non-Aligned [countries]. It is not a war we can win on.... The General Assembly will call for the complete withdrawal of American forces [in Korea]. South Korea will commence to be a nation held to be violation of international mandates. This will be a further loss and there will be consequences of that, too.⁵⁵

Moynihan ended his telegram by raising a rhetorical question that, to this research, reflects almost exactly the Ford administration’s standpoint and policy towards Hanoi:

Our scenario has us explaining to the Russians that American public opinion toward the UN would be “negatively affected” by the admission of the two Vietnams and the exclusion of South Korea. Maybe so, but you and I know

⁵² Telegram from Daniel Moynihan to Kissinger, August 1, 1975. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. Square brackets added by the author.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Square brackets added by the author.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Square brackets added by the author.

that the opinion that matters in the country will, to the contrary, assert that the administration is still fighting the Vietnam War. Irrational, unjust, but that is the way the game is played in Washington, is it not?⁵⁶

Moynihan's appraisal was indeed correct. The next day, a 12-1 vote in the Security Council put the Vietnamese membership applications on the UN agenda, but the South Korean application was officially rejected. In fact, the Security Council opposed having South Korea's case even discussed – as the U.S. Ambassador had expected. In response, the U.S. immediately announced that it would veto the Vietnamese admissions, with the argument that Washington pursued a “universality” of admissions and could not tolerate seeing the application of South Korea rejected while those of the two Vietnams were accepted.⁵⁷

However, even when the South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Tong Jo (Kim Dong-jo) confirmed that his Government would not reapply for membership in the 1975 UN session, the U.S. went ahead with a second veto of the Vietnamese applications on September 30. The U.S. vetoed again in September and November 1976, when Vietnam applied as one reunified state. Former Vietnamese Ambassador to the UN Võ Anh Tuấn recalled various obstacles that diplomatic officers from Vietnam had met during their stay in the U.S. throughout the years of embargo:

We were just allowed to get about within twenty-five miles from the UN headquarter in New York. Anyone who wished to travel beyond such control had to ask for permission. Every single move of the Vietnamese diplomatic delegation was closely watched by the FBI. Any car that carried Vietnamese diplomatic officers was immediately followed by a FBI one.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid. Underline added by the author.

⁵⁷ Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. 34-35.

⁵⁸ Interview with *Tuổi Trẻ* (Youth) for the Special Corner “20 Years of Vietnamese-U.S. Relations, Now We Know.” July 4, 2015. <https://tuoitre.vn/20-nam-quan-he-viet-my-chuyen-bay-gio-moi-ke-771960.htm>

After meeting with Vietnamese officials, the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia acknowledged in its final report in December 1976 that “no Americans are being held alive as prisoners in Indochina or elsewhere as a result of the war in Indochina,” and “because of the nature and circumstances in which many Americans were lost in combat in Indochina, a total accounting by the Indochinese Governments is not possible and should not be expected.”⁵⁹ They therefore recommended “that the Department of State promptly engage the governments of Indochina in direct discussions aimed at gaining the fullest possible accounting for missing Americans.”⁶⁰ To Vietnamese officials, the sheer absurdity of the American request led to suspicions they only wanted to use the issue to evade their responsibility to provide Vietnam War reparations.⁶¹

In short, a deep-rooted bitterness born out of the American loss of Vietnam emerged along the end of the Ford presidency. In late 1975 and throughout 1976, this bitterness remained within the executive branch, with Ford’s public statements pledging efforts to account for MIAs to the American electorate yet behind-the-scene hostility towards Hanoi. U.S. rejection of the opening of Vietnam and American opposition to Vietnamese admission to the UN mainly stemmed from Washington’s vindictiveness and fear of losing face by accepting a dialogue with its former enemy – the victors of America’s longest war. Secondly and particularly at the turn of 1976, the Ford administration felt the great pressure of the upcoming presidential election. Meanwhile, Hanoi trumpeted its claims for reconstruction aid in a counterproductive publicizing of U.S. responsibilities. It also introduced the

⁵⁹ House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, *Americans Missing in Southeast Asia*, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, December 13, 1976. 238.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 243.

⁶¹ Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 1980. *On the Question of Americans Missing in the Vietnam War*. Hanoi: Department of Press and Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 3-27.

concept of exchanging MIAs for aid – a pattern that would govern bilateral relations until the 1990s.⁶²

The American presidential election of November 1976, when Jimmy Carter narrowly defeated Gerald Ford, was to prove a major turning point for the U.S.-Vietnamese relationship. During his campaign, Carter made clear that he would seek normalization of relations with Vietnam, as part of incoming Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's belief that engaging with the Communist nations may allow the U.S. to reduce their dependency on the Soviet Union.⁶³ Thus, despite the lack of progress towards normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations since the end of the war in April 1975, by the time the Carter administration took office in January 1977, it seemed all the ingredients were at last in place for normalization.

1.2. Strong Actions upon North Korean Provocations

Within just a few days after the fall of Saigon, another crisis in the Southeast Asian waters once again affected the policy makers in Washington to remind them of the security turmoil on the Korean Peninsula. On May 12, 1975, Cambodian Khmer Rouge forces seized the SS *Mayaguez*, a U.S. container ship, in the Gulf of Thailand, took captive the crew of thirty-nine Americans. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argued that a visible show of force was necessary. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller supported Kissinger's

⁶² Michael J. Allen. 2009. *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1-11.

⁶³ During a Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs' hearing just prior to his ascension to office, Vance answered Senator George McGovern (Democrat-South Dakota)'s question of whether the new administration would use veto power to deny Vietnam's UN admission by overtly stating: "I believe that moving towards normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam is in the interest of both countries." "Statement of Cyrus Vance, Nominated to be Secretary of State of the United States of American," 1976 Briefings (Ted Sorensen). CREST. 37.

view and compared the *Mayaguez* incident with the humiliating seizure of the USS *Pueblo* in 1968.⁶⁴

During the *Pueblo* crisis, the American crew had been held captive for almost a year until the Johnson administration had finally agreed to sign a letter of apology drafted by the North Koreans. This time, Rockefeller made it clear that the *Pueblo* situation must be avoided at all costs. He concluded, “I think this will be seen as a test case... I think a violent response is in order. The world should know that we will act and that we will act quickly.”⁶⁵ President Gerald Ford agreed. His primary objective was the speedy recovery of the *Mayaguez* crew.⁶⁶ Throughout the *Mayaguez* crisis, the President supported Kissinger’s analysis and remained a principal hawk and advocate of the “insurance policy.”⁶⁷

The fact that Washington leadership linked the incidents happened in Southeast Asia with that in Northeast Asia and vice versus reflects how big the impact of the Communist takeover in Indochina casted on U.S. policy under Ford. In reality, a year from this crisis in the Southeast Asian waters, the U.S. would face another “test case” right at the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that resulted in another strong action from the Ford administration.

As a direct participant in the Vietnam War, South Korea was not only disheartened by the U.S. failure in Indochina but also concerned about its adverse repercussions on the Korean Peninsula. In the aftermath of the

⁶⁴ See more on the Ford administration’s linkage of *Mayaguez* and *Pueblo* in Johannes Kadura. 2016. *The War After the War: The Struggle for Credibility during America’s Exit From Vietnam*. Cornell University Press. 141-147; Marvin L. Kalb. 2011. *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. 31-32; Andrew J. Gawthorpe. 2009. “The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia-Pacific after the Fall of Saigon.” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 3. 707-709.

⁶⁵ Minutes of Conversation, “National Security Council Meeting,” May 12, 1975, National Security Adviser, National Security Council Meeting Files, 1974-1977, Box 1, Ford Presidential Library (FPL).

⁶⁶ Yanek Mieczkowski. 2005. *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*. Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky. 296.

⁶⁷ A full account of *Mayaguez* is found in Menétrey-Monchau. 2005. “The *Mayaguez* Incident as an Epilogue to the Vietnam War and its Reflection of the Post-Vietnam Political Equilibrium in Southeast Asia.” *Cold War History*, Vol.5, No. 3, 337-367.

collapse of Saigon, the Ford administration articulated a clear distinction between Vietnam and Korea and offered a number of public statements to guarantee the South's national security. When being asked about U.S. policy toward the Korean peninsula in the post-Vietnam era, Secretary Kissinger answered:

In South Korea there can be no ambiguity about our commitment because we have a defense treaty ratified by the Congress. If we abandon this treaty, it would have drastic consequences in Japan and all over Asia because that would be interpreted as our final withdrawal from Asia and our final withdrawal from our whole postwar foreign policy.⁶⁸

A week later, Kissinger warned North Korea not to make the mistake of questioning the efficacy of the U.S. security commitment to the Republic of Korea (ROK). Moreover, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger threatened to respond to North Korean armed aggression with massive retaliation and indicated that “the United States would not hesitate to use the tactical nuclear weapons stationed in South Korea.”⁶⁹

As the matter of fact, Washington drastically changed U.S. policy regarding the Korean peninsula immediately after the fall of Saigon. Despite the deteriorated situation in Indochina when Ford assumed the presidency after Nixon's resignation in August 1974, the U.S. did not view North Korea's offensive moves that year as a real threat and thus decided to maintain the policies taken by the Nixon administration without major changes.⁷⁰ With Soviet-American détente and Sino-American rapprochement still advancing, there was a strong belief and determination in the Ford's cabinet that a continuation of the previous administration's policy would best serve the strategic balance on the Korean peninsula.

⁶⁸ Recited from Lee Chae-Jin, 2006. *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 76.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 박원곤. 2011b. “미국의 대한정책 1974~1975 년-포드 행정부의 동맹정책 전환,” 신육회.

『테탕트와 박정희』 서울대학교 국제문제연구소. 서울: 논형. 81-82.

Nevertheless, the Communization of Indochina and North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's visit to China in late April 1975 gave Ford enough security anxiety to change U.S. policy towards South Korea.⁷¹ At the same time, Washington realized that South Korean President Park Chung Hee's attempt to develop nuclear weapons was based on Seoul's concern of weakening U.S. commitment. As a result, the Ford administration took a series of steps to strengthen Seoul's self-defense capabilities throughout 1975, retracting the internal discussions on the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) withdrawal that was initiated by the Nixon administration, while being determined to halt Park's clandestine program for nuclear weapons development.⁷² President Park was further assured by the announcement of Ford's "Pacific Doctrine" in December 1975, in which he stated that "world stability and our own security depend upon our Asian commitments."⁷³

As shown in the later part of this chapter, this is a rather wrong assessment by the Ford administration of Chairman Kim's China visit in the wake of the Communist capture of Saigon. It is also a typical example of U.S. misreading of North Korean military posture and the "offensive unification policy" allegedly taken by Pyongyang that occasionally happened throughout the Cold War. Washington's false concern continued into 1976 and significantly contributed to the unnecessary show of force during the Axe Murder Incident in August 1976.

When prospects for inter-Korean reconciliation shattered around the time of the Vietnam debacle, the venue for the inter-Korean contest shifted to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Unlike their earlier cooperation in 1973, the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) now competed to promote the diplomatic interests of their respective allies at the United Nations. After heated debates and intense lobbying, the Thirtieth United Nations General Assembly in October 1975 adopted two

⁷¹ Ibid. 83-84.

⁷² Ibid. 91-96.

⁷³ Lee Chae-Jin. 2006. 77.

mutually contradictory resolutions – the pro-Seoul resolution (whose cosponsors included the United States and Japan) by a vote of fifty-nine to fifty-one with twenty-nine abstentions, and the pro-Pyongyang resolution (whose cosponsors included China and the Soviet Union) by a vote of fifty-four to forty-three with forty-two abstentions.⁷⁴

The pro-Pyongyang resolution called for the unconditional dissolution of the United Nations Command (UNC) and the withdrawal of all foreign troops stationed in South Korea under the flag of the United Nations and asked “the real parties to the Armistice Agreement” (meaning the United States and North Korea) to replace it with a peace agreement.⁷⁵ The United States and other supporters of South Korea submitted a rival, pro-Seoul resolution that urged “all the parties directly concerned” (meaning the United States, the PRC, South Korea and North Korea) to embark on talks as soon as possible, so that “the UNC may be dissolved concurrently with arrangements for maintaining the Armistice Agreement.”⁷⁶ Ultimately nothing changed as the passage of the two contradictory resolutions (3390A and 3390B) ensured that neither resolution would be implemented and that no further UN resolutions on the Korean question would be adopted for many years to come. This North-South rivalry at the UN in the mid-1970 indeed resulted not in a North Korean victory, but a stalemate.⁷⁷

It was also during the Thirtieth UNGA that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for the first time proposed the “cross-recognition” between the Koreas and their allies, a convening of four-party talks on Korea among the U.S., North Korea, China, and the ROK, and the simultaneous entry of North and South Korea to the United Nation. This was the proposal to be picked up later by his successor in Carter’s White House Cyrus Vance. By making clear

⁷⁴ Lee Chae-Jin. 1996. *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press. 105.

⁷⁵ Lee Chae-Jin. 2006. 79.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Charles Armstrong. 2013. *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*, Cornell University Press. 197-198.

that South Korea should be negotiating party in the proposed conference, Kissinger dismissed again the North Korean invitation to a bilateral conversation with the United States. In other words, Kissinger rejected Pyongyang policy of non-recognition of South Korea. This proposal reflected the U.S. Government's "two Koreas" policy.⁷⁸ In fact, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Habib had unofficially suggested the same idea during his visit to Seoul together with President Ford in November 1974.⁷⁹ Habib said that the United States was prepared to recognize North Korea if the Soviet Union and China would recognize South Korea. However, the Kissinger proposal was the first official American statement of the principle.

Kissinger during the keynote address at the Thirty-first UNGA in July 1976 took his proposal one step further by suggesting a "phased approach" designed to eliminate the diplomatic deadlock on Korea. Pyongyang and Seoul should first have a preliminary conference and the participation of Washington and Peking should depend on the satisfactory results of this inter-Korean meeting.⁸⁰ As expected, North Korea immediately refuted, but Kissinger's proposal worried South Korean leaders of a prelude to the gradual reduction of American involvement in Korea, particular in light of the 1976 U.S. presidential election. Therefore, in a meeting with ROK Foreign Minister Pak Tong Jin, Kissinger affirmed him that the purpose of his speech is not for attaching new importance to the expanded meeting (of four parties), but to emphasize that "direct talks between South and North Korea is the most important factor to address the Korean issues."⁸¹ Pak was pleased that he came

⁷⁸ Kim Hakjoon. 1986. *Unification Policies of South and North Korea, 1945-1991: A Comparative Study*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press. 373.

⁷⁹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Media, January 15, 1975, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. 29-30.

⁸⁰ Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, Charles Kraus (2013), "The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Analysis on the Suggestion of the U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for Holding 4-Party Talks, September 21, 1976. 16. (Hereafter "The Carter Chill")

⁸¹ Telegram to the President from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Report on the Meeting between the Foreign Minister of the ROK and the U.S. Secretary of State and Foreign Ministers of the ROK and Japan," September 28, 1976. "The Carter Chill," 18.

away with the strong impression that the U.S. side “did not seek to propose anything new.”⁸²

Interestingly, this pattern of North and South Korean rejection of a U.S. initiative, prompting Washington to reassure Seoul of the strong alliance, which would result in the South’s one-step concession yet Pyongyang’s stiff-necked stance, was repeated once again when Carter replaced Ford in the Oval Office. As shown in the next chapter, the Carter administration’s bold initiative regarding North Korea led to a formidable opposition from the Park Chung Hee Government. However, when Park decided to give in to his patron state’s ambition in seeking diplomatic contacts with Pyongyang, it was the DPRK renouncement that frustrated Carter’s enthusiasm.

On August 18, 1976, a United Nations Command (UNC) work crew attempted to trim a polar tree in the neutral Joint Security Area (JSA) of Panmunjom because the tree was obstructing the observation of North Korean activities. All of the sudden, a group of North Korean security guards obstructed the tree-cutting operation, killing two U.S. officers and wounding several others with axes. This so-called Axe Murder Incident at Checkpoint Number 3 of the JSA provoked more immediate and forceful U.S. reactions than the North presumably expected. A Washington Special Actions Group Meeting was organized right after the incident took place. Below are excerpts from the meeting’s conversation among Kissinger, Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) member Admiral James L. Holloway, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs Morton Abramowitz and National Intelligence Officer (NIO) Evelyn Colbert⁸³ about a strong action against the North Korean grave provocation:

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ A full testimony of Colbert on his diplomatic life was conducted by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training for their Foreign Affairs Oral History Project on September 20, 2014, which detailed the Axe Murder Incident and his one year of working at the State Department under the Carter administration.
<https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Colbert,%20Evelyn.toc.pdf> . 51-61.

Kissinger: Now there are two things that come to my mind. A few weeks ago we turned off a B-52 exercise because it would be provocative to the Chinese. We might resurrect that exercise. The second possibility would be to alert all forces in Korea.

Holloway: We could go from DEFCON 4 to DEFCON 3.

Kissinger: What would that do?

Holloway: Unless we had specific plan in mind or the North Koreans felt we had a specific plan in mind they probably would not react at all.

Kissinger: Well on that basis you could not threaten anything.

Abramowitz: [USFK Commander Richard G.] Stilwell recommends that we finish pruning the tree.

Clements: I am in complete accord with that and think we should cut the God damn thing down.

Kissinger: I am in favor of that too but I don't think we should do anything about the tree until we do something with our forces. What is the meaning of the DEFCON alert stages?

Holloway: 5 is normal and 1 is war. Stage 2 means that war is inevitable and stage 1 is when the shooting starts.

Colbert: If the alert was moved up to 3 how would the media and the US people react to that in this campaign year.

Kissinger: That has nothing to do with it. The important thing is that they beat two American to death and must pay the price.

Colbert: The North Koreans are looking for indications that they can create another Vietnam type mentality in this country. Therefore to disabuse them of this it is important to have the right kinds of expressions of support from the media and opinion makers.

Kissinger: What about resurrecting the B-52 exercise? The State Department hereby withdraws its objections to it. This is now the best time in the world to run it.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft from Jeanne W. Davis, "Minutes of WSAG Meeting August 18 1976," Digital National Security Archive (DNSA). Square brackets added by the author.

While the angry Secretary of State thought that “North Korean blood must be spilled,”⁸⁵ the UNC sent another work crew to cut down “the damned tree” in a show of force. The United States, along with South Korea, placed its forces on full alert, deployed F-4 aircraft from Okinawa and F-111 fighter-bombers from Idaho, conducted daily flights of B-52 heavy bombers from Guam to Korea, and dispatched the aircraft carrier USS *Midway* task force to the area.⁸⁶ Washington’s unexpected strong action forced Chairman Kim Il Sung to send a “regretful” message. This was the first time North Korea expressed apology for an incidence of violence along the Demilitarized Zone since the Korean War armistice in 1953. In another surprise, Pyongyang proposed on August 25 that the JSA be divided at the demarcation line to prevent future incidents – a proposal the UNC had made before yet received disagreement from the North.⁸⁷

Different from the newly inaugurated Nixon administration during the 1969 EC-121 shoot-down incident,⁸⁸ in which Nixon’s White House had little to no information about the location and availability of both U.S. and North Korean forces that resulted in American lateness to react, Ford’s Oval Office was fully reported about the “tree incident.” Both of the U.S. administrations, nevertheless, could not strongly react in effect. Facing a difficult presidential election, President Ford decided to avoid any military action that might lead to another Korean War. He tried to solve the security crisis through negotiations and accepted Chairman Kim’s “regret.”

Seoul, though expected a more aggressive American response, was pleased with the Ford administration’s handle of the Axe Murder incident.

⁸⁵ Don Orberdofer & Robert Carlin. 2014. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. New York: Baisc Books. 62.

⁸⁶ Lee Chae-Jin, 2006. *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 80; Andrew J. Gawthorpe. 2009. “The Ford Administration and Security Policy in the Asia-Pacific after the Fall of Saigon.” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 3. 712-713.

⁸⁷ Don Orberdofer & Robert Carlin. 2014. 65-66.

⁸⁸ U.S. Navy EC-121 *Warning Star* on a reconnaissance mission was shot down by a North Korean MiG-21 aircraft over the Sea of Japan (Korea’s East Sea), killing all 31 Americans on board. This is the largest single loss of U.S. aircrew during the Cold War era.

Foreign Minister Pak Tong Jin praised Operation Paul Bunyan, especially “at a time when there was certain skepticism in public opinion regarding the defense of Korea since the communization of Vietnam.”⁸⁹ Meanwhile, North Korea’s reputation and international image was severely damaged by the incident as it “lost many friends.”⁹⁰

In short, as a result of the Communist expansion in Southeast Asia, the Ford administration decided to escalate its hawkish stance on the incidents happened following the Vietnam War’s end, including that surround the Northeast Asian region. By acting forcefully during these security crises, Ford exercised American power when many Americans found isolationism attractive following the debacle in Indochina. The reassurance of U.S. commitment toward Asian allies and the use of military force enabled Ford to maintain a vigorous international profile. Furthermore, the same as the Vietnam case, any hope entertained by the DPRK to win over South Korea’s position at the UN was quelled by American representatives.

This hardline policy and intense mood in dealing with North Korea maintained not long when the new wind of politics blew through Washington. Just a few months followed the brutal incident and uproarious show of force at the DMZ, the White House welcomed the Democrat Jimmy Carter as the new President of the United States whose bags was full of policies on peaceful coexistence, diplomatic establishment and dialogue. A new impetus to bilateral exchanges with North Korea was opened, so as a total review of U.S. relations with South Korea.

1.3. Reaffirming the Chinese via Official Visit

⁸⁹ Telegram to the President from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Report on the Meeting between the Foreign Minister of the ROK and the U.S. Secretary of State and Foreign Ministers of the ROK and Japan,” September 28, 1976. “The Carter Chill,” 18.

⁹⁰ Vietnamese Ambassador in DPRK Lê Tùng Nam revealed to GDR Ambassador Franz Everhartz. Recited from Charles Armstrong. 2013. 182.

Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972 ushered in a new era of Sino-American rapprochement. Dubbed by Nixon himself "the week that changed the world," it marked a significant shift in the Cold War balance, driving a wedge between the Soviet Union and China and resulting in remarkable Soviet concessions to the U.S. The trip also spawned China's opening to the world and economic parity with capitalist countries. The Shanghai Communiqué set forth the principles towards the normalization of bilateral relations, including the agreement that none should "seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region," and the acknowledgement of "One-China policy" as well as a cutting back of military installations on Taiwan.⁹¹

However, Nixon's promise to normalize U.S. relations with China during his second term ended with his resignation in August 1974 amidst confusions surround the Watergate scandal. Vice President Gerald Ford immediately assumed the presidency, privately affirming Nixon's pledge to shift diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China.⁹² He also promised a full and unconditional pardon of Nixon, which he fulfilled one month after the inauguration. During his visit to China in November 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger signed a communiqué that stated Ford's visit to the country in 1975. Yet the fall of South Vietnam and the inglorious evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in April 1975 delayed any effort regarding China until the end of the year.

In preparation for President Ford's visit, Kissinger departed for Peking in October 1975, where he received a frosty reception. During his toast at the welcoming banquet, Foreign Minister Chi'ao Kuan-hua (Qiao Guanhua) skipped introductory words of welcome for the U.S. Secretary. He instead launched into the standard Chinese warning that détente was an "illusion" that should not blind the world to hegemonism – a code word for Soviet

⁹¹ See an excellent account of Nixon's visit in Margaret MacMillan. 2006. *Nixon in China: The Week that Changed the World*. Penguin.

⁹² Chi Wang. 2014. *The United States and China since World War II: A Brief History*. New York: Routledge. 92; Patrick Tyler. 1999. *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China*. New York: Public Affairs. 183.

expansionism.⁹³ Such warning was not seen before during a Kissinger visit. Chi'ao also showed a degree of concern regarding U.S. adherence to the principles of the Shanghai Communiqué. One week before Kissinger's departure, Peking had accused the United States of violating the Shanghai Communiqué by refusing to stop activities by nationalist Tibetan groups in the U.S.⁹⁴

While Kissinger spent almost three hours of the first day of his visit with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping to discuss "global strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union,"⁹⁵ his short yet exciting conversation with Chairman Mao Zedong the next day captured the big picture of Sino-American relations in the period of 1975-1976. The first minute into talks, using his fingers, Mao started to draw up the international chess game:

Mao: You are this (wide space between two fingers) and we are this (small space). Because you have the atom bombs, and we don't.

Kissinger: Yes, but the Chairman has often said that military power is not the only decisive factor.

Mao: As Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping has said, millet plus rifles.

Kissinger: And we have some common opponents...

Mao: You said the U.S. asked nothing of China and China asked nothing of the U.S. As I see it, this is partially right and partially wrong. The small issue is Taiwan, the big issue is the world... According to your priorities the first is the Soviet Union, the second is Europe and the third is Japan.

Kissinger: That's not correct. The Soviet Union is a great danger for us, but not a high priority.

Mao: That's not correct. It is a superpower. There are only two superpowers in the world (counting on his fingers). We are backward (counting on his fingers). America, the Soviet Union, Europe, Japan, China. We come last. America,

⁹³ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Media, "Kissinger in PRC: "Friendly" Meeting with Mao Highlights Peking Visit," October 22, 1975. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 2.

⁹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, "Global Strategy for Dealing with the Soviet Union; the Historical Lessons of the 1930s," October 20, 1975. Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976 Volume XVIII, China, 1973-1976 (Hereafter FRUS v.18). 765-778.

Soviet Union, Europe, Japan, China—look.

Kissinger: I know I almost never disagree with the Chairman, but he is not correct on this point—only because it is a matter of our priority.

Mao: (Tapping both his shoulders) We see that what you are doing is leaping to Moscow by way of our shoulders, and these shoulders are now useless. You see, we are the fifth. We are the small finger.

Kissinger: We have nothing to gain in Moscow.

Mao: But you can gain Taiwan in China.

Kissinger: We can gain Taiwan in China?

Mao: But you now have the Taiwan of China.

Kissinger: But we will settle that between us.

Mao: In a hundred years.

Kissinger: It won't take a hundred years. Much less.

Mao: It's better for it to be in your hands. And if you were to send it back to me now, I would not want it, because it's not wantable. There are a huge bunch of counter-revolutionaries there. A hundred years hence we will want it (gesturing with his hand), and we are going to fight for it.

Kissinger: Not a hundred years.

Mao: (Gesturing with his hand, counting) It is hard to say. Five years, ten, twenty, a hundred years. It's hard to say. (Points toward the ceiling) And when I go to heaven to see God, I'll tell him it's better to have Taiwan under the care of the United States now.

Kissinger: He'll be very astonished to hear that from the Chairman.

Mao: No, because God blesses you, not us. God does not like us (waves his hands) because I am a militant warlord, also a communist. That's why he doesn't like me. (Pointing to the three Americans) He likes you and you and you.

Kissinger: I've never had the pleasure of meeting him, so I'm not sure.

Mao: I'm sure. I'm 82 years old now. (Points toward Secretary Kissinger) And how old are you? 50 maybe.

Kissinger: 51.

Mao: (Pointing toward Vice Premier Teng) He's 71. (Waving his hands) And after we're all dead, myself, him (Teng), Chou En-lai, and Yeh Chien-ying, you will still be alive. See? We old ones will not do. We are not going to make it

out.⁹⁶

As shown in the later half of this chapter, from the mid to late 1970s, China's internal and external environments were in flux due to the decease of the Mao's generation leadership, including some of the names that the Chairman had listed for Kissinger. The domestic struggle for power between two main factions resulted in an introverted politics and deprived Peking's opportunity to come to a deal with Washington. Also, the "big" and "small" issues of Moscow and Taiwan, respectively, continued to impede official Sino-American normalization throughout the early years of the Carter administration, which will be deeply analyzed in the next chapter.

In discussions with Kissinger, the Chinese leaders also made an attempt to strike on American psychology regarding the Missing in Actions (MIA) issue, by revealing that they had information on the American servicemen that were lost over China. Kissinger immediately informed President Ford:

Vice Premier Deng indicated during my October visit that he had some information to give you on the matter of the remains of servicemen from the Indochina war killed in the PRC. You should also make a low-key reference to the continuing concern of our people for the fate of the MIAs in Indochina, and how Hanoi's lack of forthcomingness on this issue seriously constrains our ability to move beyond the past and normalize relations with Vietnam.⁹⁷

Chairman of the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia. G.V. 'Sonny' Montgomery quickly caught wind of the news and urged for more clarifications.⁹⁸ Yet in order to draw more attention from Washington and

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, October 21, 1975. FRUS v.18. 788-790.

⁹⁷ White House Central Files, Subject Files, ND 8-1, Box 9, Folder "Casualties 12/1/75-12/31/75 (Executive)," Ford Presidential Library (FPL).

⁹⁸ G.V. Montgomery to Vernon C. Loen, January 12, 1976. White House Central Files, Subject Files, FO-8, Box 40, Folder "1/1/76-1/25/76 (Executive)," FPL.

enhance Peking's position, Deng decided to give the U.S. side the material and the information on the issue during their "next visit."⁹⁹

Followed Kissinger's visit, President Ford finally arrived in Peking on December 1. At this moment, Ford's trip was not much more than a photo show because of the upcoming elections in the U.S. and the declining health of Chinese leaders made any progress toward normal relations impossible. The purpose of the trip to China was to signal that both countries remained committed in improving ties. The natural step would be to formally normalize relations, but that required a solution to the issue of Taiwan, which had to be put on hold for the time being. As Andrew Crain points out, Taiwan was a "hot button" for Republican conservatives, and Ford was not willing to antagonize them before the election.¹⁰⁰ Kissinger explained the situation to his staff: "For political reasons it's just impossible for the U.S. to go for normalization before '76. If there's any one thing that will trigger a conservative reaction to Ford, that's it."¹⁰¹

When the American guests came, Chinese welcoming remarks softpedaled the need for formal normalization of bilateral relations. The Chinese stressed instead the importance of compatibility in U.S. and Chinese international policies, particularly vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. For his banquet remarks, Deng devoted unusual stress to "a more important question" involving the need for U.S. vigilance against Soviet international expansion. Though not explicitly mentioning the USSR, Deng harshly attacked "the country which most zealously preaches peace" as "the most dangerous source of war," added that "the crucial point is what line or policy" the United States and China would pursue in the face of this mutual threat.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, "The President's Visit and Communiqué; Bilateral Relations; Indochina MIA; Korea; South Asia," FRUS v.18. 804.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Downer Crain. 2009. *The Ford Presidency: A History*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co. 232.

¹⁰¹ Recite from Andrew Downer Crain. 2009. 233-234.

¹⁰² FBIS Trends, Trends in Communist Media, "President's China Visit: "Friendly" Talk with Mao Highlights President's China Trip," December 3, 1975. CREST. 1.

Deng then exhorted his audience to follow Peking's example, not to fear such "hegemonism," but to form a broad international front against it and to wage "tit-for-tat struggle."¹⁰³ He explained that the USSR was "weak by nature" and "bullies the soft," but that it "fears the tough."¹⁰⁴ The Vice Premier underlined the common U.S.-Chinese cause against Moscow by highlighting as "an outstanding common point" the Shanghai Communiqué's call for opposition to international "hegemony."¹⁰⁵ These Deng's most explicit terms up to then indicated that China saw a stronger U.S. strategic resolve against Soviet expansionism as the most important contribution the Ford administration could possibly make to enhance Sino-American rapprochement.

The primary impression President Ford took from the trip was that the Chinese top officials were deathly afraid of the Soviet Union, and he spent a lot of time reassuring them that the United States was still committed to stopping Soviet expansionism. This included two-hour talk with Deng Xiaoping to discuss "approaches to dealing with the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁶ In the most disconcerting part of the meeting, Deng explained that the Chinese believed a new world war was a real possibility, and even equated Moscow to Hitler:

We have always held that there exists at present the danger of a new war, and if it breaks out it will be a world war. We have always believed that in the contemporary world, there are only two countries qualified to fight such a war, the Soviet Union and the United States; and we believe at present the danger comes from the Soviet Union.

As for the global strategic situation, we also feel that at present the United States is in a defensive position and the Soviet Union is in an aggressive

¹⁰³ Ibid. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. See also "Vice-Premier Teng Hsiao-Ping's Toast at the Banquet in Honour of President Gerald R. Ford," December 1, 1975. NSA Reports, Box 2, Folder "December 1-5, 1975, President Ford's Visit to Peking," FPL. Digitalized at <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/Chinatrip.asp>

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, "Approaches to Dealing with the Soviet Union," December 2, 1975. NSA Reports, Box 2, Folder "December 1-5, 1975, President Ford's Visit to Peking," FPL. Digitalized at <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/Chinatrip.asp>

position. We also feel that the contemporary situation is very similar to the state of affairs prior to the outbreak of World War II. To put it plainly, we believe that to a very great deal degree the Soviet Union has taken the place of Hitler.¹⁰⁷

Similar to Kissinger's preparation visit, the Chinese Government refused to say when or whether President Ford would meet with Mao. In his memoirs, White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen recalled how much strictly the Chinese controlled news release about Ford's visit, resulted in criticism of his performance during the trip.¹⁰⁸ At three in the afternoon of December 2, Chinese officials notified the American delegation that Chairman Mao would meet with Ford an hour later. The Chinese decreed that the President could bring only his wife, their daughter and five aides.

In the last chance the American officials saw Mao, the Chairman talked about their joint interest in reining in the "Socialist Imperialists."¹⁰⁹ He also expressed an interest in continued good relationship with the United States, but at the same time recognized that domestic factors in both countries would prevent normalizing relations for the time being. In Mao's words, "Probably this year, next year, and the year after there will not be anything great happening between out two countries. Perhaps afterwards the situation might become a bit better."¹¹⁰ In the final meeting Vice Premier Deng also acknowledged that the Taiwan issue would wait for another time:

We have understood Mr. President's point; that is, that during the time of the election it will not be possible to make any new moves. As for our side, we have told the Doctor [Kissinger] many times that we are very patient. And in our relations we have always put the international aspect first and the Taiwan issue second.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ron Nessen. 2011. *Making the News, Taking the News: From NBC to the Ford White House*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press. Chapter 32.

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, December 2, 1975. FRUS v.18, 858.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 859.

¹¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, "Taiwan; bilateral relations; MIA; trade (oil and computers); Dalai Lama; Korea; Chinese minorities; agriculture; Amb. Bush," December 4, 1975. FRUS v.18. 894.

The Chinese agreed to return the remains of two American airmen shot down during the Vietnam War, and to provide information on five other Americans missing in action. Deng also stated that he was not worried about a military attack by North Korea against South Korea. Instead, he asked President Ford to “keep an eye on Park Chung Hee” and expressed his concern about Japan’s potentially militaristic ambitions in Korea and Taiwan.¹¹² Meanwhile, Ford told the Chinese he intended to continue improving relations with the Soviet Union despite Peking’s objections. Kissinger then informed them that while the United States wanted to improve and formalize diplomatic relations with the Peking Government, it also intended to maintain a cultural and economic relationship with the Chinese Nationalist Government on Taiwan.

In short, faced with a challenge to his nomination from the conservative wing of the Republican Party who supported Ronald Reagan, Ford had never been able to assign a high priority to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Peking. During the campaign, Reagan faulted Ford for failing to do more in South Vietnam, and was openly critical of U.S.-China diplomatic reconciliation. The fall of the Saigon Government into the hands of the Communists simply turned the President’s official visit to China at the end of 1975 to just a fulfillment of what was agreed on with the Chinese during Kissinger’s visit in November 1974. The five-day trip was a mere symbol of the reaffirmation of Sino-American rapprochement, not a concrete step toward the improvement of bilateral relations.

The turn of 1976 was even worse for the Ford presidency, with Nixon’s name popped into the news again, reminding American voters of Ford’s controversial pardon. Even though Nixon had promised Ford that he would travel to China only after the 1976 election, he accepted an invitation to visit the country, which he did just before the primary election. Nixon not only

¹¹² Ibid. 902.

renege on his promise but also ignited political criticism on the President who, by pardoning him, made possible his freedom to travel.¹¹³ The situation did not improve toward the end of the year, and despite the fact that he survived the “thunder from the right”¹¹⁴ of his own Party, Ford could not win the race for the White House against the enthusiastic runner from the Democratic Party, Jimmy Carter.

2. The Foreign Policies of Asian Communist Countries

2.1. Vietnam: Ideology-Driven Diplomacy

To Hanoi, the victory of the Vietnamese communists was a turning point in the history of Southeast Asia in particular and Third World nations in general, and Vietnam’s foreign policy was based on its perception of that victory and its implications. The Vietnamese Communist leadership doubtless believed that, at a minimum, the new Vietnam deserved unquestioning respect from Laos and Cambodia as the preeminent power in Indochina. Beyond Indochina, the Vietnamese clearly felt they were entitled to respectful cooperation from the other nations of Southeast Asia, particularly from Thailand. On Hanoi’s pinnacle of superiority as a direct result of the Communist takeover in Indochina, Brantly Womack provides an excellent observation:

For Vietnam, victory was sweet indeed. One hundred years of subjection, of heroic resistance mixed with unheroic accommodation, and of national division were over. Forty years of guerilla war were over. The twenty-year-old Saigon regime was defeated, despite its American backing. Moreover, Vietnam had played a leading role in the Cambodian and Lao revolution, and expected their cooperation and deference. Most important, Vietnam was now

¹¹³ Ford’s aides were so concerned about the prospects of bad publicity that they briefly considered schemes to prevent the trip, such as refusing to let a Chinese plane land in the United States to pick up the former president, even seizing the plane to demand that China pay debts to the United States. Yanek Mieczkowski. 2005. *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*. Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky. 312-313.

¹¹⁴ A chapter title in Mieczkowski. 2005. Chapter 17 “Thunder from the Right.”

truly independent. It had defeated its enemies, and it was no longer under the duress of war when dealing with its friends. It was the world's hero of 1975, and it expected to be as successful and respected in peace as it was at war.¹¹⁵

Therefore, the Vietnamese leadership's attitude after 1975 was filled with "illusions of victory,"¹¹⁶ with a strong sense of national pride, entitlement and heroism in the world. The December 1976 Fourth Party Congress of the unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam¹¹⁷ spelled out the task of "doing our best to ensure the most favorable conditions to quickly heal the war wounds, reconstruct and develop the economy, develop culture, technology and science, strengthen national defense, and build the material and technological foundation for socialism" as the most important task for post-war Vietnam.¹¹⁸ Hanoi's domestic and foreign policies after 1975, as a result, were mainly concentrated on socialist transformation and economic reconstruction in the whole country, as well as the resolution of territorial boundary disputes with its neighbors.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Vietnam published annual reports covering the country's foreign policy over the first six months of the year. Just by analyzing these papers, which are still classified as "SECRET" or "TOP SECRET" in the Vietnamese archives, we may capture the big picture of Hanoi's diplomacy. Among them, the 1976 MOFA report is highly noteworthy.

The report opens with the international context, in which revolutionary in the world was believed to be facilitated better than ever. Vietnam appeared in this situation as a strong force, which played such an important role and

¹¹⁵ Brantly Womack. 2006. *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*, Cambridge University Press. 187-188.

¹¹⁶ A chapter title in Womack. 2006. Chapter 9 "Illusions of Victory."

¹¹⁷ The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG or South Vietnam) created a single central government and renamed the country the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) on July 2, 1976. The Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) was also renamed the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) at the end of the year.

¹¹⁸ *Nhân Dân*, July 3, 1976.

held such a high position in the world, especially in Southeast Asia. On top of this, Vietnamese MOFA recognized a total decline and decreased global position of the imperialist America, which brought about a crisis in the overall capitalist imperialism.¹¹⁹ Among the three great powers of the Soviet Union, China and the U.S., the struggle over influence in different regions in the world and over global issues was essential.¹²⁰

To Vietnamese MOFA, Sino-American relations remained unchanged. Also, the Vietnamese proved to closely observe the situation by comments such as: “At times, China showed its cold attitude towards the U.S. (Hua Guofeng only welcomed Chief of U.S. Liaison Office in Peking a month after he first arrived)”¹²¹ or “For China, the U.S. also conducts the wooing policies so that China continues its anti-Soviet policy. For example, it spreads the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations with China after the [1976 presidential] election, military assistance for China, withdrawal of American personnel from Kinmen island, etc. Yet the most practical relationship between the U.S. and China – economic cooperation – does not improve at all.”¹²² Such confidence on the side of Hanoi of the premature, unripe Sino-American rapprochement would contribute to the formation of its foreign policies towards both Washington and Peking during the period following the Vietnam War’s end.

On its relations with the outside world, what was most emphasized is Vietnamese ties with its Communist allies. The MOFA concluded: “Vietnam’s relations with the Socialist countries continue to grow, except for that with China.”¹²³ As the matter of fact, Hanoi after 1975 succeeded in avoiding increased pressures from Moscow, such as the urge to tighten its relationships

¹¹⁹ “Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1976 của Bộ Ngoại giao” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1976). August 1976. Folder 9833, Collection of the Prime Minister’s Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), 5. Hereafter “CPMO.”

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. 5-6.

¹²² Ibid. 6. Square brackets added by the author.

¹²³ Ibid. 8.

with the SEV¹²⁴ countries and to allow Soviet naval ships to enter its Southern ports.¹²⁵ However, Hanoi's relations with Peking was severely damaged. The 1976 report clearly cited a sudden decrease in Chinese economic aid for Vietnam and estrangement from the Chinese investors:

We are particularly facing many difficulties in the relationship with China. They has been cold to us in terms of political relations and limited their economic assistance for us. They exported to us goods with high prices, at the same time required higher quality in our exported products to China. Within the first six months [of 1976] they transported to us only 40% of the products for the whole year. Regarding the products that we urgently requested, such as food and oil, China delivered to us at a very low ratio. Chinese projects in Vietnam are progressing slowly. China also does not inform us of the future projects.¹²⁶

To make the problem worse, territorial trespasses happened both on land and in the sea, with encroachments increased in terms of not only numbers but also intensity. The report raised concerns:

At the border, China increasingly violated our territory. The number of violations, the violating spots and the number of the troops mobilized are all increased compares to the last six months of 1975. Border violations are centered surround Cao Lạng, Lào Cai provinces, where we have both important economic and strategic locations. Their shipping boats have encroached along our Southern sea coastal and went as far as the Spratly Island (*quần đảo Trường Sa*).¹²⁷

Facing their closest comrades during wartime, a relationship that was famously described by the beloved leader Ho Chi Minh as “lips and teeth,” it

¹²⁴ Sovét Ekonomícheskoy Vzáimopómoshichi (SEV), or Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) or also COMECON, the Soviet-dominated trade bloc.

¹²⁵ “Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1976 của Bộ Ngoại giao” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1976). August 1976. Folder 9833, CPMO, 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 9. Square brackets added by the author.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

is not difficult to imagine how hard Hanoi tried in keeping the waves under the water. As indicated in the MOFA report:

We have made concerted efforts to maintain friendship with China, actively suggested the exchange of delegations, improving economic relations, avoiding cold relations, while at the same time we are determined in defending our territorial integrity.¹²⁸

Regarding its relations with the United States, the former enemy, Hanoi remained suspicious of the Ford administration's policy towards Vietnam. Yet prospects were still opening as American non-state actors had showed interests in post-war Vietnamese economy as well as reconciliation with Hanoi. Stated in the MOFA report:

The U.S. is continuing its embargo on us. They sent letters to our Foreign Minister and diplomatic notes to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the MIA issue¹²⁹ out of propaganda purposes for the upcoming [1976] election, rather than pure goodwill to improve mutual relations. Meanwhile, some of American politicians and businessmen, petroleum companies in particular, wish to improve the two countries' relations to facilitate their businesses.¹³⁰

Facing post-war economic hardships and badly in need of the capital required for the upcoming Second Five-Year Plan to be announced at the end of the year, the Vietnamese leaders were highly determined in extracting aid from the U.S. Government. The report continued:

We maintain our principal of U.S. contribution in healing Vietnam War wounds as regulated in Article 21 of the Paris Peace Accords, as well as the normalization of Vietnam-U.S. relations based on such principal. We also urge

¹²⁸ Ibid. 9-10.

¹²⁹ This refers to the three diplomatic notes that Henry Kissinger and the State Department sent to Hanoi, which was analyzed in the first part of this chapter.

¹³⁰ “Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1976 của Bộ Ngoại giao” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1976). August 1976. Folder 9833, CPMO, 12. Square brackets added by the author.

American politicians and businessmen to exert their influence on the American government accordingly.¹³¹

Meanwhile, the Communist Party Daily *Nhân Dân* (The People) continued to condemn American imperialism and predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism, even while reminding the Americans of their moral and legal obligation to pay war reparations. In April 1976, *Nhân Dân* published Nixon's 1973 letter, which stated "the U.S. Government will contribute to the postwar reconstruction in North Vietnam without any political conditions whatsoever," quoting "USD 3.25 billion in non-refundable aid for a period of five years."¹³² As shown in the first part of this chapter, the Ford administration quickly denied such a letter and maintained its hostile policy towards Hanoi.

Within Indochina, even though Viet-Laotian solidarity was strengthened, Viet-Kampuchean relations remained low, mostly due to the border conflicts caused by the Kampuchean side. While the first border negotiation between two sides did not gain any concrete results, in international forums, Phnom Penh showed "different standpoints and activities" with Hanoi.¹³³ It should be noted that, however, although uncomfortable feelings filled the report's comments regarding both China and Kampuchea, Vietnamese MOFA still used personal pronoun "friend" (*bạn*) for both of these governments. This reflected Vietnam's efforts in maintaining good relations with the Chinese-Kampuchean camp, though Hanoi's anxiety was obvious.

Prior to this point, Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh during a National Assembly speech announced that "Southeast Asia is a region that is

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² *Nhân Dân*, April 16, 1976.

¹³³ "Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1976 của Bộ Ngoại giao" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1976). August 1976. Folder 9833, CPMO, 8.

critical to Vietnam's security and development,"¹³⁴ and in an interview with the official Vietnam News Agency confirmed that "Vietnam is a Southeast Asian nation."¹³⁵ Nonetheless, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was not mentioned in this 1976 MOFA report, probably due to Hanoi's suspicions of the true nature of the Association. Hanoi had always viewed ASEAN as "a product of the U.S. imperialist policy of intervention and aggression." After 1975, the suspicion was still there and Vietnam refused to establish relations with the organization by obtaining its membership. Instead, it pursued bilateral relations with different ASEAN states.

In December 1976, just prior to Carter's inauguration in Washington, the Vietnamese Communists held the Fourth Party Congress – their first after sixteen years of war. Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh announced at the Congress that "a unified Vietnam is the third among Socialist countries in terms of population, with its abundant human resources and strong politics and military."¹³⁶ The ambitious Second Five-Year Plan (1976-1980) was adopted, presenting the new government's strategies to achieve the three main tasks: shifting the North from a wartime into a peacetime economy, complete dismantlement of the capitalist economy and society of the South, and comprehensive integrating these hitherto separate economies under a single command economy.¹³⁷

It was also during this Congress that Vietnamese leaders removed the most pro-Chinese elements from the leaderships – a further affirmation of Hanoi's desire to deepen its already close relations with Moscow. This included most notably the dropping of Hoàng Văn Hoan – the former Vietnamese Ambassador to China.¹³⁸ Sino-Vietnamese relations went

¹³⁴ Nguyễn Duy Trinh. 1978. *Ra sức tranh thủ những điều kiện quốc tế thuận lợi góp phần đẩy mạnh xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội và làm tốt nghĩa vụ quốc tế.* (In Taking Advantage of Favorable International Conditions to Boost Socialism Construction and Accomplish International Duties), Hà Nội: Sự Thật (Truth Publisher). 25.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 41.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 53.

¹³⁷ D. R. SarDesai. 1992. *Vietnam: The Struggle for Identity.* Westview Press. 100.

¹³⁸ Stephen J. Morris. 1999. *Why Vietnam invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the*

downhill from this point. At the same time, Hanoi saw the high priority of Vietnam in Carter's agenda a great chance to finally get the massive American aid which it considered as war reparations contributing to the war wounds healing process for national reconstruction. Right after the fall of Saigon, using the MIA issue as a bargaining chip, Hanoi has hoped for a "dollar rain" from the Ford administration.¹³⁹

In short, final victory against American imperialism resolved by a twenty-five year resistance war and unification deluded the leadership in Hanoi of unprecedented high status of Vietnam in the global political arena. Vietnam, therefore, conducted an ideology-driven diplomacy, maintaining its war-like approach in crafting and implementing foreign policy. Lacking an advanced worldview and thorough research on world politics, it continued to see the U.S. and ASEAN nations as hostile states and the relationships with Communist ones as the core of its foreign policy. Ideological considerations about antagonisms between socialism and capitalism were usually emphasized. Overall, Hanoi seemed to make greater efforts to project its image as a non-aligned nation within the developing world. Also, it began some diplomatic efforts to underscore Vietnamese independence from socialist powers. This meant distancing itself from China and identifying Vietnam as a Southeast Asian nation.

Nevertheless, as shown in the next chapter, the arrogance of the victors blocked Vietnamese leaders' foresight to launch an effective and flexible foreign policy that could facilitate Hanoi's efforts in some desired goals as early as 1977. These include an ASEAN membership, U.S.-Vietnamese diplomatic normalization, and a balance not to fall into the Sino-Soviet rivalry (of not completely taking side with any party). Not until its relations with the Chinese-Kampuchean camp severely worsened did Hanoi drastically change its policy.

Causes of War. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 180.

¹³⁹ Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brothers Enemy: The War after The War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 142.

2.2. North Korea: Diplomatic Competition versus South Korea

Following the Communist victory in Indochina, North Korea seemed to look forward to a “Vietnam solution” to the Korean division: a revolutionary uprising in the South, supported by military assistance from the North, which would lead to unification on Pyongyang’s terms.¹⁴⁰ The protests against the Park Chung Hee dictatorship in Seoul and the existence of some pro-Pyongyang elements in South Korea apparently led Chairman Kim Il Sung to believe that such a solution was a real possibility. Kim apparently attempted to seek “another Vietnam” scenario even before Saigon fell into the hands of the Communists.

While the effects of the two-day visit to Seoul by U.S. President Gerald Ford in November 1974 started to fade, Chairman Kim Il Sung secretly visited China in April 1975. He met with Premier Zhou Enlai in a Peking hospital and also conferred with Chairman Mao Zedong.¹⁴¹ On April 28, the PRC-North Korean Joint Communiqué was signed. It was stated in the official document that “the new victories the Indochinese peoples have won in their liberation struggles greatly inspire the people of all countries.”¹⁴² The communiqué indicated that the Chinese agreed to take a harder line on negotiations on the Korean question. In it, the two sides make the standard demand that the United Nations Command (UNC) be dissolved and the U.S. Forces be withdrawn from South Korea. Moreover, the Chinese went further than usual by supporting the DPRK as the “sole legal sovereign state of the Korean nation” and condemning the United States for pursuing a “two Koreas”

¹⁴⁰ Charles Armstrong. 2013. *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*, Cornell University Press. 204.

¹⁴¹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Propaganda, “Sino-Korean Relations: Kim Il-Song PRC Visit Communiqué Stresses Unity of Views,” April 30, 1975. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. 8

¹⁴² Telegram from Peking to Secretary of State Kissinger, “Kim Il Sung’s Visit to the PRC,” April 28, 1975. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA).

policy.¹⁴³ These statements suggest that the Chinese had agreed not to negotiate compromises with the United States on the Korean question either at the United Nations or elsewhere, and to back off from their propaganda support for negotiations between the North and South Korean governments.

At the same time, as State Department officials realized, the Chinese managed to cool off some of Kim's rhetoric on the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula. It is due to the fact that none of Kim's tough statements in his opening banquet speech on the possibility of a new war – for example, the accusations that the South was stepping up war preparations, or that the North “had nothing to lost in a war but the Demarcation Line” – survived the negotiations on the text of the communiqué.¹⁴⁴ There was also an unusual statement that the Chinese people had “trust in” Kim Il Sung, which might be a veiled reference to a promise by the North Korean leader that he would not step up military provocations to a level which would risk war on the Korean peninsula. Charles Armstrong argues that even though not being dissuaded by China, Kim did not push for a military solution at least in part because the Chinese clearly stated that they would not support it.¹⁴⁵ Declassified East German documents further revealed that Peking's insincere attitude toward Korea might pushed Kim Il Sung to rebalance his position in the triangular relationship with the PRC and the Soviet Union in the late 1970s.¹⁴⁶

All in all, a more recent study shows that although Vietnam was unified, this very fact did not increase the unity among North Korea, North Vietnam and China. Hanoi-Pyongyang relations began to deteriorate since the

¹⁴³ “On the Visit of a DPRK Party and Government Delegation Headed by Kim Il Sung to the PR China from 18 to 26 April 1975,” April 29, 1975. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114124>; “Summarized Evaluation of Kim Il Sung's Visit to the PR China (18 to 26 April 1975),” May 6, 1975. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114125>

¹⁴⁴ Telegram from Peking to Secretary of State Kissinger, “Kim Il Sung's Visit to the PRC,” April 28, 1975. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA).

¹⁴⁵ Charles Armstrong. 2013. 204.

¹⁴⁶ “East German Documents on Kim Il Sung's April 1975 Trip to Beijing,” E-dossier, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, North Korea International Documentation Project. May 2012. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/east-german-documents-kim-il-sungs-april-1975-trip-to-beijing>

beginning of the 1970s and the North Korean leadership looked at the Vietnam case just to see no capability for it to achieve unification in the path of Hanoi.¹⁴⁷ Analyzing Vietnamese documents, 도미엔 argues that the Vietnam War's end had some impacts on the unification policy of North Korea, yet it was not unification-by-force but a more flexible and diverse policy. Therefore, it is concluded that Pyongyang held a “weak unification will,” and its leaders indeed “nurtured a status quo policy instead of one for unification.”¹⁴⁸

홍석률 also points out the fact that, by paying a visit to China during such a sensitive moment of the panic situation in Indochina, the North Korean leader sought to enhance the reputation of the Kim regime both domestically and internationally, preparing for the hereditary process of his son Kim Jong Il and drawing the attention of the United States.¹⁴⁹ As of 1974, Kim Il Sung decided to exclude South Korea out of his previous proposals of signing a “peace treaty” among the two Koreas and the U.S., and pursuing instead a separate agreement with Washington.¹⁵⁰

As a matter of fact, follows Kim's China visit, North Korea continuously announced that it had “no intention of using force of arms to reunify the country.”¹⁵¹ Pyongyang greeted the Twenty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1975 by emphasizing DPRK proposals for a peaceful settlement of the Korean problem. For the first time in several years, neither its Defense Minister nor the Korean People's Army (KPA) Chief of Staff attended the Pyongyang rally.¹⁵² The rally speech was given by Yu Chang Sik, the North's Deputy Co-Chairman and Chief Spokesman at the North-South Coordination Committee. Yu, while claiming

¹⁴⁷ 도미엔. 2014. “1975 년 베트남전 종전과 북한정부의 대응: 베트남자료를 중심으로” (The 1975 Conclusion of the Vietnam War and North Korea's Strategic Responses: Focusing on Vietnamese Materials), 『이화사학연구』 (Bulletin of the Ewha Institute of History), 99-102.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 116-119.

¹⁴⁹ 홍석률. 2012. 『분단의 히스테리』 파주: 창비. 362-363.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *Rodong Shimun*, June 25, 1975, 1.

¹⁵² FBIS Trends, Trends in Communist Media, “Korea: Pyongyang Stresses Peaceful Intentions on War Anniversary,” July 2, 1975. CREST. 10.

that the United States was “suffering dire political, economic and military crisis,”¹⁵³ did not suggest that this affected the U.S. commitment to the ROK. Also, while suggesting that the world believed the Park regimes “is the next to fall after Indochina,” he did not call for Park’s overthrow nor offer Northern support for the “struggle” in the South. This was somewhat different with the previous year’s rally speaker Yi Yong Mu, who had called on the North to “actively assists the bloody struggle in the South.”¹⁵⁴ The North Koreans had made much the same pitch in conversations with foreign diplomats.

In July, Foreign Minister Heo Dam (Ho Tam) acknowledged to Australian Foreign Minister Don Willesee in Pyongyang that reunification was not an early prospect and that a new Korean War was not likely.¹⁵⁵ In Peking, Willesee was given the same message. Chinese Foreign Minister Chi’ao Kuanhua (Qiao Guanhua) played down Kim Il Sung’s visit to Peking in April, claiming to Willesee that it had been planned months in advance and only “fortuitously” coincided with the collapse of Indochina.¹⁵⁶ Chi’ao therefore expressed confidence that North Korea would not attack the South.

To this research’s observation, North Korean propaganda continued to play some militant themes, but with less prominence since Kim’s China visit. Pyongyang almost certainly recognized that Kim’s threatening tone at the outset of his visit to Peking was counterproductive, as it encouraged a closing of ranks in South Korea – quieting President Park’s political opposition – and prompted strong expression of support for Seoul by high U.S. officials. The stress on peaceful intentions probably was also aimed at increasing diplomatic support for North Korea at the upcoming conference of Non-Aligned countries in Lima, Peru and at the sessions of the United Nations.

At the moment of 1975, the diplomatic strategy that Pyongyang had pursued since the early 1970s netted it notable results. The North was

¹⁵³ *Rodong Shimun*, June 25, 1975, 1.

¹⁵⁴ FBIS Trends, Trends in Communist Media, “Korea: Pyongyang Stresses Peaceful Intentions on War Anniversary,” July 2, 1975. CREST. 11.

¹⁵⁵ CIA Weekly Review, “Korea-China: Talking Peace,” July 4, 1975. CREST. 20-21.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

recognized by a large number of states, and enjoyed diplomatic relations with nearly as many countries as Seoul. North Korea was admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) organization from which it derived considerable support in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA); the South was not.¹⁵⁷ One CIA report remarked that the General Assembly “has become a principal theatre of Pyongyang’s effort to establish diplomatic superiority over the South and to win wide support for their long-standing demand for U.S. troop withdrawal.”¹⁵⁸ This was a victory in Pyongyang’s competition with the South, but North Korea’s courting of NAM also represented a shift away from radical regimes and movements to the more moderate countries of the Third World as a whole.¹⁵⁹

As clearly explained in Part 1 of this chapter, a pro-North Korean resolution was passed at the UNGA for the first time in October 1975, in which it called for dissolving the United Nations Command (UNC) and replacing the Armistice Agreement by a Peace Treaty negotiated by the “real parties to the armistice agreement” – that is, the United States, the PRC, North Korea, and South Korea. The North’s hopes for American withdrawals were buoyed by growing U.S. Congressional criticism of South Korean President Park. Kim Il Sung hence floated many proposals for direct contacts with Washington. Chairman Kim also refused to talk with the South so long as President Park Chung Hee remained in power. To the assessment of a National Security Council staffer in President Carter’s Cabinet, around this time of 1975 “he [Kim] enjoyed the diplomatic momentum. He seemed persuaded time was on his side.”¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the North established commercial links

¹⁵⁷ In August 1975 North Korea joined NAM as full-fledged member based on the unanimous decision of the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers’ Conference held in Lima, while Seoul’s application was rejected.

¹⁵⁸ CIA Special Report, “The Two Koreas,” August 2, 1976. CREST. 18.

¹⁵⁹ Charles Armstrong. 2013. 180.

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, “Contact and Communications with North Korea,” February 28, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Country File (NSA6), Box 43, Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

with Western Europe and Japan. They outpaced the South in the development of any indigenous defense industry.¹⁶¹

However, North Korea fell on hard times in 1976. Growing debt problems compromised efforts to accelerate industrialization and expanded commercial ties with Western countries, while forcing the DPRK back toward greater dependence on Peking and Moscow – neither of which had been very generous in furnishing hard currency loans. Scandals involving North Korean smuggling activities in Scandinavian countries impaired Pyongyang’s international reputation. While DPRK Ambassador to Denmark was expelled in August, four North Korean diplomats were deported from Finland in October,¹⁶² all of which were due to their involvement in smuggling. In the same month the DPRK Embassy in Norway was caught red-handed of selling liquor and cigarettes with a black market value of some one million USD.¹⁶³ The scale of the operations in Sweden was yet the largest.¹⁶⁴

Regarding Pyongyang’s relationship with its patron states, it was concluded that neither Moscow nor Peking seemed prepared to put pressure on North Korea “to do things it was obviously not prepared to do.”¹⁶⁵ The CIA listed two reasons for China and the Soviet Union to refrain from pressuring the North:

- they know that a fiercely independent Pyongyang will normally see no reason for adjusting its policies to their demands
- and they know that Pyongyang’s independence has been reinforced by its relatively recently acquired ability to mobilize third world support on its own and even more by the opportunities Sino-Soviet rivalry affords North Korea to balance its two allies off against each other.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, Charles Kraus (2013), “The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, iv-v. (Hereafter “The Carter Chill”).

¹⁶³ Andrei Lankov. 2013. *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, Oxford University Press. 22.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ CIA Special Report, “The Two Koreas,” August 2, 1976. CREST. 19.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 19-20.

In reality, these assessments of Peking and Moscow's restraint were proved accurate even up until the end of the 1970s. However, as shown in the next chapter, amidst President Carter's "parallel policy" for Korea, the hardliners in the Carter's Cabinet changed their perceptions on North Korean relations with the two Communist giants to wrongly concluded that a "China Card" might work to gain ground in achieving the diplomatic victory of engagement with the North. At this moment of 1976, American intelligence community, based on these assessments, anticipated that Pyongyang could not count on Soviet or PRC support when the overriding interests of either dictate a contrary course, because:

- Neither seems prepared to stretch itself to help Pyongyang overcome its present economic difficulties
- and each has accepted with apparent equanimity periods of quite troubled relationships with Pyongyang brought on by aid or other policies adopted by Moscow or Peking for its own reasons but deeply resented in Pyongyang.¹⁶⁷

Believed in Pyongyang's "uncertainty" over the response of its allies, especially the amount of assistance it could receive, the CIA further concluded that North Korea would not initiate hostilities.¹⁶⁸ Roughly two weeks following this report, American intelligence agents would come to know that they were unfortunately wrong. On August 5, the North Korean Government issued a long memorandum and statement charging that the U.S. had "completed preparations for a new war" and "is going into the state of directly provoking war."¹⁶⁹ Only hours before releasing the statement, there was a shooting incident in the DMZ between North and South Korean forces. On August 18, the "tree incident" occurred. The killings of the two UNC officers were the first deaths ever in the Joint Security Area (JSA), site of the joint Armistice Command meetings.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum for William G. Hyland from William Gleysteen, "WSAG Meeting on Korean Incident," August 18, 1976, National Security Adviser NSC East Asian and Pacific Affairs Staff Files, Box 27, Folder WSAG, August 18, 1976, Korean Incident. Ford Presidential Library (FPL).

Lee Chae-Jin argued that the reason for Pyongyang to launch the Axe Murder Incident was because it was frustrated by the inability of the United Nations to disband the UNC and to eject U.S. troops from South Korea.¹⁷⁰ He reasons the North's despair when it was forced to withdraw its resolution from the UNGA¹⁷¹ after realizing that support for its position was declining. As a result, Chairman Kim Il Sung decided "to mount a challenge to the sacrosanct neutral area, a visible symbol of the U.S. military presence at Panmunjom."¹⁷² This research, however, suggests a supplementary explanation, that South Korea's continuing rapid economic development and military modernization persuaded the North that time was no longer on its side. Pyongyang likely estimated that it was approaching the peak of its political and diplomatic gains vis-à-vis the South.

At the August 1976 Colombo Non-Aligned Conference, the first one attended by the DPRK after its admission to the NAM the previous year, ham-handed North Korean diplomacy alarmed many moderate less developing countries (LDCs).¹⁷³ These included even Yugoslavia, whom Pyongyang could usually rely on for support.¹⁷⁴ North Korea's reputation was further damaged by the brutal assault at Panmunjom's JSA, which occurred during the time of the Colombo conference. Pyongyang's diplomacy lost momentum, despite efforts to revive it.

These developments must had been all the more discouraging to the North in view of South Korea's phenomenal economic performance and relative political tranquility. In 1976, the South's Gross National Product

¹⁷⁰ Lee Chae-Jin, 2006. *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 79-80.

¹⁷¹ In a sudden turnabout, North Korea instructed its supporters in the UN to withdraw from the provisional agenda of the UNGA the draft resolution favoring the North on the Korean question in September 1976. National Intelligence Bulletin, "North Korea: Withdrawing UN Resolution," September 21, 1976. CREST. 7.

¹⁷² Lee Chae-Jin, 2006. 80.

¹⁷³ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "Contact and Communications with North Korea," February 28, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's Country File (NSA6), Box 43, Folder Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, 1/77-1/81. Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

¹⁷⁴ Charles Armstrong. 2013. 182.

(GNP) achieved 15 percent real growth and exports exceeded USD 8 billion.¹⁷⁵ Seoul's relative advantages in most measurable elements of national power continued to grow. Moreover, while North Korea enjoyed broader recognition, it also realized that few states were willing to give up ties with Seoul in order to preserve links with them. Therefore, an increasing number of states as of forty-eight recognized both, as a result, lending increased legitimacy to the reality of the existence of the two Koreas.¹⁷⁶

This is not to mention South Korean Park Chung Hee Government's substantial success in establishing a stable political system, despite periodic flare-ups of protest activity against his regime. The 1972 Yushin Constitution was followed by a series of emergency decrees giving extensive control power to government security forces. These actions undermined and extinguished Park's opponents. Whereas the North Korean Workers' Party (KWP) organ *Rodong Shimun* and its English version *The Pyongyang Times* reported on a daily basis the anti-Park and anti-U.S.-ROK alliance demonstrations in the downtown area of the South's capital Seoul, the reality was not what the North Koreans desired. The CIA assessed Park's opposition figures as of spring 1976 as bellow:

The students, intellectuals, politicians, and Christian groups opposed to Park are not only intimidated by fear of arrest and other reprisals, but they lack any highly-charged, emotional issue on which to galvanize broad-based opposition.

Those Koreans who oppose President Park are among the best educated and most westernized individuals in the country, but they are relatively few in number, not well organized, and their calls for basic democratic reforms and human rights do not have broad appeal in South Korea today. The military, business, and bureaucratic establishments, and most of the rural population,

¹⁷⁵ Special Reports, "Political Stability in the ROK," July 23, 1976; "South Korea – Internal," July 26, 1976; "Politics in the South," November 11, 1976. CREST.

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "Contact and Communications with North Korea," February 28, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's Country File (NSA6), Box 43, Folder Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, 1/77-1/81. CPL.

support Park's basic economic and defense policies and accept the need for a strong central government.¹⁷⁷

The Communist takeover in Indochina in spring 1975 also contributed to stability by reinforcing Park's arguments that the Communist threat to his country required tight discipline.

In short, the "glorious victory of Vietnam in the resistance war against the American imperialists" gave North Korean leaders a certain level of confidence and flexibility in their conduct of foreign policy. As a result, the year 1975 marked the high point of North Korea's diplomatic offensive in the Third World and toward the Non-Aligned countries in particular. However, the effects of the Vietnam War's end did not last long. The hardships of 1976 forced the North Korean leaders to reexamine the premises underlying their previous strategy, including their refusal to deal with President Park's regime. Chairman Kim's failed attempts to secure economic assistance from the USSR compelled North Korea to turn to the PRC and other partner nations, as well as to increase its openness towards Japan and other Western countries.

2.3. China: Seeking Assurance upon Soviet "Encirclement"

The reunification of Vietnam under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)'s rule brought about mixed feelings among the Chinese leadership. Throughout most of the Vietnam War, Peking invested both money and men for Hanoi's cause of liberation and guerrilla warfare to expel American forces and bring down the Saigon puppet regime. Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that, starting from the 1970s and especially follows President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 and the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, Peking preferred a "status quo" in its Southern neighboring

¹⁷⁷ Memorandum for Director, Division of International Security Affairs, ERDA, "South Korea: Prospects for Political Stability, Security Conditions, and the Territory Threat," April 9, 1976. CREST.

country.¹⁷⁸ In other words, the PRC would rather have the “two Vietnams” scenario, rather than a strong unified Vietnam at its Southern doorstep. Yet what China considered the worst case after 1975 was a Vietnam fallen into the Soviet influence.

North Vietnam was dependent on Chinese and Soviet support throughout the war years but even so managed to play the two Communist powers off against each other. As shown previously in this chapter, since Vietnam now sought to end the relative isolation of the war years, the balance has tilted toward Moscow. The basic relationship with Peking was one of limited tension; Moscow now provided substantially greater political and material support. The most dramatic demonstration of Vietnam’s defiant independence came in September 1975, when Vietnamese Party Secretary Lê Duẩn ended his Peking trip without offering the customary farewell banquet. There was also no joint Sino-Vietnamese communiqué, only an interest-free Chinese loan to the DRV and a protocol on the supply of general goods to Vietnam in 1976.¹⁷⁹ The next month Duẩn went to Moscow with unusually warm Soviet praise and a joint declaration, which broke new ground in putting Hanoi on record as supporting Moscow’s policies of détente.¹⁸⁰ The warming trend in Soviet-DRV relations even made the CIA officials question whether

¹⁷⁸ Using Chinese sources: Qiang Zhai. 2000. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. “Conclusion: The Duality of China’s Policy;” 유인선. 2012. 『베트남과 그 이웃 중국: 양국관계의 어제와 오늘』 파주: 창비. 420-431. Using Vietnamese sources: Kosal Path. 2011. “The Economic Factor in the Sino-Vietnamese Split, 1972–75: An analysis of Vietnamese Archival Sources,” *Cold War History*, 11:4, 545; 도미연. 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Media, “Vietnam: Le Duan Delegation Signs Aid Accord, Departs China,” October 1, 1975. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. 11. Declassified documents revealed that Deng Xiaoping lectured Duẩn on the dangers of the Soviet Union yet Duẩn rejected, refusing outright an anti-Soviet coalition with China. “Deng Xiaoping and Le Duan, September 29, 1975.” Odd Arne Westard, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung & James G. Hershberg. 1998. *Seventy-Seven Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars of Indochina, 1964-1977*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Cold War International History Project. 192-193; Edward C. O’Dowd. 2007. *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War*. New York: Routledge. 40-41.

¹⁸⁰ FBIS Trends, Trends in Communist Media, “USSR-Vietnam: Le Duan Visit to Moscow Suggests Strengthened Relations,” November 5, 1975. CREST. 11.

Hanoi would be able to continue its balancing act between its two giant Communist allies.¹⁸¹

Even apart from putative Soviet influence in Hanoi, the Chinese considered Vietnam a relatively well-armed, potentially expansionist and generally troublesome close neighbor, and Peking seemed prepared to take the lead in keeping Hanoi in check. Furthermore, underlying the tension between China and Vietnam was a conflict in national-ethnic-cultural pride. China's sense of superiority had for more than 2,000 years caused the Chinese to expect all other peoples to come to them.¹⁸² As Western power receded from Southeast Asia, Peking inevitably thought it should exercise the most important foreign influence in the region. The fear of a Soviet-Vietnamese alliance that might challenge its sphere of influence in the region triggered China to act, and its first target was no other than the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

At the end of June 1975, Peking welcomed a Thai delegation's visit through which the communiqué of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and RPC was signed. Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, representing an ailing Premier Zhou Enlai, laid special stress on alleged Soviet expansionist intentions in Southeast Asia in the wake of Communist victories over U.S.-supported regimes in Cambodia and Vietnam. During his banquet speech, he focused exclusively on the USSR as the present danger in the area: speaking in the usual euphemisms, Deng said that while one of the "superpowers" had suffered defeat and had to withdraw from Indochina,

The other superpower with wild ambition has extended its tentacles far and wide. It insatiably seeks new military bases in Southeast Asia and sends its naval vessels to ply the Indian and West Pacific oceans, posing a menacing threat to the peace and security of the Southeast Asian countries. The specter of

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² See a detail account of this issue in J. William Duiker. 1986. *China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California.

its expansionism now haunts Southeast Asia, as it hankers for converting this region into its sphere of influence some day.¹⁸³

Deng also expressed confidence in the Southeast Asians' ability to resist superpower schemes, and he capped his assessment by saying: "Southeast Asia belongs to the people of the Southeast Asian countries, and not to any superpower."¹⁸⁴ The July 1, 1975 PRC-Thai communiqué contained the standard anti-hegemony clause, underlining both sides' resolve to resist "any attempt by any country" to dominate or create spheres of influence in the world. Deng also promised Chinese support for "all oppressed nations and peoples" to oppose foreign attempts at "aggression," "subversion" and "control."¹⁸⁵

While the relationship between China and Vietnam grew colder, that between China and Cambodia was warming up. When Democratic Kampuchea's Chairman of the State Presidium Khieu Samphan visited Peking a few weeks before Lê Duẩn's September 1975 visit, he signed a joint communiqué that in strong terms condemned Soviet hegemonism.¹⁸⁶ Whereas Vietnam was seeking to emphasize the unity of the Indochinese people, China, in its discussions and propaganda, chose to reinforce the theme of Cambodian independence.

Moreover, the outcome of the Second Indochina War "renewed" Peking's concern that Moscow was maneuvering to "surround" and isolate China. In this sense, Chinese fear of Soviet success in isolating and encircling China clearly conditioned Peking's approach to relations with North Korea. In the later half of the 1970s, China supported Pyongyang's position on reunification and withdrawal of U.S forces from the Korean peninsula and on related issues in the United Nations far less equivocally than was the case in

¹⁸³ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Media, "PRC-Thailand: Diplomatic Ties Established during Prime Minister's Visit," July 2, 1975. CREST. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 14.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ O'Dowd. 2007. 41.

the early 1970s. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Kim Il Sung's visit to China in April 1975 and Chinese Politburo member Chang Chun-chiao's visit to Pyongyang in October 1975 were clearly meant to underline the closeness of the mutual relationship.

This unbalanced cultivation of Pyongyang had paid off to some degree. As indicated in the CIA briefing book for Secretary of State Kissinger in preparation for his China visit in October 1975, North Korea did not bother to edit out anti-Soviet remarks by the Chinese leaders when relaying their speeches in Korean media.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, by identifying closely with Chinese support for Prince Sihanouk and with Peking's position on Cambodia generally, the North Koreans endorsed Chinese attempts to circumscribe Soviet influence in Indochina. Peking's cultivation of Pyongyang underscored its belief that it was playing for high stakes in Korea, and that its vital interests were involved in the attempt to ensure a lesser degree of Soviet influence on the Korean peninsula than it seemed to believe now existed in Indochina. This particular point will be further analyzed in Chapter 6.

Regarding the United States, China continued to see Washington as a major piece in the international chess game, but it seemed to be more skeptical of the immediate and tactical advantages of the relationship than it was in the 1971-1973 period. Still, due to its possible salutary effect on Soviet attitudes, the Chinese highly expected President Gerald Ford's visit to occur soon.¹⁸⁸ Peking's reading of the political atmosphere in the United States in the wake of the Vietnam debacle, however, suggested to them that the trip might have been deferred. To ensure that it took place on schedule, throughout 1975 Peking was busy passing the word in all quarters that President Ford would be

¹⁸⁷ Memorandum from Herbert E. Horowitz to William Gleysteen, Briefing Book for Secretary Kissinger, "PRC Foreign Policy Orientation," October 15, 1975. CREST.

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum from Herbert E. Horowitz to William Gleysteen, Briefing Book for Secretary Kissinger, "China's View of Relations with the United States," October 15, 1975. CREST. 1.

welcomed in China, that Peking considered the trip important, and that there were no preconditions attached to it.¹⁸⁹

At the same time, domestic audiences were conditioned to expect little in the way of substantive advances in the bilateral relationship as a result of Ford's trip. Specifically, they were informed that a breakthrough on the Taiwan problem was unlikely. At the international stage, Chinese leaders and diplomats stressed that China remained patient concerning the Taiwan problem and that it was no hurry to see the issue resolved.¹⁹⁰ Deng Xiaoping in particular stressed the proposition that China would prefer a peaceful resolution of the issue.

Peking also concerned about what it considered a deterioration of the balance of military power between Washington and Moscow. The Chinese believed that Washington's overall international posture was defensive, while that of Moscow was aggressive. They concerned that the United States was entering a temporary period of neo-isolationism follows the fall of Saigon and feared that quarrels between the executive and legislative branches could limit Washington's freedom of action. A parallel concern for the Chinese was continuing U.S. efforts to cement détente with the USSR. Peking believed that far greater U.S. time and energy was expended on furthering the Soviet relationship that was expanded on the Chinese connection. Given the multifaceted nature of the U.S.-Soviet connection, even in the field of agriculture,¹⁹¹ compared to the much more limited connection with Peking, the Chinese suspected that Washington had pursued ties with China largely as a means of securing a "better deal" with Moscow. In other words, the Chinese

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹⁹¹ In the first half of 1975, negotiations concerning Soviet purchases of U.S wheat were organized.

leadership was afraid that the U.S. was playing the “China Card” vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.¹⁹²

With Zhou Enlai’s health worsening and precluding active involvement in state and Party matters, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping emerged as China’s day-do-day leader. Since the restaffing of the government bureaucracy at the National People’s Congress in January 1975, Deng had established himself as the People’s Liberation Army Chief-of-Staff, a Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and a member of the powerful Politburo Standing Committee.¹⁹³ Both Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou had come to rely increasingly on Deng who can be expected to succeed Zhou as Premier and play a key role in Party affairs after Mao’s death.

The death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 had been followed almost immediately by the arrest of the radical leaders associated with Mao’s widow, Jiang Qing. The purge of the Gang of Four removed from the Politburo the last opponents of an accommodation with the United States. The nominal successor to Mao was Hua Guofeng, a relatively “colorless” provincial official who had been named heir in the spring of 1976 in a compromise between the radical and moderate factions of the Party.¹⁹⁴

Since Mao’s death, the Chinese leadership moved quickly to reconfirm the general outline of Chinese foreign policy, especially toward the U.S. and the USSR. Now that both architects of the Sino-American rapprochement – Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai – had passed from the scene, Peking found the need to reaffirm the U.S. its commitment in reaching a compromise in bilateral relations to tackle potential Soviet “encirclement.” Therefore, China used several occasions since Mao’s death to reiterate the importance they attached

¹⁹² Memorandum from Herbert E. Horowitz to William Gleysteen, Briefing Book for Secretary Kissinger, “China’s View of Relations with the United States,” October 15, 1975. CREST. 2.

¹⁹³ Memorandum from Herbert E. Horowitz to William Gleysteen, Briefing Book for Secretary Kissinger, “China in 1975: The Domestic Political Situation,” October 15, 1975. CREST. 1.

¹⁹⁴ Harry Harding. 1992. *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutions. 69.

to relations with Washington. Peking also made it clear that it remained displeased with some aspects of U.S. foreign policy, such as the continuation of American détente with the Soviet Union.

Both the official announcement of Chairman Mao's death and Premier Hua Guofeng's eulogy for Mao included statements of China's intention to "resolutely" carry out Mao's "revolutionary line and policies in foreign affairs," a euphemism for China's diplomatic opening to the U.S.¹⁹⁵ The statements also included sharp criticism of the USSR, calling the Soviets a "renegade clique" at the core of "modern revisionism."¹⁹⁶ The Chinese press quickly published President Gerald Ford's letter of condolence, in which he reaffirmed determination to complete the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations. Chinese media also replayed Ford's statement to American newsmen on Mao's death. At the same time, Peking rejected condolatory message from the Soviet Party Central Committee, on the grounds that the Chinese "have no relations" with the Soviet party.¹⁹⁷

Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador to the UN Huang Hua was explicit in his attacks on détente during talks with U.S. Ambassador William Scranton. Huang reiterated standard Chinese warnings that détente might hasten war rather than prevent it, and deplored the fact that "some European countries were not standing up to the Soviets."¹⁹⁸ These indications of unhappiness was designed to warn Washington that, although a relatively close relationship with the U.S still had the support of most Chinese leaders, critics at home could gain the upper hand if progress toward that goal was not made soon.

3. The Transition to Carter

¹⁹⁵ National Intelligence Bulletin, "China: Reaffirming Foreign Policy," September 21, 1976. CREST. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

During the 1976 U.S. presidential campaign, Democrat candidate Jimmy Carter strongly attacked the style and substance of Nixon-Ford-Kissinger policies, stating that America's image had been tarnished by the use of Machiavellian tactics such as secret diplomacy, back channels, excessive concern with power politics, and an accompanying neglect of principles and morality. He criticized Ford's pardon of Nixon and frequently linked the two presidencies with the term "the Nixon-Ford administration."¹⁹⁹ Carter furthered his attack by lambasting Kissinger's so-called "Lone Ranger" approach to national foreign policy. For example, during the second television debate in October 1976, Carter declared that the outgoing president "has shown an absence of leadership" and "as far as foreign policy goes, Mr. Kissinger has been the president of this country."²⁰⁰

Instead, Carter emphasized values throughout the campaign. He publicly chastised Nixon and Kissinger for their secretiveness and deception. He also denounced the Kissingerian policy of *Realpolitik*, which emphasized power in international relations over morality, and which he thought led America to support corrupt, repressive governments in the name of containing Communism.

Making himself different from the previous leaders, Carter did not regard Communism as the chief enemy. He talked repeatedly that America had become too fearful of the Communists while giving little attention to the great danger of the arms race and too much support to repressive right-wing dictatorships around the world.²⁰¹ To this candidate, America had forgotten its historical role as protector of democracy and individual liberty; human rights

¹⁹⁹ For example, speech at the Foreign Policy Association, "A Community of the Free," New York, June 23, 1976. Jimmy Carter. 1977. *A Government as Good as Its People*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Reprint: Jimmy Carter. 1996. Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press. 93.

²⁰⁰ "The Second Carter-Ford Debate: Foreign Policy," October 6, 1976. San Francisco, California. Jimmy Carter. 1996. 182.

²⁰¹ United States. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter*, in two volumes. U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington, DC.

had be neglected for *Realpolitik*; and Third World countries had been ignored in the pursuit of an East-West condominium.²⁰²

After a few primaries victories, Carter was approached by various Taiwanese lobbyists and from then, his ideas of U.S. foreign policy towards China and Asia began to form. Since this very moment, he would rather separate Asian policy from Soviet-American conflict. Written in his memoirs around these months, “I believed that too many of our international concerns were being defined almost exclusively by the chronic United States-Soviet confrontation mentality, which seemed to me shortsighted and counterproductive.”²⁰³

Later in May 1977, the new President delivered a speech at Notre Dame University, Indiana, declaring that his foreign policy would be “free of that inordinate fear of Communism.”²⁰⁴

For many years we have been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our values for theirs. We fought fire to with fire, never thinking what fire is better fought with water. This approach failed, with Vietnam the best example of its intellectual and moral poverty.²⁰⁵

To him, a new world order would be sought in which all nations would enjoy the right to self-determination, cooperation, free trade and mutual defense. Carter hoped that adopting a regionalist approach to foreign policy and considering Third World countries outside the framework of American-Soviet confrontation would deemphasize the East-West conflict so as not to allow it to dominate foreign policy making. Stated in this Notre Dame speech:

... Based on a strong defense capability, our policy must... seek to improve relations with the Soviet Union and with China in ways that are both more

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Jimmy Carter. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. New York: Bantam Books, 188.

²⁰⁴ Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. May 22, 1977. Gerhard Peters & John T. Woodley, The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7552>

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

comprehensive and more reciprocal. Even if we cannot heal ideological divisions, we must reach accommodations that reduce that risk of war.²⁰⁶

In other words, he seemed wanting to expand his vision of the “community of the free”²⁰⁷ globally, even to the areas where American (former) foes were located. In historian Odd Arne Westad’s words, Carter thought he was “capable of breaking through the ice that the Cold War had cast over U.S. foreign policy with regard to enemies and allies alike.”²⁰⁸

There is one more detail which is worth emphasizing and which might have constructed Carter’s positive, joyful mindset regarding “our international neighbors”²⁰⁹ before he stepped in the White House. Prior to the Democrat candidacy, as Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter had made visits to ten foreign nations, including Japan, Brazil, Germany, Israel, with the hope “to promote friendship and trade and to learn as much as possible about our host.”²¹⁰ He also realized the interest which foreign leaders displayed having the governor of an American state in their country. Everywhere he went, he received the warmest welcome and friendship, and was able to visit with “political, economic, and cultural leaders who could best teach us about their native land.”²¹¹ Such pleasant foreign travels made him realize that existed among international community “a natural friendship toward the American people, but a growing distrust of our government.”²¹²

It was also during this time that he joined the Trilateral Commission, a foreign policy think-tank, to learn more about foreign affairs.²¹³ Formed in 1973 by David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski of Columbia University,

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Underline added by the author.

²⁰⁷ Title of speech at the Foreign Policy Association, “A Community of the Free,” New York, June 23, 1976. Jimmy Carter. 1996. *A Government as Good as Its People*. Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press. 93.

²⁰⁸ Odd Arne Westad, 1997. *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations During the Carter Years*. Scandinavian University Press. 23.

²⁰⁹ Chapter title of memoirs. Jimmy Carter. 1975. *Why not the Best?*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press. “Thirteen: Our International Neighbors.”

²¹⁰ Jimmy Carter. 1975. *Why not the Best?*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press. 124.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid. 127.

the Trilateral Commission developed a unified game plan in order to substitute for the Nixon-Kissinger “grand design.” Soon Brzezinski became Carter’s “Henry Kissinger,” serving as special assistant to the President for national security affairs. Vice President Walter Mondale, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of the Treasury Michael Blumenthal and other leaders in the Carter administration were also members of the Commission.

Although not against the pursuit of détente with Moscow and Peking, this think-tank believed that a genuine and lasting improvement of relations with the Communist giants could only be achieved if the industrialized democracies of North America, Western Europe and Japan cooperated more closely, and if the rich First World countries could also work out a more cooperative relationship with the poor countries of the Third World.²¹⁴ The appointment of Andrew Young, an African American, as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, seemed to indicate an emphasis upon better relations with the Third World.

While much has been studied on the Carter presidency’s global strategy, it is widely agreed among scholars that the foreign affairs hallmarks of the new administration include fostering human rights, striving to eliminate all nuclear weapons, halting nuclear proliferation, and reducing arms transfers. Jerel Rosati, a prominent expert on this presidency, even concludes that the Carter administration attempted to implement the “first post-Cold War foreign policy.”²¹⁵ Similar to their predecessors, the Carter administration continued to exercise a global leadership role. Nonetheless, Rosati argues, instead of developing a foreign policy revolving around the three major underlying intellectual roots of the Cold War: (1) a strategy of containment; (2) a *Realpolitik* vision; and (3) an ideology of Anti-Communism, officials within the Carter administration shared a post-Cold War foreign policy approach

²¹⁴ Donald Brandon. 1978. “Carter and Asia: The Wages of Inexperience,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review*. Vol. 5, Issue 5. 267.

²¹⁵ Jerel A. Rosati. 1994. “The Rise and Fall of America’s First Post-Cold War Foreign Policy,” in Herbert D. Rosenbaum & Alexej Ugrinsky eds. *Jimmy Carter: Foreign Policy and Post-Presidential Years*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 35-52.

based on (1) a strategy of adjustment and preventive diplomacy; (2) an image of complex interdependence; and (3) the promotion of human rights and global community.²¹⁶

In other words, Carter hoped to build a new international system that contained “a new world-wide mosaic of global, regional and bilateral relations,”²¹⁷ a “global community” of interdependent and cooperating nations.²¹⁸ Interdependence was the new international reality, and neither the United States nor the Soviet Union could control the world’s destiny. Mutual cooperation was not just a convenience but a vital problem. The old world order of the post-World War II era was believed to be over. The focus on East-West issues and American-Soviet rivalry was considered anachronistic. Human rights and democracy, normalization and improvement of relations, the resolution of conflict in Africa and the Middle East, arms control, the health of the global economy, Third World development, et cetera, were considered significant issues.²¹⁹

So where did Asia stand in this global strategy of the Carter administration? Overwhelmingly occupied with détente and negotiations of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II with the Soviet Union, the U.S. under Carter seemed to invest less attention to Asia, and defined many countries of this continent into the category of either the “Third World” or “Communist nations.” As early as August 1977, critics of U.S. foreign policy had argued that “there appears to be no overall concept or framework governing the Carter policy in Asia, or at least none that is visible.”²²⁰ The next year, political scientist Chalmers Johnson points out “three probable

²¹⁶ Ibid. 44.

²¹⁷ Jimmy Carter. Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. May 22, 1977. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7552>

²¹⁸ Jimmy Carter. United Nations – Address Before the General Assembly. October 4, 1977. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6744>

²¹⁹ Srinivas M. Chary. 1994. “Principled Pragmatism: Carter, Human Rights, and Indo-American Relations,” in Herbert D. Rosenbaum & Alexej Ugrinsky eds. *Jimmy Carter: Foreign Policy and Post-Presidential Years*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 246.

²²⁰ *Christian Science Monitor*, Special Editorial, August 17, 1977.

causes” that might be named for failures of U.S. policy in East Asia under Carter: “amateurism, a concern with domestic politics, and an adherence to a covert ideological line.”²²¹ Later Gaddis Smith, a leading historian of the Carter administration, concludes in his well-known book: “at the outset, there was no overarching Asian policy.”²²²

It is thus suggested that Carter’s Asian policy was firstly separated from Soviet-American conflict; and secondly constructed of particular policies towards individual nations, based on the general desire to deemphasize military considerations and superpower contentions, emphasizing human rights, and seeking reconciliation with the past foes.

Early in Carter’s term as President, U.S. actions in East Asia proved the administration considerably distanced itself from a number of pro-American regimes over disagreements related to human rights. The Carter administration encouraged Indonesia under President Suharto to release thirty thousand political prisoners who had been held ever since the abortive Communist putsch of 1965.²²³ The U.S. also encouraged President Marcos of the Philippines, a key strategic ally that hosted two of American military bases, to hold elections.²²⁴ It was also out of humanitarian concerns that Carter stated that his administration would withdraw U.S. ground forces from South Korea.²²⁵

The Carter administration also planned a break away from the long-standing assumption that radical or “revolutionary” change necessarily

²²¹ Chalmers Johnson. 1978. “Carter in Asia: McGovernism without McGovern,” *Commentary*. 38.

²²² Gaddis Smith. 1986. *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years*. Hill & Wang. 85.

²²³ Joshua Muravchik. 1986. *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. 186.

²²⁴ Scott Kaufman. 2008. *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration*. Northern Illinois University Press. 32-35.

²²⁵ Kenneth L. Adelman. 1978. “The Runner Stumbles: Carter’s Foreign Policy in the Year One,” *Policy Review*. No. 3. 109.

threatened U.S. vital interests.²²⁶ Radical governments did not wish to isolate themselves from economic exchange with the West or submitting their countries to Soviet disciplines. In many cases revolutionary regimes placed national interest above ideology, countering the arrangements of international order by the great powers. This fresh attitude was stemmed from the perceived lessons of the recent American defeat in Vietnam, particularly when considering the behaviors of the Communist leadership in Hanoi.

The Vietnam War also led Carter and his advisors to question the costliness and utility of military intervention in non-vital areas of the Third World. The previous U.S. administrations had often overestimated the capacity of America to guide the internal social and political evolution of other countries. For the Carter presidency, this presumption would be reversed. In Carter's words,

We don't have any inclination to be involved in the internal affairs of another country unless our security should be directly threatened... I think we've learned our lessons the hard way in Vietnam and other instances.²²⁷

It was also the Vietnam experience that suggested the U.S. to exercise influence in the Third World less through direct intervention and the presence of U.S. military troops than through an improvement of relations with "influential countries" in such area of the world. Carter announced in his Notre Dame speech:

We will cooperate more closely with the newly influential countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. We need their friendship and cooperation in a common effort as the structure of world power changes.²²⁸

²²⁶ David Skidmore. 1996. *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Failure of Reform*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University. 39-44.

²²⁷ Jimmy Carter. Interview with the President Question-and-Answer Session with Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting Service. November 13, 1978. The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/interview-with-the-president-question-and-answer-session-with-bill-moyers-the-public>

²²⁸ Jimmy Carter. Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. May 22, 1977. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7552>

This is indeed the foundation of the Carter administration's attempts to improve U.S. relations with China and Vietnam, prevent Japanese reprocessing of spent fuel for nuclear power reactors, and withdraw American troops from South Korea. It should be noted that, still, the administration had no intention to transform the relationship with China into a military alliance that might provoke the Soviets and threaten détente. Meanwhile, it was believed that the withdrawal of ground forces would help eliminate automatic U.S. involvement in another Asian land war.²²⁹

The last feature in this global strategy and Asian policy was a contradiction between the Carter's two main foreign policy appointees: National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Whereas Vance, an able and experienced diplomat, shared Carter's rather idealistic vision, a Soviet expert and Professor Brzezinski had argued since the early 1960s for policies aimed at deepening the "schisms" between Socialist countries.²³⁰ Rivalry between the two key advisers would later impacted the Carter administration's policy towards Asia in general and Communist regimes there in particular.

To conclude this chapter, the Communist takeover of Indochina in April 1975 redefined international order in East Asia, not to the direction of a thawing Cold War in Asia that some might cheer on, nor a signaling of the "domino effect" which many had feared of. Those who expected the future of Asia to follow these two paths underestimated the depth of tensions within the Socialist-Communist camp, which resulted from the long-existed Sino-Soviet split. U.S. withdrawal from Saigon in reality opened door for simmering intra-Communist rivalry in the region. Without a unifying American adversary, suspicions grew between the once fraternal Communist parties in Asia.

²²⁹ Larry Niksch. 1981. "U.S. Troop Withdrawal from South Korea: Past Shortcomings and Future Prospects," *Asian Survey*. Vol. 27. 326.

²³⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1963. "Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 41:3. 513-525.

The most obvious reality of the post-Vietnam War Asian context is the rise of three Communist regimes with their strong military and ambitious plans to cast a greater influence in the region and all over the world. Follows Nixon's 1972 visit whose one of the key goals was ending the war in Vietnam, mainland China marked its ever-strong balance of power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the superpowers' struggle for influence since its establishment in 1949. In Northeast Asia, Peking found its loyal comradeship of the Pyongyang regime under Kim Il Sung, whose confidence was largely extended throughout its diplomatic competition against South Korea's Park Chung Hee Government. In Southeast Asia, a Communized Indochina headed by Vietnam received worldwide attention, especially among the Third World nations and the Non-Aligned countries. Hanoi, exhilarated by its victory over the world's greatest power, began moving to conduct a confident foreign policy to win more friends at the United Nations and other international organizations.

However, as demonstrated in this chapter, the reunification of Vietnam under Hanoi's rule added fuel to the already-existed cracks among the Asian Communists. Both Peking and Pyongyang felt alarmed to some extent upon Hanoi's victory, and Moscow's continued support for North Vietnam after 1975 further placed Peking on the alert of a possible Soviet "encirclement." Beginning to see Vietnam as Soviet outpost in Asia, Deng Xiaoping, the new Chinese *de facto* leader, was ready to make any party pay dearly for their mistake by challenging Peking's will and power.

Meanwhile, deeply wounded by the Vietnam experience, the United States conducted a hostile policy towards Communist Indochina. The Ford administration extended embargo against Vietnam and Cambodia, and repeatedly vetoed Vietnam's entry into the United Nations. However, pressures from the family members of MIA American personnel forced the U.S. Government to cooperate with the Vietnamese for a full account of the lost servicemen. Washington was also willing to display the talons when North Korea made any attempt to harm the security landscape on the Korean

peninsula, which was clearly reflected through the unnecessary show of force during the Axe Murder incident. Last but not least, in the face of U.S. domestic opposition and Chinese leadership struggle, Ford backtracked from the promise to normalize with China, even though he might have attempted to complete the process had he won reelection in 1976. All what he could do was a symbolic visit to reaffirm the Chinese, hoping for a brighter prospect in the near future. Still the road was not that smooth and flat.

On November 2, 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected to replace Ford in the Oval Office. As Governor of Georgia, Carter was a Washington outsider untainted by the scandals that had plagued the White House during the Vietnam War era. Although he boasted few foreign policy credentials, Carter's strong Christian morals and emphasis on human rights presented a compelling alternative to Kissinger's *Realpolitik*. In his Inaugural Address on January 20, 1977, Carter began by thanking his predecessor "for all he has done to heal our land," but promised to enable the Americans "to be proud of their own Government once again" through a "rekindling of confidence."²³¹ Also, the Thirty-ninth President of the United States expected "the elimination of all nuclear weapons from this Earth," and was eager to show the world that Washington would build a lasting peace, "based not on weapons of war but on international policies which reflect our most precious values."²³² The last chapter of the Vietnam War seemed now to be closed once and for all.

²³¹ Jimmy Carter, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241475>

²³² Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARDS ASIAN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

(1977-APRIL 1978)

On January 16, 1975, two weeks after leaving the governorship of Georgia and a month after declaring his candidacy for president, Jimmy Carter stated that he favored pulling U.S. troops out of South Korea. Reiterating this desire during a campaign speech in June 1976, Carter further announced his extreme dissatisfaction with South Korean human rights record. From that point on, a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. ground forces stationed in Korea became one of Carter's major foreign policy initiatives in East Asia. To this end, the improvement of North-South Korean relations and a less antagonistic environment around the peninsula would be vital.

Carter also took office hoping to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), which would require switching American recognition from Taiwan to Peking and ending a sacred defense treaty between the U.S. and Taiwan. Some saw this as a simple acknowledgment of reality; yet in fact, as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke recounted, "it was a momentous step that required diplomatic skill and political courage."²³³ The U.S. had to find ways, while recognizing Peking, continue dealing with the authorities of Taiwan without recognizing its claim to represent China. Most importantly, Washington had to retain the right to sell arms to Taipei. The politics were not simple with

²³³ Richard Holbrooke. *The Washington Post*. December 15, 2008.

powerful Taiwan lobbyists, including the leading contender for the 1980 Republican nomination Ronald Reagan.

As of Southeast Asia, Carter since 1976 continuously criticized President Ford's half-hearted efforts in accounting for a full list of American Missing in Actions (MIAs) in Indochina. He saw the Ford administration's inability to send a special delegation directly to Southeast Asia for a thorough investigation the "most embarrassing failure."²³⁴ With the Vietnam trauma was still going on in America, Carter's special concern for the MIA issue gained him more votes as the new President. Carter also made clear that he would seek normalization of relations with Vietnam, out of the belief that the closer Vietnam or any of the Communist countries get to the U.S., the less dependent they would be on the Soviet Union. Whereas Carter's incoming Secretary of State Cyrus Vance admitted in a Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs' hearing that "American intervention in Vietnam was big mistake,"²³⁵ the incoming Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Andrew Young stated: "We consider Vietnam as a Yugoslavia of Asia – not a part of China or the Soviet Union, but an independent country. Such a strong and independent Vietnam matches U.S. national benefits."²³⁶

It is also important to emphasize that one of Carter's stated goals during his presidential campaign was the establishment of normal relations between the United States and fourteen nations, including the Communist regimes of China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba, which had no official ties with Washington. Soon after taking office, Carter instructed his Secretary of

²³⁴ Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 145.

²³⁵ *Nhân Dân*, January 13, 1977, 4. Also "Statement of Cyrus Vance, Nominated to be Secretary of State of the United States of American," 1976 Briefings (Ted Sorensen). CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II.

This research places Communist sources first in explaining the standpoints or policies taken by the U.S. side and vice versus, in an attempt to show the mutual effects and perceptions between three Communist countries and the U.S. Government under Carter. See Chapter 1, Methodology and Sources.

²³⁶ Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)'s then Director-General for North American Affairs (Vụ trưởng Vụ Bắc Mỹ Bộ Ngoại giao) Trần Quang Cơ's memoirs *Hồi ức và Suy nghĩ* (Memoirs and Thoughts). 2003. 10-11. Also Don Oberdorfer, *The Washington Post*. January 28, 1977.

State Cyrus Vance to draw up a list of nations with which Washington did not enjoy diplomatic relations. Moreover, Vance should also give comments on the “prospects” and “advisability” of normalization with these countries.²³⁷ A month after inauguration, the President seemed finishing his most-wanted list of nations for diplomatic reconciliation, which turns out to be all Asian Communists. Written in his *White House Diary*:

FEBRUARY 23 My inclination is to alleviate tension around the world, including disharmonies between our country and those with whom we have no official diplomatic relationships, like **China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba**, and I’ll be moving in the direction. I think the country’s ready for it, although in some instances like Cuba it’s going to be quite controversial to do so. If I get an equivalent response from these countries, then I would be glad to meet them more than halfway.²³⁸

His plan was to launch “détente at a smaller scale/level” – approaching these “minor” Communist regimes, particularly those in Asia. It was to create a “multi-alignment” system – a diversity of crosscutting relationships linking Communist and non-Communist nations on different issues.²³⁹ Carter then enthusiastically announced U.S. wish to seek reconciliation with all states in his first address before the United Nations General Assembly.²⁴⁰

One interesting episode during his conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda at the White House on March 21, 1977 revealed Carter’s special concern, not to say, an almost obsession of diplomatic recognition and establishment of ties among the countries worldwide. Asked by Fukuda whether the U.S. have ties with North Korea, President Carter

²³⁷ Handwritten memorandum from Jimmy Carter to Cyrus Vance, January 28, 1977, Name File, “Vance, Cyrus (Secretary of State).” Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

²³⁸ Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 27. Bold typed by the author.

²³⁹ Franklin B. Weinstein. 1978. “U.S.-Vietnam Relations and the Security of Southeast Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56. 844.

²⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter. United Nations – Address Before the General Assembly. March 17, 1977. Gerhard Peters & John T. Woodley. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7183>

replied, “We have none,”²⁴¹ and threw the question back to Japan. After hearing Fukuda’s answer that Tokyo did have some ties including a limited amount of trade with Pyongyang, the President decided to have a small “examination” on Japan’s diplomatic relations.

Carter first questioned how many countries Tokyo did not have diplomatic relations with. When the Japanese Prime Minister enumerated North Korea and Taiwan, the President moved to query Japan’s diplomatic relations with Albania and Cambodia. After affirming Fukuda that Washington did not have diplomatic relations with some fourteen countries, including Iraq and Rhodesia, he continued his test, asking whether Japan traded with Rhodesia.²⁴² Obviously, the new owner of the White House seemed to hold strong pacific ideas that it would be very much unpleasing to him if the U.S. not befriending with nations throughout the world.

In his memoirs *Keeping Faith*, the President argues that automatic recognition of all established governments, which most European countries already adhered to, “would give us a toehold in the unfriendly country and an opportunity to ease tensions, increase American influence, and promote peace.”²⁴³ Moreover, this stance revealed Carter’s wish to view Third World countries as independent states, rather than superpower proxies, torn between the two camps and potentially targets for the expansion of Soviet hegemony abroad. Such an approach in Carter’s words would be conformable with “a new world-wide mosaic of global, regional and bilateral relations,”²⁴⁴ a “global community” of interdependent and cooperating nations.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Memorandum of Conversation, “President Carter – Prime Minister Fukuda Conversation I,” March 21, 1977. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS).

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Jimmy Carter. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. New York: Bantam Books, 195.

²⁴⁴ Jimmy Carter. Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. May 22, 1977. The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7552>

²⁴⁵ Jimmy Carter. United Nations – Address Before the General Assembly. October 4, 1977. The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6744>

In a similar spirit, the U.S. Congress also addressed the general desirability of diplomatic relations. The Foreign Relations Authorization Act for 1979 states:

CONDUCT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Sec. 607. The Congress finds that the conduct of diplomatic relations with a foreign government has as its principal purpose the discussion and negotiation with that government of outstanding issues and, like the recognition of a foreign government, does not in itself imply approval of that government or of the political-economic system it represents.²⁴⁶

Hence, the Congress and the administration shared the general view that diplomatic relations are a valuable tool for achieving U.S. larger purposes and that, in the absence of overriding reasons to the contrary, the U.S. should have relations with all countries. The long process of seeking reconciliation with the Asian Communist regimes began with Vietnam.

1. Negotiating Diplomatic Normalization with Vietnam

Normalization with Vietnam has its place on Carter's agenda, especially given his pledge to "rekindle" national confidence following the recent defeat in Indochina. Tackling the issue of Vietnam at an early stage would prove Carter was living up to his campaign promises on accounting for American Missing in Actions (MIAs). The new President was eager for his first foreign policy victory.

Nevertheless, there was more than just "the Carter zeal." U.S. geopolitical calculations in the Asia-Pacific region urged the new administration to come closer to its former adversaries. In the case of Vietnam, on the specific question of establishing relations with the country, the U.S. Government's policy was influenced by several considerations. With a

²⁴⁶ Section 607. "Public Law 95-426," October 7, 1978. U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-92/pdf/STATUTE-92-Pg963.pdf>

population exceeding 50 million, Vietnam was the third most populous Communist nation and maintained one of the world's largest military establishments after 1975. As the events in Southeast Asia had graphically demonstrated, Vietnamese actions toward other nations in the region, peaceful or otherwise, were of concern to U.S. policy and inevitably affect U.S. relations with other Asian countries. Washington wanted to be in the best possible position to communicate with Hanoi and, if possible, exert a positive influence on their policies and actions. In addition, it wanted to be in the best possible position to influence the Vietnamese on providing an accounting of MIAs, on allowing family reunification to move forward, on resolving the refugee situation, and on moving toward the observance of internationally accepted human rights. There was also the possibility of trade and opening the way for American business to compete.

On the other side of the table, the Vietnamese could not have asked for a more supportive U.S. president. Where as Gerald Ford, his predecessor, held a deep bitterness toward Hanoi, publicly depicting the Vietnamese as “a bunch of international pirates,”²⁴⁷ and upon a tough election had declared several times that “I never said we would seek to normalize or recognize the North Vietnamese,”²⁴⁸ Carter even positioned Vietnam as one of his policy goals. The Democrat President embraced a strategic viewpoint excessively different from a Republican Ford, and he seemed to hope to demonstrate such difference via Vietnam. On January 6, 1977, Washington via Moscow offered to Hanoi a three-step plan on U.S.-Vietnamese normalization of relations:

- 1) Vietnam to provide information on American MIA.
- 2) The U.S. to allow Vietnam to join the United Nations and ready to establish full diplomatic relations, as well as to begin trade with Vietnam.

²⁴⁷ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 2, 1976.

²⁴⁸ *The New York Times*, April 24, 1976.

- 3) The U.S. may contribute to the restoration of Vietnam through trade, providing equipment and other types of economic cooperation.²⁴⁹

On March 3, the Carter administration decided to partly ease sanctions on Hanoi, accepting foreign ships and planes carrying goods to Vietnam to draw and land American ports and airports for fuel. Even though it still maintained restrictions on American citizens to trade with Vietnam and American ships to visit the country, Washington on March 9 allowed American citizens to visit Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and the People's Republic of China (PRC), starting from March 18, 1977.²⁵⁰ A week after this move, a Presidential Commission was sent to Hanoi, paving the way for an American comeback to the land of the former enemy, this time bringing with them not B-52 or napalms but an olive branch.

1.1. The Woodcock Mission to Hanoi

Once in the office, despite opposition from the National Security Council (NSC) of the idea,²⁵¹ Carter hurriedly sent a U.S. Presidential Commission delegation to Hanoi, opened the prospects for negotiations of diplomatic normalization. The commission was headed by Leonard Woodcock, leader of the U.S. Auto Workers Union, and joined by three liberal Democrats and Representative G. V. 'Sonny' Montgomery, all of whom anti-Vietnam War politicians. Before their departure, the President already held high hopes

²⁴⁹ Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)'s then Director-General for North American Affairs (Vụ trưởng Vụ Bắc Mỹ Bộ Ngoại giao) Trần Quang Cơ's memoirs *Hồi ức và Suy nghĩ* (Memoirs and Thoughts). 2003. 11.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ As soon as the decision to dispatch a delegation to Hanoi was made, NSC staffer Michael Armacost strongly criticized such an idea, thinking sending a high-level mission to Hanoi at this moment was "premature," "unwise" and "dramatic." Memorandum from Michael Armacost of the NSC Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, "Yost Mission to Hanoi," February 2, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's (NSA) Staff Material, Far East, Box 1, Armacost's Chron File, Folder "2/1-6/77," CPL; Memorandum from Michael Armacost of the NSC Staff to Brzezinski, "U.S. Policy Toward Vietnam: Some Wider Aspects of the Problem," February 4, 1977. NSA Brzezinski Material, Country File, Box 85, Folder "Vietnam, 1/77-12/78," CPL.

of what the delegation would achieve in Hanoi. As he had decided on a symbolic accounting of America's MIAs in Vietnam, the purpose of Woodcock's trip was to defuse this thorny issue and pave the way for normalization. Carter wrote in his *White House Diary*:

MARCH 12 I met with the delegation going to Vietnam and Laos to get an accounting for servicemen who are missing in action. The Vietnamese leaders have been very receptive to this, and I hope this is a preview of the possibility of normalizing relationships with Vietnam. If they don't insist on reparations and don't castigate us publicly, I think we can accept some reasonable accounting for the MIAs.²⁵²

On its trip from March 16 to 20, 1977, Hanoi and Vientiane rolled out the red carpet and Vietnam presented twelve more bodies of American servicemen as a cooperative gesture – a sign of reconciliation quite in contrast to the Khmer Rouge who refused flat out the request for a meeting. When the American guests arrived, while expressing a strong desire to move toward normal relations with the U.S., Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền initially tried to link the provision of Vietnamese information on Prisoners of War (POW)/MIAs as a bargaining chip to gain American reparations. His position was that since the obligation for Vietnam to provide an MIA accounting was provided for in Article 8 (b) of the Paris Peace Agreement, it only made sense that it be implemented alongside Article 21 and the Nixon letter.²⁵³ Sensing the promising meeting seemed devolving into deadlock, Woodcock tried to explain that the American public would view such a request as “sell us the remains of our MIAs in return for economic

²⁵² Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 33. Bold typed by the author.

²⁵³ “Memorandum on the Position of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392, Collection of the Prime Minister's Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), 6. Hereafter CPMO.

Also “Presidential Commission Meeting with Phan Hien SRV Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 17, 1977,” Box 3, Folder 12 “MIA Commission, Vietnamese leadership transcript meeting, 1977 March.” Leonard Woodcock Papers, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. 11-13, 17-18. Hereafter Woodcock Papers.

aid,”²⁵⁴ and reminded Hiên that he was “hardly likely to see a more sympathetic delegation here in many years.”²⁵⁵

During the coffee break, Woodcock then spoke privately to Hiên, confessing that the accounting for MIA (Article 8b issue) was a cover for the delegation to come (back) to Vietnam, making the team the very first American officials to land on Vietnam’s soil, both North and South, after 1975. He said:

- We do not find an ultimate solution to the MIA issue. The [MIA] issue that we have to solve is actually smaller than how it was blown up in the U.S. As long as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has credible action, showing that this issue is being settled.
- Our main purpose is to defuse the political bomb within the U.S. so that the U.S. President can tell his people that the problem is being solved, then we pave the way to normalization of relations and friendship buildup between the two countries.²⁵⁶

In other words, the mission of the Woodcock delegation was to confirm the conclusion of the House Select Montgomery Committee report in December 1976 that no American servicemen remained alive in Indochina, and that all POWs and MIAs were now declared dead and reclassified as killed in actions (KIAs). If no more American servicemen were listed as MIAs or POWs, then Washington would simply be requesting the release of remains, rather than hostages. In doing so, the Carter administration sought to bypass American popular and Congressional opposition to a diplomatic

²⁵⁴ “Presidential Commission Meeting with Phan Hien SRV Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 17, 1977,” Box 3, Folder 12 “MIA Commission, Vietnamese leadership transcript meeting, 1977 March.” Woodcock Paper. 18. Also interview with Leonard Woodcock in Elizabeth Becker. 1986. *When the War was Over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and its People*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 387.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ “Minute of L. Woodcock’s words when speaking privately with Phan Hiên (During the break of talks, March 17, 1977 morning),” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 3. Square brackets added by the author.

rapprochement, at the same time depriving Hanoi of its bargaining card for reconstruction aid and similar preconditions for normalization.

As Nayan Chanda pointed out, the Woodcock delegation left many wrong impressions to the leadership in Hanoi that prospects for diplomatic normalization were high,²⁵⁷ even regarding the Article 21 of the Paris Accords issue – the American moral and legal obligation to pay war reparations of up to USD 3.25 billion. Woodcock continued to whisper in Hiền’s ears:

- On Article 21, please understand that we are facing difficulties in terms of legal system. The Commission has no authority to say which actions being taken by the U.S. following this. We are willing to listen to all of the initiatives and will report fully to Mr. Carter. However, the initiative taken by Cater is constructive and aims at solving our relations quickly.
- As the President of the USA, Carter can make his own decision in some problems and the process is not necessarily to be reported to the Congress; there are also tasks that he can just go ahead then report to the Congress later.²⁵⁸

In suggesting that Hiền drop reparations as a condition, Woodcock promised that “further efforts will be made to seek aid for Vietnam later, after normalization.”²⁵⁹ After the private meeting, Hiền adopted a new line, proposed the following formulation: There are three issues – MIAs, normalization, and economic contributions; they are separate issues but closely interrelated, yet “none of these three issues was a preconditions to the other two.”²⁶⁰ Hiền promised to commit Vietnam to achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing American remains, which Hiền stressed, Hanoi considered a humanitarian problem. In a spirit of reciprocity, the Deputy

²⁵⁷ Chanda. 1986. 145-151.

²⁵⁸ “Minute of L. Woodcock’s words when speaking privately with Phan Hiền (During the break of talks, March 17, 1977 morning),” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 3.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. Woodcock also shared similar information with Elizabeth Becker in an interview. Becker. 1986. 387.

²⁶⁰ “Report on Trip to Vietnam and Laos March 16-20, 1977,” March 23, 1977. Box 3, Folder 7 “MIA Commission, Report for Jimmy Carter, 1977 March 23.” Woodcock Papers. 9, 11, 22.

Foreign Minister concluded, the U.S. Government must recognize the need to address war-related destruction of Vietnam. Aid, Hiền concluded, “was an obligation to be fulfilled with all your conscience and all your sense of responsibility.”²⁶¹ This formulation, however, was not actively presented to the American press or Congress. Thus, as shown later in this chapter, when the aid issue surfaced the press following the first round of talks in Paris, it caught the American public by surprise, precipitating a Congressional condemnation.

During the delegation’s meeting with Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng, Woodcock even went further, saying he was not a lawyer and he agreed with Hiền that “if the Paris Accords is no longer valid, both Article 8 (b) and Article 21 are invalid, no one can argue on this.”²⁶² Congressman G.V. ‘Sonny’ Montgomery, full of confidence in his second meeting with the Vietnamese Prime Minister, even showed his wish for Đồng to visit Washington to talk directly with President Carter. Đồng replied that he thought such a trip was “too early.”²⁶³

Considering its mission a success, the Woodcock Commission’s final report stated that the Vietnamese seemed prepared to “deemphasize references to aid as coming from U.S. obligations under the Paris Agreement,” that they appeared “willing to discuss aid instead in humanitarian and moral terms,” because they “understand our domestic political constraints on the issues.”²⁶⁴ The report also repeated the conclusion of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia that “there is no evidence to indicate that

²⁶¹ United States. “Presidential Commission on Americans Missing and Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia: A Report on Trip to Vietnam and Laos, March 16-29, 1977.” March 23, 1977. 11.

²⁶² “Summary of Contents: Anh Tô (alias of Phạm Văn Đồng) confers with Woodcock delegation from 15:30-16:30, March 17, 1977 afternoon,” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 4.

Also “Presidential Commission meeting with SRV Premier Pham Van Dong March 17, 1977,” Box 3, Folder 12 “MIA Commission, Vietnamese leadership transcript meeting, 1977 March.” Woodcock Papers. 4.

²⁶³ Ibid. 5.

²⁶⁴ “Report on Trip to Vietnam and Laos March 16-20, 1977,” March 23, 1977. Box 3, Folder 7 “MIA Commission, Report for Jimmy Carter, 1977 March 23.” Woodcock Papers. 22.

any American POW's from the Indochina conflict remain alive."²⁶⁵ The team further suggested that "normalization of relations affords the best prospect for obtaining a fuller accounting for our missing personnel" and recommended that "the normalization process be pursued vigorously for this as well as other reasons."²⁶⁶ Carter received the report with enthusiasm, accepting the Vietnamese invitation to begin normalization talks in Paris.

Similarly, an enthusiastic atmosphere pervaded the press conferences surround the Woodcock trip. Called it a "superb mission," President Carter announced at the White House during a news briefing on the Hanoi Commission that "there are no preconditions requested, and there will certainly be no preconditions on our part for these talks in Paris."²⁶⁷ Senator Mike Mansfield (Democrat-Montana) answered the reporters: "the aiding for Vietnam depends on which way we want. For now, aiding through international organizations is the rightest way."²⁶⁸ Path was now wide opened for the two former adversaries to get back to the negotiating table in Paris, hoping to achieve something even more remarkable than what was reached in 1973.

1.2. The Negotiations in Paris

The first round of the Paris normalization talks took place between Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền and Richard Holbrooke on May 3-4, 1977,

²⁶⁵ Ibid. Also "Special Report on U.S. Assessment of L. Woodcock Commission's trip to Vietnam," Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 23.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ "Special Report on U.S. Assessment of L. Woodcock Commission's trip to Vietnam," Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 23.

Also Jimmy Carter. "Presidential Commission on Americans Missing and Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia Remarks at a News Briefing on the Results of the Commission's Trip to Vietnam and Laos." March 23, 1977. The American Presidency Project.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/243329>

²⁶⁸ Ibid. 23.

to a great fanfare. Holbrooke, who would later become one of America's most distinguished diplomats and peacemaker in the 1994 Dayton Accords that ended the Bosnia War, was at this time a thirty-six year old enthusiast only two months into his post as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He had been posted to the U.S. Embassy in South Vietnam from 1963 to 1969 and participated in the early rounds of the Paris Peace negotiations, where he and Phan Hiền first met. Holbrooke was also one of the most outspoken advocates for normalization of relations with Vietnam, believing that engagement was the only way to draw Vietnam away from the USSR and towards the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). There was also Holbrooke's overt ambition to dismiss critics of his youthfulness by bagging the first major diplomatic coup of his office: turning the page of the painful and divisive chapter in American history, the Vietnam War, once and for all.²⁶⁹

It was during this meeting that Holbrooke made Hiền the famous offer for unconditional normalization, effective immediately. The U.S. would furthermore withdraw its veto of Vietnam's United Nations membership and lift of the trade embargo as soon as an American embassy was established in Hanoi. At one point Holbrooke even told the Vietnamese chief negotiator: "Mr. Minister, let's leave aside the issues that divided us. Let us go outside and jointly declare to the press that we have decided to normalization relations."²⁷⁰ To his surprise, Hiền replied that normalization could only come with a promise of aid. When Holbrooke reiterated that the U.S. Government did not recognize the legality of the Nixon letter and that his maximum offer was for the U.S. Government to consider humanitarian aid after normalization had

²⁶⁹ Derek H. Chollet and Samantha Power, eds. 2011. *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke in the World*. New York: Public Affairs. 76-161.

²⁷⁰ Chanda. 1986. 152; Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006b. "The Changing Post-War U.S. strategy in Indochina." In Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*. London, UK: Routledge, 74.

been completed, Hiền stood firm.²⁷¹ The next day Holbrooke terminated the talks.

Though publicly spun by Holbrooke as “constructive,” that meeting had decidedly failed. Hoping to elicit sympathy from the American public by employing Hanoi’s standard approach whenever negotiations stalled, Hiền disclosed to the American media for the first time that aid was his condition for normalization. This backfired almost immediately as the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly on May 4 to prohibit U.S. officials even to negotiate “reparation, aid, or any other form of payment” to Vietnam.²⁷² In early May, Vietnamese Communist Party’s daily *Nhân Dân* once again published the Nixon letter,²⁷³ which prompted a furor in the U.S. that eventually forced the State Department to admit to its existence and release its full contents on May 19. But by then, the letter only served to force officials to make profuse assurance that they will not provide aid to Vietnam, quite the opposite of what the Vietnamese had hoped.²⁷⁴

The controversy surrounding the publication of the letter clouded over the next round of talks, which initially scheduled for May 15 but were postponed to June 2. The negotiations went ahead – Holbrooke had nothing to hide, as he had already made his maximum offer – but the atmosphere was poisoned. Hiền revealed for the first time the domestic pressures that he faced, arguing, “The Research Department that gave me the list of twenty MIAs [provided in this meeting as a token of goodwill] will ask me what have I come back with.”²⁷⁵ He therefore stuck to the “package deal” covering not only diplomatic relations but the postwar aid and MIA accounting problems as

²⁷¹ Intelligence Memorandum, “Vietnam: Attitude towards Paris Talks,” May 12, 1977. Document 0000438687. FOIA E-Reading Room.

²⁷² The Ashbrook Amendment passed by a vote of 266 to 131. Section 505 (a). “Public Law 95-105,” August 17, 1977. U.S. Government Printing Office.
<http://gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-91/pdf/STATUTE-91-Pg844.pdf>

²⁷³ *Nhân Dân*, May 4, 1977.

²⁷⁴ Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy after the Capture of Saigon, 1975-1979*. McFarland & Company. London, UK: Routledge. 115-130.

²⁷⁵ Chanda. 1986. 155.

well.²⁷⁶ Vietnam's chief delegate also asked the Carter administration to use "imagination" in persuading the U.S. Congress to lift the restrictions on aid and in resolving "political difficulties."²⁷⁷ Holbrooke then suggested that aid could come through different international organizations, but refused to specify the sum.²⁷⁸

Soon after the talks concluded without any result, U.S. Congress caught wind of this conversation, and the Young Amendment to the Foreign Aid Bill was passed by the House of Representatives on June 22 to prohibit such use of international financial institutions.²⁷⁹ This amendment was only withdrawn in September when Carter promised to direct American representatives to veto any loans to Vietnam and six other countries – which it promptly did in the April 1978 Asian Development Bank session. Thus, the last loophole for the administration to circumvent Congress and provide aid to Vietnam was closed.²⁸⁰

The U.S. nevertheless did withdraw its veto in the United Nations against Vietnamese membership as a gesture of goodwill, allowing Vietnam to become a full member in September and to receive a loan of forty-nine million USD.²⁸¹ During the adherence ceremony U.S. Ambassador Andrew Young expressed his personal support, while President Carter invited new Vietnamese Ambassador to the UN Đinh Bá Thi to a luncheon.²⁸²

In November, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh for the first time revealed to the American negotiators the division within Hanoi's

²⁷⁶ *The Washington Post*, July 3, 1977.

²⁷⁷ Memorandum from Vance to Carter, "US-Vietnamese Talks in Paris," November 29, 1977. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS).

²⁷⁸ Chanda. 1986. 156.

²⁷⁹ Passed by a vote of 228 to 119. Section 505 (a). "Public Law 95-105," August 17, 1977. U.S. Government Printing Office.

<http://gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-91/pdf/STATUTE-91-Pg844.pdf>

²⁸⁰ Edwin A. Martini 2007. *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 33-39.

²⁸¹ Chanda. 1986. 157.

²⁸² "Tập tài liệu của Liên hợp quốc về nạn nhân chiến tranh ở Việt Nam và giúp đỡ Việt Nam xây dựng lại đất nước năm 1977" (United Nations Report on the Vietnamese War Victims and Assisting Vietnam in National Reconstruction). Folder 10226, CPMO, 4.

leadership regarding the issue of normalization of relations with the U.S. Accordingly, two factions continued to exist within the Political Bureau: one believed that normalization should be tied to aid from the U.S., and the other, which had become stronger in recent months, believed that normal relations should be established with the U.S. first and aid would follow as a natural result.²⁸³ To Trinh, this basic disagreement had been the cause of frequent disputes among Politburo members and had created a sense of “malaise” among them. Therefore, normalization with the U.S. had fallen to the fifth place in Vietnam’s list of priority problems:

- A. Exhaustion of stocks of food supplies in Vietnam
- B. Persistent tensions in Southern Vietnam
- C. Border incidents with Democratic Cambodia, supported by the People’s Republic of China (PRC)
- D. Trying to maintain a diplomatic equilibrium between the USSR and the PRC
- E. Normalization of relations with the U.S.²⁸⁴

The reason for the above downplay of reconciliation with the U.S. among Hanoi’s urgent tasks, according to the Foreign Minister, was American “intransigence” on the aid question. Five days later, in a Top Secret-Sensitive Intelligence memorandum to President Carter, National Security Advisor Brzezinski detailed the names within the two factions in Hanoi: Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng and Vice-Premier Lê Thanh Nghị favored normalization of relations with the U.S. prior to resolution of the reconstruction aid issue. However, other senior SRV leaders, notably General Secretary Lê Duẩn and Chairman of the National Assembly Trường Chinh, strongly disagreed and continued to link the two issues.²⁸⁵ Foreign Minister

²⁸³ Intelligence Information Cable. “Statement of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) Foreign Minister on Differences within the SRV Political Bureau regarding Normalization with the U.S.,” November 10, 1977. Document 0000667506, FOIA E-Reading Room.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Information Items,” November 15, 1977. DDRS.

Nguyễn Duy Trinh also indicated that since Vietnam had recently returned twenty-two American remains, it was Washington's turn to make a gesture.²⁸⁶

As a result, one week before Holbrooke left for Paris to begin the third round of normalization talks, Vance summarized to Carter the “three things” that Hanoi realized thus far:

Without abandoning their position on aid, the Vietnamese now seem to recognize three things: that they will not get it; that they need a relationship far more than we do; and that we are under no domestic pressure to normalize.²⁸⁷

Vance hence brought up the “Interests Section” initiative with the Vietnamese, which Carter agreed on. If the Vietnamese offered to exchange trade offices or some non-diplomatic form of representation on condition that Washington lift the trade embargo, Holbrooke would reject and suggest interests section instead. An establishment of interests section or consulates, both of which are important steps but short of full diplomatic relations, would be seen as a constructive proposal yet without lifting the embargo. The Secretary of State cited the successful cases of Cairo and Syria, in which the opening of an autonomous interests section resulted in diplomatic relations later without negative Congressional reactions to any, including the Cuban one.²⁸⁸

As the pressure from the Khmer Rouge built up while the U.S. veto of Vietnamese UN membership was no longer an issue, towards the end of 1977 there was an incentive for Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền to move more quickly on normalization with Washington. Holbrooke and Hiền met for the third round of talks in December 7-10. Perhaps sensing that the impending conflict with China and Cambodia would not bode well for normalization, but also doubtful whether aid would be forthcoming once the fighting in Cambodia begins in earnest, the Vietnamese side for the first time offered to

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Memorandum from Vance to Carter, “US-Vietnamese Talks in Paris,” November 29, 1977. DDRS.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

normalize relations without formal conditions. The only thing Hiền needed was the most informal of pledges that aid would be provided after normalization, telling Holbrooke, “You just whisper in my ear the amount you’ll offer and that is enough.”²⁸⁹ Unfortunately, by this time the legislative walls erected over the summer had severely limited Holbrooke’s options, and he could not promise even the removal of the trade embargo, let alone any sort of aid, following normalization.

When Holbrooke proposed to establish interests section, Hiền refused, saying that Hanoi “will never do what the Chinese did.”²⁹⁰ The Foreign Minister’s refusal of the liaison office offer was predicted on Vietnamese understanding of the Chinese experience. Reciprocal liaison missions were established in Peking and Washington in 1973. As of December 1977, normalization between China and the United States was still uncertain. Accordingly, Hiền rejected what he feared would be an indefinite low-level holding pattern. Even though Hiền’s pleading tone might be an indication of the degree of desperation the Vietnamese attached to the aid issue, his refusal of a liaison office closed off one more option in the sagging negotiations. Holbrooke then held out hope for a final convergence of their positions come the next round of talks scheduled in February 1978 in Hanoi.

Those talks never took place. The spying affair of David Trương in January 1978, in which Vietnamese Ambassador Đinh Bá Thi was convicted as involved, resulted in Thi’s eviction from the United Nations.²⁹¹ Understandably, the Vietnam took the move to be a hostile diplomatic signal and the normalizing process was halted. In February, Vietnam decided to remove the Pol Pot regime at a special meeting of the Party Central Committee. This decision led to a remarkable series of policy moves, suggesting Hanoi’s resignation to confrontation with China and the need for diplomatic preparation. Moreover, in March, Hanoi issued a decree of nationalizing all

²⁸⁹ Chanda. 1986. 156.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ See more on the spying affair in Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a, 144-147.

industry and commerce directly related to production, an order whose consequences fell most heavily on the Chinese business community – the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City. It seemed like Vietnam was preparing for war at two fronts.

On the other hand, February and March 1978 brought important changes to the Carter administration's grand strategy. These months saw Cuban troops play a crucial role in the victory of the Soviet-backed Derg in Ethiopia over the American-backed Somalis.²⁹² With Cuban expeditionary forces once again involved in a brewing conflict in Angola,²⁹³ the U.S. feared that Soviet proxies, possibly including Vietnam, could become a new vehicle for Moscow to assert its will. In its wake there was backlash against the administration as a whole and Vance's State Department in particular for being "soft on Communism."²⁹⁴ This was a direct factor leading Carter to send National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski to China in May to negotiate normalization of Sino-American relations, over Vance and Holbrooke's reservations. As revealed in the next chapters, the Chinese proved more cooperative than the Vietnamese, and a timetable was quickly reached for normalization before the end of the year. In the process, Brzezinski and Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng discussed the importance of "assistance to Southeast Asian efforts to check Soviet support of Vietnamese expansionism."²⁹⁵

In sum, once Carter ruled the White House, both Vietnam and the United States expressed the desire and began the efforts to put the past behind them. However, the Vietnam War's emotional legacy continued to be the main obstacle to normalization of relations. As clearly shown, negotiators on both

²⁹² Odd Arne Westad. 1997. *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations During the Carter Years*. Scandinavian University Press. 283-306.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Cyrus Vance. 1983. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 72-75.

²⁹⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 212.

sides were encumbered by conflicting attitudes over the charged issue of U.S. assistance to the war-torn Vietnamese economy.

Nonetheless, the very source of such barrier did not come from the executive branch in Washington but the legislative one. Throughout 1977, U.S. Congress went on record as rejecting assistance of any kind to Vietnam. Therefore, Hanoi ironically called on the Carter administration to exert more leadership in relation to Congress in order to make a breakthrough possible on the postwar aid issue. It should be noted that for years, during and after the war, the Vietnamese had looked to Congress to challenge and ultimately help force changes in administration policy.

Particularly throughout 1975 and 1976, the Ford administration, out of their bitterness towards the former foe, discouraged any relations with Vietnam. It was the House of Representatives which took the lead in breaking the ice, with the trips to Paris and Hanoi by the Select Committee, and the passage of legislation provisionally lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam – part of the military aid bill vetoed by President Ford. Whereas Liberal Congressmen called for reconciliation, Ford adopted aggressive policies towards Hanoi.

As a result, 1977 witnessed a reversal of U.S. domestic trends as the executive branch opted for reconciliation, while Congressional conservatives jeopardized any chances for diplomatic rapprochement. Whereas the Ford era was characterized by the primacy of domestic politics and the impact of Kissinger-manner strategies on executive policies, the Carter administration shifted to a more balanced approach. It is hence concluded that whereas the Ford and Carter administrations' policies towards Vietnam enormously varied in both aims and means, they shared the same antagonism between the executives and the legislatures, blocking a decisive solution for normalization.

At the same time, Vietnamese patience was running shortly. Radicalism started to emerge in Hanoi, especially amidst constant threats in the country's Southwest border now overtly applauded by Peking. The Carter

administration was informed of the factional division within the Hanoi leadership regarding the possible reconciliation with Washington rather late (November 1977), and did not seem to fully realize how urgent the Vietnamese was in the face of their border insecurities throughout the year. The chance for normalization, as a consequence, was unfortunately missed in the first year of the Carter presidency.

Yet it should be emphasized that even though slowed down at the end of 1977, prospects were still opening for Hanoi-Washington negotiations. As minutely depicted in Chapter 5, these chances technically continued as far as December 1978, until the conclusion of Sino-American normalization, but was significantly narrowed down following National Security Advisor Brzezinski's visit to China in May 1978.

2. Seeking Measures to Approach North Korea

During his 1976 presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter promised to withdraw all American troops stationed in the Republic of Korea (ROK), resulting in the so-called "Carter Chill"²⁹⁶ with regards to a close U.S. ally in the Asia-Pacific region. In his landmark work, Don Oberdorfer concluded that nobody, including President Carter himself, seemed to know precisely the origin of his determination that American forces should be withdrawn from Korea.²⁹⁷ While all the focus, both historically and academically, has been paid to the reactions from Seoul upon an abrupt U.S. policy change by the Carter administration in comparison with that of Ford, little has been known from the Pyongyang side.

As clearly depicted in the next chapter, North Korea apparently welcomed the new owner of the White House. From the end of 1976 to mid-

²⁹⁶ A Chapter title in Don Oberdorfer's signature book *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. Chapter 4 "The Carter Chill."

²⁹⁷ Don Oberdorfer & Robert Carlin. 2014. *Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. New York: Basic Books, 67.

1977, Chairman Kim Il Sung launched at least three attempts for direct contact with Carter via personal letters handed in to the U.S. President by various heads of state from Africa, Europe and Asia, such as Pakistan, Gabon, Yugoslavia and Rumania. It was likely that Carter's troop withdrawal plan resulted in a "cautious optimism" in Pyongyang that followed the 1975 fall of Saigon, but quickly turned sour during the Axe Murder incident of August 1976.

Meanwhile, South Korea found ways to cope with the U.S. President-elect's plan. During a 1977 New Year's press conference, President Park Chung Hee stated that he would not oppose the withdrawal of American troops stationed in Korea after the conclusion of a South-North Mutual Non-Aggression Pact. However, unprepared for the "Carter's zeal" regarding North Korea,²⁹⁸ Seoul was not happy with the U.S. administration's attempt to engage Pyongyang. Ambassador Richard Sneider was questioned by the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) about the list of fourteen nations with which the U.S. Government did not have diplomatic relations; the Koreans inquired as to whether the list included North Korea.²⁹⁹

Clearly concerned, President Park paid close attention to the negotiating process between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). He was afraid that the talks would lead to a U.S. recognition of the SRV and pave the way for Vietnam's entry into the United Nations, which would in turn swing two votes against the ROK on the Korean question.³⁰⁰ Secretary of State Cyrus Vance recognized that although U.S. normalization with Vietnam would not directly affect South Korea, it would

²⁹⁸ Declassified documents reveal that North America Division 2 of South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not even mention "North Korea" in its forecast report on Carter's policy vis-à-vis Korea. "Forecast on Presidential Candidate Carter's Policy on ROK and Analysis on It," November 1976. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118400>

²⁹⁹ Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "MOFA Inquiries About List of 14 Nations with which U.S. Desires to Normalize Relations," February 18, 1977. The National Archives Access to Archival Databases (AAD).

³⁰⁰ Telegram from Ambassador Sneider to Secretary of State Vance, "U.S.-Vietnamese Relations," February 10, 1977. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS).

trigger worries about a possible U.S. move to improve relations with North Korea.³⁰¹ Therefore, while South Korean media reported in great detail of the Woodcock Commission's visit to Hanoi to opening chances for normalization,³⁰² the Carter administration kept the Park government closely informed of the negotiating process with Vietnam throughout 1977 and 1978.³⁰³

At the same time, Carter's plan for Korea faced opposition in Washington, especially from the Congress. Before leaving office, Gerald Ford warned that sudden changes in Korea policy would be harmful and negatively affect U.S. relations with Japan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Carter's White House staff was also suspicious of North Korean intentions.

Nonetheless, the National Security Council (NSC) fully recognized the importance of Carter's Korea plan for the very North Koreans. NSC staffer Michael Armacost concluded, "The U.S. is the key to North Korea's strategy."³⁰⁴ He particularly suspected DPRK "flexibility" in achieving its aim of reunifying the Korean peninsula on its own terms, including the North's proposal for inter-Korean dialogue, yet at the same time seeking secret communications with the U.S. In his words:

We need not play their game on this. Promotion of our interests in Korea requires resumption of a serious North-South dialogue. That can come only

³⁰¹ Cable from Secretary of State Vance to the Embassies, "East Asian Attitudes toward U.S. Normalization with Vietnam Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals," March 15, 1977. The National Archives AAD.

³⁰² The front pages of *The Korean Herald*, *The Korea Times* and *Korea JoongAnh Daily* in the later half of March 1977 all filled with pictures and reports about the Woodcock team's visit to Hanoi.

³⁰³ For example, despite its "confidential basis," Assistant Secretary Richard Holbrooke briefed South Korean Foreign Minister Pak Tong Jin in details of the state of dialogue between Vietnam and the U.S. Government. Telegram from Seoul, "Tour D'Horizon with ROK Foreign Minister Park – International Issues," September 23, 1978. DDRS.

³⁰⁴ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "Contact and Communications with North Korea," February 28, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's Country File (NSA6), Box 43, Folder "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, 1/77-1/81," Carter Presidential Library (CPL). 3.

when Kim recognizes that he cannot hope to resolve Korean issues behind Seoul's back.³⁰⁵

Armacost therefore suggested the U.S. to try and take the upper hand in dealing with the North. In February 1977, he advised National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski or Secretary of State Cyrus Vance not to receive a letter from North Korean Foreign Minister Heo Dam, which had been carried by a friend of Jerry Cohen, a Marxist;³⁰⁶ this was another attempt by Pyongyang at direct communication with the Carter administration. In his turn, Brzezinski advised President Carter not to pay attention to the reports of a North Korean proposal for talks with South Korea due to its "limited significance," concluding that "the North was playing an old record."³⁰⁷

During Carter's first year in office, North Korean leader Kim Il Sung tried to approach him privately for direct talks that would exclude South Korea. Two attempts came via letters to Carter in May and October 1977 from President Ali Bongo of Gabon and Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, respectively.³⁰⁸ However, the U.S. was unwilling to accept these terms that would mean cutting out its ally, and reacted to such proposals carefully. For example, the Carter Cabinet delayed an official response to President Bongo's letter for almost a month, and the reply letter from the American President ran cautiously as:

We have made clear that we are prepared for such improvement provided North Korea's allies take steps to improve relations with South Korea. We have also explained that we would hold discussions with the North on the future of the peninsula only if representatives of the Republic of Korea take

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Memorandum for Brzezinski from Armacost, "Evening Report," February 17, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's (NSA) Staff Material, Far East, Box 2, Armacost's Chron File, Folder "2/18-28/77," Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

³⁰⁷ Memorandum for Carter from Brzezinski, "North Korean Proposal for Discussions of Reunification with South Korea," March 14, 1977. NSA6, Box 43. Folder "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, 1/77-1/81," CPL.

³⁰⁸ Memo for Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "HIRC Request for Our Responses to NK Approaches," March 30, 1978. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA).

part. We do not intend to deal unilaterally with North Korea without the Republic of Korea Government to participate.³⁰⁹

At the same time, President Park Chung Hee's strong opposition to U.S. troop withdrawal forced Carter to hold back information regarding his initiatives with the North and consent to his NSC advisors of not accepting Pyongyang's offer for contact. The best Carter could do was instruct his staff to provide a thorough study of Pyongyang and its relationships with other Communist states. As discussed later in this chapter, the U.S. proceeded cautiously on North Korea in the first six months of the Carter presidency before officially embarking on a diplomatic initiative.

2.1. Observing Pyongyang

Washington carefully considered Pyongyang's reactions to the troop withdrawal plan, an issue the NSC thought "as important as it is conjectural."³¹⁰ Various courses of action from the North had been drafted a week before the Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting on Presidential Review Memorandum/ PRM-13 of troop withdrawal was scheduled. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had also investigated the possible reactions by Pyongyang's major Communist allies. In a report discussed during NSC meeting at the end of April, the CIA anticipated the below points:

19. Moscow and Peking would be motivated to discourage Kim from embarking on a major conflict with all of its troublesome and uncertain implications for Japanese security policy, bilateral relations with the U.S., and the power balance in East Asia. But, if Kim become convinced that the U.S. no longer posed a

³⁰⁹ Letter from Jimmy Carter to El Hadj Omar Bongo, June 24, 1977. Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, "Letter to President of Gabon," June 23, 1977. NSA Staff Material, Far East, Box 3, Armacost's Chron File, Folder "6/28-30/77." CPL; Memorandum of Mike Armacost to David Aaron, "HIRC Request for Our Response to North Korean Approaches," May 31, 1978. NSA Staff Material, Far East, Box 6, Armacost's Chron File, Folder "3/22-31/78." CPL. Underline added by the author.

³¹⁰ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, "North Korea Reactions to U.S. Forces Reductions," April 12, 1977. NSA6, Box 43. Folder "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, 1/77-1/81," CPL.

credible deterrent and that other signs of weakness or instability in the South had opened the door for a quick victory, it is doubtful that either Moscow or Peking would be willing or able to place a veto on the venture.

20. Moreover, the buildup of offensive military capabilities in the North and its growing self-reliance in arms production suggest that Pyongyang recognizes that it must be able to mount a surprise attack without Soviet and Chinese support. We believe that the North is capable of such an operation.

21. Moscow and Peking no doubt are anticipating North Korean pressure for increased military assistance in the event that a U.S. force reduction leads to a substantial upgrading of South Korea military capabilities. The Chinese in recent years have been more forthcoming than Moscow in supplying military assistance. But Pyongyang would have to turn primarily to Moscow since China cannot supply the advanced equipment North Korea would require to match a U.S. assistance package for the South.³¹¹

Repeated these points in a later report in June, the CIA further concluded that both Moscow and Peking saw the U.S. as generally on the defensive internationally, and more specifically as unwilling to become engaged in a future land war in Asia. The CIA also saw “important differences” in the ways the Chinese and the Soviets viewed, respectively, an American reduction of forces in South Korea. Whereas the troop withdrawal would not significantly complicate U.S.-Soviet relations or lead Moscow to conclude that the U.S. was less of a global adversary, it could, felt the CIA, raise some troublesome implications for Peking.³¹² This is because Washington saw Chinese support for U.S. military presence in South Korea not only as a deterrent to rash action by Kim Il Sung, but also as a strategic counterweight to the threat of “Soviet military encirclement of China.”³¹³

If we look at the situation in Indochina, it is clear that the predictions of the CIA proved to be accurate. Chinese fear of a Soviet “encirclement”

³¹¹ CIA and National Intelligence Reports on Ground Troop Withdrawals, April 28, 1977. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. Underline added by the author.

³¹² Central Intelligence Agency, “U.S. Ground Forces Withdrawal: Korean Stability and Foreign Relations,” June 7, 1977. CREST

³¹³ Ibid.

resulted in its leaders' decision to support the Pol Pot regime (the Khmer Rouge) in Cambodia beginning in September 1977 and —with the underground support of President Carter himself—to launch a war against Vietnam, a country which Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping later called “a Cuba of Asia”. As long as the U.S. maintained the ability to project military force as an Asia-Pacific power, thus blocking the expansion of Soviet influence in the region, China would be pleased. All of these points will be analyzed in great detail later throughout the dissertation.

On May 5, 1977, Jimmy Carter issued Presidential Directive/ NSC-12, ordering a substantial troop withdrawal from Korea, including the removal of one brigade by the end of 1978 and the complete removal of all ground forces by 1981-1982.³¹⁴ A State memorandum (concurring in by a Defense memo) offering recommendations for public and diplomatic handling of troop withdrawals was prepared by National Security Advisor Brzezinski to President Carter right afterwards. In this document, both the State and Defense recommended that Washington to keep East Asian allies informed of the plan, using existing channels to clarify U.S. intentions to the PRC and the USSR. Also, it was suggested that the U.S. to “hew closely to its current line of making any improvement of relations with North Korea contingent on reciprocal steps by Pyongyang’s allies toward Seoul.”³¹⁵ This shows the emergence of an intention on the American side in bringing in the North’s patron states and to some extent plans in pressuring the PRC and the USSR to take action.

The South Korean Government showed disappointment, but, viewing Carter’s determination to implement his plan, accepted the U.S. ground force withdrawal. In a consultation meeting between President Park Chung Hee and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Phillip Habib on May 25, Park harshly questioned Habib about U.S. plans in the event of a North Korean

³¹⁴ Presidential Directive/NSC-12, “U.S. Policy in Korea,” May 5, 1977. DNSA.

³¹⁵ Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Your Meeting with General Brown and Phil Habib,” May 20, 1977, NSA6, Box 43, Folder “Korea, Republic of, 5-6/77,” CPL.

attack, and whether the U.S. was prepared to provide air and naval support.³¹⁶ Moreover, Park did not respond to a query from Habib's as to whether the U.S. could be helpful in facilitating a North-South Korean dialogue, particularly as Washington was about to enter into serious discussions with Peking about normalization. Park's refusal to consider dialogue with the North, assisted by the U.S. and China, shows his hardline attitude towards the two powers' attempted interference in the Korean peninsula.

To calm its ally in Seoul, Washington continuously announced U.S. clear-cut intention vis-à-vis Pyongyang. For instance, Michael Armacost emphasized in a public White House briefing in mid-June the future agenda regarding the Korean peninsula as:

Our basic diplomatic stance will not change. We will refuse to enter any bilateral discussions on Korea's future with the North unless South Korea is present. We will continue to affirm that we are prepared to improve relationship with the North provided there are some reciprocal steps by North Korea's allies toward Seoul. And we will continue to endorse the entry of both Koreas into the UN on a provisional basis, pending some progress towards reunification.³¹⁷

In July, U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance reprised Henry Kissinger's old notion of "cross-recognition"—the USSR and the PRC would recognize the ROK and the U.S. and Japan recognize the DPRK—and concurrent recognition of both Koreas within the United Nations. Vance's actions triggered vocal disapproval from Pyongyang regarding the U.S.'s policy of "brutal interference in Korea's internal affairs and endorsement of Korean division."³¹⁸ North Korean centralized press, radio and television

³¹⁶ Telegram from the American Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal: Consultations with President Park," May 25, 1977. NSA6, Box 43, Folder "Korea, Republic of, 5-6/77," CPL.

³¹⁷ White House Briefing, June 16, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's Office File (NSA15), Country Chron File, Box 3, Folder "Asia: 1977," Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

³¹⁸ Telegram 066667 from the Romanian Embassy in Pyeongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 7, 1977. Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, Charles Kraus (2013),

actively campaigned against these American ideas.³¹⁹ At this moment Chairman Kim also tried to show North Korean neutrality upon Peking-Moscow confrontation, answering foreign reporters that the relationship between the Soviet Union and China “is a topic for the Soviet and Chinese people to comment on, not a matter for us to explain.”³²⁰

Within the same month, another security crisis erupted on the Korean peninsula. U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter was shot down by North Korean troops over the eastern end of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), killing three crewmembers and one was captured alive. To the U.S. surprise, the DPRK Government acted “prudently and reasonably”³²¹ in the aftermath of the incident, compared to the near-catastrophe over the Axe Murder Incident a year earlier. After three days of negotiations in Panmunjom, an agreement was reached and the North quickly returned the survivor and the bodies of three other crewmen. Pyongyang seemed to try hard not to jeopardize Carter’s announced plan to withdraw U.S. ground troops from South Korea. The handling of the July 14 downing thus “marked a milestone of sorts in North Korea-American relations.”³²²

On July 27, 1977, the Carter administration decided to take one step forward, constructing a diplomatic strategy to accompany the troop withdrawals. President Carter agreed to his staff’s idea that talks between South and North Korea with or without PRC participation was “the missing dimension” in the troop withdrawal policy.³²³ A scenario was enabled for the first time: tripartite talks (North Korea-U.S.-South Korea) or talks that would

“The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 171. (Hereafter “The Carter Chill”)

³¹⁹ Pyongyang equated this “cross-recognition” formula with the “two Koreas” notion that it thought was conspired by the “splittists” to prolong the division of the Korean peninsula. “DPRK Government Memorandum: Creation of ‘Two Koreas’ is the Basic Principle of U.S. Policy towards Korea,” *The Pyongyang Times*, February 11, 1978. 1.

³²⁰ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 21, 1977; *The Pyongyang Times*, July 23, 1977.

³²¹ *The New York Times*, July 16-20, 1977.

³²² Byung Chul Koh. 1984. *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea*. University of California Press, 170.

³²³ Memorandum for Mike Armacost from David Aaron, “Talks between North Korea and South Korea,” July 26, 1977. NSA 6, Box 43, Folder “Korea, Republic of, 7/77,” CPL.

involve the major powers in the region, including Japan. The U.S. would move forward with the troop withdrawal plan in parallel with dialogue with both Koreas. The President instructed Brzezinski and Vance to “go ahead and move as suggested,” while Deputy National Security Advisor David Aaron instructed Michael Amarcost to sketch out appropriate instructions to the Department of State.³²⁴ This decision was made for several reasons.

The first was the American evaluation of the great significance the Chinese attached to the presence of U.S. forces in Korea and thus, the problems that would follow the reduction of these forces. The second was a positive signal from Pyongyang. Taking into account the rapid progress of Sino-American normalization of relations and the current tilt of Pyongyang towards Peking, the U.S. had important reasons to move forward with the North. As a result, despite Seoul’s opposition to the idea, Washington quickly launched the very first initiative: wooing Seoul into talking with Pyongyang.

2.2. Reviving Inter-Korean Dialogue

The idea of North-South Korean dialogue was first introduced by the South Korean Government in 1971 as one of Seoul’s reactions to the Nixon Doctrine, which resulted in the gradual U.S. withdrawal from the Asian geopolitical sphere and the Vietnam quagmire. Following the July 4, 1972 North-South Korean joint statement were short-lived efforts from both sides for true dialogue and cooperation.³²⁵ This process of dialogue was actually used by President Park Chung Hee to strengthen his political power.³²⁶ However, once it was revived by the Carter administration, Park strongly opposed the idea for which he had been the primary proponent.

³²⁴ Memorandum from Amarcost to Brzezinski, “Talks between North Korea and South Korea,” August 4, 1977. NSA Staff Material, Far East, Box 4, Amarcost’s Chron File, Folder “8/1-15/77.” CPL.

³²⁵ Khue Dieu Do. 2016. “The Nixon Doctrine as its Impact on U.S. Relations with Asia Allies (South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines),” *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 2, No. 2. 160-174.

³²⁶ Ibid.

South Korea's negative reaction was based on two main reasons. First, it opposed the idea of leaving China out and recalled Washington's most recent proposal, which had called for four-party talks that included the Chinese. Seoul, following developments related to the Sino-American rapprochement, was trying to develop a relationship with China and excluding the Chinese might diminish Seoul's prospects for achieving this objective. Second, and more importantly, there was anxiety on the South Korean side of a repetition of the Paris Peace talks in which trilateral discussions between the U.S., North Vietnam, and South Vietnam served essentially as a "cover" for bilateral discussions between Washington and Hanoi. In a conversation with National Security Advisor Brzezinski in May 1978, right after his China visit—during which the intention for trilateral talks was directly discussed—President Park showed his explicit disdain for the idea. In his words, "in such circumstances, the ROK would look simply like a bridesmaid with the United States and North Korea serving as the bride and the groom."³²⁷

Seoul's fear of a possible Washington-Pyongyang "wheel and deal" was not unfounded. Right after the decision was made in July 1977, the East Asia Inter-Departmental Group (EA-IG), chaired by the State Department, started to prepare a study of diplomatic initiatives on Korea designed to encourage an early resumption of North-South talks with or without U.S. involvement.³²⁸ There was even concrete deadline for such initiatives: "prior to the fall [Thirty-second] session of the UNGA [United Nations General Assembly]." ³²⁹ Brzezinski instructed the EA-IG that such diplomatic initiatives should not exclude an analysis of ways in which the implementation of the troop withdrawal plan could be used to promote such a result of inter-Korean dialogue.³³⁰ Essentially, it means the Carter administration was going as far as using the troop withdrawal issue as a "bargaining chip" to obtain

³²⁷ Memorandum of Conversation between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Park Chung Hee, May 28, 1978. DNSA.

³²⁸ Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance, "Talks Between North Korea and South Korea," August 5, 1977. DNSA. 2.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid. Square brackets added by the author.

political concessions from North Korea. NSC staffer Michael Armacost, while was wary about the rationality of such an idea, supported his boss, saying:

I am not sure there is anything to look at here given the way we have defined our policy publicly. But since there is no precise terminal date for the third withdrawal stage, there is at least a small opening for this.³³¹

As a factual matter, Armacost seemed to be the one within the Carter's White House with least enthusiasm about the idea of Seoul-Washington-Pyongyang trilateral meeting. Similar to the way he immediately opposed sending the Woodcock delegation to Hanoi once the trip was initiated, the NSC staff member quickly emphasized to his boss the long list of the "premises" that should guide U.S. diplomatic approach to the Korean issue, thinking "unless we are clear about these premises, an activist diplomatic approach could be troublesome."³³² In other words, the United States would turn to an "officious mediator" if it acted without certain ground rules. For example, Armacost thought "this is not the most propitious time to launch initiatives on the diplomatic front,"³³³ that "it is not incumbent on us constantly to produce new initiatives simply because the North has not responded,"³³⁴ and that "Carter's zeal" would only lead to further consequences. In his private words to Brzezinski:

By speaking frequently of our desire to establish relations with those 14 governments with whom we have no regular diplomatic contact, we have generated expectations in Seoul and Tokyo that we may contemplate bilateral dealings with Pyongyang in the near future.³³⁵

As Brzezinski's key China advisor, Michael Armacost suggested instead quadripartite talks that included Peking. He also thought of a six-

³³¹ Memorandum from Mike Armacost to Robert Rich, "EA-IG Study of Additional Diplomatic Initiatives for Korea," August 17, 1977. DDRS.

³³² Memorandum from Armacost to Brzezinski, "Talks between North Korea and South Korea," August 4, 1977. NSA Staff Material, Far East, Box 4, Armacost's Chron File, Folder "8/1-15/77." CPL.

³³³ Ibid. 2.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid. 3.

power conference (including the USSR and Japan) as “a superficially attractive variation on this proposal,” though expected that the Chinese would “vigorously oppose.”³³⁶

While doubts began raising on the North Korean side of the real attitude of the Chinese regarding the Korean issue in the face of Carter’s troop withdrawal plan, Pyongyang did in fact receive Peking’s support during Secretary of State Vance’s visit to China in August 1977. In meetings, Foreign Minister Huang Hua criticized Carter’s half-hearted troop withdrawal policy and the warlike actions of the Park Chung Hee Government.³³⁷ Meanwhile, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping advised the U.S. Secretary of State that the Korean issue belonged in the same category as the question of “two Chinas, two Germanys, two Vietnams, and the two Koreas.”³³⁸ Citing Vietnam as a typical example, Deng said that the struggle for reunification was inevitable and the issue of division would be solved eventually, whether it took one hundred or one thousand years.³³⁹

In October, North Korea aimed another indirect request for a meeting with U.S. officials, this time was broached in a letter from President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, delivered to Carter personally by Yugoslav Vice President Edvard Kardelj. Through Tito, Chairman Kim Il Sung suggested that a trilateral talks that included the Republic of Korea could be possible only “when Park Chung Hee is removed from power in South Korea,” and that “another personality, instead of him, should participate in the negotiations.”³⁴⁰ Carter read the message “intently,” telling Kardelj that his administration was interested in initiating talks with the North Koreans, however South Korean

³³⁶ Ibid. 2.

³³⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, “US-Soviet Relations; Europe; Yugoslavia; Middle East; Africa; Japan; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: Volume XIII: China, 189. (Hereafter FRUS v.13)

³³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, “International Issues; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. FRUS v.13. 204.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Memorandum from Robert Hunter to Brzezinski, “Letter to Njegova Ekselencija Gospodin James Earl Carter, Predsjednik Sjedinjenih Americkih, Drazva,” October 7, 1977. White House Central Files (WHCF), Subject File, Box CO 67, Folder “Confidential, 1/20/77-1/20/81,” CPL. 6.

envoys must also participate “with equal rights.”³⁴¹ He further emphasized to Kardelj that:

a) the Carter administration considers that discussing the Korean issue at the UN is not likely to be conducive to the proper conditions for finding an adequate solution to the situation in the region;

...

c) the US does not oppose a direct dialogue with North Korean envoys, however South Korean representatives must also participate since the US cannot accept excluding South Korea due to its binding obligation under bilateral treaties, as well as to the potential negative reactions South Korea’s exclusion would trigger in Asia, particularly in Japan.³⁴²

Meanwhile, Carter replied Tito in a restrained manner, saying that Washington encouraged “direct discussions between the parties most directly concerned.”³⁴³

During his visit to Washington in March 1978, Tito proposed to President Carter the idea of Yugoslavians as mediators for tripartite talks on Korea, with the South Korean Government as a full participant but without the presence of President Park Chung Hee himself. Carter apparently rejected this proposal,³⁴⁴ as did Brzezinski when Nicolae Ceaușescu, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party and President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, suggested a similar framework for trilateral talks. The anti-Soviet National Security Advisor in fact told the Rumanians that “he was surprised that they were so busy promoting the Soviet line on Korea and that they

³⁴¹ Telegram 085374 From the Romanian Embassy in Washington, DC to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The DPRK-US Dialogue Attempts, Outcomes Forthcoming,” October 22, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114880>

³⁴² Ibid. Underline added by the author.

³⁴³ Letter from Jimmy Carter to Marshal Josip Broz Tito, October 7, 1977. White House Central Files (WHCF), Subject File, Box CO 67, Folder “Confidential, 1/20/77-1/20/81,” CPL.

³⁴⁴ Carter strongly confirmed this issue to Park in a personal letter. Letter from Jimmy Carter to Park Chung Hee, May 17, 1978. President’s Personal Foreign Affairs Files, Box 2, Folder “Korea, Republic of, 5/78-11/80,” CPL.

should stick to areas with which they had greater familiarity.”³⁴⁵ Brzezinski further emphasized to Ceaușescu that the Romanian President “was wasting his time.”³⁴⁶

Meanwhile, according to the observation of some Australian diplomats in Peking, after retaining Chinese backing in the latter half of 1977, North Korea was able to reestablish a close relationship with the Soviets.³⁴⁷ The Kremlin also responded positively: in January 1978, Dinmukhamed Akhmedovich Kunayev, member of the Soviet Politburo, headed a Soviet delegation to Pyongyang. During his visit, Kunayev delivered the Order of Lenin to Kim Il Sung and agreed to expand cultural and trade relations with the North.³⁴⁸ In May, the Soviet Government sent an invitation to Kim Il Sung to visit the USSR and Kim accepted.³⁴⁹

To check the rise of Soviet influence in North Korea, Peking quickly planned a visit to Pyongyang by Chairman Hua Guofeng. No Chairman of the Communist Party of China had gone abroad in twenty years; accordingly, the visit marked a milestone in China’s efforts to strengthen foreign relations with neighboring countries. Hua’s Pyongyang visit on May 5-10, 1978 turned out to be highly successful, as the two sides reached “a full identity of views on the issues discussed,” including direct contact between the DPRK and the U.S.³⁵⁰ Moreover, the Chinese expressed a notably moderate position toward both the U.S. and South Korea. This was evidenced by both the absence of military personnel within the delegation of Hua and the rejection of North Korea’s

³⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation Between Takeo Fukuda and Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 23, 1978. DNSA.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Letter from C.G. Woodard to Andrew Peacocks, “DPRK: The Year in Review,” 3 January 1978. “The Carter Chill,” 264.

³⁴⁸ Telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Ambassador in the United Kingdom, March 31, 1978. “The Carter Chill,” 291.

³⁴⁹ Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President, “Information Items,” May 8, 1978. DDRS.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

request for military aid. Hua also made it clear that he objected to the U.S.-North-South Korea tripartite talks.³⁵¹

Washington observed these developments within the Communist bloc with great interest. The CIA, while maintaining its initial evaluation that both the Chinese and Soviets held little enthusiasm for Kim Il Sung's reunification efforts, now predicted that Kim would abandon his efforts to preserve a balance in ties with Moscow and Peking, and might even consider aligning with one or the other.³⁵² The CIA acknowledged Pyongyang's great concern over the possibility of a Korean settlement imposed by the major powers, which was best reflected in its intense attacks on various proposals for "two Koreas" or "cross-recognition." An important CIA report prior to Brzezinski's visit to China in May 1978 concluded that his trip would promote even greater anxiety in Pyongyang.³⁵³

Sensing that China was trying to regain total influence over North Korea, and that the concern of great power politics on the side of the North was rising, Washington decided to seek a "China solution." The plan for trilateral talks, therefore, was one of the key issues raised during Brzezinski's talks with top Chinese leaders in May 1978. Moreover, as deeply analyzed in Chapter 5, it was also follows Brzezinski's China trip that U.S. normalization initiative with Vietnam was seriously under reconsideration.

In short, what was widely observed from the Carter administration's Korea policy was a volte-face, a reversal from the "insurance policy" of the Ford-Kissinger team. President Carter proved to be willing to take risk in designing and determined in implementing bold initiatives, particularly with regards to the Korean peninsula. What this study hopes to highlight is the

³⁵¹ Kim Hakjoon. 1987. *Unification Policies of South and North Korea, 1945~1991: A Comparative Study*. Seoul National University, 379-380.

³⁵² Central Intelligence Agency, National Foreign Assessment Center, "The Seoul-Pyeongyang Dialogue on Reunification: Origins, Decline, and Prospects," May 10, 1978. DORS.

³⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, "The Pyeongyang-Beijing-Moscow Triangle," May 10, 1978. Remote Archives Capture (RAC), CPL.

“North Koreans aspect” of such distinct policy shift, emphasizing not the “Carter chill” (by withdrawing U.S. troops from South Korea and criticizing Seoul’s violation of human rights) but the “Carter zeal” (by seeking ways to engage the DPRK through diplomatic talks, either bilateral or trilateral).

If the focus is adequately placed on North Korea-related materials, it is unveiled that Carter had in mind a parallel plan for the two Koreas: ground force withdrawal in the South and diplomatic contact with the North. While many view his attempts to establish contact with North Korea as merely a way to facilitate his troop withdrawal plan in South Korea, this research argues that it was Carter’s regionalist vision of world affairs both prior to and during the early stage of his presidency that led him to approach Pyongyang. Chairman Kim Il Sung could not be more rejoice, as Kim privately approached the U.S. President as soon as he won the 1976 election, and throughout his first year in office constantly proposed an individual meeting with him without the participation of South Korean representative.

With his strong belief that the U.S. should have normal relations with every country, Carter might have accepted Kim’s proposal for direct talks had he could do so in his personal name. Still there was the Cold War alliance framework that restricted the new President’s bold initiative in engaging North Korea. In other words, Carter could not shake hands with Kim Il Sung behind President Park Chung Hee’s back. As a result, the Carter administration was circumspect at first in responding to Pyongyang’s proposals. But beginning in July 1977, it became more evident that the North Koreans were tilting towards Peking, and the Chinese were paying close attention to U.S. Korea policy, especially the troop withdrawal plan. Having high hopes in the progress of Sino-American normalization at the turn of 1978, particularly ahead of National Security Advisor Brzezinski’s trip to Peking, the U.S. was decisive in putting forth a “China solution” to the Korean issue.

3. Testing the Attitudes of China

The year 1977 brought new political leaders to power in Washington and Peking. Jimmy Carter succeeded Gerald Ford as the U.S. President in January, finally ending the long national sting surrounding Watergate. Carter now had a mandate to put forward new initiatives in domestic and foreign policy, and completing the normalization of Sino-American relations was one of his objectives. In China, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, who was rehabilitated in the middle of 1977, soon mounted a challenge to Premier Hua Guofeng's leadership. Within just a few months of his political reappearance, Deng had regained substantial control over Chinese domestic and foreign policy making.³⁵⁴ With a new American leader and stable Chinese leadership, prospects seemed high for diplomatic normalization.

The four key actors from the American side, including the President himself, his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Council (NSC) staffer Michel Oksenberg wrote abundantly on China in their memoirs.³⁵⁵ Scholars have also dwelled on Brzezinski's visit to China in May 1978, a decisive move that largely contributed to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Peking on January 1, 1979. This research, therefore, tries a different approach. Using declassified materials, it aims to highlight the other unattended yet crucial aspects throughout the process of Sino-American negotiations of normalization, emphasizing the role of the other actors besides the National Security Advisor.

For Moscow and especially Peking, the interest was not just placed on President Carter himself but the fact that he brought a different team of advisers with their own distinctive views of America's role in the world to the

³⁵⁴ Chi Wang. 2014. *The United States and China since World War II: A Brief History*. New York: Routledge. 97. Harry Harding. 1992. *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutions. 69.

³⁵⁵ Jimmy Carter. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. New York: Bantam Books; Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux; Cyrus Vance. 1983. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster; Michel Oksenberg. 1982. "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 61.

White House. As a moderate and even-handed lawyer, Cyrus Vance argued that the United States should not attach top priority to U.S.-China diplomatic normalization. He was afraid that any demonstrable tilt toward Peking would jeopardize the important negotiations with the Soviet Union with respect to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II and would upset some Senators whose support was needed to ratify the highly controversial Panama Canal Treaty.³⁵⁶ Therefore, the Secretary of State strongly believed that American approach to both of the Communist giants was that any moves toward China could only go in tandem with improvements in Soviet-American relations. Carter at the beginning of his presidency seemed to lean in favor of Vance.

As a result, the Carter administration assigned lower priority to Sino-American normalization than to other issues. Harry Harding, a prominent U.S.-China relations expert, points out that China was not even one of the subjects addressed by the first wave of Presidential Review Memorandums (PRMs) set forth by the incoming NSC at its first informal meeting on January 5, 1977, two weeks before the new administration was inaugurated.³⁵⁷

Still, soon after taking office, the Carter administration began a review of U.S. policy toward China, not excluding the possibility of normalizing relations with Peking. The result was a cautious and skeptical PRM-24,³⁵⁸ in which the NSC laid out different options for Carter regarding relations with the PRC and policy towards the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan). Carter in February 1977 invited Huang Zhen, Chief of the Chinese Liaison Office in Washington, to the White House and expressed his welcome of a visit by high-level PRC officials. Huang frankly replied Carter that “as long as there is a Taiwanese ambassador in Washington, this will not be possible.”³⁵⁹ The President then named Leonard Woodcock, who led the American delegation to Hanoi in March, to head the American liaison mission in Peking and showed

³⁵⁶ Vance. 1983. 75-83.

³⁵⁷ Harding. 1992. 70.

³⁵⁸ Harding. 1992. 70-74; Scott Kaufman. 2008. *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 131-132.

³⁵⁹ Carter. 1982. 189.

his wish to see Woodcock becoming the first U.S. Ambassador. He also added his son, Chip Carter, to the bipartisan Congressional delegation to China as a gesture of his personal interest.³⁶⁰

However, when initial contacts with Peking came to a deadlock and the National Security Advisor bombarded the President with suggestions on how to build up a strategic relationship with the Chinese, Carter told Brzezinski that “we should not ass-kiss them the way Nixon and Kissinger did, and also be careful not to antagonize domestic constituencies.”³⁶¹ Moreover, it should be noted that during the 1976 election campaign, Carter showed his cautiousness of the future of Taiwan and American relationship with that island. He said, for example:

I would like assurances that the people of Taiwan... be free of military persuasion or domination from mainland China. That may not be a possibility; if it is not, then I would be reluctant to give up our relationship with the Republic of China.³⁶²

The President was preoccupied of the ways in which ties with Taipei was cut without incurring the charge that the United States was betraying an old and faithful ally. Therefore, it is concluded that at the beginning of his presidency, Carter remained concerned of the Taiwan issue, while supporting a modest and restrained approach towards Peking. He decided to test the waters but had no intention to rapidly normalize relations with China.

3.1. The Stalemate around Taiwan and Moscow

³⁶⁰ In a handwritten letter to Chairman Hua Guofeng, the President wrote: “I want to take advantage of my son’s visit to your country to express my personal good wishes to you and your colleagues, and my thanks for your hospitality. I hope that we can work together to promote the common objectives of our people and yours.” Letter from Carter to Hua Kou-feng, April 6, 1977. Brzezinski Material – President’s Correspondence with Foreign Leaders Files (NSA 3), Folder “China, People’s Republic of: Chairman Hua Kou-feng, 4/77-9/80.” Carter Presidential Library (CLP).

³⁶¹ Brzezinski. 1983. 200.

³⁶² Recited from Gaddis Smith. 1986. *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years*. Hill & Wang. 86-87.

While President Carter had sent the Woodcock Commission to Hanoi to open talks regarding normalization merely two months after his inauguration, not until late April 1977 that a U.S. Congressional delegation accompanied by Brzezinski's top China advisor Michel Oksenberg started to departure for Peking. Once arrived, the China specialist of the National Security Council (NSC) realized that Chinese politics, already quite traditional before Mao and Zhou's deaths, had become even more so. The "brilliance" and "imagination" which Mao and Zhou had brought was missing. In Peking, Oksenberg felt "the reassertion of a traditional, somewhat unimaginative and less supple mandarin who believe they perform a favor by allowing foreign supplicants to hear their virtuous words."³⁶³ He acknowledged that the political situation in China remained unsettled, giving an impression of uncertainty, which accounted for how much the Chinese leaders were preoccupied with their domestic political problems.³⁶⁴

With respect to Peking's foreign policy and Sino-American relations, the main Chinese concern remained the global strategic posture of the United States. The Chinese repeatedly condemned the "appeasement" posture of Washington in the SALT talks and even more so in Africa. Oksenberg could not but disappointed realizing that China drew no distinctions between Carter and Ford administration policies toward the USSR.³⁶⁵ The Chinese expressed no impatience with the U.S. over failure to establish full diplomatic relations, although they referred to the "debt" Washington owed Peking on this score. Peking took their usual stance on the Taiwan issue, going out of their way to stress that it was an internal matter that would ultimately be resolved by force. Any flexibility of theirs was to be found not on the modality but on the timing of reunification, Oksenberg concluded.

³⁶³ Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #10," Mike Oksenberg's summary of the U.S. Congressional delegation's and his trip to China, April 22, 1977. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS). 1.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 2.

The NSC staffer estimated that one reason for Chinese tough rhetoric on the Taiwan issue might well be a lingering concern, that in spite of the President's proclaimed adherence to the Shanghai Communiqué, at heart Carter would like to pursue some variant of a "two Chinas" policy.³⁶⁶ Peking might wish to underscore the impossibility of such a course. Oksenberg also praised Chip Carter's performance, adding he thought the President's son "has a great future as a diplomat" and pleased that Chip's "inclusion in the delegation performed its intended purpose."³⁶⁷

Therefore to reassure the Chinese, the President declared in his speech titled "A Foreign Policy Based on America's Essential Character" at Notre Dame University in May, which is widely considered by scholars as Carter's first foreign policy announcement, that:

It is important that we make progress toward normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China. We see the American-Chinese relationship as a central element of our global policy, and China as a key force for global peace. We wish to cooperate closely with the creative Chinese people on the problems which confront all mankind, and we hope to find a formula which can bridge some of the difficulties that still separate us.³⁶⁸

Carter then sent Vance to Peking in August for the new administration's first round of talks with Chinese leaders. However, the President made it clear that he wanted to move slowly. A resolution of the Panama Canal issue was his first priority.³⁶⁹ For Carter, normalization with China should be deferred, which was agreed on by his key advisors. Even Brzezinski, who favored the exploration of common political and security interests with China, later wrote in his memoirs that he himself wanted to go slowly on the Taiwan issue. When the President asked him to prepare a draft communiqué on U.S. policy should the Chinese responded positively during

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Jimmy Carter, Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame, May 22, 1977. Gerhard Peters & John T. Woodley, The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/243018> Underline added by the author.

³⁶⁹ Carter. 1982. 192.

Vance's forthcoming trip, the National Security Advisor "was pleased but also worried."³⁷⁰ He suggested instead to "put more emphasis on the preparation of alternative arrangements, including more political and economic connections, but short of normalization."³⁷¹

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, the Chinese had held high expectations of the Vance visit, their first with a Carter Cabinet member. They were concerned, however, about recent policy assessments, notably NSC Presidential Review Memorandum 10, leaked to the press prior to Vance's visit. PRM-10, an interagency review of the global balance of power, argued that the Soviet military threat had slowed down and that the Soviet Union faced impending bottlenecks in economic production and technological development. Accordingly, confident of American superiority, the report cautioned against alarmist, bipolar global views.³⁷²

Vance was authorized to discuss with the Chinese leaders confidential matters related to the eventual American de-recognition of Taiwan – President Carter and the Secretary's greatest concern. Vance's mission, therefore, was to present Washington's "maximum position" on Taiwan, proposing that the U.S. was considering Peking's three demands³⁷³ yet would want to continue having informal diplomatic ties with Taipei. He also assigned to test Peking's willingness regarding a peaceful liberation of that island, implying that if the Chinese sympathized with American views, Carter would have favorable reactions at home to rapidly complete the normalization process.³⁷⁴

To his surprise, Vance found the Chinese relatively uninterested in the Taiwan question. This was because Peking simply considered it a fixed, pre-decided matter that required no further discussion. On the first day of talks,

³⁷⁰ Brzezinski. 1983. 201.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Banning Garret. 1981. "The Strategic Triangle and the Indochina Crisis," in David W. P. Elliott, eds. *The Third Indochina Conflict*. Boulder: Westview Press. 196-197.

³⁷³ China's three demands for Sino-American normalization: Washington to: 1) sever diplomatic ties with Taipei; 2) withdraw all U.S. military presence from Taiwan; and 3) abolish U.S.-Taiwan Defense Treaty.

³⁷⁴ Vance. 1983. 79-83.

Foreign Minister Huang Hua reiterated the “debt” the Americans owed the Chinese by supporting Chiang Kai-shek during the civil war and now by continuing the support for his son. Therefore, to Hua, “reciprocal efforts” for the resolution of Taiwan was not the case, and “the longer the delay” of Sino-American normalization due to U.S. insistence on Taiwan, “the heavier the debt.”³⁷⁵ Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping even forewarned his American counterparts not to even raise this matter. In his words:

As for the method by which we reunify Taiwan with the motherland, let us Chinese worry about that. We Chinese do have the ability to solve our own issues. There is no need whatever for American friends to worry themselves over such issues.³⁷⁶

Instead, the Chinese top leader reiterated the PRC’s standard line on the Soviet threat and frequently raised and questioned parts of PRM-10. Below are excerpts in the long tit-for-tat conversation between Deng and Vance especially reserved for this particular NSC document:

Deng: You perhaps know better than we do that the PRM–10 gave rise to very strong reaction in Europe. There was reason for their uneasiness. You said that there is no longer any isolationist trend in the United States. We are willing to believe that explanation but there seems to exist at least a kind of appeasement.

Vance: In what form?

Deng: That PRM was the manifestation.

Vance: I think you have placed much too much emphasis on this paper which was inaccurately reported. This is what happens when people get hold of a fragment of information and report it inaccurately.

...

Deng: What we wish to say are still the same old words, that is to say you should not negate or to take lightly the Polar Bear. The second point is also old words. That is we always wish to see the establishment of a truly equal

³⁷⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, “US-Soviet Relations; Europe; Yugoslavia; Middle East; Africa; Japan; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: Volume XIII: China, 59, 182. (Hereafter FRUS v.13).

³⁷⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “International Issues; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. FRUS v.13. 205.

partnership between the United States and its European Allies. If that can be accomplished that would be better. You of course know the “gang of four” overthrew me and it has been a year and eight months since I have come in contact with some Europeans. But in 1974 and 1975 I came into contact with very many Europeans. Those Europeans were not satisfied with everything the United States did. They were not without their worries – not without their anxieties.³⁷⁷

By saying that he had contacts with “many Europeans,” Deng implied to the American guests that Peking would interfere if it observed any sign of Washington-Moscow secret collusion against the interests of China. Following Vance’s visit, the Vice Premier proved he was not simply bragged about Chinese connections with American “European allies.”

The Chinese then pressed the U.S. Secretary to concur with a public statement condemning “hegemony,” China’s code word for Soviet foreign policy. A supporter of détente, Vance refused. The mood was severely poisoned. Almost hurt by the Chinese constant criticism of the U.S. nuclear arms negotiations with Moscow in which he was the key architect and of the “defensive” posture of the USA, Vance responded emotionally:

There can be no question but that we have devastating power, both to deter and to respond. In addition to our military strength, we have economic strength that is unparalleled in the world. We have great political power and the will to use that power. We have the support of the American people for what we do. No one should make the mistake of underestimating our strength.³⁷⁸

All in all, the Secretary of State was not disappointed that little progress was made during the visit since his preference was to secure the SALT II agreement with the Soviet Union first before moving on the China issue. However, Chinese later tactical responses in announcing negatively

³⁷⁷ Ibid. 196-197.

³⁷⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, “US-Soviet Relations; Europe; Yugoslavia; Middle East; Africa; Japan; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. FRUS v.13. 183.

about his trip, calling it a “setback” for U.S.-China relations, embarrassed Vance’s State Department. In the stunned Carter’s White House, Vance’s misreading of the Chinese and the surprise Chinese press attack against him played into the hands of the opponents of détente, typically National Security Advisor Brzezinski. The Secretary of State then believed Washington now launched on the “beginning of a long and undoubtedly difficult road.”³⁷⁹

On the other hand, follows Vance’s visit, Brzezinski’s top China advisor Michel Oksenberg immediately nosed out chances for the NSC to play a greater role in the Carter administration’s handling of China policy upon Vance’s lose-face. In a memorandum to the National Security Advisor a few days after Vance’s trip, Oksenberg recommended that future discussion with the Chinese should aim at “identifying a mutually acceptable formula for normalization that would enable both sides to remain true to their principles.”³⁸⁰ He also suggested Washington in the upcoming weeks to undertake “unilateral steps” to “invest some ties with Taiwan,” including:

Reduction in the scope and intensity of joint military exercises with the ROC, reducing the quantity and value of our war material storage in the ROC (transferring some of the equipment to the ROC), and possibly altering the organizational form of our intelligence activities upon the island.³⁸¹

Meanwhile, in Taipei, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke tried hard to calm both the last U.S. Ambassador to the ROC Leonard Unger and Taiwan’s Premier Chiang Ching-kuo down. An obviously panic Chiang warned his American friends that Peking was seeking “to deal a fatal blow to U.S. prestige,” and groaning that

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski, “Major Policy Activities,” September 6, 1977. DDRS.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

“U.S. and ROC are as close as lips and teeth, when the lips are gone, the teeth feel cold.”³⁸²

Amidst these backgrounds, Carter and Vance decided to put normalization with China on hold and returned to the other major issues, such as the Panama Canal Treaty, SALT II and the Middle East. Both of them thought time was not right to pursue the China question. “Besides, it was not the right moment to tackle another highly controversial issue,”³⁸³ the President recalled. After all, the stalemate surround Taiwan and the Soviet Union resulted in postponement in normalizing negotiations for another year and a half since the inauguration of Carter.

3.2. The National Security Council (NSC)’s Growing Influence

At the end of 1977, American public and Congressional opinion was swinging increasingly against the Soviet Union, a move which hardened its sympathies towards Vietnam as well. A growing Soviet presence in Africa and a pro-Soviet military coup in Afghanistan fueled the changing mood. Brzezinski appeared to have done his best to deepen fears of Soviet intervention by labeling the growing conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, which occupied the headlines in the first days of 1978, “a proxy war between the Soviet Union and China.”³⁸⁴ On his trip back home during this time, Ambassador Leonard Woodcock publicly expressed his impatience with the lack of progress toward Chinese normalization.³⁸⁵

Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Polish descendant with a strong anti-Moscow bias, vigorously advanced the notion that the United States should move

³⁸² Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, “Assistant Secretary Holbrooke’s Meeting with ROC Premier Chiang Ching-kou,” August 27, 1977. FRUS v.13. 222.

³⁸³ Carter. 1982. 193.

³⁸⁴ Asked by a reporter “What is your reading on the border clash between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians?” Brzezinski replied: “I find it very interesting, primarily as the first case of a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union.” Recited from Gaddis Smith. 1986. *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years*. Hill & Wang.97.

³⁸⁵ Vogel. 2011. 316.

quickly to normalize its diplomatic relations with China because Peking was central to the maintenance of the global power equilibrium, especially vis-à-vis Soviet expansionism. Disappointed by Vance's performance, Brzezinski maneuvered to take charge of China policy. He urged a trip to China by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, as a signal that a strategic-military relationship need not wait on normalization.³⁸⁶ The National Security Advisor's most direct challenge to Vance came over his own proposed trip to China. Vance and Holbrooke fought the idea, which they feared would raise doubts as to who spoke for the United States. The Secretary of State recounted in his memoirs:

I felt very strongly that there could only be two spokesmen, the President and the Secretary of State. I was also concerned that Zbig [Brzezinski] might get into the issue of normalization before we had finished formulating a detailed position and had consulted Congress adequately.³⁸⁷

Then, not wishing to repeat the failure of the Vance trip to China and increasingly inclined to share Brzezinski's view on Asia, in April 1978 Carter finally permitted Brzezinski's trip.³⁸⁸

From that moment on the National Security Advisor increased his criticism of the way the State Department handled U.S. China policy, sometimes directly pointing at the Secretary or his aide Richard Holbrooke. In a memorandum to Carter on April 21 prior to his China trip, Brzezinski explained with the President that he thought Vance's efforts to withdraw American troops from South Korea were "unsettling" and "precipitate"; that the way Vance negotiated the normalization of relations with Vietnam made "little sense"; that U.S. "naval presence" in the Pacific was "inadequate" to meet the growing Soviet threat; that "U.S. weakness vis-à-vis Moscow

³⁸⁶ Smith. 1986. 88.

³⁸⁷ Vance. 1983. 114-115. Underline added by the author.

³⁸⁸ A full account of Brzezinski's hard efforts in changing Carter's mind regarding normalization with China and in allowing his May 1978 visit can be found in Betty Glad. 2009. *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. London: Cornell University. 123-126.

justifiably [caused] China to view us as a less attractive partner;” and, cutting to the heart of his argument, that “we have failed to use the China Card against the Soviets.”³⁸⁹

Brzezinski also did not hesitate to throw a tantrum at President Carter when the State Department notified Moscow of his China trip one hour in advance of its public announcement. Going berserk that this was the second time the State Department took such initiative on White House actions without coordinating with the White House, he angrily charged that “the Soviets did not give us any advance notification of [General Secretary Leonid] Brezhnev’s trip to Germany, nor of General Petrov’s arrival in Ethiopia, nor of General Ogarkov’s visit to Turkey, nor of the recent mission to Peking by Deputy Foreign Minister [Leonid] Ilichev.”³⁹⁰

Two days before Brzezinski left for China, Carter sent him a personal letter of instructions, which scholar Marvin Kalb suspects was drafted by the National Security Advisor himself. Stated right in the first page, “The United States and China have parallel, long-term strategic concerns. The most important of these is our common opposition to global or regional hegemony by any single power.”³⁹¹ Aware of Chinese concerns surround U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union on strategic nuclear weapons, Carter through Brzezinski sought to explain with Peking that SALT II was “not a product of weakness but the consequence of prudence.”³⁹² He then laid out his vision of the Soviet threat:

My concern is that the combination of increasing Soviet military power and political shortsightedness, fed by big-power ambitions, might tempt the Soviet Union both to exploit local turbulence (especially in the Third World) and to intimidate our friends in order to seek political advantage and eventually even political preponderance. This is why I do take seriously

³⁸⁹ Marvin L. Kalb. 2011. *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. 63.

³⁹⁰ Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Advance Notification to the Soviets of My China Trip,” May 4, 1978. FRUS v.13. 356. Square brackets added by the author.

³⁹¹ Recited from Kalb. 2011. 63.

³⁹² Ibid.

Soviet action in Africa and this is why I am concerned about the Soviet military buildup in Central Europe. I also see some Soviet designs pointing towards the Indian Ocean... and perhaps to the encirclement of China through Vietnam (and perhaps some day through Taiwan).³⁹³

Carter then repeated that his policy was designed “to shape an international system not subject to hegemony by a single power.”³⁹⁴

Press reports prior to Brzezinski’s departure confirmed rumors that Washington had decided to increase the level of technological equipment cleared for sale to China – a decision which unmistakably elevated China’s geopolitical importance in Washington.³⁹⁵ As if to publicly distance himself from Vance’s concern for America’s soon-to-be-jilted ally in Taipei, Brzezinski arrived in Peking on the day of the inauguration of the newly elected Taiwanese Premier Chiang Ching-kuo.

In Peking, Brzezinski told his hosts that Washington accepted the three basic Chinese conditions regarding diplomatic normalization: namely, the United States would terminate diplomatic relations with Taiwan, withdraw all U.S. military personnel and installations from Taiwan, and abrogate the U.S.-Taiwan Security Treaty. Brzezinski also expressed his anti-Soviet views in discussions with Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders. He especially briefed them on the U.S. positions on a range of security issues, including the SALT II negotiations and global military assessment. He alerted the Chinese to the fact that the Soviets might soon achieve strategic superiority. They were, he warned, in a position to destabilize southern Asia and might eventually encircle China.³⁹⁶ Moreover, Vietnam and North Korea were also deeply discussed, as carefully demonstrated in Chapter 5. A breakthrough was made as an immediate result of Brzezinski’s China visit, and a target date for full diplomatic ties between Washington and Peking was soon pronounced.

³⁹³ Ibid. 63-64. Marvin Kalb obtained this letter from “reliable source.” Kalb. 2011. Note 46. 310. Underline added by the author.

³⁹⁴ Ibid. 64.

³⁹⁵ Garret. 1981. 199.

³⁹⁶ Brzezinski. 1983. 211-213.

In summary, Jimmy Carter came to the White House with high hopes of the improvement of U.S. relationships with the international community in general and Third World nations in particular. His expectations for Vietnam, the Korean peninsula and China were even higher due to their geopolitical importance and his belief that a different approach toward Asian Communist regimes would regain American prestige in Asia in the post-Vietnam War era. Carter wanted to overturn what he considered then as a “Republican policy,” a “Nixon policy” and Kissinger’s *Realpolitik*. Therefore, his bag was full of diplomatic initiatives: going (back) to Paris to negotiate with the Vietnamese, finding ways to contact the North Koreans, and testing the waters to be able to conclude the negotiations of diplomatic normalization with the Chinese. Washington was ready to open to the Asian Communists and make a comeback to Asia by using not force but diplomacy.

Among this set of bold attempts towards Asian Communist countries, the Carter administration found its hands tied in Korea and China: the “parallel strategy” faced oppositions from U.S. allies and client states of South Korea and Taiwan. Washington could not shake hands with Pyongyang and Peking without alarming Seoul and Taipei and these countries’ lobbyists at home, and was also not ready to give up U.S. longtime military treaties and political influence there. Free from this kind of obstacle while dealing with Hanoi, still, Carter faced Congressional conservatives and public sentiment continued to be haunted by the Vietnam War’s emotional legacy.

At the turn of 1978, factional politics within the Carter administration was gradually hardened. Whereas prior to 1978, an establishment of U.S. diplomatic relations with Peking was not at all a priority, after the NSC and its head official Brzezinski took the lead in monitoring Washington’s foreign policy, China began topping Carter’s deck. U.S. diplomatic directions regarding Vietnam and North Korea were also changed to the fit to the Chinese’s ears, as Chapter 5 unveils.

RESPONSES FROM ASIAN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES UPON U.S. INITIATIVES

1. Vietnam

Despite a drastic political change in the United States when the White House was about to welcome its new owner, a Democrat whose exceptional enthusiasm in opening contacts with the Communist regimes worried his own advisors, in Hanoi the Vietnamese was not that impressed. As soon as results of the 1976 presidential election was announced, Vietnam paid much attention to the new American top leader. Calling him a “President who plants peanuts,” Hanoi saw Carter as someone who was still to the American public “enigmatic,” with many “equivocal, ambiguous statements.”³⁹⁷ In particular, Vietnamese Communist Party’s daily organ *Nhân Dân* columnists assessed that on Vietnam, Carter “has not said anything different from the old viewpoint made by Gerald Ford and Kissinger,”³⁹⁸ that he readied to negotiate on Vietnam’s United Nations entry only after receiving the full account of all American Missing in Actions (MIAs).

When Carter entered the White House, Hanoi hoped for positive changes in U.S. foreign policy. In early 1977, *Nhân Dân* commented that:

With Nixon at the helm, the U.S. ship sank further into a deep and comprehensive crisis... Today, with Jimmy Carter as captain, many people

³⁹⁷ *Nhân Dân*, November 7, 1976. 3.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

aboard the U.S. ship do not yet clearly see where they are going. They have the feeling that they are still groping around in heavy fog.³⁹⁹



Illustration 4.1. – New captain but old voyage go aground!⁴⁰⁰

Jimmy Carter – Downturn – Inflation – Unemployment – U.S. Prestige

This remarks and the above cartoon appeared on the daily indeed reflected Vietnamese sentiment back then. For example, Foreign Minister Nguyễn Cơ Thạch voiced his hope that Carter’s policy towards Vietnam would be wiser than Ford’s.⁴⁰¹ The Vietnamese press also began to call the failure of Ford’s policies towards Hanoi a “Lesson for Carter.”⁴⁰²

The Vietnamese Communist Party’s daily then continuously published editorials that underestimated the socio-economic and political situation in the United States, with striking titles such as “Many arduous problems besiege Carter,”⁴⁰³ “White House still perplexed by unemployment,”⁴⁰⁴ or “Stormy

³⁹⁹ *Nhân Dân*, January 22, 1977. 4.

⁴⁰⁰ *Nhân Dân*, January 29, 1977. 4.

⁴⁰¹ *The New York Times*, November 4, 1976. A26.

⁴⁰² *Quân Đội Nhân Dân*, January 26, 1977.

⁴⁰³ *Nhân Dân*, January 17, 1977. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ *Nhân Dân*, March 27, 1977. 4.

petrels of 1977 among the Capitalist countries.”⁴⁰⁵ Also appeared on the pages of the state newspapers are propaganda cartoons that depict the “hardships” of the newly elected U.S. President, such as the one on the worrisome unemployment situation bellow. No one might expect that the Thirty-ninth President of the United States was indeed sketching out plans to reconcile with Vietnam as early as this moment.

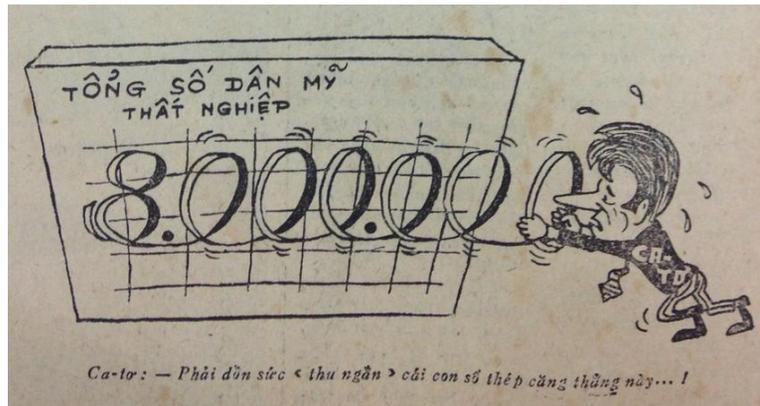


Illustration 4.2. The total number of the unemployed in the USA
Carter: – I have to make every effort to shorten this stressful number...!⁴⁰⁶

As such, the majority of the country was told of an America still facing internal problems and its international image was severely damaged because of the recent defeat in Vietnam. A perplexed President could not help the USA overcome the common difficulties of the late 1970s that was rampant among the Capitalist world, the Vietnamese population believed. Yet what the leadership in Hanoi thought was what that mattered.

In reality, Hanoi saw the high priority of Vietnam in the Carter’s agenda a great chance to finally get the massive American aid which it considered as “war reparations” (*đền bù chiến tranh*), a U.S. obligation to “contribute” to the “war wounds healing process” for national

⁴⁰⁵ *Nhân Dân*, February 13, 1977. 4.

⁴⁰⁶ *Nhân Dân*, February 23, 1977. 4.

reconstruction.⁴⁰⁷ Right after the fall of Saigon, using the MIA issue as a bargaining chip, Hanoi has hoped for a “dollar rain” from the Ford administration yet without much success. What is also noteworthy is that Hanoi did not welcome emerging dependent reliance on Moscow. Throughout 1977, the Soviets again were pressuring Vietnam to join Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), the Soviet-dominated trade bloc, and the Vietnamese again were resisting. To counter this pressure, in April 1977, Hanoi drafted a liberal foreign investment law, modeled after World Bank and International Monetary Fund guidelines, in an unsuccessful effort to attract Western capital. The code promised foreign investors up to forty-nine percent equity in joint ventures producing for Vietnam’s domestic market and total ownership of export-oriented ventures. It allowed for profit repatriation of offered negotiations of specific terms on a case by case basis.⁴⁰⁸

For this reason, the Vietnamese had signaled the importance they attached to Leonard Woodcock delegation’s visit from day one, by dispatching Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền, one of Hanoi’s most seasoned diplomats, to the airport to welcome him. In formal meetings with Woodcock, both Hiền and then Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh stressed their insistence on American war reparations. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng explained:

On the question of Articles [8 b and 21] we are not being formal. If the United States wants them to be settled within the framework of the Paris Peace Agreement, that is alright. If on a legal basis, that is also alright. If on a moral basis, that is also acceptable. We regard this as a matter of honour for both sides – but it must be a two-way settlement.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ The full term in Vietnamese: “*Nghĩa vụ đóng góp vào công cuộc hàn gắn vết thương chiến tranh, tái thiết đất nước.*”

⁴⁰⁸ Franklin B. Weinstein. 1978. “U.S.-Vietnam Relations and the Security of Southeast Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56. 850.

⁴⁰⁹ “Summary of Contents: Anh Tô (alias of Phạm Văn Đồng) confers with Woodcock delegation from 15:30-16:30, March 17, 1977 afternoon,” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder

In short, whatever the names to call it, such as “humanitarian aid” (*viện trợ nhân đạo*) as preferred by the Americans, or “reconstruction aid” (*viện trợ tái thiết*) as stipulated in the Paris Peace Accords, or “war reparations” (*đền bù chiến tranh*) as Vietnamese propaganda newspapers kept reiterating, it was just a question of terminology to Hanoi. The Vietnamese only changed their language for a more constructive expression, not their basic demands. As a matter of fact, during the last day of talks, the Vietnamese side handed straight forward to the Woodcock delegation a list of goods that Vietnam needed in concrete numbers of amount, including food, textile, agricultural equipment, construction materials and medicines. The expected list ran up to a five-year span period, as captured from the original document in Table 4.1 and translated into English by the Woodcock team in their final report in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1. List of Goods the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Needs⁴¹⁰

	<u>Hàng năm</u>	<u>5 năm</u>
Lương thực (gạo, mì)	1 triệu tấn	5 triệu tấn
Sợi bông và sợi tổng hợp	4 vạn tấn	20 vạn tấn
Máy kéo 50 - 70 ngựa	4 ngàn cái	2 vạn cái
Máy ủi đất 120-140 ngựa	600 cái	3 ngàn cái
Phân bón urê	40 vạn tấn	2 triệu tấn
C-tô vận tải cho thủy		
lực 15 tấn	200 cái	1 ngàn cái
Xi măng	40 vạn tấn	2 triệu tấn
Sắt thép xây dựng	20 vạn tấn	1 triệu tấn
Dược liệu, thuốc chữa		
bệnh.....	20 triệu đô la	100 triệu đô la

10392. Collection of the Prime Minister’s Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), 4. Hereafter CPMO.

⁴¹⁰ A separate MEMO (GHI NHỚ) listing the needed items is attached. Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 7.

Table 4.2. List of the Commodities Needed⁴¹¹

1. List of the commodities needed:

	<u>Annually</u>	<u>5 years total</u>
Cereals (rice and wheat)	1 million tons	5 million tons
Cotton yarn and synthetic fibre	40 thousand tons	200 thousand tons
Tractors (50 to 70 horsepower)	4 thousand pieces	20 thousand pieces
Bulldozers (120 to 140 horsepower)	6 hundred pieces	3 thousand pieces
Fertilizer (urea)	400 thousand tons	2 million tons
Trucks used for irrigation work (capacity 15 tons)	200 pieces	1 thousand pieces
Cement	400 thousand tons	2 million tons
Building steel	200 thousand tons	1 million tons
Pharmaceutical raw materials and medicines	20 million dollars	100 million dollars

Such TOP SECRET documents found at Center III, Vietnam National Archive, and Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in Detroit unveil Hanoi's high expectations in the Woodcock delegation's visit in particular and future talks with the Americans in general. Particularly, the above requested list showed Vietnamese leaders' aspirations in gaining the compensation it could not extract from the hostile Ford-Kissinger team. Hanoi from this moment stuck to the American duty in contributing to the postwar reconstruction of Vietnam, even when the three rounds of talks in Paris in May, June and December 1977 turned to no concrete results, as shown in the previous chapter.

Nonetheless, Hanoi did not believe that aid would come soon, as it realized one statement by Carter in another news briefing: "I do not think that we have to say sorry or criticize ourselves, or consider ourselves as being guilty... I do not think that we owe them a debt nor we are obligated to

⁴¹¹ A separate AIDE-MEMOIRE attached to "Phan Hien Second Meeting March 18, 1977." "Presidential Commission Meeting with Phan Hien SRV Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, March 17, 1977," Box 3, Folder 12 "MIA Commission, Vietnamese leadership transcript meeting, 1977 March." Leonard Woodcock Papers, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

compensate.”⁴¹² At this moment, Hanoi probably suspected that Carter, a new and problematic personality in the international stage, was testing the waters. The Vietnamese were uncertain of the new President’s real intension in opening up with the former foe when war just ended not long ago. It was the hurry and positive attitude the Woodcock Commission brought to Hanoi, however, that strengthened the Vietnamese (wrong) belief that the Americans needed them.

As analyzed in Chapter 2, Hanoi leadership’s attitude after 1975 was filled with “illusions of victory,” with a strong sense of national pride, entitlement and heroism in the world. Therefore, the ideology-driven diplomacy that prevailed during the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War was further fed in March 1977 through the olive branch that the Americans offered. Phan Hiền, with all the position of “the winning side”⁴¹³ strengthened by the wrong signals the Woodcock delegation had sent, now headed to Paris to negotiate with the former adversary. This, however, does not conflict with the fact that Vietnam was committed and sincere in engaging in talks with the Carter administration. One Vietnamese diplomat expressed Hanoi’s recognition that the upcoming Paris talks “might be longer and more difficult than the Kissinger-Lê Đức Thọ discussions in 1973.”⁴¹⁴ In fact, Hiền’s

⁴¹² Jimmy Carter Answering the Press, March 24, 1977. “Special Report on U.S. Assessment of L. Woodcock Commission’s trip to Vietnam,” Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). March 18-25, 1977. Folder 10392. CPMO. 28.

⁴¹³ Book title by Huy Đức. A Vietnamese opposite journalist, Huy Đức drawn much attention both internally and externally in 2013 after publishing his book on the 30 years of Vietnam followed the fall of Saigon. The book publication is banned in Vietnam, but widely circulated over the Internet. A whole panel at the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) 2018 that included top Vietnam scholars was dedicated to this book, with Huy Đức himself as the discussant. Panel 298. “Huy Đức and His Pioneering History of Post-1975 Vietnam, *Bên Thắng Cuộc* (The Winning Side),” AAS 2018. Peter Zinoman’s analysis of the book at the meeting was published on BBC Vietnamese right after the event.

<https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/forum-43570599>

⁴¹⁴ Intelligence Memorandum, “Vietnam: Attitude towards Paris Talks,” May 12, 1977. The Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Document 0000438687. Hereafter FOIA E-Reading Room.

delegation was assigned to stay quite long in Paris for around “five months”⁴¹⁵ to negotiate with the Americans, reflecting Vietnamese earnest in this issue.

Once in Paris, in order to gain the best possible deal that included a formal pledge for aid, the Vietnamese decided to use “brinkmanship” tactic, for which they had done so well in 1968 or 1972 during the war years. At the end of the first day of talks, all of the sudden Phan Hiến stepped outside in front of the press and read aloud a statement publicly detailing the secret 1973 Nixon letter promising 3.25 billion USD, a promise Hiến said would have been kept before Vietnam agreed to full diplomatic relations with the United States. In the second round of talks, Hiến stuck to Hanoi’s “package deal” of normalization that includes aid and MIAs. Up to this point, American position in the Paris negotiations was unyielding. Under these circumstances, Vietnam’s equally unyielding insistence on post-war reparations as a precondition for diplomatic normalization was a costly one.

We know the limits that Congress and public opinion placed on the Carter administration’s ability to promise aid to Vietnam. But why did Vietnam, having come so close to normalization, remained so obstinate about its demand for aid in the 1977 talks? Steven Hurst puts it down to Hanoi’s Communist worldview, which caused them to believe that since the American capitalists had failed to open up the Vietnamese market by force, they would try to do so by peaceful means. Vietnam could then exploit their supposedly irresistible greed to gain some aid.⁴¹⁶ Lư Văn Lợi alleges that Hanoi did not really take prospects of normalization seriously until 1986.⁴¹⁷ For Menétrey-Monchau, Vietnam’s insistence on a legally-binding guarantee derived from a

⁴¹⁵ “Hồ sơ xét duyệt đoàn ra, đoàn vào cho Bộ Ngoại giao từ tháng 1 đến tháng 6. 1977” (Immigration Approval Records for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January-June 1977). June 30, 1977. Folder 10123. CPMO.

⁴¹⁶ Steven Hurst. 1996. *The Carter Administration and Vietnam*. New York: St. Martin’s Press. 39.

⁴¹⁷ Lư Văn Lợi, 2004. *Năm mươi năm ngoại giao Việt Nam 1945-1995* (Fifty Years of Vietnam’s Diplomacy, 1945-1995). Hà Nội: Công an Nhân dân. 559-565.

lingering distrust that the U.S. would carry through an informal promise.⁴¹⁸ Huy Đức, a Vietnamese opposite journalist, blamed Hanoi's arrogance of the victors in his recent landmark work "The Winning Side."⁴¹⁹ Emphasizing Vietnam's ideology-reflected sources, typically the theoretical journal *Tạp chí Cộng sản* (Review of Communism), Tuong Vu blames it all on Hanoi's "limits of ideology."⁴²⁰ Others pointed out the vital amount of money that Hanoi badly needed in recovering its post-war economy. From an examination of the documents collected at Vietnamese archives, this research argues that limitations in Hanoi's worldview and its distrust of the American side both combined to shape Vietnam's "rough" negotiating stance.

All in all, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) until mid-1977 still considered U.S.-Vietnam relations as "the relationship between the enemy and us" (*quan hệ địch-ta*).⁴²¹ As much as the Carter administration was skeptical of the Communist counterparts, Hanoi also had doubts on Washington's intention. Stated in the MOFA report covering the foreign affairs during the first six months of 1977:

For now the U.S. wants to normalize relations with Vietnam to limit us [*i.e. our influence*] and to keep the situation in Southeast Asia remaining "stable." We opened contacts with the U.S. to agitate in forcing them to implement Article 21 of the Paris Accords. Our standpoint includes three issues: Article 21, Article 8b and normalization of relations;⁴²² the U.S. wants normalization

⁴¹⁸ Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a. *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy after the Capture of Saigon, 1975-1979*. McFarland & Company. London, UK: Routledge. 11-20.

⁴¹⁹ Huy Đức. 2013. *Bên thắng cuộc* (The Winning Side). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. Part 1. Chapter 5 "Chiến tranh" (War).

⁴²⁰ Tuong Vu. 2016. *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology*. Cambridge University Press. 216-221.

⁴²¹ "Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1977 của Bộ Ngoại giao" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1977). Folder 10160, CPMO, 16.

⁴²² The three issues were combined to create the so-called "package deal" proposed by the Vietnamese negotiators.

of relations first and ignores Article 21. Therefore, our struggle has not produced concrete results.⁴²³

In addition, 1977 MOFA secret document also revealed Vietnam's step-by-step calculations from the protracted negotiations with the Americans. The report continued:

However, our negotiations with the U.S. is remarkable and essential to facilitate us in taking advantage of the conflicts among the great powers to gain science-technological capital necessary for our country buildup. The U.S. has publicly announced support for us becoming a member of the United Nations. We have to reconsider this, taking up the chance to join the United Nations within this year to strengthen our position in foreign affairs. Progressive public opinion in the world supports our standpoint of requesting U.S. contribution in healing war wounds and reconstruction of our country. Some capitalist countries, those who have hesitated to do business with us because they were cautious of the U.S., now express their intentions in doing business with us.⁴²⁴

Also, in contrast to the optimistic atmosphere of the 1976 MOFA report, a pessimistic feeling together with anxiety covered its report on Vietnam's foreign affairs during the first six months of 1977. The main sources of insecurity, according to Vietnamese foreign affairs officials, came from the border conflicts with China and Cambodia, as well as complex Soviet-Sino-American triangle relations.⁴²⁵ Different from the 1976 report, China and Cambodia were no longer granted "friend" (*bạn*)⁴²⁶ personal pronoun. At this moment, Peking, which previously kept refraining from directly criticizing Hanoi in its relations with Cambodia, now started to support Phnom Penh overtly. In February Peking refused additional aid to

⁴²³ "Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1977 của Bộ Ngoại giao" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1977). Folder 10160, CPMO, 16. Square brackets added by the author.

⁴²⁴ Ibid. 16-17. Underlines added by the author.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. 2.

⁴²⁶ "Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1976 của Bộ Ngoại giao" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1976). August 1976. Folder 9833. CPMO.

Vietnam. In April Cambodia launched attacks on the villages of An Giang province, Southwest Vietnam, then turned down Vietnamese offer of border negotiations in June.

Above all, the Vietnamese saw the international context was on the side of the Soviet Union. While political struggle was still going on inside China, Hanoi believed the Carter administration was facing difficulties both internally and externally.⁴²⁷ The MOFA concluded: “To weight all three of them, the Soviet Union is the most advantageous, with a stable internal situation and firm economic development.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ “Báo cáo tình hình công tác sáu tháng đầu năm 1977 của Bộ Ngoại giao” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Report on the Foreign Affairs of the First Six Month of 1977). Folder 10160, CPMO, 2.

⁴²⁸ The Vietnamese MOFA gave assessments of the three superpowers as follows:

“According to the Western sources, **the Soviet Union** is expected to have a bumper crop of 215 million tons of food this year. Industrial production for the first four months exceeded its initial plan, increase 5,8% compares to the first four months of 1976. Through big events such as the 60th anniversary of October Revolution, the new Constitution draft announcement, the replacement of [Nikolai] Podgorny with [Leonid] Brezhnev as the new Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, it is concluded that the USSR is giving prominence to and concentrating the power into the hands of Brezhnev.

The internal struggle in **China** is still severe and protracted. Key personnel have not yet been finalized. There are adjustments of policy in terms of economics and culture to improve production and living stabilization, yet there is no change in terms of foreign policy: the anti-Soviet campaign and undermining attempts towards the Non-Aligned Movement are still going on. China maintains its stands in many international issues, which reduces its international prestige.

In **the USA**, Carter wants to create an image of “the President of change,” yet Carter became American President in the most difficult situation. Internally, inflation and unemployment are not being tackled, the crisis of trust is still deeply struck within American people. Externally, American prestige is drastically decreased after its failure in Vietnam. The U.S. faces many problems not only with its rivals but also its allies. After six months in office, it is clear that Carter’s foreign policy goal is still blocking the strength and influence of the Soviet Union, preventing the development of revolutionary forces in different areas in the world. However, since Washington was now in a weak position after the failure in Vietnam, at the same time it has to cope with various difficulties simultaneously, for the previous six months the Carter administration has conducted exploratory steps in its foreign policy in the new situation and solving its difficulties. This, in turn, reveals American weaknesses, that it is avoiding direct confrontation and maintaining the status quo in the world. Nevertheless, Carter has just assumed power for only six months, we need more time to observe him in order to have a full evaluation of U.S. adjustments in terms of strategy and policy...

... The U.S. tries to settle conflicts, calls for cooperation among allies to solve international issues based on U.S. hegemony in the capitalist world. Carter’s tactics is foxy and deceiving: including the “human rights” issue in its foreign policy to plant internal difficulties and lessen international prestige of the Soviet Union and Socialist countries, at the same time using the “human rights” card to coerce its allies and satellites who do not meet its desire or who are not in complete harmony with it.”

The declassified documents of the Vietnamese Prime Minister Office thus challenge previous arguments by well-known historians of this period that it was Hanoi's blindly ideological rigidity to blame for, which bound itself not striking a deal with the Americans. The reality was an almost contradict: the Vietnamese Government embraced various pragmatic calculations in constructing their foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis the United States. The negotiations in Paris helped Hanoi to achieve certain goals in its strategic plan, and it was not unhappy if talks only resulted in step-by-step outcomes. As a factual matter, until the end of the year, Foreign Minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh gave this assessment in front of the National Assembly: "When it came to the latter half of 1977, Vietnam's foreign relations faced even more difficulties, yet Vietnamese-American relations was in good process... U.S.-Vietnam relations was in the process of improvement."⁴²⁹

Limitations in worldview might hinder its diplomatic achievements, but Hanoi did step out of the vicious circle of ideology-driven diplomacy once negotiations started. Propaganda statements served as one of Vietnamese tools in drawing American attention and thus did not reflect their deep reckonings. If the CIA officials realized that China since the beginning of the 1970s produced a "pragmatic strategy in ideological terms,"⁴³⁰ then Vietnam was indeed embarking on such policy once they came to the negotiating table.

Therefore, when Vietnam became the 149th member of the United Nations in September, which was obviously thanks to the absence of an American veto, the Communist Party daily *Nhân Dân* continuously bragged

Ibid. 2-4. Square brackets added, bold typed by the author.

⁴²⁹ "Những nét lớn của tình hình thế giới và hoạt động đối ngoại của ta năm 1977– Báo cáo của đồng chí Nguyễn Duy Trinh tại kỳ họp thứ 3 quốc hội khoá 6 tháng 12 năm 1977" (The Main Features of the World Context and Our Foreign Affairs Activities in 1977 – Report by Comrade Nguyen Duy Trinh at the Third Meeting of the Sixth National Assembly, December 1977). Collection of the National Assembly (Phòng Quốc hội), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), Hanoi. (Hereafter CNA). Folder 2332.

⁴³⁰ According to the CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, Peking published "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Three Worlds" in November 1977 to justify China's pragmatic strategies while at the same time insisting on ideological terms. Report for Walter Mondale, "Memorandums in Support of the Vice President's Trip to China," August 1979. CREST.

about the deterioration of U.S. positions in the UN.⁴³¹ Joining Hanoi, Pyongyang saw Vietnam's UN entry as a "heavy blow to American imperialism."⁴³² North Korean leader Kim Il Sung in an official congratulate message to Party Secretary Tôn Đức Thắng praised it a "severe attack against the imperialist America and their lackeys."⁴³³ From this moment on, using its presence at the UN, Vietnam pushed forward the A32-258 Resolution of "Assistance for the Reconstruction of Vietnam" adopted by the General Assembly in October 1977 to force Washington to pay war reparations. Speaking in front of the UN General Assembly in October, Vietnamese Ambassador Đinh Bá Thi overtly criticized President Carter:

Despite the goodwill of the mankind all over the world, the U.S. Government still does not show an appropriate attitude in accordance with its duty of the situation in Vietnam. During a banquet with Asian representatives on October 5, U.S. President Carter announced in his speech that, "In Southeast Asia, we are fixing the losses caused by the recent war." We strongly hope such announcement by the American President will turn to practical actions and the U.S. Government will embrace a more positive attitude in accordance with its prestige and duty.⁴³⁴

Meanwhile at home in September, the Khmer Rouge made swift coordinated raids along the border, penetrating several kilometers inside Tây Ninh and killing hundreds of civilians. A few days after these raids, Pol Pot – General Secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea – appeared in Peking at the Twenty-eight anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. During his visit, while Pol Pot denounced that "the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Cuba are cooperating in order to fight us in the border areas,"⁴³⁵ China promised to give

⁴³¹ *Nhân Dân*, September 22, 1977.

⁴³² *The Pyongyang Times*, October 1, 1977.

⁴³³ *Nhân Dân*, September 26, 1977.

⁴³⁴ "Tập tài liệu của Liên hợp quốc về nạn nhân chiến tranh ở Việt Nam và giúp đỡ Việt Nam xây dựng lại đất nước năm 1977" (United Nations Report on the Vietnamese War Victims and Assisting Vietnam in National Reconstruction). Folder 10226, CPMO, 4.

⁴³⁵ "Hua Guofeng and Pol Pot," September 29, 1977. Westard, Odd Arne, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung and James G. Hershberg. 1998. *Seventy-Seven Conversations*

remarkable support to Democratic Kampuchea's policy "in the struggle against imperialism and hegemonism."⁴³⁶ The Vietnamese responded with a large-scale military operation against Cambodia and Phnom Penh suspended its diplomatic relations with Hanoi at the end of December.

Before the December attack, a high level delegation of Vietnamese Government leaders, led by Communist Party General Secretary Lê Duẩn, made an unexpected visit to China. No reason for the visit was given. On its completion, *Nhân Dân* editorialized that the "official friendly visit" had ended successfully.⁴³⁷ However, what happened was actually the opposite. As soon as Duẩn landed, he felt a strained atmosphere full of distrust. Welcomed him at the airport were Party Chairman Hua Guofeng, Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien (Li Xiannian) and Politburo member Wu De, representing a "low" greeting protocol, which was quite what Duẩn and the Vietnamese delegation had predicted.⁴³⁸

Prior to the trip, the Duẩn delegation also anticipated a tough stance from Peking, apprehending that "the Chinese side might talk about its outlook of 'two super powers—three worlds,'⁴³⁹ blame us on the border issue, criticizing that we lean on the Soviet Union, and imply the limitation of Chinese assistance for Vietnam. They might also mention Vietnam-

between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars of Indochina, 1964-1977. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Cold War International History Project. 193.

⁴³⁶ Chanda. 1986. 101.

⁴³⁷ *Nhân Dân*, November 26, 1977.

⁴³⁸ At the end of the report was a handwritten section says:

"Evaluation: The Chinese are going to greet us lower than greeting Tito and Pol Pot (welcoming Tito at the airport were Deng Xiaoping, Li Hsien-nien (Li Xiannian), Wu De – welcoming Pol Pot at the airport were Deng Xiaoping, Li Hsien-nien, Ji Dengki, Wu De, Geng Biao, Fang Yi, Chen Muhua, all are members of the Party Politburo)."

"Hồ sơ về chuyến đi thăm Trung Quốc của đoàn đại biểu Đảng và Chính phủ Việt Nam do Tổng bí thư Lê Duẩn dẫn đầu tháng 11 năm 1977" (Report on the China Visit by Vietnamese Communist Party and Government Delegation Led by Party Secretary Le Duan). Folder 10461, CPMO.

⁴³⁹ Mao Zedong's Three Worlds Theory: the First world of superpowers (the U.S. and the USSR); the Second world of developing powers (Japan, Canada, Europe) and the Third world of exploited nations (Africa, Latin America, Asia).

Kampuchea border issues.”⁴⁴⁰ In Peking, the Vietnamese emphasized in negotiations with the Chinese that the different points of view between the two countries on a series of international problems must not affect friendly relations between them. Also, Hanoi avoided raising the most important foreign policy issues of mutual concerns, i.e. long-term Chinese aid, the ethnic Chinese (*Hoa kiều*) problem in Ho Chi Minh City, the border problem between two countries or Vietnam’s border issue with Cambodia, in order to avoid “complicating negotiations.”⁴⁴¹ This was the last friendly direct communication between the Communist parties of Vietnam and China.

As talks with the Americans came into deadlock in 1977, at the turn of 1978, the Vietnamese decided to try another brinkmanship attempt. On January 31, David Truong (Truong Đình Hùng) and Ronald Humphrey were arrested in connection with the State Department Information Agency spying affairs. A few days later the role of the Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Nations Đinh Bá Thi in channeling the stolen cables was discovered. It turned out that Vietnam attempted to sound out the mood at the future talks and to prepare its delegates more efficiently for the confrontation with Holbrooke.⁴⁴² While the information that they passed on was of negligible importance, the sensational story did much to undermine trust from both sides. The very fact that Vietnam chose to take such risks at such a sensitive time to peek into the American negotiation agenda gave Washington a good reason to halt bilateral dialogue for sometimes.

Almost a year after Vietnam officially became a unified state, its negotiators returned to Paris to meet with American officials of the brand new administration. It turned out that past experience in negotiations with the U.S.

⁴⁴⁰ “Hồ sơ về chuyến đi thăm Trung Quốc của đoàn đại biểu Đảng và Chính phủ Việt Nam do Tổng bí thư Lê Duẩn dẫn đầu tháng 11 năm 1977” (Report on the China Visit by Vietnamese Communist Party and Government Delegation Led by Party Secretary Le Duan). Folder 10461, CPMO.

⁴⁴¹ Stephen J. Morris. 1999. *Why Vietnam invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 184-185.

⁴⁴² See more on the spying affair in Menétrey-Monchau. 2006a, 144-147.

side did more harm than good in the 1977 normalization talks. As victors of America's longest war, Hanoi believed it had secured an upper hand in discussions. Limitation in its worldview and a certain distrust of the new leadership in Washington blocked Hanoi from a flexible and effective strategy vis-à-vis the Americans. It should be emphasized that, still, the Vietnamese side was mainly occupied with national interests rather than ideology during negotiations, as widely suggested in the existed literature. Vietnam would soon soften its stance to a more pragmatic one in racing against China, who was also pursuing the same normalization agenda with the Carter administration.

2. North Korea

With the advent of the Carter administration, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was quick to seize this opportunity of possible policy change in Washington. From the end of 1976 to mid-1977, North Korea toned down its usually shrill anti-American rhetoric and refrained from attacking Carter personally. In November 1976, Chairman Kim Il Sung sent a personal letter through Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to the U.S. President-elect at Plains, Georgia, asking for direct contact. In the letter, Kim suggested that after North Korea-U.S. bilateral talks, it was possible to expand the format to a three-way dialogue that included South Korea and even four-way talks that involved the Chinese.⁴⁴³

In his 1977 New Year address, Kim proposed a peace treaty with the U.S., making sure to differentiate between the old and new administrations in Washington. In denouncing the “aggressive machinations” of the “U.S. imperialists” against North Korea, Kim specifically referred twice to the “Ford

⁴⁴³ 홍석률. 2016. “카터 행정부기 미국의 대한반도 정책과 3 자회담,” 『한국과 국제정치』 32(2), 33.

administration of the United States.”⁴⁴⁴ It was likely that President Carter’s troop withdrawal plan from the Republic of Korea (ROK) resulted in a “cautious optimism” in Pyongyang that followed the 1975 fall of Saigon, but quickly turned sour during the Axe Murder incident of August 1976.

Added to North Korean alarming posture of late 1976-early 1977 was the fact that, despite the country’s emphasis on self-reliance in arms production for its offensive military capabilities buildup, there was a decrease in military assistance from its patron states – China and the Soviet Union. Moscow was particularly rigid, which was even more frustrating for Pyongyang, as the North would need advanced equipment to match future U.S. military assistance to South Korea. During North Korean Deputy Premier Gong Jin-tae (Kong Jin Thae)’s visit to Moscow in January-February 1976, the Soviets indeed refused to supply Pyongyang’s proposal of the construction of a nuclear power plant, which the North reportedly said would build out of “primarily military considerations.”⁴⁴⁵ North Korea then received the same answer from Moscow when Premier Pak Seong-cheol (Pak Song Chol) visited the Soviet Union in January 1977 with a similar offer.⁴⁴⁶

With optimism now heightened again due to Carter’s attempted troop withdrawal, Pyongyang began launching a diplomatic offensive towards the Carter administration at different levels. First and foremost, it sought to directly approach Washington. On February 11, North Korean Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Heo Dam (Ho Tam) sent a letter to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, suggesting that the two sides “should have active talks immediately.”⁴⁴⁷ The letter was carried by “an American national currently

⁴⁴⁴ *The Pyongyang Times*, January 1, 1977. See also Byung Chul Koh. 1984. *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea*. University of California Press, 169.

⁴⁴⁵ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” April 15, 1976. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111473>

⁴⁴⁶ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” November 21, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110131>

⁴⁴⁷ “Letter from the DPRK to the U.S. Secretary of State,” February 11, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118393>

teaching in Canada recently returned from Pyongyang,” and a friend of G. A. Cohen (Jerry Cohen), a Canadian Marxist political philosopher who was teaching at Harvard University at that time.⁴⁴⁸ The reasons that National Security Council staffer Michael Armacost cited when suggesting not to receive the letter and to immediately turn Cohen off was that “this is an unlikely channel for serious communications.”⁴⁴⁹ In Armacost’s words,

For the last few years North Korea has made a variety of efforts to get in touch with U.S. officials. In the process they have discovered that a number of governments are quite eager to extend their good offices in promoting a dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang – most notably Pakistan, Egypt and Romania. Thus there is no dearth of plausible channels. At the same time there are lots of people like this friend of Cohen’s who are eager to get in on the action.⁴⁵⁰

Realized the limitations of lower level contacts, as well as Carter’s special endeavor to improve U.S. relations with Third World nations, Chairman Kim Il Sung decided to aim higher with bigger targets: the most prominent leaders of the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) organization. He invited Ali Bongo, President of Gabon and incoming Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to Pyongyang on May 9-12.⁴⁵¹ During talks, Kim took pains to explain to Bongo his perceptions of Carter and South Korean President Park Chung Hee. The North Korean Chairman realized that “it would seem that the Carter administration is very interested in the Korean question. It seems that it too is seeking a way to start

⁴⁴⁸ Memorandum for Brzezinski from Armacost, “Evening Report,” February 17, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s (NSA) Staff Material, Far East, Box 2, Armacost Chron File, Folder “2/18-28/77,” Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

⁴⁴⁹ Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Mike Armacost, “Contact and Communications with North Korea,” February 28, 1977. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Country File (NSA6), Box 43, Folder “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of, 1/77-1/81,” Carter Presidential Library (CPL). 1.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ *The Pyongyang Times*, May 14, 1977.

negotiations. We are prepared to hold negotiations with it to discuss the problem upon conclusion of a peace agreement.”⁴⁵²

Kim then asked the OAU Chairman to “transmit to them [the Carter administration] that sincere intention on our part,” and welcomed Bongo’s idea that the Americans to visit North Korea for a “correct understanding” of the “real situation.”⁴⁵³ At the same time, he condemned Park Chung Hee as a “pro-Japanese through and through,” who jailed democratic and religious persons that believed in American type of democracy, notably former presidential candidate Kim Dae Jung, who was “completely pro-American as well as a Christian.”⁴⁵⁴ This is one of Pyongyang’s tactics to draw Carter’s attention, based on the North’s considerations of his strong Christian morals and emphasis on human rights.

In reality, as Charles Armstrong points out, Pyongyang held “no illusion about the Carter administration.”⁴⁵⁵ In an interview with Japanese *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Chairman Kim stated that while North Korea was taking a “wait and see” attitude toward President Carter, it was nonetheless disturbed by what it perceived as a discrepancy between Carter’s campaign pledges and his action since taking office.⁴⁵⁶ Kim particularly expressed reservations about the slow pace of the proposed withdrawal of U.S. troops, its incomplete nature, and Washington’s intention to consult with both Seoul and Tokyo about the process.⁴⁵⁷

In another interview with the Editor-in-Chief of French *Le Monde*, Kim again criticized the planned withdrawal for being only partial, not total.⁴⁵⁸ It is true that the U.S. continued to refuse to be drawn into direct discussion of

⁴⁵² Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Statement by Kim Il Sung to President Bongo on North-South Korea Questions,” June 28, 1977. NSA Staff Material, Far East, Box 3, Armacost Chron File, Folder “6/28-30/77.” CPL, 3-4.

⁴⁵³ Ibid. 4. Square brackets added by the author.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Charles Armstrong. 2013. *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992*. Columbia University, 203.

⁴⁵⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, May 6, 1977; *The Pyongyang Times*, May 7, 1977.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 21, 1977; *The Pyongyang Times*, July 23, 1977.

the Korean problem with Pyongyang without the participation of ROK representatives. Furthermore, the withdrawal plan was gradual in nature, not affecting air and naval units, and would be accompanied by an increase in assistance to the ROK.⁴⁵⁹ Thus, the North actually feared that the South was getting politically and militarily stronger, regardless of the American troop presence, and that the removal of troops did not necessarily give the North an advantage over the South.

However, Secretary Vance's scheduled visit to China at the end of August 1977 was widely publicized. Pyongyang considered the possibility that Vance's Peking visit would enable unofficial contact between the U.S. and the DPRK "in view of clarifying the main problems between the two."⁴⁶⁰ As a result, during and after the July 14 incident—the incursion of a U.S. military helicopter into the North's airspace—Pyongyang reacted in a surprisingly "calm and highly balanced manner."⁴⁶¹ The press also objectively presented the facts, without any rhetoric against the U.S. This "understanding" reaction by the North Korean authorities was attributed first to the fact that the U.S. assumed responsibility for the incident, and second to the North's desire to create favorable conditions for initiating dialogue with Washington.

Within just a month the North again changed its mind. As the Sino-Soviet split intensified while the Carter administration was opening diplomatic channels with Peking, the North Koreans became skeptical of China's real intentions with regards to Korea in the later half of 1977. At this moment rumor has it that the PRC was interested in retaining American troops in South

⁴⁵⁹ North Korea strongly criticized the Carter administration's troop withdrawal plan, arguing that Carter was "violating his campaign pledges," and seeing it as a "smokescreen," (*The Pyongyang Times*, August 6, 1977), an "arms reinforcement under the veil of withdrawal" (*The Pyongyang Times*, August 20, 1977).

⁴⁶⁰ Telegram 0666678 from the Romanian Embassy in Pyeongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "US Helicopter Incident of July 14," July 19, 1977. Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, Charles Kraus (2013), "The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 171. (Hereafter "The Carter Chill"). 190.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid; Memorandum from Dennis Chapman to the White House, "Shootdown of U.S. Helicopter in Korean DMZ – Information as of 0500, July 14," July 14, 1977. DDRS; Cable from Vance, "CH-47 Helicopter," July 14, 1977. DDRS.

Korea spread out, which undeniably affected North Korean leaders. As a result, the DPRK decided against contacting Cyrus Vance during his visit to Peking. In a discussion with Romanian Ambassador to the DPRK Dumitru Popa, Heo Dam noted that “there are currently no favorable conditions for an American-North Korean dialogue.”⁴⁶² Asked by Popa of the rumors of China’s duplicitous policy on Korea, Heo Dam replied that “North Korean officials are not fully aware of their Chinese counterparts’ intentions.” Heo also added, however, that “in official talks, the PRC declares to support the DPRK in terms of Korean unification.”⁴⁶³

In the latter half of 1977, the North Korean leader invited even more heads of state from Africa and Europe to Pyongyang, through whom he sought to indirectly contact the United States. On August 24-28 Josip Broz Tito, President of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, visited North Korea and conferred with Kim Il Sung. Together with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Tito was widely known as the founding member and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) organization, a forum of developing world states wishing to avoid being drawn into the great powers’ rivalry throughout the Cold War. During bilateral talks, Kim noted that the DPRK was willing to liaise with the U.S. in order to discuss the Korean problem “on a general level, not in detail,” and did not wish to discuss it with Japan, the USSR and China.⁴⁶⁴ Chairman Kim also emphasized to Tito the possibility of a tripartite talks, with the pre-condition of non-appearance of Park Chung Hee:

Acknowledging both North and South Korea’s interests in the matter, as well as the role of the United States, the DPRK is willing to discuss the Korean

⁴⁶² Telegram 066691 from the Romanian Embassy in Pyeongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 31, 1977. “The Carter Chill,” 217.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Telegram from the Romanian Embassy in Pyeongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to comrade Constantin Oancea and Ion Ciubotaru, “Regarding President Tito’s Official Visit to the DPRK,” September 4, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114857>

issues and negotiate with American and South Korea envoys, but not with representatives of the fascist leadership in Seoul until it has been replaced with a democratic government.⁴⁶⁵

As the North Korean side asked Tito to ensure the U.S. President received the message “as soon as possible,”⁴⁶⁶ he then reiterated Kim’s words in his personal letter to Carter, delivered by Yugoslav Vice President Edvard Kardelj in October. In the letter, the Yugoslav President minutely explained Pyongyang’s proposed agenda for Carter:

He [Kim] emphasized that – after the statement by the People’s Republic of China to the effect that it does not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of the people of Korea – the remaining participants are in fact the United States, North and South Korea. Proceeding from the stand that the reunification of Korea is an affair of the Korean people, President Kim Il Sung consider that the negotiations on the conclusion of peace treaty should be conducted by the countries signatories to the Armistice Agreement, i.e. the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and your country. After that, in his opinion, the representatives of the North and the South would talk about the question of reunification.⁴⁶⁷

Chairman Kim could not be more pleased with Tito’s enthusiasm. It was because for several months the North had made every effort to demonstrate to the foreign governments its basic formula that peace treaty and reunification were two separate questions to be solved between different parties: the former was between Pyongyang and Washington, the later was between the two Koreas. The mission was significantly assigned to Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Heo Dam when he arrived in New York in late September to attend a ministerial meeting of NAM countries, becoming the

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Telegram 085374 From the Romanian Embassy in Washington, DC to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The DPRK-US Dialogue Attempts, Outcomes Forthcoming,” October 22, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114880>

⁴⁶⁷ Memorandum from Robert Hunter to Brzezinski, “Letter to Njegova Ekselencija Gospodin James Earl Carter, Predsjednik Sjedinjenih Americkih, Drazva,” October 7, 1977. White House Central Files (WHCF), Subject File, Box CO 67, Folder “Confidential, 1/20/77-1/20/81,” CPL.

highest-ranking North Korean official ever to set foot in the United States.⁴⁶⁸ Yet it turned out that Chairman Kim's tactic of "indirect contact" vis-à-vis the Carter administration not always gained the desirable results.

On December 10, 1977, Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and Chairman of the Council of State of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), arrived in Pyongyang. In contrast with Honecker's visit to Hanoi, the Pyongyang visit was not a great success, largely due to ideological differences between the GDR and the DPRK over the question of divided states.⁴⁶⁹ Similarly divided as North Korea, however, East Germany did not pursue unification, as a unified Germany was perceived a threat to peace in the USSR's view. Honecker, acting at the behest of the Soviets, lectured Chairman Kim on the applicability of a two Germanies solution for Korea.⁴⁷⁰ In reply, Kim took pains to persuade him that North Korea was not a blind follower of either Chinese or Soviet leadership.⁴⁷¹ Yet indifferent to his hosts and also attempting to forewarn the bull-headed North Koreans, Honecker was lavish in his praise for Vietnam during the banquet speech:

Internationalist solidarity has firm roots in the minds and hearts of our people. It was with great joy that we noted the victory the people of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea won over the imperialist aggressors after waging a sacrificing struggle. Only a few days ago we have seen with our own eyes the growing strength of the SRV [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] which is exerting an increasing influence on developments in Southeast Asia in the interest of peace and for the benefit of peoples.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Byung Chul Koh. 1984. 170-171.

⁴⁶⁹ Telegram from U.S. Embassy in Berlin to Secretary of State, "GDR Leaders Visit North Korea," December 19, 1977. The National Archives AAD.

⁴⁷⁰ "Report on the Official Friendship Visit to the DPRK by the Party and the State Delegation of the GDR, Led by Com. Erich Honecker, 8-11 December 1977," December 13, 1977. James Person. 2009. "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: New Evidences on Sino-DPRK Relations, 1955-1984" eds. North Korea International Documentation Project. Woodrow Wilson Center. Document Reader #2. 57-63.

⁴⁷¹ Oberdorfer & Carlin. 2014. 79-80.

⁴⁷² *The Pyongyang Times*, December 10, 1977. Square brackets added by the author.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 and then further demonstrated in Chapter 6, unpleasant feelings has gradually taken shape among the Asian Communists after the fall of Saigon and unification of Vietnam under Hanoi's rule. In this particular case of Vietnam-North Korea relations, any eulogium for Hanoi was now unpleasing to the North Korean ears.

Next to the German haughtiness, there came the Yugoslav over-enthusiasm. On March 6-9, 1978, President Josip Broz Tito visited the USA, where he met President Carter and proposed to be the mediator for a trilateral dialogue without the presence of Park Chung Hee. He suggested the meeting would be "not at the top level but at the level of delegations of both countries," and "of course, the U.S. should provide its delegation as the third party."⁴⁷³ As shown in the previous chapter, while strongly confirmed to South Korean President Park via a personal letter that he immediately rejected Tito's proposal, declassified documents disclose that Carter in fact responded Tito instantly "That is a good advice."⁴⁷⁴ He even agreed with Tito's idea to some extent that the appearance of Park Chung Hee in such tripartite meeting seemed problematic, saying "It would definitely be better for us and for South Korea that our delegations meet at the lower level."⁴⁷⁵

Surprisingly, Tito's proposal received widespread media attention everywhere except in Pyongyang, where it was greeted with stony silence,⁴⁷⁶ obviously due to the North Korean desire for direct talks with the U.S. Pyongyang's media avoided direct comment on the initiative, although it was conveyed to the North by early April 1978 and has been widely reported in the Japanese and Western press. The North also showed its annoyance over Tito's plan in a broadcast in which it pointedly quoted Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu as saying that he did not present any proposals on Korea to

⁴⁷³ Unofficial Translation of the Yugoslav Minutes of Conversation between President Carter and Yugoslav President Tito, March 7, 1978. "The Carter Chill," 277-278.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. 278.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Intelligence Memorandum, "Korea and the Major Powers," October 30, 1978. CREST.

President Carter because “this is the right of the Koreans themselves.”⁴⁷⁷ In short, at this point Pyongyang was still aiming to bypass Seoul and pin down a U.S. agreement to engage in bilateral talks.

In reality, during his meeting with Carter in Washington on April 13, the second and last Communist leader of Romania conveyed Kim Il Sung’s view that North Korea would not deal with President Park Chung Hee or his Government but would negotiate with “another government in the South acceptable to the United States.”⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, Carter had to confirm Ceaușescu that Washington would not meet with representatives of the DPRK without “the full participation of representatives of the current government of the Republic of Korea.”⁴⁷⁹ Later in May when Ceaușescu arrived in Pyongyang, Chairman Kim explained to the Romanian officials the reason why he could not accept trilateral negotiations:

The comrades from South Korea do not agree with the participation of the representatives of the Seoul regime at the negotiations, saying that it will encourage Park Chung Hee in his actions against the organizations and democratic elements that exist in South Korea.⁴⁸⁰

However, when Ceaușescu suggested that he inform Carter about North Korean difficulty regarding this issue, Kim turned down the proposal, saying he “had to consult with the comrades from South Korea first.”⁴⁸¹ All in all, Chairman Kim still believed that even if trilateral talks happened, a South Korean retreat sooner or later would be unavoidable, because “their [the

⁴⁷⁷ CIA National Foreign Assessment Center Report, “The Seoul-Pyongyang Dialogue on Reunification: Origins, Decline, and Prospects,” May 10, 1978. Brzezinski Material, Trip File (NSA 4), Folder “Brzezinski, Asia, 5/18-25/78: Korea,” CLP. 16.

⁴⁷⁸ Memorandum to Brzezinski, “HIRC Request for Our Response to North Korean Approach,” April 26, 1978. NSA6, Box 43. Folder “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of, 1/77-1/81,” CPL.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Minutes of Conversation at the Official Meeting between the Romanian Delegation and the Korean Delegation, May 20, 1978. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114456>

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

three parties'] problems will be actually discussed only by the DPRK and the USA.”⁴⁸²

Noting the tactics in North Korea's various attempts in opening contacts with the U.S. from 1977 to mid-1978, it was evident that Kim Il Sung became more and more flexible. He gradually turned from a rigid bilateral dialogue format to seemingly accept the idea of trilateral talks; he no longer requested the removal of Park Chung Hee before talks could start and suggested instead a “democratic government,” then “another government” in the South that Washington would accept. Nevertheless, in the end the North still preferred to be in an active position in initiating dialogue, rather than being passive and dependent on a third party. As a matter of fact, Kim had adequate reasons of not putting his trust on the third or the fourth party.

In January 1978, the North Korean Ambassador to Gabon was recalled for consultations and for designing certain measures to counter South Korea's increasing interactions with the Government of Gabon. It was reported that the Seoul Government decided to build a large store where the Gabonese Ministry of Trade and Industry's headquarter and other institutions would soon move in; it provided free doctors, and was trying to enter the African country's agricultural sector.⁴⁸³ Accordingly, some of Pyongyang's counter-measures included constructing a party cadre training school free of charge; building a five-meter height statue of president Bongo in bronze; dispatching ten doctors; organizing exhibition of North Korean products “that are superior to those from the Gabonese-South Korean shop.”⁴⁸⁴

In other words, Seoul's “open door” policy starting from 1973 and the fierce diplomatic competition that the two Koreas launched throughout the early 1970s that peaked in 1976 led to the North's caution. This is not to mention Pyongyang's already built-up skepticism throughout 1977 regarding a

⁴⁸² Ibid. Square brackets added by the author.

⁴⁸³ Telegram 047.011 from the Romanian Embassy in Libreville to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Gabon-North Korea Relations,” January 6, 1978. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116427>

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

possible Sino-American secret deal on Korea. As the next chapter unveils, its skepticism of the third or the fourth party in dialogue soon affected Pyongyang's decisions regarding tripartite or quadripartite talks proposals in the later half of the Carter administration.

At the same time, North Korea returned to its regular tactic of verbal attacks on the United States. Though its criticism on the Carter administration was somehow restrained throughout 1977, starting from 1978, the Workers' Party daily *Rodong Sinmun* remarkably increased its vicious attacks, pointing directly at Carter, as contained in the lengthy two full-page commentary titled "Wolfish Nature of Imperialism Cannot Change" as follows:

[The US imperialist's] policy of Korean aggression remains unchanged after Carter took office as President and it is assuming more grave dimensions as the days go by. Even though a president is replaced by another in the United States, its policy cannot change. The real rulers there are the monopolies and the administration is a mere instrument for executing the monopoly capitalists' policy of aggression and war.

Carter is more cunning than his predecessors and his Administration steps up the policy of aggression on Korea in a most sinister and vicious way. This is well proved by the preparation for a new war carried on by the US imperialists in south Korea behind the screen of "troop pullout" and by the "joint south Korea-US military exercise" staged some time ago.

The present US ruling quarters, like the preceding successive rulers, want a war, not peace, and want split, not reunification in Korea.⁴⁸⁵

Three years after Chairman Kim's decision to seek direct contacts with the U.S. in order to reach a "peace treaty" that excluded South Korea, he found such a golden opportunity with the inauguration of the new leadership in Washington. Throughout the first half of the presidency of Carter, Pyongyang made the most of its soft balancing tactics in drawing his administration's attention. "Letter diplomacy" and "indirect contact" were actively brought into play, yet with limited results. Then came May 1978, a critical month for North

⁴⁸⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 28, 1978; *The Pyongyang Times*, April 1, 1978.

Korea to decide its future strategy. In early May, Chinese Chairman Hua Guofeng visited Pyongyang where he showed quite a moderate position toward both the U.S. and South Korea. At the end of the month, a hardliner within the Carter administration, “another Kissinger” the North Koreans might think, visited Peking to resume talks with the Chinese. The scenario of the years 1970-1971 seemed like repeating.⁴⁸⁶ New calculations, thus, were highly recommended. As shown in the next chapter, the North quickly changed its tactics follows Sino-American normalization.

3. China

Political crisis at the end of 1976 in China created a huge momentum for reform and opening. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, with Chairman Mao Zedong’s death in September, followed by purges of the Jiang Qing clique (the Gang of Four), ultra-left influence evaporated and the Cultural Revolution came to an end. The enactment of the Four Modernizations⁴⁸⁷ was now begun. This led to what Chinese scholar Li Jie calls the “domestic dynamics of the opening to the outside world” in China.⁴⁸⁸ Support for making economic construction the highest priority became widespread, so did support for narrowing the gap between the country and the developed world, giving birth to internal incentive for improving Sino-American relations.

At this moment of 1977, Deng Xiaoping had reemerged in China’s political arena. For long Deng had become convinced that China needed to break away from its past and undertake fundamental political and economic

⁴⁸⁶ In April 1970, Premier Zhou Enlai paid an official goodwill visit to North Korea. The next year, in July 1971, Nixon’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger secretly visited Peking, laid the groundwork for the President’s visit to China, creating the “Nixon shock” for many parts of Asia, including the Korean peninsula.

⁴⁸⁷ The Four Modernizations were goals set forth by Deng Xiaoping in 1977 to strengthen the fields of (1) agriculture, (2) industry, (3) defense, (4) science and technology in China.

⁴⁸⁸ Li Jie. 2005. “China’s Domestic Politics and the Normalization of Sino-U.S. Relations, 1969-1979,” in William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross C and Gong Li, *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History* eds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 78.

reforms. He also believed in that a sustained interaction with the West was crucial in the modernization process. Speaking at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in May, Deng said:

In the past, we did not absorb advanced knowledge from foreign countries. The developed countries attach importance to scientific achievements. It is said that each day, some science news reaches the desks of the heads of other governments. The advanced result of scientific study is the result of human labor. Why not absorb these results? What is shameful about absorbing them? For our whole country to catch up and surpass the advanced countries of the world, scientific study is the prerequisite.⁴⁸⁹

These words by the future architect of China's modern reform and opening surprisingly resembles that of the Vietnamese leaders around the same period, as previously shown in this chapter. It seems both Peking and Hanoi were all heading to one target: seeking normalization with the United States at the earliest time possible. Considering this common goal between the two Communist regimes, it would be understandable if they competed against each other in order to win American attention and efforts.

In July, Deng was appointed Vice Premier and Vice Chairman of the Party at the Eleventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), just prior to U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's Peking visit. The difficult task of breaking the deadlock over normalization, which essentially surrounding the Taiwan issue, thus now fell on his shoulders. Over the previous four years, the Chinese leaders had repeatedly listed three conditions the United States would have to meet for the establishment of relations:

- 1) sever diplomatic ties with Taipei;
- 2) withdraw all U.S. military presence from Taiwan; and
- 3) abolish U.S.-Taiwan Defense Treaty.

This approach was commonly termed by the two sides as the "Japanese formula." It was because Japan, which had hurriedly established relations with

⁴⁸⁹ Recited from Li Jie. Ibid. 79. Underline added by the author.

Peking after the “Nixon shock,” had cut off all diplomatic relations with Taiwan and had carried out its business on the island through representatives who had no official or government status. The U.S., however, could not simply replicate the “Japanese model” for establishing relations with China. Japan, after all, did not have any defense links with Taipei, not to mention a security treaty.

The fact is that in February 1973, Henry Kissinger told Chinese leaders that after the 1974 elections, Washington would move toward “something like the Japanese solution with respect to diplomatic normalization.”⁴⁹⁰ Therefore, when Vance presented the Carter administration’s desire to maintain U.S. Government personnel in Taipei, even if they would not work in an embassy, Deng was irritated, saying this offer was less than what Nixon, Kissinger and Ford had promised. The angry Vice Premier rejected Carter’s new proposal, equated it as having a “flagless embassy” on Taiwan. Deng told Vance:

The second point is that you want an Embassy that does not have a sign on its door. No matter what you call it by name or whether you can fly your flag on it – in the final analysis it is the reversal of the existing Liaison Office, switching the Liaison Office to Taiwan.⁴⁹¹

The above remarks is what the Chinese called the “reverse liaison office” plan that Peking had long rejected throughout past negotiations with the Americans. From the Chinese point of view, Vance’s proposal was indeed a substantial step backward, because it indirectly sought a tacit Chinese promise not to use force against Taiwan. Moreover, allowing American officials to continue to stay in Taipei was nothing more than maintaining the

⁴⁹⁰ James Mann. 1998. *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton*. New York: Alfred A Knoff. 83.

⁴⁹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, “International Issues; Normalization,” August 24, 1977. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: Volume XIII: China, 59, 182. (Hereafter FRUS v.13).

liaison office. In other words, Vance “reproduce in a new form the formula already rejected by the Chinese side.”⁴⁹²

The Chinese response to Vance’s tough stance was a calculated one. Initial U.S. press reports, based on briefings with Vance in China, described the talks as a great success. On the way to the airport, Huang Hua emphasized the significance of Vance’s meeting with Hua, and Deng said they were very pleased with the visit.⁴⁹³ However, after seeing Vance off at the airport, Deng issued a searing statement, which termed the Vance visit a “setback” for U.S.-China relations. Regarding normalization, the Vice Premier declared Vance’s proposal represented a retreat, not a forward step, from the 1975 position.⁴⁹⁴

Irritated by the Vance visit, Deng Xiaoping decided to embark on plans to change his negotiation partner from Vance to the hardliner Brzezinski. Making full use of American curiosity about China, Deng took himself as a channel to influence the U.S. media and Congress to lobby for normalization. He answered major American newspapers and met prominent politicians, particularly members of the Republican Party, including future president George H. W. Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy (Democrat-Massachusetts).⁴⁹⁵

He even aimed a stronger strike by approaching one of the U.S. “European allies.” Meeting with Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany) Defense Committee Chairman Manfred Wörner in September, Deng proposed an anti-Soviet alliance, expressed interest in acquisition of Western European military technology, and explained to Wörner his blast at Secretary Vance “as a need to correct a press interpretation.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹² Betty Glad. 2009. *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. London: Cornell University. 123.

⁴⁹³ Memorandum from Dennis Chapman to Rick Inderfurth, “Secretary Vance’s PRC Trip,” August 29, 1977. Office of the Chief of Staff Files, Hamilton Jordan’s Confidential Files, Box 34a, Folder “Chinese Normalization, 1978,” CPL. 2.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 1.

⁴⁹⁵ Ezra Vogel. 2011. *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. London: Belknap Press of Harvard University. 2011. 315-316.

⁴⁹⁶ White House Briefing Notes, “4. Teng Proposes Anti-Soviet Alliance,” September 26, 1977. DDRS.

Peking also hit another ally of Washington – Tokyo. The PRC turned down a request by Hideji Kawasaki, a prominent member of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to visit Peking, since the stated purpose of the proposed visit was to serve as an advance party for a later visit by Foreign Minister Ichirō Hatoyama. Kawasaki was told that it would be useful for Hatoyama to visit the PRC until Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda had decided to proceed with the signing of the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty. NSC staffer Michel Oksenberg was shocked that the Chinese would turn down a potential Hatoyama visit. He assessed such “relatively new pattern in Chinese foreign policy” meant that Washington should not expect high administration officials would be able to visit China in the mean time, “unless those visits are seen to be genuinely connected with the normalization process.”⁴⁹⁷ Oksenberg admitted the Chinese had a relatively few ways in which they could actually communicate displeasure over the pace of normalization, but believed “this is one way they could do so.”⁴⁹⁸

And then came the “hundred-day thaw in China’s Soviet policy.”⁴⁹⁹ Peking intended to hit hard at the heart of the Washington-Moscow axis by improving its ties with the Soviet Union. Throughout the fall of 1977, China embarked on a temporary “thawing” in Sino-Moscow relations, dispatching a new Ambassador to Moscow to fill a post that had been vacant for the previous eighteen months.⁵⁰⁰ The Chinese addressed their border dispute with the Soviets with great earnestness, reaching an agreement on river navigation in October. Peking then sent Foreign Minister Huang Hua to the Soviet

⁴⁹⁷ Memorandum to Brzezinski, “Evening Report,” September 16, 1977. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA). 5.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Thomas M. Gottlieb. 1979. “The Hundred-Day Thaw in China’s Soviet Policy,” *Contemporary China*. Vol. 3. 3-14.

⁵⁰⁰ Harding. 1992. 69; Herbert J. Ellison. 1993. “Soviet-Chinese Relations: The Experience of Two Decades,” in Robert S. Ross. eds. *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. 97.

Embassy to attend National Day celebrations in November, the highest level official representation at such an event in more than ten years.⁵⁰¹

Although agrees that none of these initiatives represented a major concession on the China's part, this research argues that they were not mainly intended to evoke a positive Soviet response, as Harry Harding suggests, but rather a positive response or say, concession from Washington. The Chinese tactical response was thus a way of increasing their leverage in the normalization talks. Most importantly, it provided an opening for Brzezinski.

It should be noted that, despite China's strong rejection of the Carter administration's proposal in August 1977, throughout this time Chinese officials did not reject peaceful reunification with Taiwan. Deng Xiaoping also did not state that Peking oppose U.S. statement favoring a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue.⁵⁰² The Vice Premier, who made every effort to promote reform and opening, was extremely concerned about the normalization of Sino-American relations. Nevertheless, he understood that in dealing with the Americans, it was important to be patient. Receiving a U.S. Congress delegation in January 1978, Deng announced:

How to solve the Taiwan problem is our own business; it is impossible for us to declare that we will not use force. What I can say is that after the realization of the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations, we can consider the reality of Taiwan when we solve the Taiwan problem. We will try to solve the problem peacefully. But as Chairman Mao said to Kissinger in 1973, we Chinese, like you Americans, have two hands only. To solve the Taiwan problem requires two hands. No hand could be excluded. We will solve the problem peacefully by the right hand, [but] it may take more force. If that does not work, we will have to use the left hand, that is, military means.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Scott Kaufman. 2008. *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 133.

There cannot be any flexibility [on this question]. As to flexibility, to wait is the flexibility.⁵⁰³

Domestically, Deng successfully repulsed the popular claims by the military that China had to rapidly acquire modern armaments because it was engaging in a race against time with the Soviets. To Deng, what Peking needed was to buy time rather than race against it. As a result, within the country, there was a tendency in the official press to downplay the Soviet threat and then expanded it in the official English publications.⁵⁰⁴

There was a potential security threat from the Southern border that made the Chinese leaders think they could not wait any longer, however. As shown in the Vietnam section of this chapter, throughout 1977 China's relations with Vietnam was getting closer to the breaking point. Peking was highly alarmed by the large volume of Soviet aid going to Vietnam, and had persuaded Hanoi to turn down assistance from Moscow. Apart from his belief that Vietnam was becoming a Soviet outpost in Asia, Deng Xiaoping was further concerned of Hanoi's own ambitions for hegemony in Indochina. At the end of the year large-scale Vietnamese forces had entered Cambodia. For this reason at the turn of 1978, Deng was determined to establish a more solidly based anti-Soviet international united front that included the United States. Summing up the Vice Premier's calculations, Robert Garson critically evaluates:

As the principle negotiator in Beijing he realized that he could create a political programme of his own by drawing together his advocacy of modernization on the domestic front, the challenge to America's former foes in Vietnam, and normalization of relations with the United States.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Recited in Gong Li. 2005. "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations: China's U.S. Policy, 1972-1978," in William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross C and Gong Li, *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History* eds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 136

⁵⁰⁴ Michael Yahuda. 1983. *Towards the End of Isolationism: China's Foreign Policy After Mao*. London: Macmillan. 201-202.

⁵⁰⁵ Robert Garson. 1994. *The United States and China since 1949: A Troubled Affair*. London: Pinter Publisher. 158.

Therefore, as soon as the Chinese Liaison Office in Washington was notified of Brzezinski's interest in visiting China, Deng immediately responded that Peking would welcome him. The Vice Premier lost no time to plan the trip and once the U.S. National Security Advisor arrived, affirmed him that "what was said in Peking stayed in Peking." Bellow are excerpts of the confidential talks in Peking:

Brzezinski: ...With respect to discussions about normalization, which we trust will begin in June, I would like to suggest that these discussions be confidential and that no advance publicity be issued. I think continuing such discussions in the context of confidentiality would make their success more likely and would minimize some of the political complications...

Deng: You have mentioned just now the confidential character of the negotiations which may start in June. Please rest assured that in China there are better conditions to keep secrecy than in the U.S.

Brzezinski: I am afraid you are absolutely right. That is why it is better to conduct them here than in Washington.⁵⁰⁶

Thanks to this underground consent, later Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking Leonard Woodcock was given the green light to lead negotiations with the Chinese, even without the State Department's screening.

In sum, similar to the "cautious optimism" that spread among the Vietnamese and the North Koreans, the Chinese in 1977 were eager to resume and foster what had been achieved five years ago when Sino-American rapprochement was first launched. And just like their Asian Communist comrades, Peking was rigid upon the initial proposal made by the Carter administration. With or without forces, sooner or later, China would retake Taiwan, Deng Xiaoping insisted. Nevertheless, reform and opening, as well as security concerns from the Southern border, required a bold strategic move. And so the "boldest strategist of modern China" could definitely not miss this chance.

⁵⁰⁶ Memorandum of Conversation. "Meeting with Vice Premier Teng Hsiao P'ing," May 21, 1978. FRUS v.13. 438-439.

REVERSAL IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND COMMUNIST COUNTRIES' REACTIONS (MAY 1978-1980)

1. Carter's Policy Change: Normalization with China on Top

As of early 1977, China apparently supported U.S. engagement with Vietnam. Before sending the Woodcock Commission to Hanoi, President Carter had asked Huang Zhen, Chief of the Chinese Liaison Office in Washington, for his opinion. Huang replied “this was good,” and that normal relations between Hanoi and Washington “would be in the interest of both the U.S. and Vietnam and in China’s interest as well.”⁵⁰⁷ Whenever the question of Vietnam came up from the Chinese, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the others in the State Department usually referred to Ambassador Woodcock, that he was fully familiar with the issues related to Vietnam having served as the Chairman of the President’s Commission to open up with them, as a guarantee of U.S. China policy prioritization.⁵⁰⁸

Yet the second day of National Security Advisor Brzezinski’s historic visit to Peking in May 1978 began with Foreign Minister Huang Hua lectured him on the Vietnamese ambition to establish an “Indochinese Federation” and

⁵⁰⁷Memorandum of Conversation, “SALT; CBT. Indian Ocean; Africa, Middle East; Belgrade Conference; Vietnam; Fukuda Visit; Claims/Assets; Exchange Program,” March 23, 1977. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: Volume XIII: China. 59, 61. (Hereafter FRUS v.13)

⁵⁰⁸Memorandum of Conversation, “U.S. Foreign Policy; Domestic Roots; Allies; Strategic Forces; Arms Control; East-South Asia; Yugoslavia; ME,” August 22, 1977. FRUS v.13, 153.

seeking hegemony in the region, which was backed by the Soviets.⁵⁰⁹ Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping repeated these points and further showed disappointment with Vice President Walter Mondale's statement on the human rights issue in Cambodia during Mondale's Southeast Asian trip, arguing that such statement helped the Soviet Union.⁵¹⁰ In response, Brzezinski made it clear that the U.S. Government was interested in cooperating with China in actively opposing the Soviet Union. In a veiled reference to the continuing conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, Brzezinski employed China's favorite code words for the policies of the Soviet Union and Vietnam. He assured his hosts that Washington would share their resolve to "resist the efforts of any nation which seeks to establish global or regional hegemony."⁵¹¹ The Chinese were clearly pleased. The anti-Soviet "China Card" was winning out in the administration policy debate.

Back to Washington, Brzezinski defended normalization with China only, seeing Hanoi as a Soviet puppet, a thorn for Peking, which would harm American talks with the Chinese. The National Security Advisor recalled in his memoirs, "I repeatedly mentioned to the President that such action [of normalizing with Hanoi] would be interpreted by the Chinese as a 'pro-Soviet, anti-China move.'⁵¹² He even explained to Carter that the "Vietnam threat" helped in creating an accommodation from the Chinese on normalization with the U.S., as Peking surely feared a security threat on three sides.⁵¹³ Therefore,

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, "Summary of Dr. Brzezinski's Meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua," May 21, 1978. FRUS v.13, 429.

⁵¹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, "Summary of Dr. Brzezinski's Meeting with Chairman Hua Kuo-feng," May 22, 1978. FRUS v.13, 455.

⁵¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting with Vice Premier Teng Hsiao P'ing, May 21, 1978. FRUS v.13, 444.

⁵¹² Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 228. Square brackets added by the author.

⁵¹³ "Southeast Asia. The Chinese concern about Vietnam is extremely great, certainly much more than I had anticipated. China now faces threats both to its south [Vietnam] and its north [Soviet Union]. This helps establish the basis for an accommodation on normalization, for the Chinese hardly wish to face a security threat on three sides."

Memorandum from Michel Oksenberg of the NSC Staff to Brzezinski, "Appraisal of the China Trip," May 25, 1978. FRUS v.13, 465.

the National Security Council (NSC) thought the Carter administration should hide away its engaging intentions with Vietnam:

The Chinese **concern**... should lead us to stop saying that we wish to normalize relations with Vietnam. State should be instructed to delete this sentence from its standard descriptions of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.⁵¹⁴

This is not the only time the “Chinese concern” emerged to affect the policies toward Vietnam. Indeed, until the very end of 1978, the NSC has constantly tried its best to cram President Carter’s mind of a worrying Peking. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report in June assessed the below points:

- Hanoi might eventually feel it necessary to permit a Soviet military presence in Vietnam, long a major **concern** of Peking.
- The deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations almost certainly will prompt Hanoi to seek better relations with the United States, which the Vietnamese believe could become an alternate source of economic assistance.⁵¹⁵

The above assessment of Vietnamese imperative need for economic assistance could not be more accurate. In May 1978, a Chinese delegation of financial-monetary experts came to Hanoi, requested the abolishment of the fifteen-year-old noncommercial measure in payments (*thanh toán phi mậu dịch*) between China and Vietnam to adopt a new measure of “free foreign currency of the third country” (*ngoại tệ tự do của nước thứ ba*), such as French franc or U.S. dollar.⁵¹⁶ Basically, Peking no longer allowed special treatments in payments with Vietnam. Hanoi was stunned. Using all what they could to persuade the Chinese delegation to change their mind, the Vietnamese

⁵¹⁴ Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Report on My China Visit (May 20-23),” May 25, 1978. FRUS v.13, 470. Bold typed by the author.

⁵¹⁵ Intelligence Assessment Prepared in the National Foreign Assessment Center, Central Intelligence Agency, “The Peking-Hanoi-Phnom Penh Triangle,” June 1978. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. See also FRUS v.13, 507-508. Underline added by the author.

⁵¹⁶ “Báo cáo của đoàn chuyên viên Bộ Tài chính về tình hình làm việc với đoàn chuyên viên Tài chính Tiền tệ Trung Quốc năm 1978” (Report by the Ministry of Finance Delegation on the Meetings with the Chinese Financial-Monetary Experts in 1978). May 22-July 14, 1978. Folder 10774. Collection of the Prime Minister’s Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III). Hereafter CPMO.

questioned whether China implemented such a new measure in payments with any of the twelve member nations within the Prague Treaty of Noncommercial Payments. The Chinese officials avoided providing a clear answer yet Hanoi was well aware that there was no change in the regulations between the Prague Treaty signatures and Peking.⁵¹⁷ At the end of September, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced to the embassies of Prague Treaty countries Peking's unilateral withdrawal from the treaty, creating a shock among the Socialist nations.⁵¹⁸

The day after the U.S. National Security Advisor left China, Peking began a publicity campaign, charging Vietnam with mistreatment of its ethnic Chinese residents, the Hoa, tens of thousands of whom were fleeing Vietnam by land and sea.⁵¹⁹ In Vietnam, the alienation of the Hoa followed directly from the policies implemented to nationalize commercial property, which by design or default most strongly affected Vietnam's overseas Chinese community, the backbone of its commercial middle class in the South. China had good reason to be concerned about the fate of the Hoa, while at the same time the timing of its public condemnations could not help but to create the impression in Hanoi that there was direct linkage between Peking and Washington, which threatened to further isolate Vietnam.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ “Báo cáo của Bộ Tài chính về việc Trung Quốc rút khỏi Hiện định Phi mậu dịch Praha và Việt Nam cử đoàn đi Liên Xô bàn bạc với các nước trong khối SEV về biện pháp thanh toán năm 1978” (Report by the Ministry of Finance on the Chinese Withdrawal from the Noncommercial Prague Treaty, and Vietnamese Delegation to the Soviet Union to Discuss with SEV Countries about the Measures of Payments in 1978). November 14-30, 1978. Folder 10775. CPMO.

⁵¹⁹ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 5, 1978.

⁵²⁰ Some extent of skepticism with regard to Peking motives was based on the Chinese reaction of Khmer Rouge nationalization of overseas Chinese property in Cambodia after 1975. As many as half a million overseas Chinese in Cambodia were victims of expropriation and forced labor under the Khmer Rouge. Despite a significant diplomatic presence in Cambodia, Peking made no public effort to come to the aid of the Cambodian-Chinese. Many were said to have died, others fled to Thailand or ironically, Vietnam.

On the reason why Peking failed to lend a hand to the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, see Nicolas Khoo. 2011. *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Soviet Alliance*. New York: Columbia University Press. 5-6; Chenyi Wang. 2018. “The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological

In June 1978, after the cutoff of Chinese aid, and with its economy in tatters, Hanoi dropped its earlier resistance to move from observer status to full membership in the Soviet-sponsored Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).⁵²¹ Peking retaliated by closing down Vietnamese consulates in China, announcing termination of its aid program to Vietnam and closing the border on July 3. China also increased aid for the Khmer Rouge on July 11. Having set a clear course in its relations with Peking and Moscow, Hanoi unleashed a “diplomatic offensive” aimed at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states and Washington, signaling an interest in advancing rapidly the relations with the U.S.

In July, Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền visited the capitals of ASEAN countries. During his visit, Hiền declared that Vietnam recognized ASEAN as a “genuine regional organization for economic cooperation,” dropping the charge that it was a militaristic tool of American imperialism, and that Vietnam was prepared to discuss ZOPAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality) – the organization’s basic principal.⁵²²

In September and October, Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng toured all of the ASEAN capitals. In Malaysia, Đồng swallowed his ideological pride to visit the monument commemorating Malaysian soldiers who gave their lives fighting Communist insurgents. He even apologized for Hanoi’s aid to the insurgents, which was for all purposes inconsiderable compared to the Chinese support.⁵²³ In Thailand, Đồng assured the Thais that Hanoi did not support the Thai Communist Party.⁵²⁴ That effectively left the spotlight on Peking – the main supporter of the Thai Communist Party. Đồng also knocked on all

Victory and a Strategic Failure,” The Wilson Center Cold War International History Project Working Paper #88. 25-34.

⁵²¹ Also known as SEV (Sovét Ekonomícheskoy Vzaimopómoshichi), or CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance).

⁵²² *Nhân Dân*, September 11, 1978.

⁵²³ Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 319.

⁵²⁴ *Nhân Dân*, September 9, 1978.

ASEAN doors with a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in hand. All he got, however, were some nicely worded joint statements.

At the same time, Vietnamese spokesmen publicly stated that Hanoi would no longer demand bilateral economic assistance as a precondition for normalization of relations with the United States. The fruits of the Vietnamese speeding up included visit by a Vietnamese delegation to Missing In Actions (MIA) Identification Laboratory in Hawaii in July; visit by Congressman ‘Sony’ Montgomery delegation of seven to Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City in August;⁵²⁵ and the resumption of discussions on normalization in New York in September. The President wrote in his *White House Diary* thus:

AUGUST 21... I think we ought to move on Vietnam normalization. [Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan] Ham feels that it might be a serious political problem, but I believe the country is ready to accept it now that they’ve dropped their demands for reparations or payments.⁵²⁶

Yet it was revealed that these improvements in contacts were actually slowed down by Brzezinski’s hard efforts, as he repeatedly warned Carter of possible negative reaction from Peking. He advised the President, for example:

Chinese-Vietnamese animosities, (U.S.) efforts to improve relations with Vietnam, which would strengthen Hanoi’s international position, could adversely affect our efforts to elicit some **flexibility** from Peking. [Carter wrote in the left-hand margin of the report “Do *not* send a negative signal. Just delay.”]⁵²⁷

This Peking’s “flexibility” was crucial and vital for Washington in its attempts regarding not just Taipei but also Pyongyang, as will be covered in detail in the later part of the chapter. From this moment on, any positive

⁵²⁵ This was the first time Vietnam allowed an American delegation to officially enter Ho Chi Minh since the city was renamed from “Saigon.” Director-General for North American Affairs Trần Quang Cơ himself guided the Montgomery delegation throughout the trip to the Southern part of the country. Trần Quang Cơ. 2003. *Hồi ức và Suy nghĩ* (Memoirs and Thoughts). 14.

⁵²⁶ Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 215. Square brackets added by the author.

⁵²⁷ Memorandum from Brzezinski to President Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #64,” June 23, 1978. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: Volume XXII: Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 91. (Hereafter FRUS v.22). Bold typed by the author.

signals from the State Department regarding U.S. contacts with Vietnam was immediately and severely criticized by the National Security Council. Brzezinski pushed Carter to choose “Vietnam or China, and China is incomparably more important to us.”⁵²⁸ It was also from this moment that China officially topped Carter’s deck. Now any signal from Hanoi had to go through the China experts in the NSC, and even worse for the Vietnamese, through the Chinese leaders.

When Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyễn Cơ Thạch implied to Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke that Hanoi would drop the demand for aid during their talks in New York on September 27, 1978, Oksenberg and Brzezinski were panic of an inevitable scenario where the U.S. would end up normalizing relations with Vietnam before doing so with China.⁵²⁹ In reality, Thạch first raised the pledge of aid, yet decided to drop it to accept the American terms for normalization. He pressured Holbrooke to agree to immediate normalization, with no pre-condition, and asked to sign a memo of understanding. Delighted, Holbrooke took the offer to Washington, while his deputy, Robert Oakley, explored the establishment of working groups, to fine-tune the normalization process.⁵³⁰ In an interview in 1980 with Michael Morrow, the American journalist who uncovered the Mỹ Lai massacre, Thạch, then Vietnam’s Foreign Minister, revealed he also told Holbrooke that day that the U.S. do not have to choose between China and Vietnam, saying Washington could go ahead normalize its relations with Peking first, then normalize with Hanoi later.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Memorandum from Brzezinski to President Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #66,” July 7, 1978. FRUS v.13, 509.

⁵²⁹ Memorandum from Michel Oksenberg of the NSC Staff to Brzezinski, “Dick Holbrooke’s Conversation with the Vietnamese,” September 22, 1978. National Security Advisor Files, Country Files, Box 85, Folder “Vietnam, 1/77-12/78,” Carter Presidential Library (CPL). The same document appears in FRUS v.22, 92. See also Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski, “Dick Holbrooke’s Meeting with the Vietnamese at the UNGA, September 27, 1978.” FRUS v.22, 93-94.

⁵³⁰ Chanda. 1986. 265-267.

⁵³¹ Deputy Foreign Minister Lê Văn Bằng in an interview with VietnamNet in 2011. *Rơi vào ván bài nước lớn, Việt Nam lỡ bước* (Fall into the Great Power’s Gamble, Vietnam Made a

As normalization had been agreed in principle with the Vietnamese all thanks to Richard Holbrooke's hard attempts, the National Security Advisor immediately found ways to put U.S.-Vietnam normalization off until after agreement with China was complete. The next day, September 28, Brzezinski noted in his daily journal:

I pointed out to the President that his comments on the evening notes from Cy [Vance] last night might imply that he is now giving the green light to the rapid establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam. This, in my judgement, could prejudice our efforts with China. The President, though somewhat reluctantly, wrote on the margins of the evening notes an additional sentence: **'Please first give me the reactions of the Chinese.'** I hope this will slow things down somewhat.⁵³²

By taking into account the standpoints of the Chinese, Carter gave in to the National Security Advisor's strategic calculations of prioritizing Peking over Hanoi. Also, two days after Thach-Holbrooke New York meeting, asked by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance his opinion of the Hanoi's new move in negotiations, Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua answered that Vietnamese-American normalization "is a matter strictly for your two countries."⁵³³ However, what important lies in the next clause of Hua's sentence:

... But (*pu-kou*) if we are interested, what we are interested in is the impact of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Vietnam on the strategic policy of the U.S. in the Far East... In Vietnam, there already are naval and air bases constructed by you. The Soviet Union will go out to use these bases.⁵³⁴

The Chinese leaders from this moment began moving to the next step: pressuring the U.S. to pioneer in rejecting Vietnamese entreatment for any forms of aid to isolate Hanoi economically at a large scale. It is because, in Huang Hua's words, "giving economic aid to Vietnam means supporting the

Slip), December 6, 2011. <https://baomoi.com/roi-vao-van-bai-nuoc-lon-viet-nam-lo-buoc/c/7485808.epi>

⁵³² Brzezinski. 1983. 228. Bold typed by the author.

⁵³³ Memorandum of Conversation, "Summary of Secretary Vance's Meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua," October 3, 1978. FRUS v.13, 522.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. Underline added by the author.

Soviet Union.”⁵³⁵ Hua in this meeting warned Vance that China gave aid to Vietnam that worth more than “\$20 billion” but could not hold back the Vietnamese ambition of “regional hegemony.”⁵³⁶

Meanwhile, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping told Japanese newsmen that aid to Vietnam was “a waste of money.”⁵³⁷ Later, reciting the “USD 20 billion” in China’s failed effort to check Hanoi’s gravitation to Moscow, he further said to the American officials: “It is delusory to think that the establishment of diplomatic relations will extract Vietnam from the influence of the Soviet Union, and it would be impossible for the U.S. to use economic aid to Vietnam to lure Vietnam away from the Soviet Union.”⁵³⁸ Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien (Li Xiannian) echoed, telling an American group that aid would only relieve the Soviet Union of a “great burden” while having no effect on Vietnam’s close ties to the USSR.⁵³⁹ In fact, as CIA Director Stansfield Turner concluded, the Chinese officials returned to the theme of U.S. economic assistance to Vietnam almost every time they discussed the question of U.S.-Vietnam normalization.⁵⁴⁰

On October 11, Carter decided to give in to the NSC to shelve normalization with Hanoi and hurry the establishment of ties with Peking. Still Brzezinski wanted to make sure that Carter could not reverse his statement by sending another reminding report, saying:

- (1) ...The continuing Indochinese crisis, which now involves Communist states. An early improvement in Sino-Vietnamese hostility is unlikely, and North Korea appears to be leaning toward China on this issue...

⁵³⁵ Ibid. 556.

⁵³⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of Secretary Vance’s Meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua,” October 3, 1978. FRUS v.13, 552.

⁵³⁷ National Intelligence Daily Cable. “China-US-Vietnam: Relations,” September 28, 1978. CREST.

⁵³⁸ Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence Turner to Brzezinski, “Chinese Attitude Towards US-Vietnamese Relations,” November 20, 1978. CREST. See also FRUS v.13, 598.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

(2) Timing of Vietnamese normalization. I cannot help suspecting that guilt feelings over the Vietnamese war have something to do with the evident desire of Cy (Vance) and Holbrooke to move on this issue rapidly: [In the left margin, Carter wrote: “I don’t have guilt feelings & I want to move re VNam.”] if we normalize before normalizing with China, we will leave our relations with China anomalous while coupling SALT with recognition of a pro-Soviet state with whom the Chinese currently have bad relations. Thus recognition immediately after normalization with China seems the preferred course. [Below Carter wrote “Zbig (Brzezinski) – You have a tendency to exalt the PRC issues.” He also underlined “after normalization with China.”]⁵⁴¹

It was also uncovered in this report that the National Security Advisor indeed pushed Carter to normalize with China in December, and also planned to push the Chinese that if they missed the chance, normalization could only come in fall 1979.⁵⁴² China, too, began to be unusually forthcoming, and the NSC soon achieved the “Chinese flexibility” they had longed for.

On November 1, General Secretary Lê Duẩn and Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng boarded the Soviet jet that took them to Moscow for the historic event – the signing of the twenty-five year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. By this Treaty, Hanoi obtained strategic reinsurance through a provision for “mutual consultation and assistance” in the event either country was attacked.⁵⁴³ While the Treaty did not mandate Soviet military response, it did represent the lean-to-one-side stance, which the Vietnamese had tried hard to avoid after the American withdrawal in 1975.

⁵⁴¹ Memorandum from Brzezinski to President Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #75.” October 13, 1978. FRUS v.13, 570. Underline added by the author.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Article 6: “In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat, and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and the security of the two countries.”

Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the SRV and the USSR. Socialist Republic of Vietnam, November 3, 1978. *Giai đoạn mới trong quan hệ Việt Nam-Liên Xô* (A New Stage in Vietnam-Soviet Relations), Hà Nội: Sự Thật (Truth Publisher). 10.

Meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping visited ASEAN capitals, condemned that the Vietnamese were the “hooligans of the East,” and announced to Singaporean leaders that Vietnam “must be punished.”⁵⁴⁴ In Washington, concerns raised up whether the U.S. should move on with Hanoi, since it was concluded that “the timing of any U.S. move to recognize Vietnam would be instrumental in determining the depth of Chinese displeasure.”⁵⁴⁵ Written in Carter’s *White House Diary*:

NOVEMBER 14 [Secretary of Energy James R.] Schlesinger reported that Chinese leaders are strongly opposed to normalization of relations between ourselves and Vietnam. I told him we had no intention to do this before similar action with China, provided they didn’t deliberately delay.⁵⁴⁶

Meeting in New York with Director-General for North American Affairs Trần Quang Cơ at the end of November, Holbrooke’s deputy Robert Oakley calmed the urges from Hanoi, confirming that Washington did not alter its position on normalization with Vietnam. But the U.S. had to slow down, according to Oakley, in order to receive a clear answer from Hanoi regarding the three issues:

- 1) The refugee crisis, or the “boat people” issue.
- 2) Vietnam-Kampuchea border conflict.
- 3) The Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.⁵⁴⁷

The issues that had never before been raised during negotiations were now impediments to normalization. By this request, Washington joined Peking to further isolate Vietnam by increasing the cost to Hanoi of normalization of relations with the U.S.

In response, Cơ showed Vietnamese worryment that it seemed like Hanoi was playing “the American’s game” where the “China Card” was being

⁵⁴⁴ Chanda. 1986, 261.

⁵⁴⁵ Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence Turner to Brzezinski, “Chinese Attitude Towards US-Vietnamese Relations,” November 21, 1978. FRUS v.13, 599.

⁵⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter. 2010. 260. Square brackets added by the author.

⁵⁴⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, November 30, 1978. FRUS v.22, 111-114.

used.⁵⁴⁸ Oakley affirmed Cơ that “the establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China will have no effect – one way or the other – on our policy toward normalizing relations with Vietnam... The U.S. would not allow China to affect our policies toward normalizing relations with Vietnam.”⁵⁴⁹ The intention behind Oakley’s outright lies and his handing to Cơ a picture of the old embassy of South Vietnam on the R Street of Washington, District of Columbia, as the “future” Vietnamese embassy was unclear.⁵⁵⁰ Cơ nonetheless decided to stay in New York until the end of January 1979, an action that shows Vietnam’s desperate hope, a near-like “never say die” (*còn nước còn tát*)⁵⁵¹ attitude. As shown in the next part of this chapter, even this desperate hope of Hanoi was brutally quelled by Peking.

Declassified documents obtained from the U.S. side may suggest a different explanation, which partly reflects the “China factor” in effect. It was likely that the decision that normalization with Hanoi should be put on the back-burner in deference to diplomatic negotiations underway with Peking was not immediately communicated to Holbrooke. Accordingly, Holbrooke sent Oakley to New York to meet with Vietnamese negotiators. In other words, there were in reality parallel policy discussion at work in Washington.

Starting from October, policy hard-liners, their base of operations in Brzezinski’s National Security Council, had generally won the ear of the President, a move about which Vance’s State Department had not been fully informed. As a result, State Department officials sent conflicting signals to the

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. 119.

⁵⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, December 19, 1978. FRUS v.22, 134.

⁵⁵⁰ Trần Quang Cơ in his memoirs widely circulated on the Vietnamese language online webpages since 2003 argued that the reason for continued U.S. positive signals after U.S.-Sino normalization was to “slow Vietnam down in its tilt toward the Soviets and in the Cambodian issue.” Trần Quang Cơ. 2003. *Hồi ức và Suy nghĩ* (Memoirs and Thoughts), 15.

Deputy Foreign Minister Lê Văn Bằng in an interview with VietnamNet in 2011 confirmed this information. He even recalled that in December 1978, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) had already decided major appointments in Washington, D.C., even though the Embassy itself was not yet decided. He himself was assigned to a post in the Office Affairs. *Rơi vào ván bài nước lớn, Việt Nam lỡ bước* (Fall into the Great Power’s Gamble, Vietnam Made a Slip), December 6, 2011.

<https://baomoi.com/roi-va-van-bai-nuoc-lon-viet-nam-lo-buoc/c/7485808.epi>

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. This information was shared by both of the Vietnamese former diplomats.

Vietnamese. For example, Holbrooke was quoted by Thai Foreign Ministry sources as having said Washington would normalize relations with Vietnam within “two months,” and the move would be realized following “the November by-elections in the United States,” which the Vietnamese side immediately reported on.⁵⁵² The information, however, was denied by the State Department the same day.

All in all, the National Security Advisor wrote proudly in his memoirs that only a small number of Carter administration officials were aware of Leonard Woodcock’s efforts in Peking. There the Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office was given the responsibility of leading negotiations with the Chinese for the American side, starting from October.⁵⁵³ Carter in fact gave his secret agreement that instructions sent to Woodcock for his talks with the Chinese side would be issued without State Department screening.⁵⁵⁴ Hence, this research concludes that prioritizing China over Vietnam was a policy that not everyone in the Carter’s Cabinet was in favor of or even well aware of.

In a central committee meeting in November, China decided on tentative limited military lessons for Vietnam. At the end of the month, Deng told Japanese visitors “There is another wish I have, to go to Washington... I have told you before that it would only take one second to complete the [Chinese-] Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty. If we expend the same effort it would only take two seconds for Sino-U.S. normalization.”⁵⁵⁵ On December 4, two days after the Vietnamese-sponsored Kampuchean front was announced, China hinted that they might compromise on Taiwan. The door for U.S.-Vietnamese normalization in effect was now completely shut.

⁵⁵² “VNA Reports Holbrooke Remarks on SRV-U.S. Relations in Vientiane,” October 31, 1978. National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Brzezinski Office File, Country Chron, Box 15, Folder “Vietnam: 1978-1979,” CPL.

⁵⁵³ Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 224.

⁵⁵⁴ Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006b. “The Changing Post-War U.S. strategy in Indochina.” In Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–79*. London, UK: Routledge, 78.

⁵⁵⁵ Memorandum from Michel Oksenberg of the NSC Staff to Brzezinski, “The Chinese Internal Situation: Further Developments,” November 30, 1978. FRUS v.13, 607.

Meanwhile, during official talks with the Chinese leadership in May, Brzezinski affirmed to the Chinese the “depth, durability and firmness” of the American commitment to the security and well-being of the Republic of Korea (ROK).⁵⁵⁶ Several times he emphasized U.S. readiness to organize tripartite talks if both of the Koreas were amenable, at the same time underlining Washington’s key principle:

We will not engage in separate talks with the North Korean government, and we will not participate in any efforts direct or indirect to weaken the political stability and the security of the ROK.⁵⁵⁷

The National Security Advisor also asked the Chinese leaders’ opinion of Yugoslav Tito and Romanian Ceaușescu’s proposals for the Korean problem. In turn, he received firm assurance from Foreign Minister Huang Hua and later Chairman Hua Guofeng that North Korea had no intention of moving Southward and attacking South Korea. China supported North Korea’s desire to obtain independent and peaceful unification free from foreign interference, and Hua told Brzezinski that a unified Korea would “make it difficult for Soviet revisionists” to interfere in the affairs of Korea.⁵⁵⁸

What is noteworthy is Brzezinski’s understanding of the Chinese position on North Korea. At the Blue House following his China visit, the National Security Advisor lectured South Korean President Park Chung Hee, who confessed that he could not decipher the real thoughts of the Chinese. Brzezinski saw China’s concern about North Korea developing an orientation not unlike that of Vietnam, and its political influence in Pyongyang would deteriorate if the Chinese did not provide at least formally strong support for Kim. The head of the National Security Council concluded, “the Chinese face

⁵⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation Between Dr. Brzezinski and Foreign Minister Huang Hua, May 20, 1978. FRUS v.13, 429.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid, 456.

an uncertain situation in Korea, a Soviet controlled Mongolia and expanding Soviet influence in Vietnam.”⁵⁵⁹

This assessment and reference to Vietnam was crucial in that it impacted Brzezinski’s understanding of both Chinese and North Korean actions. To avoid another pro-Soviet satellite in North Korea, the one way China could do was to identify with the North’s view. Therefore, to Brzezinski, Chinese support for North Korean position was almost formalistic. Overall, he found the Chinese assessment of the international scene to be “realistic, undogmatic” and aware that “to a large extent they share broad strategic objectives with the U.S.”⁵⁶⁰ His NSC staff agreed completely, and evaluated the National Security Advisor’s China visit thus:

The real differences between us at this point are less than the rhetoric suggests. But we harm the Chinese cause by saying this. Hence, in our public statements, it is best to ignore the genuine commonality of our views.⁵⁶¹

It appears that it was not just Communist thought, but also the calculations of Washington – Seoul close ally – that were difficult for President Park to apprehend. After complicating matter for Park by speaking about the “real” Chinese and North Korean intentions, Brzezinski returned to his ultimate goal: wooing South Korea to talk with the North. According to the National Security Advisor, in this complex situation, trilateral talks would help Park to “leave it to the North to demonstrate their own intransigence or modify its position” and “make it less necessary to understand what the Chinese really have in mind.”⁵⁶² In other words, engaging in talks with North Korea would solve all the problems and, above all, ease Park’s mind.

⁵⁵⁹ Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 25, 1978, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA); Telegram from the Secretary of State to the American Embassy in Seoul, “Dr. Brzezinski’s Meeting with President Park,” June 1, 1978. Remote Archives Capture (RAC), NLC-16-112-3-5-2. Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Memorandum From Michel Oksenberg of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), “Appraisal of the China Trip,” May 25, 1978. FRUS v.13, 465. Underline added by the author.

⁵⁶² Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 25, 1978, DNSA.

For the Thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the DPRK Government on September 10, 1978, Kim Il Sung welcomed high-level foreign leaders to attend the celebration. Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping honored Kim by spending five days in Pyongyang.⁵⁶³ Moreover, Deng was the highest-ranking official from any country to attend. In public gatherings, Kim always placed the Vice Premier right next to himself. During bilateral talks, Deng explained how difficult it had been to get the Japanese accept the “anti-hegemony” clause in the Peace and Friendship Treaty,⁵⁶⁴ as well as briefing Kim on the progress of his secret talks on normalization with the Americans.⁵⁶⁵

Moreover, in his commemorating speech at this event, Chairman Kim showed a reconciling tone, saying “we leave the door for a conversation with the United States and with the South Korean authorities and political parties,”⁵⁶⁶ adding that the open-door policy was contingent upon the sincerity of other parties. In Kim’s words, “If the South Korean authorities sincerely want a dialogue and collaboration with us, they should change their policy of national division to a reunification policy and their anticommunist policy to a policy of alliance with communism.”⁵⁶⁷ He called for “democratization” in the South, which would entail the repeal of Anti-Communist and National Security Laws, the abolition of the Yushin constitution, and the legalization of the Revolutionary Party for Reunification.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports in the latter half of 1978 therefore showed a great deal of confidence in Pyongyang’s increased dependence on Peking amidst North Korea’s intensified fears of secret

⁵⁶³ *The Pyongyang Times*, issues throughout September 1978.

⁵⁶⁴ The long-stalled ten-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the PRC was signed on August 12, 1978, in which the two sides reaffirmed their opposition to hegemonism in the Asia-Pacific and in any other region. After his landmark trip to China in May, Brzezinski urged Prime Minister Fukuda to conclude this treaty, despite the controversial clause and strong Soviet objections.

⁵⁶⁵ Ezra F. Vogel. 2011. *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 280.

⁵⁶⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, September 9, 1978; *The Pyongyang Times*, September 10, 1978.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

agreements among the great powers regarding the Korean issues.⁵⁶⁸ Strengthening this belief were White House reports on North Korean military activities in Cambodia assisting the Pol Pot army against the Vietnamese, with or without Chinese encouragement.⁵⁶⁹ Added to this was the rumor of Vice Premier Deng's visit to Pyongyang prior to his departure for the U.S.⁵⁷⁰

Above all, the international events in late 1978 strongly contributed to U.S. confidence in "Chinese flexibility." As analyzed previously in this chapter, in November, the Soviet Union concluded the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam, heightening a sense of crisis among the Chinese. Deng broke the deadlock by making concessions to the U.S. on Taiwan, a sticking point that prevented the immediate conclusion of the Washington-Peking normalization negotiations. As a result, a week before Deng's historic visit to Washington in January 1979, the CIA, on Brzezinski's order, provided an overly positive report of the situation.

Citing "Chinese flexibility" since the launch of Sino-U.S. normalization regarding their contacts with Taiwan as an example, the CIA expected the same flexibility from China with regards to the Korean issue. Believed that "at a minimum," the Chinese were likely to see an "advantage" in inferring some "future flexibility" in their policy toward the Korean peninsula, the CIA even expected Peking to request "parallel actions" in Washington – the flexibility on U.S. part to open contact with Pyongyang.⁵⁷¹ Followed the positive Four-Point Proposal⁵⁷² announced by the North Korean

⁵⁶⁸ Reports such as: Intelligence Appraisal, "Great Power Relations with the Two Koreas, September 22, 1978. DNSA; Intelligence Memorandum, "Korea and the Major Powers," October 30, 1978. CREST.

⁵⁶⁹ Memorandum from East Asia for Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Weekly Report," June 15, 1978. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS).

⁵⁷⁰ Memorandum for Dr. Brzezinski from The Situation Room, "Noon Notes," January 11, 1979. DDRS; Cable from the GDR Embassy in Pyongyang, "DPRK Proposals on Korea's Unification, January 25, 1979. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121291>

⁵⁷¹ Intelligence Memorandum, "Chinese Leverage on North Korea," January 23, 1979. DNSA. 7.

⁵⁷² The Central Committee of the Democratic Front of the Reunification of the Fatherland (DFRF) responded positively to President Park Chung Hee's proposal on January 19, offering a "Four-Point Proposal" for accelerating the reunification process, including holding a grand

authorities on January 23, 1979, the Carter Cabinet was instantly deceived by the vision of “the beginning of a Chinese-inspired effort to preempt the Korean issue prior to Deng’s trip to Washington.”⁵⁷³ The “China solution” for Korea was apparently bearing fruit and the U.S. was preparing for a historical breakthrough in solving the long-stalled Korean problem.

One of the main topics for Carter in discussions with Deng during the Vice Premier’s visit to Washington was Korea. The agenda was clear-cut, though difficult to achieve. It included urging the Chinese to

- (1) restrain any potential North Korean effort to take the South militarily;
- (2) influence the North to talk to the South;
- (3) talk directly with the South.⁵⁷⁴

While confirming no military attack from the North, the Vice Premier refused to put pressure on North Korea and thus avoided working with South Korea. The reason, as pointed out by Deng during a discussion with Senator Sam Nunn (Democrat-Georgia) prior to his U.S. visit, was China’s historic “relationship of trust”⁵⁷⁵ with the North Koreans. Deng explained that China had never interfered in the internal affairs or decision-making process of the North as the Soviet Union had, which had resulted in Pyongyang’s unhappiness with and break away from the Soviets.⁵⁷⁶

The American suggestion of an “exchange of trade relations”—the U.S. would open trade relations with North Korea if China would do so with South Korea—and that China should cooperate with the U.S. in establishing offices to mediate between the two Koreas received a sharp rejection from Deng.⁵⁷⁷

national convention. The ROK delegation for the South-North Coordinating Committee (SNCC) finally met the DFRF on February 17, but talks came to nowhere after three rounds of meeting.

⁵⁷³ Memorandum from Cyrus Vance for the President, January 23, 1979. DDRS.

⁵⁷⁴ Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, January 25, 1979. FRUS v.13, 718.

⁵⁷⁵ Telegram from the Liaison Office in China to the Department of State, January 11, 1979. FRUS v.13, 762.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of the President’s Meeting with the People’s Republic of China Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping,” January 29, 1979. FRUS v.13. 762;

Carter was also unable to convince the Vice Premier to change the North Korean position of including “different parties and peoples organizations” in any North-South Korean dialogue.⁵⁷⁸ This was the main cause for unproductive inter-Korean contacts in early 1979.

Surprisingly, even up until May 1979, the Carter administration still optimistically held hopes of the Chinese influencing Kim Il Sung to come to terms with three-way talks. Meeting with Chinese Ambassador Chai Zemin, Brzezinski constantly urged Chinese cooperation in persuading the North Koreans, saying “we can all think about it and find some creative solution,” that “it is easier if we work together.”⁵⁷⁹ Ambassador Chai subtly refuted Brzezinski’s pressing imploration, saying that he believed the National Security Advisor was “good at finding solutions to all kinds of problem.”⁵⁸⁰ In reality, this was not at all the case.

Ironically, it was South Korean President Park Chung Hee who realized that the Americans were being overly optimistic in relying on the Chinese. Park frankly told Senator Nunn that East Asian security was being placed in danger as a result of U.S.-PRC normalization and he felt that many U.S. statements were “too optimistic.”⁵⁸¹ In a letter to Carter regarding Deng’s visit, Park voiced his concern with the U.S.’s mistake in “overestimating the role of China and of underestimating the impact of diplomatic and military maneuvers of the Soviet Union.”⁵⁸² Nevertheless, Park perhaps never

Telegram from Brzezinski to Ambassador Gleysteen, “Carter-Deng Conversation on Korea,” February 10, 1979. DDRS.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 761.

⁵⁷⁹ Memorandum of Conversation between Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski and PRC Ambassador to the U.S., May 4, 1979. 6:03-6:18 PM. DDRS.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Telegram from Ambassador Gleysteen to Cyrus Vance, “Codel Nunn’s Talk with President Park,” January 13, 1979. The State Department E-Reading Room.

⁵⁸² Letter from Park Chung Hee to Jimmy Carter, January 31, 1979. Christian F. Ostermann, James Person, Charles Kraus (2013), “The Carter Chill: US-ROK-DPRK Trilateral Relations, 1976-1979,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 458. (Hereafter “The Carter Chill”) Obtained from Roll 2009-22, File 02, Frames 60-63m South Korean Foreign Ministry Archive.

The author found the same document yet with different date: Cable from US Embassy in Seoul to Secretary of State in Washington, “President Park’s Letter on US/PRC

understood that it was the overly confident U.S. assessments of both the Chinese and the North Korean positions that resulted in the final suspension of U.S. troop withdrawal, the very objective he wished to achieve in dealing with the “Carter Chill.”

A group of NSC and State Department staff and Senators succeeded in persuading Carter to make the tough decision of troop withdrawal delay on the same day as the North Korean Four-Point Proposal announcement. In a favorable situation that included a Sino-American consensus, concessions from Pyongyang, and improved U.S.-South Korean alliance, the U.S. should have grasped the opportunity of potential dialogue with North Korea. Senator Sam Nunn, indifferent to President Park’s concerns, stated bluntly to Carter, “let our withdrawals become contingent upon progress in reducing tensions on the peninsula.”⁵⁸³ The troop withdrawal plan, which was once considered a bargaining chip for inter-Korean dialogue in 1977, was now dependent on the results of the upcoming trilateral talks in 1979. Even though disagreed with his staff, Carter could not help but announce the freeze on troop withdrawals on February 9, 1979.

In early 1979, while Sino-American normalization of relations resulted in the U.S. sacrificing its diplomatic efforts with Vietnam, it was assumed that Carter’s idealistic plan in Korea would be successful, given the close-knit relationship between Peking and Pyongyang and Chinese “flexibility.” However, as history has shown, despite President Park’s concession to participate in tripartite talks, on the other side of the table the Communists proved to be intransigent.

2. Retreat from Engagement with Vietnam and North

Korea

Normalization,” January 13, 1979. National Security Advisor Files, Cable Files, Box 16, Folder “12/78-1/79.” CPL.

⁵⁸³ Memorandum of Conversation between the President and Senators, State Department and NSC staff, January 23, 1979. DDRS.

Washington and Peking finally normalized diplomatic relations on December 15, 1978, technically opening the door at last for the resumption of the U.S. normalization process with Hanoi. However, by this time the Khmer Rouge had moved nineteen divisions to the Vietnamese border and China had also militarized its border with Vietnam. Decided that it could not wait any longer, Hanoi launched a preemptive invasion of Cambodia on December 25, the Christmas Day of 1978, capturing Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979.⁵⁸⁴ Once arrived in Washington, Deng Xiaoping wasted little time in condemning Vietnam as “100 percent the Cuba of the East”⁵⁸⁵ and announcing privately to President Carter Chinese plan to “give them an appropriate limited lesson” as Peking needed U.S. “moral support in the international field.”⁵⁸⁶

Before Deng’s arrival, the Carter administration fully anticipated his announcement of a Chinese military move against Vietnam. Declassified documents unveil the fact that the U.S. Government was even well aware of the possibility of Sino-Vietnamese border clashes once Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia. As soon as January 5, 1979, CIA National Intelligence Daily constantly issued Alert Memorandums warning of possible direct Chinese military action and increasing military buildup alongside Sino-Vietnamese frontier.⁵⁸⁷ The East-West Planning Group (EWP), consisted of staffs from different offices, met in mid-January and concluded that to avoid the “paper tiger syndrome,” the pressure on China to take stern action against Hanoi was considerable. The timing, as the Group estimated, would be after Deng’s visit.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁴ Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley. 1990. *Red Brotherhood at War: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos since 1975*. New York: Verso. 104-111.

⁵⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of the President’s First Meeting with PRC Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping,” January 29, 1979. FRUS v.13, 747.

⁵⁸⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “Vietnam,” January 29, 1979. FRUS v.13, 768.

⁵⁸⁷ National Intelligence Daily (Cable), Alert Memorandum, January 5, 1979; Alert Memorandum, “China-Vietnam-USSR,” January 20, 1979. CREST.

⁵⁸⁸ Memorandum from Fritz Ermarth of the NSC Staff to Brzezinski, “Sino-Soviet Relations,” January 17, 1979. FRUS v.13, 713.

Washington was also well aware of one of the key goals of Deng coming to America: hit Vietnam with the appearance of U.S. acquiescence.⁵⁸⁹ Secretary Vance worried of such a possibility, fearing that “the roles in the years 1977 and 1978 was reversed; now it was China that play the ‘American Card’ as a counterbalance with the Soviet influence in Vietnam.”⁵⁹⁰ Therefore, Assistant Secretary of State Holbrooke met several times with the Chinese Ambassador to clearly state U.S. opposition to a military conflict between Peking and Hanoi. Yet Brzezinski advised Carter not to send any message to Deng of a U.S. “excessive panic” of possible Chinese action. The National Security Advisor wrote in his memoirs, “I was worried that the President might be persuaded by Vance to put maximum pressure on the Chinese not to use force, since this would simply convince the Chinese that the U.S. was a ‘paper tiger’.”⁵⁹¹

Though “was well aware of the pitfalls,”⁵⁹² Carter once again gave in to the National Security Council. When Deng requested a private meeting in the Oval Office and outlined all the reasons for a punitive action across the border into Vietnam, Carter avoided a direct answer, saying he thought “it was best to continue the isolation of Vietnam,”⁵⁹³ and he needed more consultation with his staff. The next day Carter privately gave the Vice Premier a handwritten letter presenting nine reasons why a punitive strike against Vietnam would be a mistake:

- a) Success would be unlikely if one of the objectives is to interrupt the action of the Viet Nam invading forces now in Kampuchea. A token action would not be considered as significant “punishment.”
- b) The peaceful image of the PRC and the aggressive invader image of Viet Nam would both be changed. Now—for the first time—Viet Nam stands

⁵⁸⁹ Memorandum from Brzezinski to President Carter, “Your Meeting with Deng Xiaoping,” January 25, 1979. FRUS v.13, 720.

⁵⁹⁰ Cyrus Vance. 1983. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 120.

⁵⁹¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 409.

⁵⁹² Vance. 1983, 121.

⁵⁹³ Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 284.

condemned by most of the nations of the world. The Soviet Union and Cuba are seen as co-conspirators.

- c) The long range result of this U.N. and worldwide condemnation will have some significant adverse effect on Viet Nam provided a concerted effort is made among industrialized nations to curtail economic aid and among the “non-aligned” nations to take U.N. action and to invoke sanctions.
- d) A serious incident may escalate into regional conflict.
- e) Plans for a brief and limited action may have to be abandoned if China is given an ultimatum to withdraw. This would make it very difficult to withdraw.
- f) Armed conflict initiated by China would cause serious concern in the United States concerning the general character of China and the future peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue. Our claim of peace and stability resulting from normalization would be refuted to some extent.
- g) The Kampuchians seem to be doing better than expected as guerilla fighters.
- h) Your border threats can create problems for Viet Nam even without intrusion into Viet Nam.
- i) Such action may create an additional excuse for greater Soviet presence in Viet Nam.⁵⁹⁴

Accordingly, Carter’s voice was relatively restrained, and did not include any condemnation of Chinese possible military action. Brzezinski was satisfied, as the letter freed America from a position which could generate later pressure to condemn China at the United Nations.⁵⁹⁵ Deng listened without interruption, then reconfirmed to Carter that “China must still teach Vietnam a lesson,”⁵⁹⁶ because, in the Vice Premier’s words, “if Vietnam thought the PRC soft, the situation will get worse.”⁵⁹⁷ Carter then offered Deng an intelligence briefing on troop placements around China.⁵⁹⁸ It was during this meeting that

⁵⁹⁴ Oral Presentation by President Carter to Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, January 30, 1979. FRUS v.13, 770-771.

⁵⁹⁵ Brzezinski. 1983, 410.

⁵⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “The President Reporting on His Conversation with Deng,” January 30, 1979. FRUS v.13, 772.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.; Jimmy Carter. 2010. 285.

Deng asked for U.S. aid to Cambodia through Thailand and Carter agreed,⁵⁹⁹ giving the green light to the Chinese to expand the Third Indochina War.

Feeling little pressure from the United States to oppose, China massed 170,000 soldiers on the Southern border with Vietnam on February 17. At that point, Carter sympathized with the Chinese, for he reportedly told the NSC that “the Soviet-backed Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia gave the Chinese little choice but to invade Vietnam.”⁶⁰⁰ Carter also approved Brzezinski’s proposal of a joint condemnation of *both* Chinese military forces in Vietnam *and* Vietnamese military in Cambodia, creating a “diplomatic umbrella” for Peking action without associating Washington with it.⁶⁰¹ Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the Chinese invasion, Brzezinski met almost daily with Chinese Ambassador Chai Zemin to be reported on Vietnam⁶⁰² and in turn, he provided Chai with intelligence reports on Soviet troop deployment at the border with China.⁶⁰³

In any event, the National Security Advisor went out his way to see that nothing interfered with the new relationship he had established with China. Brzezinski succeed in preventing Vance from blocking or postponing a planned visit to China by Secretary of the Treasury Michael Blumenthal, and fought off attempts by Senator Christopher Dodd (Democrat-Connecticut) and others to postpone Ambassador Leonard Woodcock’s arrival in Peking until such time as the Chinese withdrew their troops from Vietnam.⁶⁰⁴ The Chinese “lesson” in Vietnam, as evaluated by the National Security Advisor himself, was a military failure yet a political success, because to him, Carter’s

⁵⁹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, “The President Reporting on His Conversation with Deng,” January 30, 1979. FRUS v.13, 772.

⁶⁰⁰ Memorandum from Michael Oksenberg and William Odom to Brzezinski, February 19, 1979. Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Donated Historical Material, Geographical File, Box 10, Folder “Sino-Vietnamese Conflict, 2/17/79-2/21-79.” CPL.

⁶⁰¹ Brzezinski. 1983, 411.

⁶⁰² “Comments by Ambassador Chai Zemin, March 29, 10:00 am, Meeting with Dr. Brzezinski,” in Memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, “Chinese Attack on Vietnam” April 12, 1979. CREST.

⁶⁰³ Kenton J. Clymer. 2004. *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship*. New York: Routledge. 120.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*; Gregg Brazinsky. 2017. *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Competition During the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 340-341.

steadfastness in handling the Chinese invasion of Vietnam resulted in the first victory in Sino-American relations.⁶⁰⁵

There was another diplomatic victory for the Carter administration – Moscow’s restrained response to the Chinese Vietnam invasion. Inviting Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to the White House right after the invasion broke out, Carter hoped Moscow would not react militarily.⁶⁰⁶ In a “hot line message” to Leonid Brezhnev, Chairman of the USSR, Carter urged the Soviets “not to take actions which would exacerbate the situation, such as deploying military or navel units to Vietnamese ports or bases (such as Cam Ranh Bay) or other military actions.”⁶⁰⁷

It turned out that Moscow’s reactions were limited to merely threatened words. When Secretary Vance secretly informed Ambassador Dobrynin of the Chinese announcement to the U.S. that it began withdrawing from Vietnam, he did not forget mentioning Carter’s appreciation of the restraint shown by the Soviet leadership. Dobrynin in his memoirs recalled Vance’s words, “Moscow and Washington managed to survive that difficult time without serious damage to their relation.”⁶⁰⁸ It should be noted that Carter became President with a high hope to deemphasize American longtime superpower diplomacy, giving more space and chances for policies toward the Third World. As shown, he seemed to do the reverse once Washington recognized Peking.

As it turned out, Vietnam managed to halt the Chinese invasion with their militia and reserves, foiling Deng Xiaoping’s plan.⁶⁰⁹ In the meantime,

⁶⁰⁵ Brzezinski. 1983, 414.

⁶⁰⁶ Anatoly Dobrynin. 1995. *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)*. New York: Times Books. 418.

⁶⁰⁷ Message to President Brezhnev, February 17, 1979. Brzezinski Collection, Donated Historical Material, Geographic File, Box 10, Folder “China (People’s Republic of) – Sino-Vietnamese Conflict (2/16/79-2/21/79).” CPL.

⁶⁰⁸ Dobrynin. 1995. 419.

⁶⁰⁹ Important works by two military historians based on the latest archival research and materials unfold the remarkably weak performance and shortage of new weapons by the Chinese side during this short but punitive war against Vietnam. Zhang Xiaoming. 2015. *Deng Xiaoping’s Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991*. Chapel

Washington merely watched the collisions between Peking and Hanoi. While the U.S. publicly censured both powers, the difference was that normalization with China had been completed just in time, whereas now normalization with Vietnam was suspended for as long as Vietnamese troops remained in Cambodia.

In the aftermath of the Chinese invasion, Cyrus Vance made one last-ditch attempt to engage with the Vietnamese in May 1979, but these talks broke down in July 1979 when it became clear that Vietnam would not be able to make a strategically viable withdrawal from Cambodia.⁶¹⁰ The Khmer Rouge leadership had succeeded in evading capture, and by mid-year had regrouped and began their decade-long guerrilla resistance. The Vietnamese now found themselves saddled with a new Hun Sen Cambodian Government far too weak to defend itself and bereft of means to restore a nation still staggering from the Khmer Rouge genocide. Unwilling to abandon their position in Cambodia, Hanoi faced piling international sanctions, total economic dependence on the Soviet bloc, and the dashing of all of their postwar dreams. Vietnam's long isolation had begun in earnest.

With Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia and China's "Vietnam lesson," the Soviet influence in Vietnam increased. It soon extended to the use of Cam Ranh Bay as a naval base. Cam Ranh was the largest Soviet naval base outside the Soviet Union, allowing it to project increased power in the East Sea.⁶¹¹ The coalition of anti-Vietnamese forces – the U.S., Western Europe, Japan, ASEAN, and China – led to increased Vietnamese economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union during the subsequent decade. There was no more serious talk of normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam;

Hill: The University of North Carolina Press; Edward C. O'Dowd. 2007. *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War*. New York: Routledge.

⁶¹⁰ Vance. 1983. 123.

⁶¹¹ Douglas Pike. 1987. *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: An Anatomy of Alliance*. Boulder: West View. 193-200; Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer. 2001. "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 23. 455.

indeed, Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia became an additional precondition to renewed talks.

For North Korea, China's moves to normalize its relations with both Japan and the U.S. were not entirely welcomed in Pyongyang. But the visits to North Korea in May and September 1978 by Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, respectively, and the assurances they presumably provided helped to alleviate some of Pyongyang's apprehensions. In a lukewarm endorsement, the DPRK characterized the normalization of relations between the United States and China as a "normal event" in keeping with the general trend toward a relaxation of international tension.⁶¹² Noting American joint declaration with the Chinese that it would not pursue "hegemony," North Korea interestingly called on Washington to apply this practice also to Korea by withdrawing its forces and ending its support for the Seoul Government.⁶¹³

Looking back the situation of the early 1970s, the changing external setting that triggered by Sino-American rapprochement in mid-1971 led to the softening of the North Korean posture towards the South.⁶¹⁴ Pyongyang signaled a willingness to negotiate with the Park Chung Hee Government, and from September 1971 to June 1972, the two Koreas conducted more than twenty Red Cross talks. The Korean clauses of the Nixon-Zhou Shanghai Communiqué further pushed both Koreas to come to a political negotiation, which culminated in the famous July 4 North-South Joint Communiqué.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² East Asia Review, "North Korea: Chronology (December 1978-January 1979)," January 23, 1979. CREST. 21; *The Pyongyang Times*, January 20, 1979.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ A deep look at this issue, especially from North Korean point of view, is Byung Chul Koh. 1984. "The Korean Impasse – The View from Pyongyang" in Tae-hwan Kwak, Chonghan Kim, Hong Nack Kim eds. *Korean Unification: New Perspectives and Approaches*. Seoul: Kyungnam University Press. 49-68. A highly updated study focusing on the external context of this internal North-South Korean rapprochement is found in 홍석률. 2012. 『분단의 히스테리』 과주: 창비. 제 3 장 '미중관계와 남북관계의 맞물림: 한반도 분단의 내재화'. 141-199.

⁶¹⁵ With Park Chung Hee's instructions, Director of the KCIA Lee Hu Rak was sent to the DPRK in May 1972 to negotiate three principles "as a basis of achieving unification." The

Therefore, at this moment of the late 1970s, it is arguable that the normalization of U.S. relations with China was the key factor that prompted North Korea's positive Four-Point Proposal on January 23, 1979 regarding talks between Seoul and Pyongyang.

However, after three rounds of talks in February and March 1979, North-South Korean dialogues were suspended because each side failed to attend a subsequent meeting called by the other. Seoul insisted that the discussions be handled strictly on a Government-to-Government basis, while Pyongyang advocated that nongovernmental organizations take the lead.⁶¹⁶ Ultimately, inter-Korean talks achieved limited success because they could not address the security problem in the absence of the Americans. Frustrated, different attempts were planned in the Carter administration.

The President himself, out of the desire to bring the two Koreas into one place, wanted to make his upcoming visit to Seoul an occasion for a three-way meeting, or at least a chance for a joint U.S.-ROK proposal for tripartite summit talks. He first raised the idea with Brzezinski:

MAY 3 I discussed with Zbig the possibility of getting North and South Korean leaders together when I visit with [South Korean president] Park [Chung Hee] in June.⁶¹⁷

It means until the very end, even just a few weeks prior to his Korea visit, Carter did not want to give up the possibility of a trilateral talks framework that involved the North. Consequently, Ambassador Gleysteen "exploded with surprise and anger" when he received a phone call from the State Department

first one stated: "Unification shall be achieved independently, without depending on foreign powers and without foreign interference."

⁶¹⁶ North Korea requested that "representatives of various political parties, democratic personages and overseas compatriots" should participate in the dialogue. Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) ID: 8637 Korean Affairs Report, "DPRK Official Interview on Unification," Tokyo ASAHI SHIMBUN, June 22, 1979. CREST.

⁶¹⁷ Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 27.

informing him of Carter's wish to invite President Kim Il Sung to Seoul to join him and President Park.⁶¹⁸

For Brzezinski and his National Security Council (NSC) staff, continuing with the "China solution" seemed like the best option for the stalemate in inter-Korean dialogue as well as future trilateral meeting. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Nick Platt listed for Brzezinski a total of five drawbacks in holding a trialogue during Carter's Seoul visit:

- There is little prospect for a substantive outcome.
- Diplomatically, the North would get more from a meeting than the South, whatever the American role.
- Park would not go along.
- The Chinese would be cautious about a meeting in June.
- Other Asians, including the Japanese, would regard a trialogue now as gimmick.⁶¹⁹

Platt then concluded with the signature formula of the Carter administration's Korea policy: "Making completion of the withdrawal program contingent upon North Korean responsiveness."⁶²⁰ Together with NSC staffer Michel Oksenberg, Platt advised Brzezinski that "pressing for a Korean Camp David⁶²¹ at this point would be costly to our overall policy in Asia and would end up harm the President."⁶²² Therefore, a four-way meeting was proposed that would involve the Chinese during a future Presidential visit

⁶¹⁸ William Gleysteen. 1999. *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis*. Brookings, 42.

⁶¹⁹ Memorandum from Nick Platt for Zbigniew Brzezinski, "A Korea Trialogue in June," May 7, 1979. DDRS. 1-2.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

⁶²¹ The Camp David Accords were signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978, following twelve days of secret negotiation at U.S. President's Camp David. The two framework agreements were signed at the White House, witnessed by Carter. The second led directly to the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Sadat and Begin received the shared 1978 Nobel Peace Prize for this agreement.

⁶²² Memorandum from Nick Platt and Michel Oksenberg for Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Discussion of Asian Issues," May 21, 1979. DDRS.

to Peking.⁶²³ The two staff members wrote confidently about possible “Chinese leverage” in a later memorandum to their boss:

It is by no means certain that the Chinese will be willing exercise much leverage, even behind the scenes, to produce a flexible North Korean posture during any trilateral talks among Pyongyang, Seoul, and Washington.⁶²⁴

Thus, China experts within the NSC even suggested using Taipei as a bargaining chip to woo China to open economic negotiations with South Korea. According to this plan, contact between Peking and Seoul would be one result of the trilateral talks and, in exchange, the U.S. would put pressure on Taipei to establish economic relations with Peking.⁶²⁵

To the surprise of the American counterparts as well as his staff in the Blue House, President Park Chung Hee ultimately agreed to the three-way talks proposal. Initially, Park hoped this tripartite meeting would not be a repetition of that between Egypt and Israel where President Carter was essentially an intermediary, stating that he would consider the proposal if the U.S. was “on our side.”⁶²⁶ Whereas the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) still had doubts about the real intentions behind the U.S. proposal, Park simply questioned American officials if President Carter felt confident enough in the ROK-U.S. security relationship to embark on such a proposal.⁶²⁷ He also doubted North Korean attitude, saying he believed Pyongyang was still pressing for U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks and “did not seem prepared to move to the summit at the present time.”⁶²⁸

⁶²³ Memorandum from Nick Platt for Zbigniew Brzezinski, “A Korea Dialogue in June,” May 7, 1979. DDRS. 2.

⁶²⁴ Memorandum from Michel Oksenberg and Nick Platt for Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Beijing, Taipei, and the Korean Issue,” May 24, 1979. DDRS.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Telegram from the Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, “Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula,” May 29, 1979. DDRS.

⁶²⁷ Cable from the Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, “Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula,” June 8, 1979. DDRS.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

In response, the State Department reconfirmed security cooperation as a basis for “joint diplomatic efforts,”⁶²⁹ and took pains to persuade Seoul that the two allies “seize the initiative” to “probe the sincerity of the North.”⁶³⁰ After receiving a nod from the U.S. Government regarding the possibility of linking the proposal with security issues and American confirmation that there would be no tradeoff on human rights, Park ordered his administration to accept tripartite talks. On June 19, the ROK Government announced the conditions based on which it would positively consider the proposal:

b) if President Carter could directly and privately guarantee to President Park that no additional troop withdrawal will take place and make an announcement around July 15 (but make it clear that the trilateral meeting is not a condition to be exchanged for the postponement of troop withdrawal).⁶³¹

The Seoul Government also carefully prepared for the press treatment of the issue. Differentiating between the proposed “three-country meeting” (삼당국회의) and “trilateral talks” (삼자회담), it insisted that the meeting would feature South and North Korea as the real parties, with the United States playing the role of “cooperator” (협력자).⁶³² In other words, South Korea interpreted the proposal as a three-way talks in form, but a bilateral talks in substance. Seoul’s attempt to downplay the prospective role of Washington in such meeting made the proposal less attractive to Pyongyang, as the North sought to contact the United States rather than talking with the South.

⁶²⁹ Memorandum from the State Department to the Embassy in Seoul, “Korea Trilateral -- Response to Foreign Ministry Dialogue,” June 8, 1979. Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Country File (NSA6), Box 44, Folder “Korea, Republic of, 1-6/79,” Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

⁶³⁰ Cable from the Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, “Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula,” June 8, 1979. DDRS.

⁶³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “ROK’s Position Regarding the Trilateral Meeting (Draft Plan),” June 19, 1979. “The Carter Chill,” 601.

⁶³² 이완범. 2017b. 『카터 시대의 남북한: 동맹의 위기와 민족의 갈등』 성남:

한국학중앙연구원출판부. 245-250; Byung Chul Koh. 1984. *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea*. University of California Press, 183-184.

Throughout June, while Ambassador William Gleysteen held meeting with President Park Chung Hee and discussed with Foreign Minister Pak Tong Jin in Seoul, Richard Holbrooke met with Ambassador Kim Yong Shik in Washington, all were to brief the South Koreans on American initiative for trilateral talks.⁶³³ Based on favorable responses from the Seoul Government, Holbrooke provided Secretary of State Cyrus Vance with “preliminary views” on the location of a tripartite meeting. He raised Panmunjom, Camp David and New York as potential candidates, yet finally suggested a third country.⁶³⁴

Once arrived in Seoul, in contrast to the huge crowd that welcomed him on the streets, at the Blue House Carter faced an authoritative President Park who “read an abusive harangue for more than an hour”⁶³⁵ of the North Korean threat, and how “unwise” the U.S. was to continue further ground troop withdrawals.⁶³⁶ Park also took note of the armed clashes among Communist countries in Indochina and the Soviet military foothold in Vietnam, threatened to destabilize the region.⁶³⁷ The U.S. President was so angry that he requested a private talk to question Park’s human rights abuse and demand to know “how a tiny nation like North Korea could surpass so greatly a large and strong South Korea, even with forty thousand American troops and superb air cost.”⁶³⁸

The two statesmen then sank into a heated debate on the military disparity between the two Koreas, with Park continuously degraded South Korean defense capabilities and refused to increase Seoul’s defense

⁶³³ Action Memorandum from Holbrooke to Vance, “Korea Summit – Initiative for Trilateral Talks,” June 18, 1979. DDRS. 1.

⁶³⁴ To Holbrooke’s assessment, though Panmunjom was a possibility, “the barnacles of previous unsuccessful meetings and the military setting have some disadvantages.” Camp David had the disadvantage of appearing to establish Washington as “a mediator *à la* the Arad-Israel issue.” New York might be considered “neutral,” but he proposed to “seriously consider a location neither in Korea nor the United States.” Ibid. 2.

⁶³⁵ Jimmy Carter. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 338.

⁶³⁶ Memorandum of Conversation. “Saturday, June 30, 1979; 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM,” July 3, 1979. DNSA. 3.

⁶³⁷ Ibid. 2.

⁶³⁸ Jimmy Carter. 2010. 339.

spending.⁶³⁹ The tense atmosphere left little room for Carter to push for any dialogue with North Korea, as Park repeatedly warned the U.S. President of the North's "ulterior motives." In his words:

Their objectives are to drive a wedge between us and to foster unrest in the South... We are dealing with sly and treacherous Communists, and we should not let ourselves manipulated lest they drive a wedge between us.⁶⁴⁰

The next day Carter frankly told Park that only seventeen percent of Americans support military action to defend Korea due to Seoul's unfavorable publicity about human rights.⁶⁴¹ The South Korean President refuted, saying his counterpart "cannot apply the same yardstick to countries whose security is threatened as to countries whose security is not."⁶⁴² Park strongly believed Carter would not talk about "freedom" if the Soviet troops "were deployed at Baltimore," or "dug tunnels and sent commando units into the District of Columbia."⁶⁴³

Park Chung Hee finally achieved all of his objectives. In mid-July 1979, the final decision on U.S. ground force withdrawals was made, leaving further withdrawals of combat units suspended; the resumption of further withdrawals would be reviewed by 1981 and depend on evidence of reduced tensions on the peninsula. Brzezinski believed that this option would be the most successful, since it could achieve both domestic and international goals. In his words:

Making the resumption of further withdrawals contingent upon North Korea's willingness to join actively in an effort to reduce tensions on the peninsula will enable us to place future withdrawals in a broader diplomatic context, strengthen our hand in promoting a resumption of serious North-South

⁶³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation. "Saturday, June 30, 1979; 12:23 – 1:30 PM," July 5, 1979. DNSA.

⁶⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation. "Saturday, June 30, 1979; 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM," July 3, 1979. DNSA.

⁶⁴¹ Jimmy Carter. 2010. 340.

⁶⁴² Memorandum of Conversation. "Saturday, June 30, 1979; 12:23 – 1:30 PM," July 5, 1979. DNSA.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

dialogue, and enable us to explain the policy persuasively to the Congress and to the American public.⁶⁴⁴

United States Forces Korea (USFK) troop withdrawal – the only possible incentive for a more flexible North Korean response – disappeared, and one could easily predict the DPRK’s rejection of the proposal. Park’s apparent concession of tripartite talks, therefore, can be seen as a successful strategic move.

In an interview with Japanese *Asahi Shimbun* prior to Carter’s Seoul visit, Vice Chairman of the DPRK Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Hyon Chun-kuk strongly criticized such a trip of the U.S. President. Considering the visit as “detrimental to the promotion of unification,” Pyongyang opposed it based on North Korean assessments of the three possible outcomes of Carter’s stay in Seoul: (1) a strengthening of U.S. policy of maintaining U.S. troops in South Korea; (2) stronger support for the South Korean authorities and (3) adding strength to the line on U.S.-Japan-South Korea military integration.⁶⁴⁵

North Korea then rapidly rejected the tripartite talks proposal revealed in the Carter-Park Joint Communiqué of July 1, 1979.⁶⁴⁶ In the official response, issued by the spokesman of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pyongyang considered Carter-Park offer as “utterly infeasible”⁶⁴⁷ since two

⁶⁴⁴ Memorandum for Carter from Brzezinski, “U.S. Ground Force Withdrawals from the Republic of Korea,” July 12, 1979. Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Box 20, Folder “Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) – [5/79-8/79].” CPL.

⁶⁴⁵ JPRS ID: 8637 Korean Affairs Report, “DPRK Official Interview on Unification,” Tokyo ASAHI SHIMBUN, June 22, 1979. CREST.

⁶⁴⁶ “11. 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 is hoped can be arranged, the two Presidents have directed the Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State to communicate jointly with the Foreign Minister of North Korea in this regard in an appropriate manner.”

Telegram from Washington to All East Asian and Pacific Diplomatic Posts, Immediate, “Joint US-ROK Summit Communiqué,” July 1, 1979. The State Department E-Reading Room.

⁶⁴⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Trends, Trends in Communist Media, July 10, 1979. The full text of the statement was also reprinted in *Rodong Sinmun*, July 10, 1979. 1; and *The Pyongyang Times*, July 14, 1979. 1. Hereafter “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman’s Statement.”

separate issues were involved: a peace treaty (strictly solved between North Korea and the U.S.) and reunification (solved between the two Koreas only). It thus demanded two separate negotiations. It also proposed that even though Seoul was not entitled to take part in, if the U.S. “requests insistently,” North Korea would “allow the South Korean authorities to participate as an observer.”⁶⁴⁸

At the same time, the North condemned the joint reaffirmation of Carter-Park of the advocacy of simultaneous admission of the two Koreas into the United Nations and their “cross-recognition” (recognition of North Korea by the U.S. and South Korean allies should be contingent upon recognition of South Korea by the Soviet Union and China) as “insidious scheme” to freeze the division of Korea.⁶⁴⁹ It further raised the question of whether Washington and Seoul wanted negotiations for one Korea or for two Koreas. Queried in the statement: “What is the use of the talks, if they are aimed at permanent division, not reunification?”⁶⁵⁰

In the previous chapter, question is raised surrounding Vietnamese inflexibility of the aid demand despite having come so close to normalization with the U.S. Here in this chapter, the question is why did North Korea, despite its hard attempts in seeking contacts with the U.S., decide to refuse Carter-Park joint trilateral talks proposal? What was the logic behind Pyongyang’s calculations? Without primary sources from North Korea, a concrete answer to this question seems impossible. In his book, which is so far the only full-scale research work specifically dedicated for the trilateral framework regarding the Korean peninsula throughout the Carter era, 이완범 does not provide any assumption as regards to North Korean intentions.⁶⁵¹ Meanwhile, emphasizing Moscow-Seoul contacts in the later half of the 1970s, 홍석률 suggests that North Korea rejected the proposal

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ 이완범.2017b. 『카터 시대의 남북한: 동맹의 위기와 민족의 갈등』 성남: 한국학중앙연구원출판부.

based on its strategic calculations vis-à-vis the possible reactions of the Soviet Union and actions taken by South Korea. Pyongyang feared tripartite talks would accelerate contacts between the Soviets and the South Koreans, which were developing relatively well during that time.⁶⁵² This situation would be even more alarming for the North considering the lack of progress in contacts between Pyongyang and Washington.⁶⁵³

Although agrees with the above observation of Seoul's success in diversifying its diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, including the Soviet Union and China, as one of its reactions to Sino-American rapprochement and normalization, this research suggests a different explanation of North Korean tough response. Taking account North Korea's negative reactions upon Yugoslav President Tito and Romanian President Ceaușescu's spontaneous proposals with the U.S. Government in 1978, as well as Pyongyang's accumulated cautions regarding the international situation following Sino-American normalization and its fluctuate relationships with Communist allies, this research believes that Kim Il Sung's refusal of trilateral framework was laid on his distrust and perceptions of what was proposed.

First of all, accepting Carter-Park offer, similar to Tito or Ceaușescu's proposals, might have projected an image of North Korea reacting passively to an external stimulus, rather than taking an initiative. This image would have undercut both the North's *juche* (literally translated as "self-reliance") ideology and Chairman Kim's self-esteem.

Secondly, the nature of the proposal proves problematic for the North Koreans. Prior to Carter's arrival in Korea, a joint communiqué was considered by both Washington and Seoul as a concrete, tangible result of the American President's visit to the country and of the Seoul summit. It was indeed a joint proposal by the two Presidents of the USA and the ROK, which not only symbolized their solidarity but also demonstrated their common

⁶⁵² 홍석률. 2016. "카터 행정부기 미국의 대한반도 정책과 3 자회담," 『한국과 국제정치』 32(2), 57-61.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

determination to seek a peaceful solution for the Korean problem. Responding positively could have also symbolized North Korea's acceptance of South Korea as an equal partner in negotiations.

The timing of President Carter's visit and thus, timing of the announcement of the joint proposal, were similarly inappropriate, if they were planned to draw a certain cooperation from North Korea. Washington might have not realized that June 25-July 27 was widely considered in the DPRK as the "month of international joint struggle for withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea" (shortened as "month of anti-U.S. joint struggle"), when Pyongyang actively called for international support in order to cultivate worldwide solidarity for its "reunification cause."⁶⁵⁴

Moreover, June 25 (the day the Korean War broke out in 1950) was called in the North the "Day of struggle against U.S. Imperialism." In fact, on June 25 of 1979, a Pyongyang mass rally and demonstration took place with the participation of "more than 200,000 people."⁶⁵⁵ With Carter's South Korean trip "slated a few days later," the denouncement of the "U.S. imperialists" who had "imposed the ravages of war upon our people 29 years ago" and "still keep south Korea under their occupation" among the demonstrators turned even stronger than usual. As a result, mass rallies and demonstrations were expanded to other cities, such as Pyongsong, Wonsan, Chongjin, Kaesong, et cetera.⁶⁵⁶ Amidst this background at home, an acceptance of trilateral talks might have created an image of inconsistency and fluctuation on Pyongyang's part among its own people, as well as at the international arena. By visiting the South during the peak time in the North's vital propaganda, Carter unintentionally deprived Kim Il Sung of some possible flexibility vis-à-vis his own proposal.

⁶⁵⁴ According to the North's state media, during 1979 anti-U.S. joint struggle month, North Korea was able to cultivate quite a large support, such as a joint statement by forty-three French parliamentarians calling for dialogue for Korean unification; meetings and news coverage by various organizations worldwide. *Rodong Sinmun* and *The Pyongyang Times*, issues throughout July 1979.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Pyongyang Times*, June 30, 1979. 2

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

Next was Carter's "unfriendly" itinerary. Before arriving Seoul, Carter visited Japan for the G-7 summit meeting in Tokyo, giving the North Korean one reason that his trip "was a part of the scheme to accelerate the 'US-Japan-south Korea military integration'." ⁶⁵⁷ The fact that he immediately helicoptered to Camp Casey, the headquarters of the Second Infantry Division, to spend the night of June 29, further raised question among the North of Carter's "peace" trip. Pyongyang instead saw it as "a powder-reeking trip of a hypocrite agitating for aggression and war."⁶⁵⁸

Most importantly, still, was the Carter administration's attempted "China Card" in this issue. Given the newly established Sino-American diplomatic relations and the U.S. evident request for the assistance of Peking in persuading Pyongyang, ⁶⁵⁹ coming to the negotiating table would have harmed North Korea's national pride, as if it had yielded to the pressure of the great powers. As shown in the previous chapters, the basic diplomatic formula that the U.S. Government had publicly and repeatedly promoted throughout the Carter presidency was that "making any improvement of relations with North Korea contingent upon reciprocal steps by Pyongyang's allies toward Seoul,"⁶⁶⁰ which the North obviously undesired. North Korea held its own logic that any talks or negotiations should be pursued in a direct manner, rather through pressure or under the third or fourth party's scheme.

Also, it should be noted that just three days prior to Carter's arrival in Korea, Kim Yong Sam, president of the New Democratic Party and future President of South Korea, proposed to meet Chairman Kim Il Sung to discuss a solution for the question of national reunification. In response, the North showed "hearty welcome," saying it "always ready to meet not only Kim

⁶⁵⁷ DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman's Statement.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ A month before Carter's departure for Asia, National Security Advisor Brzezinski still asked for Chinese cooperation regarding this matter. See page 198.

⁶⁶⁰ This formula was promoted since the beginning of Carter's Korea policy. See pages 117-118 (Carter's reply letter to Bongo), 120 (State-Defense joint document), 121 (Amarcost' press briefing).

Yong Sam but also the President of the Democratic Republic Party,”⁶⁶¹ i.e. Park Chung Hee. Political factionalism in the South, therefore, was another potential dynamics that casted a certain effect to the decisions put forth by the North Korean leadership.

Before the official North Korean rejection was announced, the State Department naively expected that, following several counter-proposals, the North Koreans would eventually agree to tripartite talks “on the grounds that from the wider political angle they cannot afford not to.”⁶⁶² This erroneous prediction from the Carter administration was probably based on its expectations of immanent high-level meetings with the Chinese. Surprisingly, even when Pyongyang continued to voice strong criticism of the proposal, and Chinese Foreign Minister Hung Hua adhered faithfully to the North Korean line during meetings with Richard Holbrooke, hopes were still high in both Seoul and Washington that this was not a final rejection.⁶⁶³

The two governments, therefore, moved to the second approach of “good offices,” first and foremost via United Nations (UN) Secretary General.⁶⁶⁴ At the invitation of the Government of the DPRK, UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and his entourage visited the country on May 2-3.⁶⁶⁵ When North Korea officially rejected Waldheim’s offers to help initiate talks between Pyongyang and Seoul,⁶⁶⁶ the next possibility for good offices was

⁶⁶¹ *The Pyongyang Times*, June 30, 1979. 1.

⁶⁶² Telegram 1794 from Washington to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Korea: North/South Talks,” July 5, 1979. “The Carter Chill,” 639.

⁶⁶³ Telegram from W. Morris, “Tripartite Talks Proposal,” July 31, 1979. “The Carter Chill,” 661.

⁶⁶⁴ “Notes on a Meeting in Seoul on May 5, 1979, 10:30-12:30 AM”, May 21, 1979, “The Carter Chill.” 504.

⁶⁶⁵ *The Pyongyang Times*, May 12, 1979.

⁶⁶⁶ “Note for the File: Meeting with Ambassador Han Si Hae (DPRK) on June 1, 1979,” June 5, 1979. “The Carter Chill.” 559; Interoffice Memorandum From Ellen Lukas to the Office of the Secretary-General, “North Korea Denounced US-South Korea Communique Calling for Trilateral Talks on Reunification,” July 3, 1979. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119192>; Interoffice Memorandum from Javier Pérez de Cuéllar to the Secretary-General, “Korea,” August 27, 1979. “The Carter Chill,” 667.

Indonesia.⁶⁶⁷ As soon as he heard of the positive reaction from the Indonesians in facilitating a meeting among the two Koreas and the United States, Carter wrote to President Suharto, praising his “statesmanlike gesture.”⁶⁶⁸ Expectations were also put into Vice President Walter Mondale’s visit to Peking in August 1979 to change Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping’s mind. Mondale, in fact, did a poor job of discussing the Korean issue with the Chinese.⁶⁶⁹

The last attempt by the Carter administration to promote dialogue with North Korea came in late October. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Nick Platt in a memorandum to Brzezinski summarized the two-day meeting between U.S. delegation, chaired by Ambassador Gleysteen and attended by representatives of the UN Command in Korea, and the South Korean side headed by the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, representatives from the Blue House, Korean CIA, Ministry of Defense and the Unification Board.⁶⁷⁰ Both sides agreed that there had not been any real progress depended upon a shift in North Korean attitudes, but believed it was time to actively consider together “the possible substance, timing, and advantages of a follow-up joint private message to North Korea.”⁶⁷¹ Seoul nonetheless catalogued their concerns during meeting. Platt, therefore, concluded that although it took time to produce actual results in persuading the South Koreans, such consultations “represent an important beginning in the process of tying up the remaining great historical loose end in Asian policy, now that normalization with China

⁶⁶⁷ US Department of State Cable, “Request for Indonesian Good Offices to Facilitate ROK and US Discussions with North Korea,” June 29, 1979. Remote Archives Capture (RAC), NLC-16-12-6-14-0. Carter Presidential Library (CPL). Digitalized at the Wilson Center Digital Archive, “Inter-Korean Dialogue, 1977-1980,” <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114655>

⁶⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State Cable, “Presidential Message,” June 30, 1979. RAC.

⁶⁶⁹ Mondale did not show any of American position and ignored Deng’s positions regarding Korea to quickly move to other issues. See Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of the Vice President’s Meeting with People’s Republic of China Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping,” August 28, 1979. FRUS v.13, 959-960.

⁶⁷⁰ Memorandum from Nick Platt to Brzezinski, “Talks with the ROK on Contacts with North Korea,” October 26, 1979. DDRS.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

is complete.”⁶⁷² Brzezinski received this memorandum on the same day President Park Chung Hee was assassinated.

Political crisis in South Korea following a series of events (the Park assassination in October 1979, the military coup by Chun Doo Hwan in December 1979, the Kwangju uprising in May 1980) and similar turmoil in Washington during the Iran hostage crisis further doomed the three-way talks initiative. The year 1980 also witnessed Pyongyang’s tilt towards Moscow. At the Sixth Party Congress in October 1980, North Korea officially designated Kim Jong Il as his father’s successor.⁶⁷³ Chinese newspapers indirectly criticized Pyongyang’s hierarchical succession. The wind hauled again in the relationships among the Communists comrades, and so did the political situation in Washington: Carter did not win reelection and Ronald Reagan would soon assume the office of the presidency.

But even the Chinese could not get everything that they wanted. Washington was still unwilling to promise that it would discontinue arms sales to Taiwan. Ezra Vogel believes Deng Xiaoping made the calculated decision because “he did not have enough leverage to make the United States both normalize relations with China and stop arms sales to Taiwan.”⁶⁷⁴ After making “one of the most critical decisions in his life,” Deng therefore tried his best in pressuring the U.S. Government to reduce such sales.⁶⁷⁵

Similarly, Carter’s diplomatic victory regarding China was not integral. The Senate, angry with how China policy was pursued with limited consultation with the Congress, decided to reverse the President’s big deal with Peking. Senator Barry Goldwater (Republican-Arizona) and other twenty-five members of the Congress filled a lawsuit against Carter by

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Adrian Buzo. 1999. *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea*. Westview Press. 105-130; YongHo Kim. 2010. *North Korea Foreign Policy: Security Dilemma and Succession*. Lexington Books, 42-50; Hakjoon Kim. 2015. *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*. California: Stanford University, 86-87.

⁶⁷⁴ Vogel. 2011. 333.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid. 332-333.

claiming that it was unconstitutional for the President to abrogate the U.S.-Taiwan Security Treaty without the Senate's advice and consent.⁶⁷⁶

When the Carter administration submitted the Taiwan Relations Act to the Congress, a number of powerful Senators and Congressmen seized this opportunity to challenge Carter's diplomatic consummation with China and to substantially revise the Act in favor of the pro-Taiwanese lobby.⁶⁷⁷ Carter threatened to veto the sweeping changes in the proposed Act, but the Congress imposed stringent legal constraints on his China policy.⁶⁷⁸ The final Taiwan Relations Act in fact stipulated that:

Any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes [is] a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States. The United States shall provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character and shall maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.⁶⁷⁹

This mandate, in effect, amounted to a legal revival of U.S. defense commitments to Taiwan. Notably in the Act was the Carter administration's obligation to export "arms of defensive character" and to set up the American Institute in Taiwan to manage unofficial relations with "the people of Taiwan."⁶⁸⁰ The American Institute in Taiwan is a nonprofit, private organization based in Washington, D.C., but was staffed by those Government employees who "resigned" from their positions during their service in Taiwan. In turn, Taiwan was allowed to establish the Coordination Council for North American Affairs in Washington and several other U.S. cities. The American

⁶⁷⁶ Harry Harding. 1992. *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutions. 82-86.

⁶⁷⁷ Scott Kaufman. 2008. *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 139.

⁶⁷⁸ Jimmy Carter. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. New York: Bantam Books. 210-211.

⁶⁷⁹ H.R.2479 – Taiwan Relations Act. 96th Congress (1979-1980)

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479>

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

Institute and the Coordination Council in fact assumed various semi-official functions similar to those performed by the liaison offices between 1973 and 1978. Carter later bitterly complained in his memoirs that “a group of highly motivated right-wing political-action groups” revised the Taiwan Relations Act to undermine his China policy, but decided to sign it.⁶⁸¹

To summarize, this very key chapter of the research demonstrates the role of the “China factor” in U.S. relations with both Vietnam and North Korea in the later half of 1978. When anti-Soviet National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski returned home following confidential talks with the Chinese leaders, especially anti-Vietnamese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, he pulled a knock-out punch towards the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the State Department’s approach towards the Communist regimes in Asia. Since then, there were parallel policy discussions at work in Washington, and Brzezinski’s National Security Council had generally won the ear of President Carter. As a result, regardless of how much balanced and creative the U.S. was in its initial designs of a systematic rapprochement with the Asian Communists at the beginning of the Carter presidency, starting from May 1978 China was put first and Vietnam and North Korea had to wait.

Moreover, once Sino-American normalization negotiations significantly accelerated in October 1978, the Carter administration’s efforts in normalizing with Hanoi were temporarily put-off. They were then gradually moved to a terminating mode when agreement was reached between the U.S. and China in December 1978, and notably after Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Washington in January and Chinese military punishment against Vietnam in February 1979. Throughout the process, the Chinese leaders went out their way to extinguish even the smallest sign of a resumption or improvement in Hanoi-Washington contacts, as well as convincing the Americans to give it up on the Vietnamese – the “regional hegemonists.”

⁶⁸¹ Carter. 1982. 210-211.

Just when the White House determined that it would keep attuned to Chinese sensitivities during the Sino-Vietnamese border war, hopes were high on Peking's "flexibility" regarding Pyongyang, somewhat similar to its concession on Taiwan in achieving the long-awaited conclusion of U.S.-China diplomatic normalization. It turns out that the Chinese showed no flexibility even just for once in the matters that were related to the Korean peninsula, neither in opening contacts with South Korea, nor pressuring North Korea to accept trilateral talks and good offices proposals. Putting all of its eggs in one basket, Washington could not help but give up on initiatives regarding the North Koreans toward the end of 1979.

In the end what were apparently Carter's first foreign policy victories turned out to be the four years of "hard choices."⁶⁸² Indeed, when the U.S. decided to retreat from its initial policy vis-à-vis Vietnam and North Korea in 1979, disappointment and distrust deepened among the leaderships in Hanoi and Pyongyang of American credibility. Similar despair and skepticism also turned serious among Washington traditional allies of Taipei and Seoul.

⁶⁸² Title of Secretary of State's memoirs. Cyrus Vance. 1983. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT

1. U.S. Failed Attempts regarding Vietnam and North Korea

As the first U.S. President after the Vietnam tragedy, Jimmy Carter was both eager and ambitious to regain American confidence and image in the international stage and especially in Asia. He rejected the Nixon-Kissinger underlining of East-West relations, which was based on U.S.-Soviet competition, and favored instead a focus on North-South relations and the developing world.⁶⁸³ Carter's Asian policy, thus, was firstly separated from Soviet-American conflict; and secondly constructed of particular policies towards individual nations, based on the general desire to deemphasize military considerations and superpower contentions, emphasizing human rights and seeking reconciliation with the past foes.

Immediately upon taking office in 1977, Carter made a series of moves which marked a shift away from the stark anti-Soviet stance of the short-lived Ford administration. Carter demonstrated his support for détente through the SALT II talks and opened negotiations for normalization of relations with both China and Vietnam, as well as examining ways to contact North Korea. With regard to Hanoi and Pyongyang in particular, this set him apart from previous administrations. Then, he sought to address the emotional issue of American

⁶⁸³ Marvin L. Kalb. 2011. *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. 50; Leslie H. Gelb. 2009. *Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy*. New York: Harper Collins. 56.

Missing in Actions (MIAs), whose remains were still unaccounted for. MIA remains have always been a sensitive issue, but in the past the United States had not allowed them to blow larger diplomatic concerns. Large numbers of MIA remains were left behind in both Europe and Korea, for example.

As distinct from its predecessor, the Carter administration decided that a symbolic accounting of America's MIAs in Vietnam was all that was possible. Accordingly, Carter sent the Woodcock delegation to Hanoi in an effort to defuse the MIA issue, which the Ford administration had used to justify continuing hostility towards Vietnam and to suit its own political agenda. As shown in the previous chapters, Woodcock misperceived Vietnam's formulation of the "package deal" of three issues (MIAs, economic contributions and normalization) as a change of policy, and then brought home the news that Hanoi had softened its stand. The Vietnamese in their turn misunderstood the American stand as Washington was now yielding to Vietnamese requests for aid. Carter then announced that the U.S would no longer veto Vietnam's admission to the United Nations, as Ford continuously had done, agreed to high level talks with the Vietnamese in Paris.

From the outset, the ghost of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords haunted this new round of negotiations between Washington and Hanoi. The Vietnamese entered the talks insisting on U.S. postwar reconstruction aid, promised in Paris in 1973, as a pre-condition for normalized diplomatic relations. While flexible on the form, amount and timing of aid, the Vietnamese were not willing to bend on the basic demand.

For both Vietnamese and American negotiators, the aid issue was complicated by pressures at home. Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền argued that without some expression of American willingness to help with reconstruction, the people of Vietnam, whose country had been devastated by U.S. bombs, napalm, shells and defoliants, would not support normalization of relations. For Richard Holbrooke, the problem was unanticipated levels of opposition from Congress. In 1976, Congress had been

open to improved relations with Vietnam and had voted to lift the trade embargo, only to be vetoed by President Ford. By the time the 1977 negotiations began, however, this attitude had hardened. As shown in Chapter 3, within days of the first round of Paris talks, two amendments, one to prohibit U.S. negotiators from even discussing assistance with the Vietnamese, another to extend the trade embargo, passed the House of Representatives by large margins. In late June, the Senate added its voice to the chorus of opposition to aid for the Indochinese countries.

A *New York Times* national poll in July 1977 revealed that the lopsided votes in Congress did not explicitly reflect the thinking of the American people. The poll found sixty-six percent of the public in favor of medical and food aid to Vietnam, with only twenty-nine percent firmly opposed. By a slimmer margin of forty-nine to forty-three percent, Americans were willing to contribute industrial and farm equipment to Vietnam's reconstruction effort.⁶⁸⁴

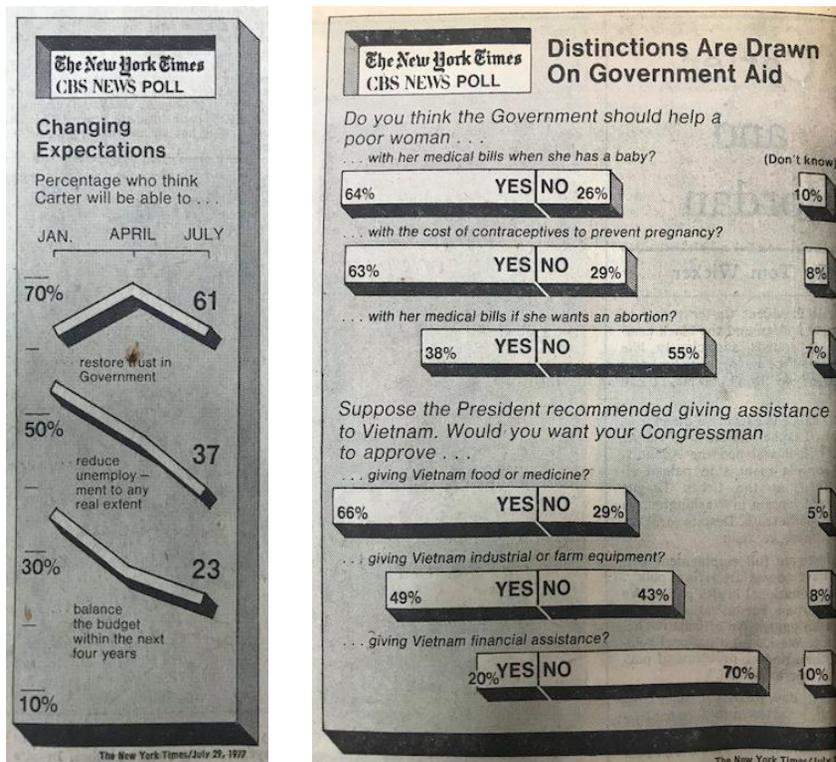


Figure 6.1. The New York Times National Poll, July 29, 1977

⁶⁸⁴ *The New York Times*, July 29, 1977. A22.

Also, according to this survey, the majority of American public favors the status quo regarding U.S. ground forces in Korea. Fifty-two percent asserted that it was the national interest to keep ground troops in Korea; thirty-four percent favor withdrawal and fourteen percent have no firm answer.⁶⁸⁵ The margin in favor of keeping forces on the Korean peninsula was only slightly less than the majority that favored keeping American ground troops in Western Europe, the survey concluded.

Despite this evidence of popular acceptance of aid to Vietnam, the Carter administration and the Congress refused to reconsider their stands. Even an appeal for emergency humanitarian food aid for Vietnamese flood victims, issued by Senator Hubert Humphrey (Democrat-Minnesota) from his deathbed and signed by seventeen other Senators at the end of 1977, failed to soften Washington's stand.⁶⁸⁶ Such discrepancy between American public opinion and Congressional policy is quite commonly heard of. This fact sheds light on the very first potential explanations for the deadlock in bilateral talks throughout 1977.

It was assumed that the Vietnamese request for aid struck more of a raw nerve among politicians, many of whom had been in office when the Americans had reluctantly accepted defeat in Indochina, than it did with the American public as a whole. In other words, while both general public and the executive branch opted for reconciliation, Congressional conservatives jeopardized any chances for diplomatic rapprochement. This is a total reverse reality of the previous administration: whereas liberal Congressmen called for reconciliation, Ford adopted aggressive policies towards Hanoi. It is hence concluded that even though the Ford and Carter administrations' policies towards Vietnam enormously varied in both aims and means, they shared the same antagonism between the executives and the legislatures, blocking a decisive solution for normalization.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1977.

On the Vietnam side, the wrong signals that the Woodcock Commission had sent by overly optimistic statements both in Hanoi and later in Washington misled the Vietnamese. Then Vietnam's post-war society and conditions, as well as past experience with the Americans influenced the Vietnamese position. Hanoi misread their American counterparts in such a way that they thought they might get both diplomatic recognition and aid. They also wrongly hoped that some segment of the American public, previously vocal in its opposition to the war, would now speak out equally forcibly in favor of U.S. aid to Vietnam. Therefore, the Vietnamese side for several times adopted brinkmanship tactics to draw American public's attention throughout negotiations. There was yet another evidence of mutual misperceptions.

During the third round of talks in Paris in December 1978, when Phan Hiến told Holbrooke that "we will never do what the Chinese did" regarding the U.S. proposal of Interests Section, there was some deeper implications behind this remark: it underlines the gap of mutual perceptions between Hanoi and Washington. As uncovered in Chapter 3, the State Department cited Cuba as a successful example of the opening of Interests Sections for Holbrooke to make the similar proposition to the Vietnamese. It means Washington had placed Vietnam and Cuba on the same level of Soviet client states, which indicated a lower importance for U.S. geostrategic concerns. Yet Hanoi compared itself to China and believed in its own inflated political importance in they eyes of the Americans. In short, mutual misperceptions led to each country's distorted appraisal of both itself and of the other.

In the later half of 1978, Vietnam constantly indicated that it was ready to drop the precondition of reconstruction aid in order to get normal relations with the U.S. Because this issue of aid had been the sticking point in the negotiations, how each side handled the matter is of considerable importance. Vietnam, for its part, dropped the reconstruction demand awkwardly. The first indication that the issue was off the table came through foreign press interview

when Phan Hiền publicly dropped the reparations demand while on a trip to Tokyo,⁶⁸⁷ Australia, and then again during his trip to New Zealand.⁶⁸⁸ Then came briefings for private U.S. visitors to Vietnam. Vietnamese leaders explained to American visitors their belief that improved U.S.-Vietnam relations could head off a growing crisis between Vietnam, China and Cambodia, China's ally.⁶⁸⁹ Last but not least, Vietnamese officials approached members of Congress, stressing that aid was no longer a precondition.⁶⁹⁰ For two months, however, the Vietnamese did not directly hand the American negotiators in Paris a communiqué, confirming the policy change.

As a result, on directions from the White House, the State Department refused to acknowledge this critical change in Vietnam's position as "official." The Vietnamese failure to formally notify American negotiators of its new stand, and the usage of low-level contacts or of the media to convey the messages, allowed Washington to maintain a cautious policy of "wait-and-see." As the *Wall Street Journal* noted, the "ambiguity" in Vietnam's position on the aid issue was a "godsend" to Carter.⁶⁹¹ To be more accurate, this was a godsend to specific individuals in Carter's foreign policy apparatus, which was now nearly paralyzed with factionalism.

At the turn of 1978, the competition for influence within the administration between Carter's two most important officials, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, became obvious. Which was more in accord with U.S. interests: a bipolar view which assumed a fundamental division of the world between Soviet and American spheres of activity and influence, or a more multi-lateral approach that linked Communist and non-Communist nations on different issues?

⁶⁸⁷ *Associated Press*, July 11, 1978.

⁶⁸⁸ Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 270.

⁶⁸⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1978.

⁶⁹⁰ Senator Paul Simon, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, August 2, 1988. State Department officials were also approached, equally awkwardly. For example, junior officers accompanying Vietnamese officials to the U.S.-Joint Casualty Resolution Center in Honolulu were informed of the switch in Hanoi's policy.

⁶⁹¹ *Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 1978.

Assuming the first perspective, normalization of relations with the PRC should be assessed in particular on the basis of its impact on relations between Washington and Moscow.

Brzezinski and his staff advisor for Chinese affairs, Michel Oksenberg, viewed international alliances primarily for their value in isolating and weakening the Soviet Union. His views were compatible with those of the post-Mao leadership, which increasingly saw all countries as “anti-Soviet friends” or “pro-Soviet enemies.”⁶⁹² Brzezinski pushed for the development of an alliance with China against the Soviet Union, and agreed with the Chinese view of Vietnam as a Soviet proxy in Asia. He believed that Sino-American alliance would not only isolate Moscow, but also insure stability in the Asian diplomatic theater. In address to American businessmen interested in trade opportunities in China shortly after normalization, Brzezinski asserted, “Few factions will contribute more to the security and stability of our important positions around the rim of Asia, than a constructive involvement in China.”⁶⁹³

In other words, from the National Security Advisor’s viewpoint, U.S. interests were best served by developing a close, working relationship with the Chinese. Anything which threatened that, specifically in this case, pursuit of diplomatic relations with Hanoi, China’s newly re-instated enemy, was considered unadvisable. Normalization with Vietnam and China, therefore, was an either-or proposition for Washington, and Vietnam was less important. Brzezinski also strongly advocated the idea and indeed led the attempts in pressuring the Chinese to pressure the North Koreans to come to terms with Washington-Seoul initiative of talks.

Meanwhile, the opposing faction, led by Cyrus Vance and his aide Richard Holbrooke, preferred an approach which sought to advance U.S. interest through a flexible, multi-tired system of alliances that allow some

⁶⁹² Gaddis Smith assesses: “Brzezinski believed that the whole point of the relationship with the People’s Republic of China was to make the Soviet Union feel threatened and, therefore, inclined to be more accommodating with the United States.” Gaddis Smith. 1986. *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years*. Hill & Wang. 92.

⁶⁹³ *Asian Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 1979.

measure of independence to smaller nations wishing to avoid the domination of any great power. The perfect balance between Moscow and Peking that Vance envisioned was about “granting nothing to one not granted to the other.”⁶⁹⁴ A strong détente advocate, Vance was less enthusiastic than Brzezinski about the prospects of a full-tilt effort to team up with China, and was less ready to give up on the Vietnamese, or laying all of U.S. bet as regards to North Korea on the Chinese.

Victory for the faction of Brzezinski began in May 1978, when Carter approved the National Security Advisor’s trip to Peking, and was clearly reflected through the decisions put forth in October 1978. These included putting Vietnam on the back-burner and pressuring the Chinese to speed up the normalization time table, among which Vance’s State Department had not been fully informed, as deeply analyzed in the previous chapter. This resulted in the growing influence of both the National Security Council and the “China factor” in U.S. foreign policy decision-making process.

At the peak of internal factionalism, Vance remarked in his memoirs that Brzezinski “would attempt increasingly to take on the role of policy spokesman.”⁶⁹⁵ More than Carter, it was the National Security Advisor who staged and managed Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the United States to irritate Moscow.⁶⁹⁶ To Brzezinski, Deng’s discussion of his plan to attack Vietnam was the “single most impressive demonstration of raw power politics” that he ever encountered in his four years in the White House.⁶⁹⁷ “I sincerely wished,” he wrote later, “that Deng’s appreciation of the uses of power would also rub off on some of the key U.S. decision makers.”⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁴ Smith. 1986. 92.

⁶⁹⁵ Cyrus Vance. 1983. *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 35.

⁶⁹⁶ Odd Arne Westad. 1997. *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations During the Carter Years*. Scandinavian University Press. 22.

⁶⁹⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski. 1983. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. 25.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

Then what was the role of Carter in this internal administration's rivalry? While most scholars studying U.S. foreign policy in the late 1970s believe in a change of the President's favor from Vance's State Department in the first half of his presidency to Brzezinski's NSC in the later half, this research agrees with the conclusion of Nancy Mitchell. To this expert of the Carter administration:

The real problem was not that Carter was torn between Vance and Brzezinski, but the opposite: he held both their viewpoints simultaneously. That is, he believed in patient diplomacy *and* in the dramatic gesture; he saw beyond the Cold War *and* he was a firm Cold War Warrior.⁶⁹⁹

Prior to and at the beginning of his presidency, Carter had attempted to deemphasize superpower politics and had promoted a balanced approach to foreign policy based on a combination of the views raised by both the State Department and the NSC. Nonetheless, Sino-American normalization had marked the predomination of Brzezinski's globalist and anti-Soviet view in the White House. Carter's decision to push for normalization with China in order to balance out the Soviet threat unexpectedly drove Washington into the vicious circle of "great power politics" in Cold War international affairs, the very feature of Ford-Kissinger foreign policy that he had declared to backtrack from. In this particular case study, it harmed his ambitious plans in North Korea and Vietnam.

Apart from factional politics or the rivalry between the State Department and the NSC, as well as the Carter administration's doubts as to Hanoi's true motivations behind its sudden reversal in position, there was also certain impact of the upcoming midterm Congressional elections. Carter refrained from tackling or publicizing sensitive issues such as normalization with Vietnam, which had triggered intense Congressional opposition in 1977, and which could jeopardize Democratic changes for reelection.

⁶⁹⁹ Nancy Mitchell. 2010. "The Cold War and Jimmy Carter," in Melvyn P. Leffler & Odd Arne Westad eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press. 69.

On November 3, 1978, Vance for the first time acknowledged Vietnam's change of position on the reconstruction aid, after being pressed on the issue by a reporter.⁷⁰⁰ By then, however, Vietnam had evidently given up hope for any change in the American position, for the same day it signed the Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union. Brzezinski finally achieved his goal of normalizing with China in December, hence, shut the door in effect for American-Vietnamese normalization, but open the door for diplomatic initiatives vis-à-vis the North Koreans.

Throughout 1977, several achievements for indirect contacts were reached between Pyongyang and Washington, even though the Carter administration constantly refused to be drawn into direct discussion with the North Koreans without South Korean Government's presence. A breakthrough for the deadlock in trilateral talks proposal almost arrived in March 1978 with Yugoslavian President Tito's suggestion, which the U.S. Government gave "the green light." Fortunately for Park Chung Hee, North Korea refused Tito's proposal, saving the South Korean President from the possibility of being left out of talks. In a memorandum to Brzezinski, NSC staffer Michael Armacost pointed out U.S. "serious error" by having high hopes in the Yugoslavians:

I still believe we made a serious error in giving the Yugoslavs the green light on this one. Already we have encouraged the GOY [Government of Yugoslavia] to inject itself further into this issue (which is unfortunate); we have created yet another bilateral issue with the ROK at an inauspicious moment; and we have revealed again a disposition to advance procedural suggestions without a clear idea of what we want to accomplish substantively.⁷⁰¹

The National Security Advisor thus strongly declined Romanian President Ceaușescu's similar proposal the next month. He had in mind the apparent best men for the job – the Chinese. When he fled from Peking to

⁷⁰⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 2, 1979.

⁷⁰¹ Memorandum from Armacost to Brzezinski, "Key Developments in Your Absence," April 3, 1978. Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS). Square brackets, underline added by the author.

Seoul in May 1978, Brzezinski succeeded in persuading President Park Chung Hee to improve Seoul's ties with Pyongyang. Firmly believed in both "Chinese flexibility" after shaking hands with the Americans (even at the price of U.S. continued arms sales to Taiwan) and "Chinese influence" over the North Koreans, Washington demanded Peking to act. Also, believed in Chairman Kim Il Sung's concession to get round the negotiating table for three (even with the presence of Park Chung Hee), the Carter administration decided to freeze its planned troop withdrawal from South Korea in February 1979 and finally suspended it in July 1979 to wait for the diplomatic efforts that involved North Korea to bear fruits.⁷⁰² In the end neither the Chinese nor the North Koreans cooperated. In other words, the National Security Advisor miscalculated most of his over-optimistic judgments of the Asian Communists follows Sino-American normalization.

Therefore, it is concluded that there was a complex set of reasons that accounted for U.S. ultimate failure in engaging both Vietnam and North Korea. Due to different levels of contacts (direct negotiations in the case of Hanoi and indirect communications in the Pyongyang case) as well as varied geopolitical contexts (unified Vietnam under Hanoi's rule versus divided Korean peninsula and strong U.S.-ROK alliance), there were different causes for American failed attempts towards two minor Communist regimes in Asia. Blaming one side or the other in negotiations or contacts, as suggested in the previous studies, is surely inadequate to understand the dynamics of late 1970s international relations in Asia.

Moreover, this research found a common ground critically explains for such unsuccessful foreign policy of the U.S. in the late 1970s: the "China factor." As shown, the intra-Carter administration competition between Vance and Brzezinski was indeed stemmed from their conflicting ideas and actions

⁷⁰² As clearly pointed out in the previous chapter, the signature formula of the Carter administration's Korea policy following Sino-American normalization was that "Making completion of the withdrawal program contingent upon North Korean responsiveness." See pages 199 (Senator Sam Nunn's advice), 208 (Nick Platt's suggestion), 212-213 (Brzezinski's assurance to Carter).

regarding how to perceive, negotiate with and take advantage of U.S. relationship with China. In addition, with Brzezinski's overwhelming influence in the administration's China policy, the Chinese leaders' attitudes were seriously taken into account. These surely included the Chinese opposition to American efforts vis-à-vis Vietnam and non-cooperation with U.S. plans vis-à-vis North Korea.

Accordingly, even though its role was diametrically different (hindering American-Vietnamese normalization versus inducing U.S.-North Korean improvement of relations), the "China factor" ultimately became the core element in the final failure of the Carter administration's engagement policy with both Hanoi and Pyongyang. In other words, Washington's decision to place Peking as the top priority from mid-1978 to early 1979 directly ended U.S. diplomatic efforts towards Hanoi and indirectly affected its on-going diplomatic attempts regarding Pyongyang.

This research, therefore, challenges the standpoints raised by "newer" scholars of the late 1970s-early 1980s, including some "revisionist" Cold War historians and especially newly emerged Area Studies specialists and political scientists.⁷⁰³ Mainly published beginning in the late 1990s, these scholars disagree with the widely established assumption that "China" had something to do with Carter's ultimate non-normalization with Vietnam. They above all reason that the Chinese leaders never directly opposed or showed displeasure with Vietnamese-American normalization in the first place. The evidences shown in Chapter 5 of this study demonstrate a complete contrary. Also, anyone with an International Relations specialty is certainly aware of the principle of "willing speech but unwilling heart" in diplomacy. The Chinese did not necessarily have to "punish" Vietnam as early as 1977 to show its

⁷⁰³ Steven Hurst. 1996. *The Carter Administration and Vietnam*. New York: St. Martin's Press; Cécile Menétrey-Monchau. 2006. *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy after the Capture of Saigon, 1975-1979*. McFarland & Company. London, UK: Routledge; Tuong Vu. 2016. *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology*. Cambridge University Press. 216-221.

frustration and to obstruct U.S.-Vietnamese reconciliation. As a matter of fact, the CIA acknowledged the below assumptions in September 1978:

Although Chinese officials are not warning that US-Vietnamese normalization would seriously affect China's relations with the US, they do appear intent on making their preference clear to Washington.⁷⁰⁴

Other allegations including that Peking was only against Hanoi as long as Vietnam did not decide to completely lean towards Moscow. As shown throughout Chapter 2, Chinese hostile activities vis-à-vis Vietnam began long before Hanoi joined the COMECON/SEV in June or signed the Friendship Treaty with Moscow in November 1978.

Moreover, taking advantage of Vietnamese language ability yet unable to get access to Vietnamese Government's key documents, these scholars over-emphasize propaganda materials that Hanoi produced to blame it all on Vietnam's narrow view in its negotiations with the U.S. plus its aggression towards neighboring countries. Rebutting this viewpoint, the research provides significant historical data to reaffirm the old-time yet never outdated argument, that great power politics had always played a decisive role in international relations in Asia throughout the Cold War, and in this particular case, in the post-Vietnam War era.

In addition, by bringing in the North Korea case, this research further consolidates its claims of Carter's strategic considerations for the attempts not only in approaching Asian Communist states but also in prioritizing China. Putting China first obviously damaged U.S. efforts regarding Vietnam, but astonishingly enough, it contributed to Carter's failure in his parallel policy for the Korean Peninsula. North Korea, therefore, is of great importance to the overall structure and argument of the research. The establishment of Sino-American diplomatic relations, this dissertation concludes, was closely

⁷⁰⁴ National Intelligence Daily Cable. "China-US-Vietnam: Relations," September 28, 1978. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration II. Underline added by the author.

interconnected with U.S. failure in building a better relationship with both North Korea and Vietnam in the late 1970s.

Here question is raised as to why the “China factor” had a direct, severe impact on the case of Vietnam, whereas U.S. “China Card” did not work in the case of North Korea? Answering this two-clause question requires a deeper look at the historical interactions among Hanoi-Peking-Pyongyang, the “three Confucian-Leninist cultures,”⁷⁰⁵ not only in the context of the late 1970s but also the long history of the Sino-centric world order in Asia, and the dynamics throughout the Korean War and the Vietnam War in modern time. Let us go back in time, beginning with the later half of the 1970s.

Soon after the fall of Saigon, China signed a treaty of economic and technical assistance for the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia in August 1975, in a strategic move to hold back Vietnamese hegemonism in Indochina after defeating the mighty America. Whereas the Democratic Kampuchea was trying to free itself from the Vietnamese sphere of influence and decided to choose Peking as its patron, Laos in July 1977 signed the twenty-five year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam. This treaty legitimized the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Laos for its protection against hostile actions by the Khmer Rouge, making the Cambodians felt trapped.⁷⁰⁶ From the later half of 1978, Vietnam gradually moved into the Soviet camp, becoming dependent on Moscow for its survival. Judging that China would not directly intervene in Cambodia, in view of the Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty and of Soviet buildup in the Northern border of China, Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia.

Irritated by these moves of Hanoi, Peking decided to give a military lesson on Vietnam, but before that, hurried the conclusion of diplomatic normalization with the U.S. and secured Washington’s acceptance of China’s

⁷⁰⁵ Chapter title by Lucian W. Pye. 1988. “Leadership in the Three Confucian-Leninist Cultures,” in Robert A. Scalapino & Dalchoong Kim eds. *Asian Communism: Continuity and Transition*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies. 151-169.

⁷⁰⁶ Elizabeth Becker. 1986. *When the War was Over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and its People*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 372.

lead in reacting to the Third Indochina War. There were tactical logics behind the Chinese invasion of Vietnam: to express anger over Vietnam's ingratitude for Chinese aid during its resistance war against the Americans; to relieve pressure on Pol Pot forces, allowing them to regroup. But fundamentally, it was aimed at a larger audience: showing the U.S. that China, although militarily weak, could take a resolute stand against aggressive foes; and signaling to the international community that China was a contender for a leadership role in a Western alliance against the Soviet Union, an alliance which could no longer count on American leadership.

Considering the above complex relationships among China-Cambodia-Vietnam-Laos, once the Carter administration decided to prioritize normalization with Peking over the similar agenda with Hanoi, the U.S. gave way for the Chinese to transform their fury with the Vietnamese into actions. The "China factor," thus, immediately exerted negative influence on American-Vietnamese rapprochement. If we look further into history, the "China factor" at work in the late 1970s seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that officials within the Carter administration might have not realized.

Throughout history, keeping a relatively weak Vietnam, a country located right at China's Southern doorstep, has always been within the interest of the authorities in Peking. Despite the total twelve invasions of Vietnam by the Chinese since the country's foundation, including the 1979 one, the Vietnamese have never yielded to such aggressions and in fact acted as an equal to China. Nationalism, 유인선 concludes in his landmark work, has dictated both traditional and modern Sino-Vietnam relations, rather than ideology.⁷⁰⁷

North Korea, on the other hand, did not share a similar history with China as Vietnam did. Until the outbreak of the Korean War, Communist China participated very little, if any, in North Korean politics, and Pyongyang had been an overt satellite of the Soviet Union. It was the massive intervention

⁷⁰⁷ 유인선. 2012. 『베트남과 그 이웃 중국: 양국관계의 어제와 오늘』 파주: 창비.

of the Chinese “People’s Volunteers” in November 1950, as well as the huge contribution for postwar rehabilitation, that the two countries built up a “blood alliance” (혈맹관계).⁷⁰⁸ Thereafter the Chinese emerged as legitimate and influential players in managing the Korean question. The North Koreans, however, tried to steer a neutral course in the face of worsening Sino-Soviet relations. As the rift between the two Communist giants further embittered, Pyongyang sought to balance Peking and Moscow influence, minimizing the extent of their direct involvement in the internal affairs of its regime.

After a short period of siding with Peking, from 1965 on, important developments of the war in Vietnam drawn both Hanoi and Pyongyang closer to the Soviet side. American bombings of selected targets in North Vietnam alarmed the North Koreans. South Korea-Japan treaty of normalization of relations further convinced the North that only Soviet military support and nuclear protection would provide an effective deterrent to American power. Distancing themselves from the chaotic Cultural Revolution in China and armed with their own *juche* ideology, the North Koreans restored relations with Moscow, before leaning towards Peking again in 1969.⁷⁰⁹

Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese leadership was in conflict with China after the 1968 Têt offensive, from which Peking criticized Hanoi for launching the campaign without proper preparations. Hanoi in turn criticized Pyongyang for causing the Pueblo incident with the U.S., overshadowing the influence of Têt. Cracks within North Korea-North Vietnam relations hence

⁷⁰⁸ 박대균. 2005. 『한국전쟁: 끝나지 않은 전쟁, 끝나야 할 전쟁』 서울: 책과함께.
“큰형님이 된 중국”. 346-371.

⁷⁰⁹ Chin O. Chung. 1978. *Pyongyang Between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement in the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975*. University of Alabama Press; Hakjooon Kim. 1985. *The Sino-North Korean Relations, 1945-1984*. Seoul: Korean Research Center; Chae-Jin Lee. 1996. *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press.

emerged, very much related to the two countries' contradicting ties with China.⁷¹⁰

The renewed Peking-Pyongyang “lips and teeth” relations was cool off again with President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, opening Sino-American rapprochement. This period in bilateral ties was what 최명해 calls “Same bed, different dreams” (동상이몽)⁷¹¹ scenario. At that time, Pyongyang expected that Peking would raise the issue of Korea with the American leaders. It turned out that, while seeking a solution for the Taiwan issue, China preferred the status quo in the Korean peninsula, as well as Vietnam, for the time being.

Toward the end of the decade, as shown in this study, the opening of China under Deng Xiaoping, his policy of de-Maoization,⁷¹² the breakthrough in concluding the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty and Sino-American normalization, all had serious implications for North Korean interests. Throughout the process, Moscow tried to take advantage of some signs of strained Peking-Pyongyang relationship. The reality of “Pyongyang between Peking and Moscow” throughout the 1960s and 1970s – the complex China-North Korea-Soviet Union relations, and North Korean attempts in manipulating Sino-Soviet split for its own interests – made impossible an absolute influence by either of the great powers on the North. Moreover, irritated enough by Vietnamese actions, particularly Hanoi’s plan to seek better relationship with Washington, China did not wish for further complications born out of potential improved North Korean-U.S. contacts.

In short, legacies of the historical experiences among Vietnam-China-Korea and the complex geopolitical structure in the Southeast and Northeast Asian regions came to the climax in the late 1970s, contributing to the

⁷¹⁰ 도미엔. 2019. 『베트남전쟁기 한반도와 베트남 관계 연구』 이화여자대학교 박사학위 논문. 200-206.

⁷¹¹ 최명해. 2009. 『중국-북한 동맹관계: 불편한 동거의 역사』 서울: 오름. 292-302.

⁷¹² De-Maoization could be an implicit criticism of the cult of personality that surrounded Kim Il Sung. Kim might have not forgotten that an attempt to overthrow him in the mid-1950s was stimulated by Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign.

different impacts of the “China factor” in the U.S. engagement with Vietnam and North Korea. On the one hand, historical animosity between Hanoi and Peking stimulated and strengthened the negative impacts of the “China factor” in U.S. reconciliation with Vietnam. On the other hand, despite Peking-Pyongyang friendly relations, the “China Card” did not work in bringing about positive outcome for Carter’s initiative with North Korea. These reverse effects, unfortunately, were truly not what the Carter administration desired.

And yet in the wake of the Third Indochina War, there emerged even the problem of a combination of “misperceptions” and the “China factor.” Soon after China invaded Vietnam, the Vietnamese press strongly condemned the Chinese actions *in association with* the American support. In many cases the state media even suggested that it was the United States who conspired, initiated or encouraged China to launch severe attacks against Vietnam, as the following cartoons and pictures portrayed:

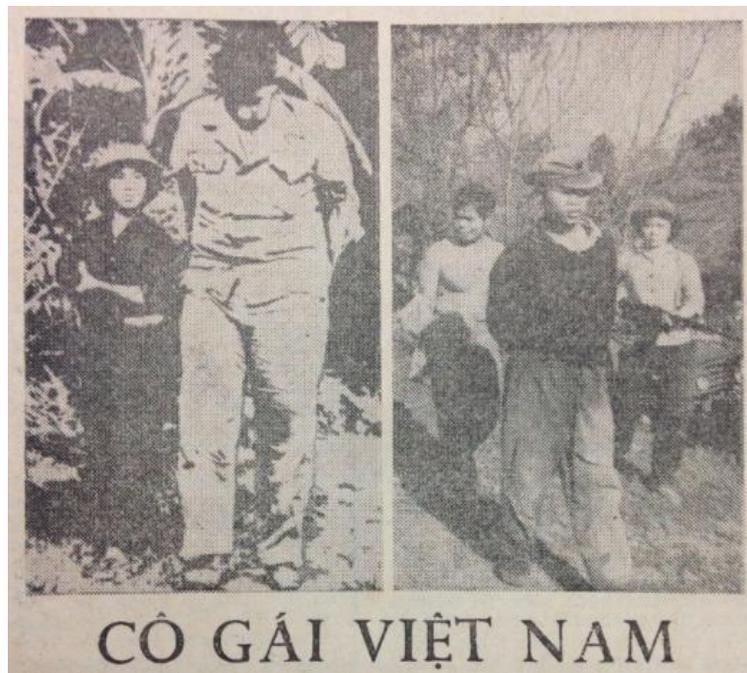


Illustration 6.1. China–USA: Stories about the tigers (before China considered the USA as paper tiger)⁷¹³

⁷¹³ *Quân Đội Nhân Dân*, March 26, 1979. 4.



Illustration 6.2. February 17, 1979⁷¹⁴



Picture 6.1. Vietnamese women⁷¹⁵

Though bizarre and were clearly made for propaganda purposes, such illustrations partly reflect Vietnamese perceptions of Deng Xiaoping's visit to Washington just two weeks prior to the Chinese invasion and American

⁷¹⁴ Quốc Đông, Phan Văn Khuyết. 1982. *Lật tẩy: Tập tranh đã kích bọn bành trướng Bắc Kinh* (Unmask: A Collection of Cartoons on Peking Expansionism). Ty Văn hóa và Thông tin Bình Trị Thiên (Cultural and Information Office, Binh Tri Thien Province Publisher). 28.

⁷¹⁵ *Nhân Dân*, February 26, 1979. 4.

reactions afterwards. If, in the early 1950s, the U.S. made a big mistake by supporting and then gradually replacing the French at the ending stage of the First Indochina War, out of its inability to grasp Vietnamese people's general perceptions of the "Western invaders," then Washington just repeated such mistake again in 1979 by positioning itself closely to the Chinese.

Last but not least, one assessment of U.S. policy towards Vietnam argues that the difficulty with Hanoi policy under the Carter administration was largely conceptual. Overall Asia policy in the post-Vietnam War period, this account asserts, lacks any clear sense of focus. This lack of focus explains the bungling of Carter's Korea policy; it explains the slowing of U.S. economic interest in Southeast Asia, as well as clashes with Japan over energy and trade and bogged-down negotiations over the bases in the Philippines.⁷¹⁶ The United States, this argument runs, had not developed a coherent post-Vietnam strategic conceptualization of Asia.

2. The Dynamics within Asian Communist "Bloc"

2.1. Diplomatic Competition vis-à-vis the United States

Throughout the research, we observe an internal competition among Asian Communist states for American attention and support as soon as the new Democrat President was elected in Washington. Since the promulgation of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969 and especially after the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in 1973, the United States had quickly withdrawn from the Asia-Pacific arena. The power vacuum that the Americans had left raised concerns and in fact ignited intraregional and intra-Communist rivalry throughout East Asia. Without a unifying American adversary, suspicions grew between the once fraternal Communist parties, which began to polarize into two rival groups around China and the Soviet Union. In such a critical moment of Asian

⁷¹⁶ Franklin B. Weinstein. 1978. "U.S.-Vietnam Relations and the Security of Southeast Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56. 844.

Communism that one scholar calls “a distorted Cold War landscape,”⁷¹⁷ Laos and Vietnam were in the Soviet camp, while China was the patron of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and North Korea.

To Communist countries in Asia, the geopolitical situation as a result of the Vietnam War’s end made a U.S. comeback preferable in the face of the pinnacle of Sino-Soviet rivalry. And so when the regional order after April 1975 was gradually formed, in which the U.S. reaffirmed its foothold in the region as an Asia-Pacific power, the Americans were now invited back to Asia, surprisingly and ironically by not its Asian long-term allies but former adversaries – the Communists.

With the fall of Saigon, Vietnam wanted to normalize its relations with the former enemy to gain the aid they badly needed for the country’s eroded post-war economy. Meanwhile, North Korea wanted a direct talk with the U.S. in order to reach a “peace treaty” and settle the Korean issue in its own terms without South Korean presence in such meetings. And China wanted to re-open the negotiations of diplomatic normalization with the U.S. that was stalled since 1972.

As a result, they participated in a diplomatic race in wining American attention and an improvement of relations with Washington, a marathon in which they knew time was limited and their competitors came from the same ideological line. As of 1978, since the three Asian Communist regimes had danced with “the Eagle,” it was now high time to conclude with some concrete results. They now all sped up for the final spurts.

First of all, all three Communist regimes of Peking, Hanoi and Pyongyang adjusted their initial proposals in negotiations with Washington to become astonishingly flexible. In the case of China, the Chinese leaders firstly ceased criticizing U.S. foreign policy. Returned from the landmark trip to

⁷¹⁷ Juhyung Shim. 2014. *Haunted Borderland: The Politics on the Border War Against China in Post-Cold War Vietnam*. Doctoral Dissertation. Duke University. 66.

Peking in May 1978, Brzezinski was reported about his achievements in dealing with the Communist China that:

Since May 23, the Chinese have not published a single article critical of our policy toward the USSR, accusing us of appeasement. They have made no reference to PRM-10. In an unusual move, they published the President's Annapolis speech in full in their Reference News, their internal newspaper circulated to higher level cadres.⁷¹⁸

Towards the end of the year, Peking even decided to neglect the provision of U.S. continued arms sales to Taiwan, the very one thing that the Chinese leaders strongly opposed from the beginning of Sino-American normalization negotiations.

For Vietnam, as of May 1977, after two rounds of unsuccessful negotiations, Vietnamese chief negotiator Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hiền immediately fled back to Hanoi from Paris to brief officials from the leadership to embrace a more pragmatic and flexible approach.⁷¹⁹ And follows a long nine-month delay in talks in 1978, the Vietnamese Government decided to drop the condition of U.S. aid obligation, giving up the much needed money they had longed for since the end of the War. Accordingly, once they were able to resume talks with the Americans in New York in September 1978, Vietnamese representatives quickly announced to the American negotiators Hanoi's wish for normalization without condition, not knowing that the Chinese had interfered with U.S. attempts regarding Vietnam in the previous months.

For North Korea, Chairman Kim Il Sung finally accepted the idea of a resumption of inter-Korean dialogue at the turn of 1979, putting aside all of his efforts in directly contacting President Carter throughout 1977-1978. This decision came to the surprise of many in Washington, Seoul and especially

⁷¹⁸ Memorandum for Brzezinski from East Asia, Weekly Report, "North Korea Military Assistance to Cambodia," June 15, 1978. CREST. 1.

⁷¹⁹ Director-General for North American Affairs Trần Quang Cơ memoirs. Trần Quang Cơ. 2003. *Hồi ức và Suy nghĩ* (Memoirs and Thoughts). 12.

some Communist leaders worldwide who had helped to bridge between Carter and Kim, such as President Ali Bongo of Gabon or President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia. As a result, expectations ran high on the American side that Pyongyang could again give in to South Korea-U.S.-North Korea trilateral talk proposals. The Carter administration hence tried to take advantage of the “China Card” in forcing the North to come to terms, yet without much success.

Realized that contacts at Governmental levels seemed inadequate, the three Asian Communist regimes all launched a public diplomacy campaign vis-à-vis the United States. As Sino-American contacts prior to normalization, including people-to-people exchange, has already been excessively well accounted through numerous books, monographs and even dictionaries on the topic of U.S.-China relations, here the author would like to unveil the policies taken by Hanoi and Pyongyang.

In November 1977, Vietnam allowed a group of three founding members of the Downtown Community Television Center (DCTV), a community media center located in Manhattan, New York, to enter the country. These included famous documentary film director Jon Alpert and his wife Keiko Tsuno.⁷²⁰ Not only did they become the first American film makers to be able to enter Vietnam after 1975, the Vietnamese Government even decided to sponsor their visit up to “15,000 Vietnam Dong” and fully assist their activities in Vietnam.⁷²¹ This was, according to the Vietnamese officials, to “promote progressive movement in the U.S. and create more pressure on the Carter administration to comply with Article 21 of the Paris Agreement.”⁷²²

In 1978, the number of Americans were allowed to visit the country drastically increased, including journalist Richard Ward of *The Guardian*, Senator M. Kennedy’s assistant Dale DeHaan, well-known reporters such as

⁷²⁰ Hồ sơ xét duyệt đoàn ra, đoàn vào cho Bộ Ngoại giao từ tháng 6 đến tháng 12. 1977 (Immigration Approval Records for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July-December 1977). December 18, 1981. Folder 10124. Collection of the Prime Minister’s Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), 4. Hereafter CPMO.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Ibid.

Gareth Porter, *Far Eastern Economic Review*'s Nayan Chanda, *The New York Times*' Fox Butterfield.⁷²³ Another noteworthy visit was that of a U.S. delegation of the National Lawyers Guild, based in New York, whose members were among the founders of the American-Vietnamese Friendship Society.⁷²⁴ This organization later greatly contributed to the public campaign demanding the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two governments in the early 1990s.

As the Carter administration quickly put forth trilateral talks initiative regarding the Korean peninsula follows Sino-American normalization, a U.S. table tennis team was invited to Pyongyang together with a sizable group of American newsmen on the occasion of the 1979 World Table Tennis Championships (WTTC). At that time the State Department showed "ignorance," confirmed "We are not sending them," explaining that "we still have a no-contact policy with North on official ground."⁷²⁵ Since 1945, only newsmen and academicians had gone to North Korea. The last time any American was official in the country was in 1972. It is thus suggested that North Korea attempted to apply the famous Chinese-style "ping pong diplomacy" to its relationship with Washington,⁷²⁶ as partly reflected in the following tournament posters and picture that its official press conveyed.

⁷²³ Hồ sơ xét duyệt đoàn ra, đoàn vào cho Bộ Ngoại giao năm 1978 (Immigration Approval Records for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1978). Folder 10486. CPMO.

⁷²⁴ Báo cáo của Hội Luật gia Việt Nam về hoạt động của đoàn luật gia Mỹ trong thời gian thăm Việt Nam năm 1978 (Report by Vietnam Lawyer Association on the Activities of the U.S. Delegation of the National Lawyers Guild during Visit to Vietnam in 1978) July 1-December 9, 1978. Folder 10717. CPMO.

⁷²⁵ "Table Tennis Team Grains Upper Echelon," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1979.

⁷²⁶ Carter in fact was questioned by the press at home whether his Government was trying "another Ping-pong diplomacy" via U.S. table tennis team in Pyongyang. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter, 1979*. Questions and Answers for Publication in the Orient Press, June 21, 1979. U.S. Government Printing Office. 1153-1154.

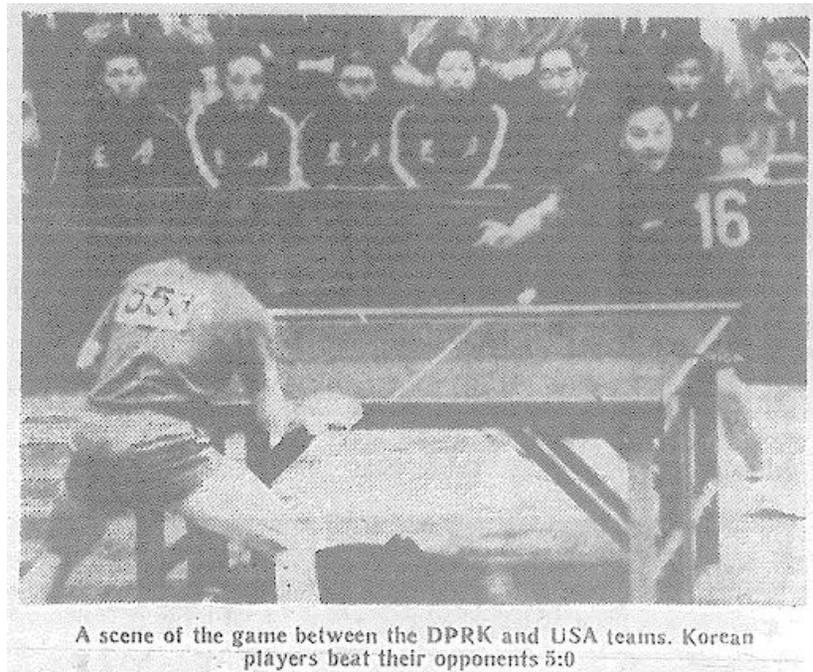


Welcome!⁷²⁷



Friendship!⁷²⁸

Illustration 6.3. 1979 Pyongyang WTTC posters



Picture 6.2. Men Team: the DPRK beat the USA 5:0 at the 1979 WTTC⁷²⁹

⁷²⁷ *The Pyongyang Times*, April 21, 1979. 3.

⁷²⁸ *The Pyongyang Times*, April 28, 1979. 3.

Meeting with a Japanese visitors' group later in May, Chairman Kim Il Sung provided detail information about this special American team presented at the Thirty-fifth Pyongyang WTTC:

The US team taking part in the Pyongyang Worlds includes two Korean women who live in America. When Koreans are teaming up even with Americans, why should they not form a single team among themselves?

Of these Korean women, one has the American citizenship and the other is denized in the United States. Regardless of this, we permitted them to come.

A large number of Korean residents in the United States came: a few as interpreters for the US team and others as tourists. Many American reporters also came.

A Korean youth, an interpreter for the US team, met his mother after a long separation, and another, too, met his family. At the request of our compatriots from abroad, we find out their families for them.⁷³⁰

At the same time, several members of U.S. Congress received invitation to visit the "Hermit Kingdom." In June 1980, Congressman Stephen Solarz and former State Department spokesman Tom Resto visited North Korea.⁷³¹ The purpose of cultivating this people's diplomacy was to rally American public opinion to form a pro-Pyongyang group in the United States.

The fierce diplomatic competition among China, Vietnam and North Korea resulted in their military actions. The once comrades-in-arms now confronted each other on the battlefield, with Pyongyang sided with Peking in fighting against Hanoi. This opened up an awkward situation, which was not limited to "Dragons Entangled"⁷³² (雙龍戰鬥 – Sang Lóng Zhàn Dòu – *Song long giao đầu*) between Vietnam and China, but expanded to an almost

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ *The Pyongyang Times*, July 7, 1979.

⁷³¹ Byung-joon Ahn. 1986. "North Korea and the United States in Global and Regional Perspective," in Robert A. Scalapino & Hongkoo Lee eds. *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context*. Berkeley: University of California. 296.

⁷³² Book title by Steven J. Hood. 1992. *Dragons Entangled: Indochina and the China-Vietnam War*. New York: An East Gate Book.

“Tigers versus Dragons” (龍爭虎鬥 – Lóng Zhēng Hǔ dòu – *Long tranh hổ đấu*)⁷³³ scenario in Asia in the late 1970s that lasted throughout the 1980s. As the 1979 Chinese invasion of Vietnam has been touched upon in the previous chapters of the research, in this part the author would like to analyze North Korean reactions, emphasizing its interactions and conflicts with Vietnam during the critical moment of incurable cracks within the Asian Communist “bloc.”

2.2. Cross-Interactions and Conflicts

When the unification of Vietnam happened in April 1975, North Korea held more a less an inconvenient feeling. Similarly divided as the Indochinese country, the Korean peninsula still remained partitioned more than twenty years after the Korean War – the North’s first attempt to reunify the country by forces. Despite the fact that Pyongyang joined the “progressive mankind” worldwide in celebrating the “glorious victory of the Vietnamese people in their resistance war against the American imperialists,” the conflict in which it contributed both men and equipment, North Korea felt uneasy that it was now the remaining country in the Asian continent that left territorial and ideological divided after Vietnam. The surprising similarity in terms of history and geopolitics between Vietnam and Korea resulted in frequent reference or comparison between the two states, further piled up Korean heavy feelings as Vietnam was now unified.

Hanoi’s arrogance, overtly expressed at the international arena after beating the number one superpower, annoyed Pyongyang. As Vietnamese Ambassador to North Korea Lê Quang Khải shared with German Democratic Republic (East Germany) officials, the DPRK in April 1976 declined his

⁷³³ Tiger is known as the animal that represents Korea, and historians have long termed China as “the big dragon” while Vietnam as “the small dragon” in Asia.

request to speak on the first anniversary of the Vietnamese people's victory.⁷³⁴ Overall, the Vietnamese comrades were “very disappointed” about the “insufficient reports on Vietnam” in the North Korean press, as well as regarding the 1976 elections in Vietnam.⁷³⁵ According to Ambassador Khai, the North Koreans authorities explained this situation as follows:

The Korean comrades are uncomfortable to talk widely about the success of the Vietnamese people, its victory, and the reunification. Apparently they are afraid of negative reactions and doubts about the correctness of their [Korean reunification] policy among their own population.⁷³⁶

With such emulative thinking of each other, how the two countries performed at the international stage might essentially decide their “correctness” as well as “success” in the process of nation-building and of becoming a more active player in different parts of the world. Considering their rather minor influence at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) became the most important diplomatic forum for both Hanoi and Pyongyang at the international arena throughout the Cold War. The organization indeed championed not only independence but also national liberation and the struggle against neocolonialism and imperialism – precisely the main goals that both North Korea and Vietnam have pursued. The Fifth Summit Conference of the NAM held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in August 1976 proved to be a milestone for both countries. It was the first one attended by the DPRK after its admission to the organization the previous year, as well as the first adherence of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) as a unified country.

During this event, the DPRK staged a massive lobbying effort. By sending the largest delegation of a hundred and twenty members led by

⁷³⁴ Report from the GDR Embassy in the DPRK, “Note About a Conversation with the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Comrade Le Quang Khai, on 5 May 1976,” May 6, 1976. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114286>

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

Premier Li Jong Ok, Pyongyang sought to have this meeting endorse its stance on Korean unification.⁷³⁷ The conference passed two resolutions on Korean problems favorable to the North, but twenty-five nations filed written reservations to the wording of the resolutions.⁷³⁸ Surprisingly, Vietnam and Cuba were among such opposing countries. During Nicolae Ceaușescu's visit to Pyongyang in May 1978, Chairman Kim Il Sung recalled for the Romanian President the unpleasant feelings at that time in Colombo:

Vietnam and Cuba were against a paragraph in this declaration in which we [the North Koreans] requested that the key-countries not to meddle in the Korean problem. Of course we do not target the socialist countries but the United States of America and Japan in the first place. In this problem the discussions with the representatives of Cuba were very intense, but the declaration was adopted as it was proposed. Cuba did not vote.⁷³⁹

North Korea-Vietnam competition for influence within the NAM would continue for another decade since this landmark Colombo conference. Easily expected, each country took pains to promote its own agenda at this important multilateral forum. However, Pyongyang was even under greater pressure regarding its performance at the NAM.

Prior to the 1976 Colombo meeting, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa García paid Kim Il Sung a visit in North Korea. At that time Havana requested Pyongyang to “take action” at the upcoming event in Colombo so as “it would not turn into an anti-Soviet Conference.”⁷⁴⁰ Meanwhile, during his visit to North Korea in May 1978, Chinese Chairman Hua Guofeng encouraged Pyongyang's activation in the NAM as well as its eager diplomatic activity in the Third World. Hua thought the DPRK should “take the role of Cuba and

⁷³⁷ Byung Chul Koh, 1984. *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea*. University of California Press. 220-221; Dae-sook Suh. 1988. *Kim Il Sung, the North Korean Leader*. New York: Columbia University Press. 265-266; Adrian Buzo. 1999. *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea*. Westview Press. 99-100.

⁷³⁸ Byung Chul Koh. 1984. 221.

⁷³⁹ “Minutes of Conversation at the Official Meeting between the Romanian Delegation and the Korean Delegation,” May 20, 1978. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114456>

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

Algeria” at the NAM, and “counter Cuba’s role in the Third World.”⁷⁴¹ The Chinese Chairman also went to Yugoslavia and Romania right after the Korean visit to win those countries over for Chinese policy, which was aimed at “limiting and eliminating Soviet influence in the Non-Aligned Movement.”⁷⁴² Hanoi-Pyongyang competition might not just happen at the diplomatic front.

On October 4-8, 1977, on the invitation of Chairman Kim Il Sung, Pol Pot, Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea, arrived in North Korea after the conclusion of his debut performance in Peking. In Pyongyang, the Democratic Kampuchean delegation received an equally enthusiastic reception compares to that by the Chinese. Celebrating the Seventeenth anniversary of the founding of Communist Party of Kampuchea, Pol Pot was conferred the title “Hero of the DPRK” at a public ceremony attended by Kim Il Sung.⁷⁴³ Speaking at the People’s Stadium in front of the citizens of the North Korean capital, Pol Pot praised Korean-Cambodian comradeship:

Comrade Kim Il Sung have powerfully assisted us in the period when we were defending the country and accelerating construction, just as they had done during our national and popular war of liberation. We highly estimate this assistance which further stimulates us to independence and sovereignty and constitutes a clear manifestation of true revolutionary friendship and militant unity based on the principles of equality and mutual respect and once again express deepest thanks to you for this.⁷⁴⁴

This shows North Korea’s support for Pol Pot from the early establishment of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Even though the DK Prime Minister did not directly condemn Vietnam in his public speech in Pyongyang as did during his discussions with the Chinese leaders, foreign diplomats stationed in North Korea immediately recognized that his “repeated

⁷⁴¹ Untitled Report from Brun, Polish Intelligence Station in Tokyo, “Concerning Hua Guofeng’s Visit to Pyongyaong,” May 12, 1978. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208554>

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ *The Pyongyang Times*, October 8, 1977.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

references” such as “we will not allow anyone to intervene in our domestic affair and to conduct subversive or espionage operations against our country” were directed at Hanoi.⁷⁴⁵ It was during this visit that Pol Pot received promises of North Korean military aid.⁷⁴⁶ Clearly, the DPRK Government was the second most important friend of the DK regime after Peking. This support might not stop at words or official visits to Pyongyang by high-ranking officials of the Democratic Kampuchea, but might expand to military assistance to fight back Vietnam during its border conflicts with Hanoi.

In a memorandum dated June 15, 1978 to Brzezinski from the East Asia Review Group (EARG), it was reported that the National Security Council picked up several reports indicating that North Korea was supplying military assistance to Cambodia. Evidently this included “the dispatch of military technicians to Cambodia and some training of Cambodian pilots.”⁷⁴⁷ However, it was concluded that the information about this development was “sparse.”

We do not know when such assistance was initiated, how extensive it may be, whether any quid pro quos are involved, or whether the Chinese provided encouragement. Predictably, it has an adverse effect on North Korea’s relations with Vietnam. Since the Vietnamese exercise considerable influence within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the rift between Pyongyang and Hanoi may further undercut North Korea efforts to globalize NAM support for its position for Korean issues at the Belgrade meeting this summer.⁷⁴⁸

Follows the Vietnamese attack in December 1978, which forced Pol Pot to retreat from the capital to a jungle base near the border with Thailand,

⁷⁴⁵ Telegram 066764 From the Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Pol Pot’s Visit to the DPRK,” October 10, 1977. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114866>

⁷⁴⁶ David P. Chandler. 1992. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 145-147; Qiang Zhai. 2006. China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970-1975,” in Priscilla Roberts eds. *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam and the World beyond Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 393.

⁷⁴⁷ Memorandum for Brzezinski from East Asia, Weekly Report, “North Korea Military Assistance to Cambodia,” June 15, 1978. CREST. 1.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Underline added by the author.

another CIA report in January 1979 accounted that around fifty North Korean personnel assigned to Phnom Penh exited Cambodia at the Thai border along with Chinese and other foreign representatives.⁷⁴⁹

More historical evidences regarding Pyongyang's support for Phnom Penh that went beyond words to even expanded to military training are yet to be found. Nevertheless, the CIA came to know much earlier of the year that, as "the Asian nations having to choose between Cambodia and the PRC or Vietnam and the Soviet Union," North Korea voted against Vietnam in the United Nations.⁷⁵⁰ Chairman Kim Il Sung did not hesitate to criticize the alleged ambitions of Hanoi regarding Cambodian territory during Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu's visit to Pyongyang in May 1978. In Kim's words:

The [North] Koreans believe that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam did not act properly on the border problems it had with Cambodia. The Parrot's Beak is Cambodia territory. It was used by the Vietnamese as a retreat place, as a place for establishing hospitals and repair shops for armament during the war. Sihanouk's permission to let the Vietnamese use this territory made the Americans disgruntled, and so they order Lon Nol to remove Sihanouk. This was also observed from the fact that once Sihanouk was toppled, the Americans took larger scale actions in the Parrot's Beak territory.

The affirmation of the Vietnamese which have a large and well prepared army, that they were attacked by the Cambodians, are not believed by anyone. It is a well-known fact that the Vietnamese got 2-3 billion dollars' worth of equipment from the Americans.⁷⁵¹

In December 1978, a North Korean Government's financial delegation led by Vice Minister of Trade Ri Song Rok visited Hanoi to negotiate trade volumes between to two countries for 1979. During negotiations, North Korea

⁷⁴⁹ East Asia Review, "North Korea: Chronology (December 1978-January 1979)," January 23, 1979. CREST. 22.

⁷⁵⁰ "Possible Redraft or Insertion in Worldwide Briefing on the Soviet Union." January 19, 1978. CREST.

⁷⁵¹ "Minutes of Conversation at the Official Meeting between the Romanian Delegation and the Korean Delegation," May 20, 1978. Wilson Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114456>

turned down many requests of Vietnam regulated in the long-term Five Year Agreement (1976-1980) signed between the two governments,⁷⁵² despite Vietnamese hard efforts to meet the demands of Pyongyang. The North finally conceded to increase some of the negotiated items, making an equal foreign trade turnover for Vietnam (of 920,000 rubles⁷⁵³ for both exports to and imports from North Korea).⁷⁵⁴

On December 27, two days after Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia, the Protocol on Goods Exchanges and Payments for Fiscal Year 1979 between the Governments of Vietnam and North Korea was signed. The final lists of agreed mutual exports (Tables 6.1 and 6.2) reveal the two sides' necessary concessions not to make bilateral trade relations further worsened as a result of diplomatic contentions as well as Vietnamese actions in Cambodia. The two sides maintained most of the volumes of exchanges in the originally signed Five Year Agreement, particularly on the Vietnam side.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, the personal pronoun used for North Korea in the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Trade's report was still "friend" (*bạn*). As shown later in this chapter, most of the items listed in the 1978 Protocol from the North Korean side was unmet in

⁷⁵² For example, in the Five Year Agreement, North Korea was to provide 100 kilograms of fresh ginseng and 5 tons of menthol to Vietnam. During negotiations, however, the North Korean delegation only promised 24 kilograms of fresh ginseng (and included them into the medicine turnovers together with 315 kilograms of flour ginseng), as well as refused to provide menthol. They also initially agreed to provide just 200 tons of lead, though the Five Year Agreement stipulated the amount of 250 tons. Therefore, the final results of negotiations, according to Vice Minister of Trade Nguyễn Văn Đào, was just "average." Báo cáo của Bộ Ngoại thương về kết quả đàm phán mậu dịch năm 1979 với Triều Tiên (Report by the Ministry of Foreign Trade on the Results of Trade Negotiation in 1979 with North Korea). Folder 11318. CPMO.

⁷⁵³ Soviet ruble (рубль) was used for inter-enterprise accounting and international settlement in the COMECON zone. After the break of the USSR in 1991, it continued to be used in the post-Soviet states, forming a "ruble zone," until it was replaced with the Russian ruble by 1993.

⁷⁵⁴ Báo cáo của Bộ Ngoại thương về kết quả đàm phán mậu dịch năm 1979 với Triều Tiên (Report by the Ministry of Foreign Trade on the Results of Trade Negotiation in 1979 with North Korea). Folder 11318. CPMO.

⁷⁵⁵ Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Trade emphasized in the report the key items of tires, rubbers, peanut oils and especially apatite that Vietnam might find it difficult to meet the demands of North Korea. Hanoi, however, still tried its best to keep them on the list for 1979. In their turn, North Korea decided to agree on the 250 tons of lead follows Vietnamese hard persuasion. Ibid.

1979 or say, all of Pyongyang's promised exports to Hanoi just went up in smoke.

Table 6.1. LIST "A" – Exports of the SRV to the DPRK in 1979⁷⁵⁶

DANH MỤC "A"
Hàng xuất của nước Cộng hoà Xã hội chủ nghĩa
Việt Nam năm 1979
sang nước Cộng hoà Dân chủ Nhân dân Triều Tiên

Thứ tự	Tên hàng	Đơn vị	Số lượng hoặc trị giá
1	A-pa-tít	Nghìn tấn	20
2	Thiếc	tấn	5
3	Cao su thiên nhiên	tấn	100
4	Tinh dầu các loại	tấn	7
5	Quế	tấn	2
6	Dầu lạc	tấn	100
7	Dược liệu	nghìn tấn rúp	50
8	Cam tươi	tấn	500
9	Chuối tươi	tấn	500
10	Tre cây	nghìn rúp	50
11	Kén tằm	tấn	5
12	Muối biển	nghìn tấn	30
13	Hàng hoá khác	nghìn rúp	100

Order	Goods	Unit	Amount/Value
1	Apatite	Thousand ton	20
2	Tin	ton	5
3	Natural rubber	ton	100
4	Essential oil	ton	7
5	Cinnamon	ton	2
6	Peanut oil	ton	100
7	Medicine	Thousand ruble	50
8	Fresh orange	ton	500
9	Fresh banana	ton	500
10	Fresh bamboo	Thousand ruble	50
11	Silkworm cocoon	ton	5
12	Sea salt	Thousand ton	30
13	Others	Thousand ruble	100

⁷⁵⁶ Nghị định thư về trao đổi hàng hóa và thanh toán năm 1979 với Tiệp Khắc, Triều Tiên (Protocol on Goods Exchanges and Payments with Prague and North Korea in 1979). Folder 11301. CPMO.

Table 6.2. LIST “B” – Exports of the DPRK to the SRV in 1979⁷⁵⁷

DANH MỤC "B"
 Hàng xuất của nước Cộng hoà Dân chủ Nhân dân
 Triệu tiền năm 1979
 sang nước Cộng hoà Xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam

Thứ tự	Tên hàng	Đơn vị	Số lượng hoặc trị giá
1	Vật liệu chịu lửa	nghìn rúp	200
2	Chì	tấn	250
3	Kẽm	tấn	200
4	Hòa a-xê-ty-len	tấn	50
5	Lụa nhân tạo	nghìn mét	100
6	Hoa nấu bia	tấn	30
7	Dược liệu	nghìn rúp	100
8	Xi măng	nghìn tấn	10
9	Sứ cách điện	nghìn rúp	60
10	Hàng hoá khác	nghìn rúp	100

Order	Goods	Unit	Amount/Value
1	Fire-resistant materials	Thousand ruble	200
2	Lead	ton	250
3	Zinc	ton	200
4	Mild acetylene	ton	50
5	Man-made silk	Thousand meter	100
6	Houblon (for making beer)	ton	30
7	Medicine	Thousand ruble	100
8	Cement	Thousand ruble	10
9	Electrically-insulated porcelain	Thousand ruble	60
10	Others	Thousand ruble	100

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

From 1979 on, North Korea publicly criticized Vietnamese actions in Cambodia. Five days after the fall of Phnom Penh, the Workers' Party daily *Rodong Sinmun* branded Vietnam's "massive military action" against Kampuchea as a "crude violation" of international law.⁷⁵⁸ Saying that Vietnam is following a "dominationist" course, Pyongyang called for Hanoi to withdraw its armed forces so that the "Kampuchean people can shape their own destiny."⁷⁵⁹ At the same time, North Korea tried its best to refrain from mentioning China's invasion of Vietnam. For example, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Heo Dam (Ho Tam) intended a short statement with the Yugoslav counterpart during his visit to the European country in March 1978 in order to avoid touching on the Sino-Vietnamese conflict.⁷⁶⁰

On May 20, 1979, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Prince of Cambodia and life-long friend of Kim Il Sung, arrived in Pyongyang on the invitation of the North Korean leader. Kim and his wife together with 5,000 ordinary capital citizens welcomed the Samdech at Pyongyang Airport,⁷⁶¹ a rather noisy celebration in consideration of the nature of the visit: seeking refutation upon the complex situation of war raging at home. At the banquet that evening, Sihanouk freely condemned the Vietnamese for invading his country in front of North Korean highest-ranking officials:

The armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam installed themselves in my country, affirming that they would "save the Khmer people" from genocide of which they were and are victims.

But, if the intention of Viet Nam is so "good," why it refuses that the Kampuchean people, under an international control, are allowed to choose, through general elections, not faked, a government and a political system acceptable to them?

⁷⁵⁸ *Rodong Sinmun*, January 12, 1979. See also a CIA coverage: East Asia Review, "North Korea: Chronology (December 1978-January 1979)," January 23, 1979. CREST. 23.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁰ Telegram to the Director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. "Report on DPRK's Foreign Minister Heo Dam's Visit to Yugoslavia, etc.," April 7, 1979. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118391>

⁷⁶¹ *The Pyongyang Times*, May 26, 1979. 1.

Far from this, the government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, from January 7, 1979, installed in Phnom Penh, a puppet government entirely devoted to it, which the whole world, except its patrons, rejects and the United Nations and the non-aligned countries obstinately refuse to recognize.⁷⁶²

Sihanouk went on, even criticizing Vietnam's actions in Cambodia as going against Vietnamese father-figure Ho Chi Minh's well-known motto of the struggle for national independence and liberation:

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam proclaims to the whole world that the following words of the late President Ho Chi Minh constitute its noblest national idea: "Nothing is more precious than freedom and independence."

But, Viet Nam, which is said to be intelligent, refuses to recognize that now humanity despises it most bitterly and history condemns it most severely, because Viet Nam only counts its own freedom and independence, does not count at all the freedom and independence of the Kampuchean people and Kampuchea.⁷⁶³

The Cambodian prince also did not forget to mention his contribution during the Vietnam War for Hanoi's resistance fighting against the Americans:

As to my personal relations with revolutionary and anti-imperialist Viet Nam, the whole world knows that in the capacity of the Head of State of the Kingdom of Kampuchea, in the 1950's and the 1960's, I accorded voluntarily all aid possible to the Vietnamese fighting against the United States for the complete liberation of their fatherland.

Without my complicity, moreover voluntary, with the DR [Democratic Republic] of Viet Nam and the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation, the US imperialist and the Lonnoillies could never have any pretext to "depose" me and "eliminate" the Kingdom of Kampuchea.⁷⁶⁴

Sihanouk further emphasized at the end of his speech that the Vietnamese "rejects with contempt and with insolence all my propositions of peaceful resolution of the Kampuchea-Vietnam conflict," and concluded in an

⁷⁶² Ibid. 2-3.

⁷⁶³ Ibid. 3.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid. Square brackets added by the author.

incisive style: “The world and history will judge.” His full speech, including the intentionally long condemnation of Vietnam, was printed on the Workers’ Party daily organ *Rodong Sinmun* and its English version *The Pyongyang Times*, showing the Kim regime’s strong support for the Cambodian Prince both at home and abroad.

During his stay in North Korea in 1979, Sihanouk was called on and met with Deng Yingchao, Member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the PRC, and wife of the late Premier Zhou Enlai, who also paid a visit to Korea at that time.⁷⁶⁵ He was also called on to the National Guest House to watch North Korean documentary film “Mansudae Art Troupe Performing in France” together with Chairman Kim.⁷⁶⁶ After a short trip to China, he and the Cambodian delegation then “inspected the fun fair facilities at the Taesongsan Pleasure Park.”⁷⁶⁷

On March 11, 1980, the Government delegation of Democratic Kampuchea led by Khieu Samphan, President of the Presidium of the State and Prime Minister of the Government of DK visited North Korea.⁷⁶⁸ The next month Sihanouk and five members of his family visited Pyongyang again. During yet another pleasant stay in the “Hermit Kingdom,” he enjoyed the movie “Tale of Chunhyang” together with leader Kim Il Sung at the February House of Culture.⁷⁶⁹ It is no exaggeration that the Democratic Kampuchea and the Sihanouks found in Pyongyang a safe harbor under Peking’s guarantee. By identifying closely with Chinese support for Prince Sihanouk in particular and with Peking’s position on Cambodia in general, the North Koreans endorsed Chinese attempts to circumscribe Soviet influence in Indochina.

At the pinnacle of the cool atmosphere that covered Hanoi-Pyongyang relations, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Trade reported that bilateral trade

⁷⁶⁵ *The Pyongyang Times*, June 9, 1979.

⁷⁶⁶ *The Pyongyang Times*, September 1, 1979.

⁷⁶⁷ *The Pyongyang Times*, September 15, 1979.

⁷⁶⁸ *The Pyongyang Times*, March 15, 1980.

⁷⁶⁹ *The Pyongyang Times*, April 12, 1980.

came to the lowest ebb in 1979 due to the extremely low level of transference.⁷⁷⁰ Import turnover from North Korea came at 200,000 rubles⁷⁷¹ – approximately one-fifth of the agreed number in the Protocol on Goods Exchanges and Payments for Fiscal Year 1979 signed in December 1978 in Hanoi. According to the assessment of Vietnamese officials, “even though *they* [the North Koreans] could deliver goods for us, *they* intentionally refused to do so due to bad relations with us.”⁷⁷² Two of the most important economic projects that Pyongyang promised to Hanoi – the constructions of an iron shipyard and a porcelain factory⁷⁷³ – were passed over in silence. Personal pronoun “friend” (*bạn*) was also no longer used. Instead, Vietnamese officials called North Koreans as “they” (*họ*), marking a considerable change in attitude.

On the diplomatic front, Vietnamese Ambassador to Hungary reported on North Korea’s political attitude towards Vietnam on June 6, 1979 as follows:

For a long time, since the time of the war against the USA, the DPRK has shown an unfriendly attitude, and in recent times an attitude of open hostility, toward Vietnam.

It unequivocally supported China’s aggression against Vietnam, and ever since that time, it keeps taking sides with China against Vietnam, and acts likewise in practice, too.

⁷⁷⁰ Bổ sung tình hình tổng quát về quan hệ Kinh tế, Kỹ thuật-Khoa học giữa Việt Nam-Cộng hòa Dân chủ Nhân dân Triều Tiên 1973-1979 (Additional Information on the Overall Economic, Technical-Scientific Relations between Vietnam and the DPRK, 1973-1979). Folder 9235. CPMO. An additional handwritten paper was attached at the end of the typed report, indicating a later add-ups in December 1979.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ The iron shipyard was planned to build in Nghệ Tĩnh province (now divided into Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh), central Vietnam. As of 1979, the two countries had not yet decided on this project. Meanwhile, the porcelain factory (mostly for manufacturing electrically-insulated porcelain products, which were crucial for electricity supply and connection in Vietnam back then) was scheduled in Thanh Hóa province, northern Vietnam. In 1977, Vietnam sent a delegation to Pyongyang to negotiate this project and on June 26, 1977 signed a contract on the design, materials, equipment and experts, all provided by the North Koreans. It was expected that North Korea hand over the design in 1978 and then send the materials in 1980. However, as North Korean side “passed over” and “said nothing” about the project due to mutual “bad relations,” Vietnam could not help but remained silent about the issue. Ibid.

It defended the regime of Pol Pot, and still supports its remnants, whereas it sharply attacks Vietnam.

It does its best to isolate Vietnam (and, together with it, Cambodia [People's Republic of Kampuchea]), and, if possible, achieve its expulsion from the Non-Aligned Movement. Most recently, the government of the DPRK also set the aim that the non-aligned countries should hold the conference scheduled for this year in Pyongyang, rather than in Havana.⁷⁷⁴

Even though Hanoi was increasingly irritated by Pyongyang's words and actions for sometimes, this was the first time a Vietnamese diplomat strongly condemned the North Korean authorities, even threatened a cut-off of bilateral relations. Said the Ambassador:

For a very long time, Vietnam has tolerated the actions of the DPRK, and wanted its leaders to cease their attacks, but to no avail.

Vietnam cannot act in this manner any longer; it must inform its people about the real situation.

It is regrettable that they must take such a measure against a socialist country. There is no other alternative. At present the DPRK cannot be regarded as a socialist country.

They will probably recall their ambassador from Pyongyang, and they will also be compelled to take additional measures.⁷⁷⁵

In reality, the Vietnamese Government had never taken any virtual "measure" regarding this problem of rift in Hanoi-Pyongyang relations. It especially did not publicize the situation on official newspapers, or propagandize against North Korea throughout the Cold War. The policy that Hanoi indeed took was a freezing silence: the DPRK began disappearing from Vietnamese newspapers starting from 1979. The North Korean side apparently took the same action.

⁷⁷⁴ Hungarian Embassy in Canada, Ciphored Telegram, "Vietnamese-DPRK Relations," June 8, 1979. Wilson Center Digital Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115837> Square brackets added by the author.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid. Underline added by the author.

On the occasion of the North Korean Workers' Party Sixth Congress in October 1980, Vietnamese delegation was invited yet could not participate in the grand meeting.⁷⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Democratic Kampuchean Ambassador to Pyongyang attended the Congress along with the other mission leaders. The Vietnamese and Cuban delegations were also accompanied by only the low-ranking Korean officials during the event.⁷⁷⁷

Later in February 1983, Chairman Kim Il Sung told French *AFP* correspondent that he thought the Non-Aligned Movement should return to its original objectives and called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from every country. Vietnamese Ambassador Cao Kiến Thiết immediately voiced his opinion, saying Kim's statement was "an anti-socialist standpoint, and actually it shows submission to the Western efforts."⁷⁷⁸ As Vietnamese troops continued to station in Cambodia for another six years from this moment (1978-1989), very much similar to the total length of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), any statement that demanded a "troop withdrawal" would be seen by Hanoi as "directed against the Soviet Union and Vietnam."⁷⁷⁹

At this moment of 1983, the DPRK launched a campaign to obtain the position of Vice-Chair in the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) as a representative of the Asian continent, which Vietnam was also applying for. To the Vietnamese Ambassador, North Korea, if was selected for the position, would "start undermining the NAM from within" and "endanger the unity of the movement."⁷⁸⁰ Ambassador Thiết also explained that although Vietnam continued to consider the DPRK a socialist country, the line of the Korean

⁷⁷⁶ Telegram from the Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang. "KWP's 6th Congress," October 24, 1980. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123746>

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Report from Hungarian Embassy in Mongolia, "Vietnamese Views about North Korean Policies," March 2, 1983. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115830>

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

Worker's Party was "contrary to Marxism-Leninism."⁷⁸¹ He even frankly pointed out one indication of such "un-pure" version of Socialism in North Korea: the dynastic step taken by Kim Il Sung "who has already selected his successor in the person of his son."⁷⁸² The Ambassador concluded his analysis as:

The Korean leadership is still unable to comprehend how Vietnam could gain a victory over American imperialism without the ideas of *juche*. This generates jealousy in the Korean leaders, and at the same time they must take into consideration that the ordinary people in Korea will contemplate that Vietnam has managed to reunify the country even without the ideas of *juche*.⁷⁸³

Full of complacency, Vietnam once again underestimated the Korean inability to reunify the country as the Vietnamese already did in 1975. This is a unique aspect or say, special root of the mutual discords or disharmony between Hanoi and Pyongyang throughout the ending stage of the Cold War. Even though the two countries did not hold the feud caused by armed conflicts as did the case of Vietnam vis-à-vis its neighboring countries of Cambodia and China, each side's perceptions of reunification led to unpleasant feelings towards each other for a long period of time. If conflicts could be solved by peace agreements, history proves that it is uncomfortable feelings in the hearts that is more difficult to overcome. North Korean-Vietnamese discord, thus, was not simply a reflection of the Sino-Soviet split, but also cultivated a dynamics of its own, largely fueled by the narrow-minded egoism of both sides. Pyongyang-Hanoi relations, followed the Third Indochina War, could never be repaired and improved.

Nevertheless, differences also appeared within the same camp or the same side of fighting-line. Just as the closest friends sometimes have conflicts,

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

North Korea and China disagreed with each other in certain problems along the Carter-Deng warming-up. As shown in Chapters 3 and 5, there were two concrete issues that Pyongyang and Peking could not be on the same page: (1) U.S. forces stationed in South Korea (the USFK) and (2) Pyongyang's improvement of relations with Seoul. China preferred if the U.S. could sustain its forces on the Korean Peninsula, one thing unacceptable by the North. Disagreement on this particular issue resulted in Pyongyang's suspects of Peking-Washington secret deal on Korea for their normalization, and/as a result Chinese inability to influence the North to come to the negotiating table with the South Korean Government.

Moreover, they also published contradictory pronouncements that underscored their different worldview, especially regarding the United States. North Korea denounced the U.S. as the "main enemy" and contended that all nations should be judged by their attitude toward "U.S. imperialism."⁷⁸⁴ China, on the other hand, tagged the Soviets as having taken over from the U.S. the role of "international Gendarme,"⁷⁸⁵ a term used by North Korea to describe the Americans. Pyongyang also studiously avoided using the term "hegemonism," a well-known Chinese code word for Soviet attempts to project and expand its power in the world. The North instead coined the phrase "dominationism" (지배주의), while omitting anti-Soviet references from its accounts of the Chinese leaders' remarks throughout 1978.

Later on if Pyongyang withheld any comment when China began its "lesson" on Vietnam in February 1979, it also did not offer any public comment on the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in January 1980. Speaking at the Workers' Party Sixth Congress in October 1980, Kim Il Sung even warned that Socialist countries "must make no unprincipled compromises with imperialism," and above all, they must not "sacrifice the

⁷⁸⁴ CIA National Foreign Assessment Center Memorandum, "The Pyongyang-Peking-Moscow Triangle," May 10, 1978, Remote Archives Capture (RAC). CPL. 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

interests of other countries in their own interests.”⁷⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Chinese newspapers indirectly criticized North Korean hierarchical succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il.

In their landmark work, Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia point out the “misunderstood friendship”⁷⁸⁷ between Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung. Despite fictitious legend about the bilateral relationship “close as lips are to teeth” and “forged with fresh blood and tested in war,” the history of Sino-North Korean relations remains a deep secret, the two Chinese scholars conclude.⁷⁸⁸ From an examination of the situation in the late 1970s, it is suggested that Chairman Kim’s friendship with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China’s modern reform and opening to the outside world, was similarly “misunderstood,” at least in this case study by the American leaders.

As the mater of fact, the Communist world, both East and West, was the chief victim of the Communist victories in Indochina in 1975. The fall of Saigon removed the one remaining basis for even token cooperation between China and the Soviet Union – their common desire to defeat the United States and their client states. Elizabeth Becker made an excellent observation: “After 1975 the Communist world became prey to sharper and deeper divisions than at any time since the Sino-Soviet split broke open in 1963, and with far more devastating consequences.”⁷⁸⁹

Unable to comprehend such discords among Asian Communists, particularly the complex interactions between Peking and Pyongyang, the Carter administration unquestioningly pushed for a “China solution” for the stalemate in trilateral talks proposal. Continuous misjudgments of North

⁷⁸⁶ Kim Il Sung’s Speech at the Sixth Workers’ Party Congress, October 10, 1980. “4. Let Us Strengthen Unity of Anti-Imperialist, Independent Forces,” *The Pyongyang Times*, October 11, 1980. 8.

⁷⁸⁷ Book title by Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia. 2018. *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1940-1976*. West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid. 1-4.

⁷⁸⁹ Elizabeth Becker. 1986. *When the War was Over: The Voices of Cambodia’s Revolution and its People*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 370.

Korean calculations and behaviors plus an over-confidence in the Chinese influence over Pyongyang contributed to U.S. final failure in the attempts to reconcile with the North.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

We have a basic decision to make in our country in our foreign policy about how we deal with nations who in the past have not been our friends and in some instances have been our enemies... Should we write them off permanently as enemies and force them to be completely under the control and influence of Communist powers, or should we start the process of giving them the option to be our friends and allies, hoping that they will come to a more democratic, free society and join with us in the making of a better world?

President Carter's remarks at Yazoo City, Mississippi, August 1977.

The collapse of the Saigon Government in April 1975 and the subsequent unification of Vietnam under Hanoi's rule radically redefined the pattern of international relations in East Asia. There emerged three Communist regimes of China, North Korea and Vietnam with their strong military and increasingly influential diplomatic positions at the regional and international stage. At the same time, without a common American adversary, intra-Communist rivalry gradually deepened among them, dividing Asia into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese camps.

With a great concern among both U.S. Asian allies and former foes of the power vacuum left after American troops withdrew from the region, Gerald Ford reaffirmed U.S. strong foothold as an Asia-Pacific power. As long as the Communists provoked, as in the cases of *Mayaguez* seizure and the Axe Murder incident, America would react strongly, not to let the Vietnam-type mentality prevail again in either Southeast or Northeast Asian region. There

was another visible manifestation of U.S. footing in Asia: Sino-American rapprochement, confirmed via Ford's official visit to China. Also, even though vowing that it was "a time to heal,"⁷⁹⁰ the Ford administration could not overcome its own bitterness with Vietnam to conduct aggressive policies towards Hanoi, rejecting any signs of Vietnamese opening and its admission to the United Nations. For this reason, America's reaction against military commitment abroad in the wake of the Vietnam disaster found its voices in its first post-Vietnam President, Jimmy Carter.

Carter entered the White House with a pacifist vision of world affairs, seeing it as a "global community" in which the United States played the key role as a pioneer in peace-building initiatives and cooperative actions. He saw countries within their regional and national context, rather than being globally influenced by the great powers. As the first post-Vietnam War President, he hoped to restore the tarnished image of the U.S. abroad, and his way was "to normalize with everybody."⁷⁹¹ In a press briefing followed Woodcock Commission's trip to Hanoi, Carter again expressed his bold idea:

For now I cannot tell you what my positions towards the future economic relations with Vietnam are. I think it could only be achieved after we continue the negotiations to see their attitude toward us. But my own natural inclination is to have normal diplomatic relationships with all countries in the world.⁷⁹²

Throughout Carter's first year in office, China, Vietnam, North Korea and even Cuba were all on his table. To this research's observation, at the moment of 1977, Hanoi was in a relatively more advantageous position in

⁷⁹⁰ Title of Gerald Ford's autobiography. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. 1979. Harper & Row.

⁷⁹¹ Nayan Chanda. 1986. *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 146.

⁷⁹² Jimmy Carter Answering the Press, March 24, 1977. "Special Report on U.S. Assessment of L. Woodcock Commission's trip to Vietnam," Tập tài liệu về chuyến đi Việt Nam của Đoàn đại biểu Ủy ban Tổng thống Mỹ trong tháng 3 năm 1977 (Report on the Visit to Vietnam by the U.S. Presidential Commission in March 1977). Folder 10392. Collection of the Prime Minister's Office (Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng), National Archive III (Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III), 27. Underline added by the author.

opening contacts with Washington than other Communist states. Whereas Carter had to find ways to manage inevitable protests from its strong allied parties in Seoul and Taipei, the fall of Saigon and the country's reunification under Hanoi's rule opened the chance for Vietnam to draw Carter's attention and efforts. Vietnam, therefore, seemed likely to become the most remarkable while at the same time promising diplomatic test for the new President's bold initiatives. From this point of view, the dispatch of the Woodcock delegation just about two months after Carter's inauguration seems to be more reasonable, not to say clever in a way.

However, Carter could not keep up his balanced approach for long. As his administration's foreign policy became increasingly influenced by the National Security Council (NSC) that headed by an anti-Soviet National Security Advisor, Carter's initial objectives gradually changed. Sino-American diplomatic normalization, a big success of the Carter presidency, turned out to be an obstacle for Carter's initiatives regarding not only Vietnam but also Korea and possibly Cuba. A hierarchical approach to normalization seems acceptable in the first place, yet as demonstrated in this research, any decision has its own price. Once giving in to the hardliners in his Cabinet to top Peking on his deck, Carter lost much of his original sense of initiative in managing foreign policy. As a result, he failed to reconcile with both Hanoi and Pyongyang.

For Vietnam, the Carter administration failed to appreciate how little time the Vietnamese had left. After 1975 and especially throughout 1977, periodic clashes had occurred along its disputed border with China, though not the scale of clashes with Cambodia. A border agreement could not be concluded and border talks broke down in March 1978. The specter of a two-front war with China and Cambodia finally prompted Vietnamese leaders to prioritize security over economic development. When Hanoi renounced aid preconditions for ties with the U.S. in June 1978, Carter had already leaned to the NSC's obsession of "Chinese concern" regarding Vietnam and possible

“Chinese flexibility” extracted out of the Vietnam threat. The U.S. wanted Vietnam to wait until it had secured normalization with China. Vietnam did not have time to wait its turn.

For North Korea, it was a surprise to both Washington and Seoul that the tripartite talks proposal received strong denial from Pyongyang. Unlike the Vietnam case in which the U.S. Government could directly negotiate for diplomatic normalization to achieve certain goals, the U.S. could not break the Cold War alliance framework with South Korea to directly contact the North. The Carter administration also misread the North Koreans in a sense that it hoped for more flexibility from Pyongyang follows Sino-American normalization. The DPRK turned out to be more inflexible and disobedient, and at the same time it attached less importance to the “comradeship” with the Chinese than expected. As shown in the research, Chinese influence over North Korea to change its behavior was weak and for many times, Peking frankly announced its unwillingness in affecting Pyongyang’s decisions despite close Sino-American contacts. Being too confident in Chinese flexibility plus the amount of possible Chinese influence on North Korea, Carter’s parallel policy in Korea ended up with no fruit.

This research, therefore, concludes that apart from a set of important reasons that was partly discovered in the existed literature, including a combination of staffs with contentious ideas within the Carter administration, and the sudden change in the international context starting from late 1978, it was the U.S. inability to apprehend the historical experiences and ongoing dynamics among Vietnam-China-Korea that led to the ultimate failure of engagement policy with both Vietnam and North Korea. At a critical moment of Asian Communist history, with a “distorted Cold War landscape” that signaled the end of the Communist internationalism and solidarity, North Korea was siding with China whereas Vietnam was about to enter a decade-long conflict with the Chinese. With the two Communist camps existed in Asia, the “China factor” had diametrically different roles in the U.S.

interactions with Vietnam and North Korea: hindering American-Vietnamese normalization, while inducing U.S.-North Korean improvement of relations. It, however, produced similar results. The change of heart over Vietnam and the unexpected failure to engage North Korea meant normalization with Hanoi did not come not until fifteen years later. In the case of North Korea, there continues to be no official diplomatic relations.

In yet another major finding of the study, whereas Washington prioritized Peking in dealing with both Hanoi and Pyongyang, there was a diplomatic competition among three Asian Communist regimes to win Carter's attention and efforts. As depicted in the research, Vietnam was short of breath in this diplomatic race against China starting from mid-1978 and finally lost the marathon at the end of the year, though prospects were wide-opened in 1977. The reaction from North Korea is also noteworthy. Pyongyang, who had been surprisingly succeeded in maintaining "neutral" in the Sino-Soviet split in the previous decades, sacrificed its comradeship with Hanoi to side with Peking in this crisis of the so-called Asian Communist "bloc."

The existence of North Korean troops in Cambodia in assisting the Pol Pot regime to fight against Hanoi's attacks remains concretely unproven. However, one thing for sure is that after Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia, the government of Thailand was so panic of its vulnerable border now exposed to one of the strongest militaries in the world that it immediately sought to arm itself, not just sat and waited for the U.S. to take action. The first and best arms sale partner that the Bangkok Government could think of was no one else but South Korea.

Declassified documents unveil that starting from June 1979, the Thais constantly approached Seoul to purchase South Korean-produced arms. A Thai military mission visited Seoul to examine what items they should

purchase, including M48A5 tanks, M-16 rifles and 105 artillery.⁷⁹³ It turns out that Bangkok was most interested in the well-known “Made in Korea” M-16 rifles that were widely used during the Vietnam War.⁷⁹⁴ Upon Bangkok’s “urgent need,” the U.S. Government immediately granted permission for Korean sales to Thailand and indeed urged Seoul to act quickly and to “review any Thai requests sympathetically.”⁷⁹⁵ South Korean President Park Chung Hee could not be more willing to help the Southeast Asian ally in need, even sending teams to assist with the refugee crisis.⁷⁹⁶ In other words, there was high possibility that North and South Korea were indeed in the same fighting-line against Vietnam, which surely is unimaginable for anyone. Pyongyang-Hanoi relations, followed the Third Indochina War, could never be repaired and improved.

The dynamics within the Asian Communist bloc after April 1975, therefore, is another significant contribution of this research. At the point of history when Pyongyang and Hanoi stood at two different lines of Communist factions, and Peking was even at war with Hanoi, any attempts by Washington towards either Vietnam or North Korea had to count in the Chinese reactions. In a conversation with Park Chung Hee in March 1979 in which much of discussion centered on Indochina at Park’s initiative, Richard Holbrooke made such a keen assessment, saying that with PRC-SRV border conflicts, “the Communist world would never be the same again in that nationalism and racial hatreds had overcome Communist doctrine.”⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹³ Telegram from U.S. Embassy in Bangkok to Secretary of State, “Possible Thai Request for Purchase of Korea-Produced Arms,” June 22, 1979. The National Archives Access to Archival Databases (AAD).

⁷⁹⁴ Telegram from U.S. Embassy in Seoul to Secretary of State, “Transfer of M-16 Rifles from Korea to Thailand,” August 2, 1979. AAD.

⁷⁹⁵ Telegram from U.S. Delegation Secretary in New York to Secretary of State, “ROK Foreign Minister’s Meeting with Assistant Secretary Holbrooke,” September 27, 1979. AAD.

⁷⁹⁶ Telegram from U.S. Delegation Secretary in Bali to U.S. Embassy in Seoul, “Korea Assistance on Refugees,” July 2, 1979. AAD.

⁷⁹⁷ Cable from U.S. Embassy in Seoul to Secretary of State in Washington DC, “Assistant Secretary Holbrooke’s Conversation with President Park,” March 19, 1979. National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Cable Files – Far East, Box 16, Folder “2-3/79.” Carter Presidential Library (CPL).

Last but not least is the discussion surround the role of Seoul. For South Korea, Carter's parallel policy raised great concern for the Park administration. Already troubled by the plan for phased American troop withdrawal, Park became even more fearful of Carter's efforts to engage North Korea and U.S.-ROK relations dipped to a new low point during the first two years of the Carter presidency. Therefore, even though the plan for trilateral talks was consolidated as soon as 1977, it took Carter's staff two years to slow down the troop withdrawals, reassuring Park and improving this alliance; this had been the vital factor for the implementation of three-way talks. However, one thing remained strong during the Carter presidency: the U.S.-ROK alliance. The Carter administration never sacrificed its alliance with the South to agree on bilateral talks or a secret deal with the North. The Cold War framework was still a significant undercurrent during one of the most idealistic eras of U.S. foreign policy.

If the history is any guide, a reference to the current U.S. Trump administration's nuclear talks with North Korea seems reasonable. Despite recent Pyongyang-Beijing close-knit moves, a surprisingly strong reemphasis on Socialist solidarity, as well as a warming relationship between the two countries' leaders of Kim Jong Un and Xi Jinping, a "China Card" or even "Russia Card" may not work as expected. Great power politics always play some role, but not always produce the desired effect. American diplomatic officials, therefore, should waste little time to focus more on the parties that are directly involved, i.e. the two Koreas. It should be noted that just prior to the first inter-Korean summit meeting at Panmunjom in April 2018, Beijing-Pyongyang relations was almost frozen to the level that many analysts observed a "China passing" reality in regional diplomacy. The dynamics within North Korean relations with its traditional allies and Socialist brothers, thus, should not be underappreciated, yet at the same time should also not be overused. Unpredictable as these regimes may seem, so do prospects in their relations and interactions.

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한글초록

이 연구에서는 1970년대 말 베트남, 북한, 중국 등 아시아의 공산주의 국가에 대한 카터 행정부의 정책을 미국의 대전략의 배경으로서 “중국 팩터(China factor)”이 작동했는지 여부를 중심으로 고찰하였다. 특히 승인과 외교 정상화를 달성하기 위해 미국과 이들 공산주의 국가가 어떤 시도와 실패를 하였는지에 초점을 맞추었다.

우선 베트남과 북한과의 관계와 관련해 포드(Ford)와 카터(Carter) 행정부의 변화하는 외교 전략을 기술하였다. 다음으로 양국 관계의 개선에 대한 거부 또는 추진으로 귀결되었던 다양한 메커니즘을 조명하였는데, 그 중에서도 특히 카터 행정부 후반부의 미-중 정상화와 “중국 팩터”의 역할에 주목했다. 이 연구는 강대국의 관점에 입각한 접근을 넘어서, 베트남과 공산주의 국가들의 1차 사료를 활용하여 정책에 대한 다양한 주체들의 인식과 대응을 조명하고자 했다.

월남의 패배에 이어 1975년 베트남이 통일되면서 미국은 군사적 동맹과 미국의 책무에 대한 집착을 점차 넘어설 필요성을 느꼈다. 중국, 북한, 베트남의 3개 공산 정권이 지역 전체에 영향을 끼치게 된 상황에서, 지역적 안정을 유지하기 위해서 미국은 적대적 관계에 있는 국가들과의 경제적, 외교적 관계에 좀 더 중점을 두는 것이 중요하다는 인식이 생겨났다. 그러나 포드 행정부는 베트남과 북한에 대해 적대적인 정책을 펼치는 한편, 미-중 정상화의 추진에도 소극적이었다.

카터 행정부는 출범 직후부터 아시아의 3개 공산 정권과의 관계 개선을 위한 계획을 신속하게 수립하고 추진했다. 베트남과의 관계에서, 미국 정부는 하노이에 특사단을 파견해 정상화 협상의 길을 열었다. 레너드 우드콕(Leonard Woodcock)의 방문에 이어 파리에서 세 차례의 협상이 이루어졌지만 원조 문제, 즉 미국의 전쟁 배상 문제로 인해 성과 없이 끝났다. 북한의 경우, 카터는 북한과의 외교 접촉을 시사하면서 남-북대화 재개 및 남북미 3자회담의 개최를 제안했다. 중국과의 관계는 대만과 소련을

둘러싼 교착상태로 인해 초기에는 정상화 협상이 비생산적으로 진행되었다. 그러나 카터 행정부의 외교정책 결정에 대한 국가안전보장회의(NSC)의 영향력이 커지면서 1978년 5월 즈비그뉴 브레진스키(Zbigniew Brzezinski) 국가안보보좌관이 중국을 방문했고, 이후 회담은 전환점을 맞았다.

그 후 베트남과 북한에 관한 미국의 외교 정책의 방향은 중국의 시선을 고려하면서 조정되어 갔다고 볼 수 있다. 이에 따라 카터 행정부의 커다란 업적 중 하나인 미-중 외교정상화는 베트남과 북한에 대한 카터의 이니셔티브에 걸림돌이 되었다. 카터 대통령은 대 중국 정책을 최우선적으로 추진하기 위해 정부 내 강경파들과 타협해야 했고, 그 과정에서 베트남과 북한과의 관계 개선을 위한 당초의 이니셔티브를 상실하게 되었다. 즉 1978년 중반에서 1979년 후반에 걸쳐 중국과의 화해가 미국 정부의 최우선 과제가 됨에 따라 베트남에 대한 미국의 외교적 노력은 중단되었고, 북한과의 관계에서 진행 중이던 외교적 노력도 간접적으로 영향을 받았다.

결론적으로 이 연구는 카터 행정부가 베트남과 북한과의 관계 개선에 결국 실패하게 된 이유는 카터 행정부 내의 의견 충돌이나 1978년 후반에 시작된 국제 정세의 급변 등 기존 연구에서 규명된 중요한 요인들 뿐 아니라 베트남-중국-북한 사이의 역사적, 역동적 관계에 대한 몰이해가 중요하게 작용했다고 보았다. 이 과정은 미국의 주목을 받고 장기적으로 미국과의 관계를 개선하려는 아시아의 3개 공산 정권의 외교적 경쟁이 이루어지는 과정이기도 했다.

주요어: 카터, 베트남, 북한, 중국, 공산, 미국-아시아 관계

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