

The Effect of Korean Domestic Politics on the Negotiations Surrounding the Withdrawal of US Troops from the Korean Peninsula in 1970-71

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The withdrawal of 20,000 US troops from the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1970-71 was a significant event in US-ROK relations. This policy decision was a catalyst in other important events, including Park Chung Hee's decision to implement the Yusin Constitution. Previous literature has focused on how unilateral decision-making by the US government made it difficult for the ROK to mount substantial resistance. This paper, using a framework based on the two-level game theory, argues that Korean domestic politics were also a critical factor in Park Chung Hee's acquiescence to a policy in 1970-71 that, in his perspective, was dangerous for ROK security. More broadly, this analysis calls for more consideration of the impact of Korean domestic politics in studying Cold War ROK-US relations.

Keywords Park Chung Hee, Richard Nixon, troop withdrawal, domestic politics

INTRODUCTION

The Nixon administration decision to withdraw 20,000 troops from the Korean Peninsula by mid-1971 in March 1970 marked a turning point in US-Republic of Korea (ROK) relations. Relations had already begun to deteriorate due to disagreements between the Johnson administration and the ROK government (ROKG) regarding the response to the North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo and the attempted assassination of ROK President Park Chung Hee. Furthermore, the ROKG was apprehensive about the recently announced Nixon Doctrine, although a summit between Nixon and Park in August 1969 had temporarily soothed the ROK's fears of abandonment. But when informed that an entire US division would be withdrawn, Park Chung Hee was, in his

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own words, “shocked.”¹ Several notable events in US-ROK relations and within South Korea in the 1970s trace back to the withdrawal, such as the proclamation of the Yusin regime, the ROK’s clandestine nuclear weapons program, and the Koreagate lobbying scandal (Boettcher 1980; Jo 2000; Kwak 2003; Ma 2003; Im 2011; Hong 2013; Chung 2016).

Given the event’s significance, there has been quite a bit of previous research on the subject. Yoo In-suk (2006) and Shin Wook Hee (2005) both provide very thorough descriptions of the changes in the international environment that precipitated the Nixon administration’s decision-making process. Park Tae Gyun (2012, 309-314) describes the changes in the ROKG’s approach to negotiating the US partial withdrawal, explaining that the initial response was to “persuade Washington to change its mind.” But, according to Park, eventually the choice by the US to unilaterally notify Seoul of its decision left South Korea with no choice but to follow along. Ma Sang-yoon (2007) provides a similar description of events, arguing that the ROKG originally sought to stonewall any negotiations about the withdrawal before altering its position in July 1970.

The above scholarship provides clear descriptions of the historical events as well as convincing accounts of why events unfolded as they did. However, two important questions remain unanswered. First, why did the ROKG not resort to more aggressive brinkmanship diplomacy to halt the partial withdrawal if the withdrawal was as devastating to ROK security as Park Chung Hee claimed? Park Tae Gyun (2009; 2012) has argued convincingly that the ROKG had used this tactic in the past. And Park (2012, 311) addresses this point in relation to the 1970 partial withdrawal by arguing that a previous attempt at brinkmanship diplomacy by the ROKG during disagreements over a military response to the North Korean provocations in January 1968 resulted in harsh threats by the Johnson administration to end the US-ROK security relationship if a security crisis was ignited by the ROK. This in turn made it difficult for the ROK to try such a tactic again in 1970. This is certainly plausible, but the answer seems somewhat incomplete considering that the Park regime was now dealing with a new US administration.

Second, what role did domestic politics in the ROK play in the ROKG’s decision-making process? Park Tae Gyun (2012, 311) notes that “the reduction of American forces in Korea came across as a political threat” to Park Chung Hee, attacking one of the “two most important pillars of the Park Chung Hee regime” in “support from the United States.” This political threat was exacerbated by the fact that Park Chung Hee was up for reelection in early 1971. Relatedly, Ma Sang-yoon (2012, 73-79) outlines the differing approaches of Park Chung Hee and Kim Dae Jung, the opposition candidate

¹ “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.013-017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Diplomatic Archives (DA). I have cited documents from the ROK MoFA DA based on the filing system of the Diplomatic Archives. First, I provided the Romanized file name (using the Revised Romanization of Korean system). Next is the year the document was produced (with the year of declassification in parentheses). This is followed in order by the roll number, file number, and frame number.

for president in 1971, to the security climate surrounding the Korean Peninsula at the time. While Park Chung Hee saw the Nixon administration's attempts to build détente as dangerous for Korea, Kim welcomed the Nixon administration's détente policy and hoped to work in concert with it to open up inter-Korean relations. Park saw the withdrawal as a reason the US could not be trusted, but Kim highlighted the fact that the US consistently stated its resolute commitment to the ROK and essentially sought to work with the Nixon administration's foreign policy. The views of Park Chung Hee and Kim Dae Jung sharply contrasted and led to many debates in Korean society ahead of the 1971 election as the withdrawal process was being carried out, but there has not yet been an attempt to connect these domestic political debates to how the negotiations regarding the US partial withdrawal progressed.

The central argument of this article is that domestic Korean politics created a situation in which Park Chung Hee was forced to acquiesce to the US decision and focus on negotiating the military modernization package. I show that the timing of various changes in the ROKG's approach to negotiating with the US on the withdrawal issue correlate with changes in the domestic political environment. Moreover, the nature of the threat from Kim Dae Jung, who was promising to work closely with the US, made it extremely risky for the Park regime to create a security crisis on the Korean Peninsula to stall the US withdrawal. In doing so, I do not seek to undercut the findings of the previous scholarship, but to add a new dimension by bringing domestic Korean politics into the equation of US-ROK relations and the 1970 troop withdrawal issue.

To substantiate this argument, this article uses the two-level game theory devised by Robert Putnam (1988) as a framework for describing the two negotiation processes—the first between the US and ROK governments and the second between the Park Chung Hee government and domestic political actors—on the same issue—the partial withdraw of 20,000 US troops from Korea in 1970-71. Rather than a strict application, the theory is employed to structure the discussion to convey how negotiations on one level constricted the options on the other. Following a description of the theory, the following section analyzes the process of negotiations between the US and ROK on the troop withdrawal issue in 1970 and 1971. Finally, the fourth section describes how domestic ROK politics factored into the process of US troop withdrawal.

THE TWO-LEVEL GAME THEORY AS A FRAMEWORK

In his seminal article, Robert Putnam (1988) described the impact of domestic politics in the foreign policy making process by invoking the metaphor of a “two-level game.” At the first game board (Level I) are the leaders of respective states where each leader tries to maximize their state's interests in negotiations with other states. At the second game board (Level II), national leaders face off against various political parties and interest groups within their state. As Putnam (1988, 434) aptly puts it, “the unusual complexity of this two-level game is that moves that are rational for a player at one board...may be impolitic for that same player at the other board.” In other words, the range of acceptable options at Level I may be constricted by the discussions going on at Level II. This is explained by Putnam using the concept of “win-sets”: the set of all possible

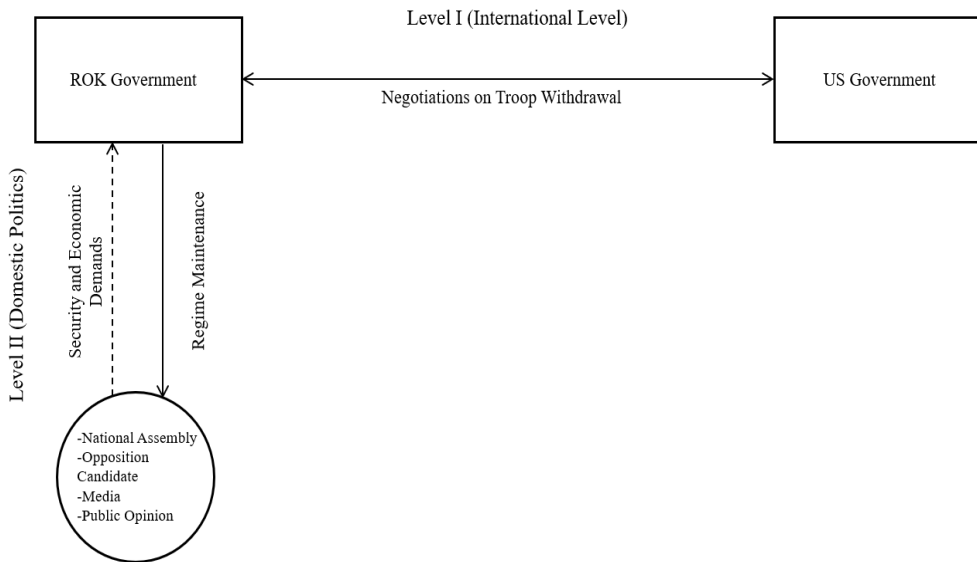
agreements at the international level that would be acceptable to the majority of actors at the domestic level. That is, if an agreement reached at Level I is to be honored, it must fall within the win-set of Level II. However, the game may expand if we consider the efforts of one state to restructure the domestic win-sets of other states (through efforts such as public diplomacy) and the efforts of domestic constituencies to pressure foreign governments. Moreover, the domestic constituencies of each state are in dialogue with each other through transnational networks.

Putnam's descriptions of two-level game negotiations in his seminal article are confined to situations where clear options are available to negotiators on both levels. Among the examples Putnam uses are arms control treaties and trade agreements where numbers and amounts can be discussed at both levels to find figures acceptable to all parties. In this article, rather than using the two-level game theory to explain a complex series of negotiations among various actors at two game tables, the two levels are used as a metaphor for two political battles being waged at the same time on the same subject.

In other words, this paper borrows minimally from Putnam's theory to describe how the ROKG was caught between two sets of actors and limited its range of action. Referring to Figure 1, negotiations between the ROK and US governments are on Level I. These discussions are the main subject of the previous scholarship on this subject and are reviewed in the following section. As shown above, the ROKG had previously sought to gain leverage in negotiations with the US by generating a security crisis in the mid-1960s and threatening to withdraw its troops from Vietnam in 1968. Resultantly, according to Park Tae Gyun (2009), the US experienced a "learning effect" and decided in 1970 to unilaterally announce its decision to the ROK rather than consulting them. However, if we consider Jimmy Carter's attempt to withdraw all US ground forces from Korea in the late 1970s, we can see that unilateral notification and decision-making does not necessarily preclude efforts to halt or reverse Carter's policy. In other words, a strong effort to prevent the partial withdrawal of 20,000 US troops from Korea in 1970-71 via brinkmanship diplomacy was possible but did not materialize. Why?

I argue the answer can be found in the Level II dimension of domestic ROK politics. On Level II, we have the debates within the ROK between the ROKG and a variety of domestic actors including the National Assembly, the opposition party candidate for the 1971 presidential election Kim Dae Jung, as well as the media and more broadly public opinion at large. As is shown in the fourth section, once the US troop withdrawal policy becomes public knowledge in the ROK, there are a variety of demands regarding the security of the ROK as well as economic demands emanating from Korean society and constraining the action of the ROKG as Park Chung Hee seeks to maintain his control of the government.

It may be argued that previous scholars were correct to ignore the role of ROK politics in the negotiations regarding the US withdrawal of troops in the 1970s because of the authoritarian nature of the Park Chung Hee regime. Park, arguably, was isolated from the demands of the people and acted merely to preserve his own power. However, several scholars have found that authoritarian leaders are still constrained by domestic institutions and actors in the realm of foreign policy (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Weeks 2009; Weeks and Crunkilton 2017). In particular, a binding legislature can serve as a check on authoritarian leaders (Wright 2008), and elections do have the potential



Source: Based on a similar diagram in Moravcsik (1993)

Figure 1. The Two-Level Game from the Park Regime Perspective

to bring down authoritarians given the right circumstances (Bunce and Wolchik 2009). Although Park Chung Hee would in 1972 implement the more authoritarian Yusin system, in 1970-71 Park was still required to stand for election and the Korean National Assembly was more autonomous than it would be after 1972. Therefore, even if Park was purely interested in maintaining his power, ignoring the concerns of the people or the attacks of the opposition party could potentially have led to his defeat in the 1971 presidential election.

US PLANNING OF AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH ROK ON US TROOP WITHDRAWAL

Although the ROKG would not officially hear of US plans on troop reductions until March 1970, the planning for the withdrawal of 20,000 troops from the Korean Peninsula can be traced to the beginning of the Nixon administration when President Richard Nixon, who was elected based on the promise of bringing home US troops from Vietnam, ordered a study on Korea policy under National Security Memorandum 27.² It is quite clear the plan from the beginning was not to debate whether or not to withdraw troops from Korea but to discuss how many troops would be withdrawn and when. Just days before meeting Park Chung Hee in California during a meeting of

² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 2.

the National Security Council, Nixon remarked that “we must face the fact we aren’t going to have 50,000 troops [in Korea] five years from now.”³ A memorandum directing further study of force reduction in Korea ordered any alternatives that did not involve troop withdrawals to be dropped.⁴ Any doubt that may have remained was laid to rest on November 24, 1969 when Nixon wrote to his Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger and stated that “the time has come to reduce our Korean presence. We could not do so because of the EC 121 [incident] at any earlier date but I do not want us to continue to temporize with this problem.” Nixon demanded that a plan for cutting the number of Americans on the Korean Peninsula in half be drafted by the end of the year and that it subsequently be “sold to the Koreans on a proper basis.”⁵

After a series of debates on the number of troops to be withdrawn and the threat posed by the North Korean military, the final decision on force reduction was reached on March 20, 1970 with the issuing of National Security Decision Memorandum 48 in which Nixon ordered 20,000 US troops to be removed from the Korean Peninsula by the end of fiscal year 1971 (June 1971). The decision also called for a modernization program for the ROK military be provided totaling \$1 billion upon approval by the US Congress.⁶ Park Chung Hee was notified of the decision a week later on March 28, 1970 by the US Ambassador to the ROK William J. Porter, thus kicking off a nearly year-long tussle between the US and ROK over the timing and organization of the withdrawal as well as the contents and size of the modernization program.

The negotiations can be divided into three separate stages: the first period, which lasted from the end of March through mid-July 1970, consisted of ROK stonewalling and an outright refusal to agree to the US policy; the second stage, which began in late July 1970 and continued through early November 1970, was a period of bargaining during which the ROKG outlined its demands which it required be met before agreeing to the Nixon administration’s force reduction policy; and the final stage, which began in mid-November 1970 and ended with the joint declaration by the two governments on the troop withdrawals on February 5, 1971, was characterized by the ROKG’s acceptance that it could not alter the US policy despite one final gasp to defy the US.

³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 34.

⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 37.

⁵ A US surveillance plan (EC-121) was shot down by North Korea in April 1969 momentarily raising tensions on the Korean Peninsula as the US increased its naval and air power resources to signal its intention to continue recon flights despite North Korean provocations. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 45.

⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 56.

First Stage — Denial

The US decision was a “shock” to President Park Chung Hee, particularly because Nixon had promised Park during their meeting in California in 1969 that no withdrawal was being planned. Thus the resultant abandonment fears felt in Seoul caused by the withdrawal were compounded by a loss of trust given what the ROKG perceived as Nixon having lied to them (Ma and Park 2009, 119-120). In a letter to Nixon drafted just days after first hearing of the US force reduction policy, Park Chung Hee stated his “surprise” and asked Nixon to delay the withdrawal for several years to provide Korea time to modernize its military and continue to develop its economy.⁷ The ROKG was also apprehensive about the modernization program which was being proposed as merely a dollar figure, and Park Chung Hee demanded that the details of this program be delivered to him before he could agree to support the US policy.⁸ However, the Nixon administration insisted that Park’s support for this policy was a prerequisite so that the administration could approach Congress and acquire its agreement in principle to provide the necessary funds. Nixon’s reply to Park’s letter on May 26, 1970 emphasized that the US is not abandoning the ROK as this was not a complete withdrawal, restated that the US will honor its treaty commitments, and called for Park Chung Hee to take the initiative and back this policy as it will make procuring funds from the US Congress considerably easier.⁹

However, Nixon’s letter failed to convince Park Chung Hee that US force reduction was in the best interests of the ROK and the ROK President responded with a second letter on June 15, 1970. Park Chung Hee argued that US troop withdrawals were a prelude to the North Korean invasion in 1950 and insisted that without more details regarding the modernization program the ROKG could not offer its support.¹⁰ While Park Chung Hee’s second letter appears to show that he is gradually coming to terms with the troop withdrawal, there is still evidence he believed stonewalling could force the US to alter its course. Park stated that his government required certain reassurances (which are addressed below) before beginning any negotiations on the troop withdrawal schedule and modernization program. But any hope of receiving these concessions was quelled in early July. On July 5, 1970, ROK Ambassador to the US Kim Dong-jo once

⁷ “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.013-017, MoFA DA.

⁸ “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.090-097, MoFA DA.

⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 58.

¹⁰ “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.108-113, MoFA DA.

again tried to stress the seriousness of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula by telling US Secretary of State William P. Rogers that North Korea was preparing for war and strengthening relations with China. But Rogers replied that the reduction of US forces stationed abroad was a US government policy that would not change.¹¹ A relatively terse letter from Nixon to Park Chung Hee on July 7, 1970 confirmed this firm stance.¹²

It is clear from Park Chung Hee's letters and discussions between US and ROK officials that the ROKG perceived the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean Peninsula as a threat to ROK national security. Park and other ROK government officials consistently pointed out that a withdrawal of US troops preceded the Korean War in 1950. Also, despite US studies that argued ROK forces could halt a North Korean attack, ROK officials were not as confident as the US and were certainly less than enthused about gambling the country's recent economic development. In the end however, Korea was a victim of its own success as its rapid economic development signaled to the US and a cost-cutting Nixon administration that the ROK was ready to take on more of the burden for its own defense. US officials during this time also persistently pressured the ROK to increase spending on defense.¹³ Thus factoring in the perceived strength of the ROK vis-à-vis North Korea and the Nixon administration's unequivocal goal of bringing troops home and slashing the budget, the ROK government had little chance of persuading Nixon to halt its troop reductions. The only way to prevent the withdrawal was a resort to brinksmanship by creating a security crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Nixon himself recognized that the EC-121 incident in 1969 had made it temporarily impossible for him to announce the withdrawal. However, as the following shows, Park Chung Hee never resorted to such drastic measures.

Second Stage — Bargaining

The ROK government came to accept that it could not change US policy and instead sought to bargain with the US to secure any benefits it could. This decision was codified in a policy paper prepared by MoFA on July 12, 1970. Here the basic position of the ROKG was that if it was satisfied with the contents of the military modernization package and a firm commitment by the US to defending the ROK, then the ROKG was willing to negotiate on the size, timing, and method of the US withdrawal.¹⁴ Although

¹¹ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.153, MoFA DA.

¹² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 64.

¹³ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.270-272, MoFA DA.

¹⁴ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit

the ROKG still harbored ambitions of slowing the withdrawal, it could no longer completely stonewall the negotiation process. If it decided to do so, the ROKG risked the US making further unilateral decisions regarding the timing of the withdrawals and the contents of the modernization process.

Therefore at the meeting of defense officials in Honolulu on July 23, 1970, ROK Minister of Defense Jung Nae-hyuk provided a list of demands that the ROKG needed to have met before issuing a statement supporting the US force reduction while also participating in discussions on the modernization package to be provided to the ROK military in exchange for US troop withdrawals. With regards to the modernization package, Jung stated that the ROKG required: \$200 million over a five year period to modernize its forces (which is the same figure proposed by the Nixon administration); US assistance establishing defense industries in the ROK; 60 percent of the equipment to be provided to the ROK should be delivered within the first two years; and the program should be designed so that it can be insulated from any future budget cuts imposed by the US Congress. Additionally, Jung stated that the ROKG required the following political assurances: a statement that the US will meet its treaty obligations and US troops will be redeployed to the Korean Peninsula if the treaty needed to be invoked; assurances that United Nations forces would stay in the ROK until unification; and an expansion of the annual defense minister meetings to include foreign ministers.¹⁵

The ROK government's demands are clearly divided into two categories: military and political. With regards to the first category, the US was willing to negotiate on this front from the beginning and statements by Ambassador Porter and Nixon himself in his letters implored Park Chung Hee to engage in meetings to hammer out the details of the modernization program. During this second stage of the negotiation process the ROK did in fact finally agree to sit down and discuss the modernization program and was successful in securing some of the above demands. For example, the ROKG had been holding discussions with the US government for some time about constructing a factory for producing M-16 rifles in Korea and the ROKG was eventually successful in not only securing the factory but having it provided in addition to, rather than as a part of, the modernization program.¹⁶ The US government also agreed to begin investigating the possibility of establishing other defense industries in Korea as Park Chung Hee requested. As mentioned above, the ROKG had submitted a modernization plan to the US government in 1969 that totaled \$3.2 billion, but the US original plan was set at \$1.0 billion. However, over the course of the modernization program discussions, the US government agreed to raise the total value to \$1.5 billion to include improvements for ROK naval and air power.¹⁷

juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.210-225, MoFA DA.

¹⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 67.

¹⁶ "Gukgun hyeondaehwa gyehoek" [Plans for ROK Military Modernization], 1971 (2002). G-0020.01.163, MoFA DA.

¹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel

These successes in negotiating the modernization package contrast harshly with the ROK's failures to secure political reassurances from the US about its security commitment to the ROK. The key point here was the failure to obtain an amendment to the US-ROK security treaty or a joint statement which would signal a strengthening of the US commitment. The above demand by Jung at Honolulu for a statement regarding the US obligations to deploy troops in the case of the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula amounted to amending the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty which states that troops would be sent in accordance with the constitutionally mandated process of the US government and was not "automatic." And the demand that UN forces remain until unification of the Korean Peninsula was a move to give the ROKG veto power over any complete withdrawal of US forces from the ROK. Deputy Secretary of State David Packard, who was representing the US at the Honolulu meeting, flatly rejected the Korean demands.

The ROKG tried to downplay its demands by stating that it was not seeking an amendment to the Mutual Defense Treaty. In a meeting with Ambassador Brown on August 3, 1970, Park Chung Hee stated he did not think it necessary to amend the Treaty, although the National Assembly had issued a statement calling for such.¹⁸ MoFA applied pressure to the Nixon administration both directly and indirectly to achieve its goal of receiving political reassurances. First, the ROKG worked with friends in Congress to indirectly press the Nixon administration for renewed statements about the US commitment to South Korea's defense. MoFA, in early August 1970, helped draft a letter to be sent to Nixon by Speaker of the House John McCormack and Minority Leader Gerald Ford.¹⁹ The letter was to be cosigned by other members of the House of Representatives, including Richard Hanna, Cornelius Gallagher, Edward Roybal, and Melvin Price who would all later be implicated in the Koreagate scandal (Boettcher 1980).²⁰ MoFA also worked with Senator Strom Thurmond to have a statement entered in the Senate record calling for the Nixon administration to defer the withdrawal plans.²¹

MoFA also sought to secure the desired political reassurances from the US directly.

J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 70.

¹⁸ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibbonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.252-261, MoFA DA.

¹⁹ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibbonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.273-275, MoFA DA.

²⁰ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibbonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.281, MoFA DA.

²¹ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibbonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.276-278, MoFA DA.

A document produced in August 1970 by MoFA provided a potential wording for a joint statement between the two countries and included phrases so strict that one would think the goal was set the asking price exceedingly high in hopes the US would agree to a watered-down version. For example, the document included the clause “The scale and timing of [the] partial reduction of the United States Forces in Korea shall be so scheduled as to proceed in proportion to the progress of modernization of the Republic of Korea forces.”²² Another example is “The Republic of Korea forces and the United States forces stationed in Korea will react instantly and automatically with their military might to resist and defeat” an outside attack.²³ These and other clauses were used by the ROKG to negotiate a bilateral statement on the occasion of Vice President Spiro Agnew’s visit to Seoul in late August 1970.

However, US documents show that the US held firm in its position to not accept any substantial statements about an automatic commitment of US forces to any contingency on the Korean Peninsula, nor to allow any statement which could be construed to suggest the ROK held veto power over the current withdrawal plan or any future plans.²⁴ The position of the US government was delivered to Park Chung Hee on November 7, 1970 during a meeting at which Park Chung Hee appeared very acquiescent, signaling an end to the Korean efforts to extract any sort of bargain or benefits ahead of the US troop withdrawals scheduled to begin in February 1971.²⁵

Third Stage — Acquiescence

Following the failure to acquire any political reassurances other than the typical statements by the US government to uphold its treaty commitments to the ROK, the ROKG refrained from making any other sort of demands ahead of the scheduled withdrawal of US troops from the Peninsula. However, the ROKG attempted to play one final game of “chicken” just ahead of the first redeployment of US troops in February 1971. As part of the withdrawal plan, troops from the US Second Division were to be redeployed to rear positions off the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Elements of the ROK First Division were to assume the positions vacated by US troops. However, the ROKG initially decided not to cooperate with this troop redeployment on February 2 with the US troops scheduled to leave on February 8. Instead, the ROKG insisted that an agreement on the wording of the joint statement, which was to be given before the redeployment began, should be agreed upon first before the ROKG would cooperate and

²² “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.396-423, MoFA DA.

²³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 71.

²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 78.

move its forces.²⁶

The US government at this time stated it would consider making its own unilateral statement on the troop movements to force the hand of the ROKG. The strategy worked and the ROKG agreed to a joint statement that was nearly identical to the wording proposed by the US several months prior when negotiations on the statement had begun back in August 1970.²⁷ The remaining withdrawal schedule would proceed on schedule although the modernization program would suffer many setbacks throughout the 1970s due to Congressional budget cuts.

This analysis of Level I negotiations in the two-level game framework shows that the ROKG recognized that it was not going to deter the Nixon administration from its plan to withdraw 20,000 troops from the Korean Peninsula and thus pivoted to maximizing concessions in the negotiations. The reason for the acquiescence is thus a realization that the US was fully determined to implement the withdrawal. While this is plausible, the question remains why not resort to brinksmanship in an effort to reverse US policy as South Korea had done many times in the past by generating a security crisis? The following section, through an analysis of the Level II game in Korea, argues that domestic politics weighed heavy on the ROKG response.

KOREAN DOMESTIC POLITICS AND US FORCE REDUCTION

The US government recognized early on in its planning of the force reduction that domestic ROK politics could heavily influence Park Chung Hee's reaction. Even before Park Chung Hee ever heard about the withdrawal plan, Ambassador Brown was alerting the US government in February 1970 that this issue could impact the 1971 Korean presidential election and called for a decision to be made quickly or to wait until after the election.²⁸ It seems that the US government did not expect the negotiations to drag out so long and there is no evidence that the policy was enacted with the intention of interfering in the election. On the contrary, Ambassador Porter argued for finishing the negotiations quickly to give Park "maximum freedom to maneuver" ahead of his election.²⁹ The US decision to move ahead with the withdrawals in 1971 and the ROKG decision to continuously make demands the US government was unwilling to accept caused the negotiation process to drag on for nearly a year. And with each passing month the issue gradually became a larger political headache for the Park administration.

During the early stages of the negotiations on the US policy for troop withdrawal

²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 86.

²⁷ Text of the statement in Korean is available in: *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (1971).

²⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

and the modernization package, as the ROKG was attempting to stonewall the US, both sides were hoping to keep the plans a secret from the Korean public. After his meeting with Nixon in August 1969, Park Chung Hee had told the Korean people publicly that the Nixon Doctrine would not have an impact on the ROK (*Chosun Ilbo* 1969). To help Park save face, the US government sought to keep the announcement private for as long as possible, including a May 22, 1970 statement that there were no plans for a force reduction (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970a). President Park Chung Hee also made a statement on June 8, 1970 denying that the US had made an official decision to withdrawal troops (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970c).

However, with word of the force reductions circulating freely in Washington, it was only a matter of time before the news became public knowledge. On May 29, 1970, newspapers carried stories of US Defense Secretary Laird's comments to reporters about the impending troop reductions including the size and timing of the withdrawals (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970b). Once the withdrawal became public knowledge, the Park regime was forced into subsequently negotiating the consequences of withdrawal on two levels. The first is the above described negotiations with the US about compensation—both material and political. The second is the Level II negotiations between the Park regime and other domestic Korean actors. These Korean actors include the National Assembly—in particular the opposition New Democratic Party—the media, and the Korean public at large.³⁰

The preferred outcome for all concerned in Korea would have been the cancellation of the US withdrawal. This was problematic for the Park regime because for some time Park Chung Hee and his officials had been claiming that the ROKG had veto power over US troop withdrawal based on the US-ROK mutual defense treaty. This understanding, according to a speech given by Kim Dae Jung before the National Assembly (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 305), was based on Article IV of the treaty: “The Republic of Korea grants, and the United States accepts, the right to dispose United States land, air and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea as determined by mutual agreement.”³¹ Even as late as May 29, 1970, Foreign Minister Choi Kyu-hah stated before the National Assembly that the US could not withdraw its troops without first negotiating with the ROKG (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1970a). Such rhetoric had been noticed by the US embassy in Korea, and Ambassador Porter recognized that the US decision to withdrawal troops was now presenting a challenge to Park's reelection given the ROKG's false statements.³² In sum, the ROKG had been promising its people

³⁰ For domestic politics to be a substantial constraint on the ROKG in its negotiations with the US government about troop withdrawal, it may be argued that the issue needed to be sufficiently salient in domestic ROK politics. Aside from the fact that both the ROK and US governments recognized that the issue was a significant concern for the Korean people, it should be noted that much of the newspaper articles referenced here appeared on the front page of the respective newspapers and also that the issue was central to the presidential campaign of Kim Dae Jung.

³¹ “Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea,” October 1, 1953, https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty_1953.pdf (accessed February 28, 2023).

³² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document

that it could provide the most preferred outcome—maintaining US Forces in Korea at their present level—but was caught in a lie. This set the stage for the various domestic actors to characterize the Park regime as being incompetent and unable to provide for the security of the ROK.

Short of halting the US partial withdrawal, domestic actors expected the Park regime to succeed in shoring up the US commitment to the defense of South Korea as the withdrawal could potentially be misread by North Korea and result in renewed hostilities. For example, Kim Dae Jung, in a letter to Nixon, argued that the US withdrawal policy “runs counter to the increasingly aggressive attitude of North Korea” and argued that three measures needed to be taken before the security of South Korea could be completely “Koreanized”: (1) the US should receive a non-aggression guarantee from North Korea through the Soviet Union and China; (2) the mutual defense treaty should be amended to state that South Korea will receive corresponding support from the US when North Korea signs new military agreements with its allies; and (3) the US should immediately provide support and aid for strengthening the defense capabilities of the ROK (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 260-261). Here we can see that Kim Dae Jung was essentially echoing the Park regime’s attempts to receive material and political compensation from the US on the one hand while, differently from Park, not seeking to stonewall and block the decision by stating he agreed with the Nixon Doctrine in principle (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 252).

This more pragmatic approach from Kim Dae Jung forced the regime’s hand in the summer of 1970 and helped push the Park government into negotiations with the US rather than stonewalling. Just as MoFA began calling for the ROK to begin negotiating the modernization package with the US in mid-July 1970, Kim Dae Jung went on the offensive in the National Assembly. He harshly criticized ROKG officials for pretending they could change a policy which had already been decided in Washington while ignoring the national interests at stake: negotiating with the US about strengthening the Korean military and securing a more robust security commitment (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 305-307; *Dong-A Ilbo* 1970c). Other members of the National Assembly demanded the resignations of Prime Minister Jeong Il-kwon and the Defense Minister for their lies about the ROKG’s ability to prevent a withdrawal of US troops (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970d).

Moreover, Kim Dae Jung and other opposition lawmakers went beyond the security ramifications and also talked about the economic impacts of the partial withdrawal. US troops stationed in Korea were a major source of economic activity. The US military in Korea would procure many needed supplies from local vendors, hire local companies to construct needed facilities, and US troops stationed in Korea spent their money off-base. All this economic activity resulted in building the ROKG’s foreign currency reserves to push along economic modernization projects. Indeed the news of US plans to close some bases in the wake of its force reduction was a sensitive issue for the Park administration (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970f). This aspect of the US force reduction was a significant part of the domestic political discussion and National Assemblymen made a point of not only questioning the Defense and Foreign Ministers but also the

Finance Minister regarding the US withdrawal (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1970b, 1970c). Kim Dae Jung during his speech at the National Assembly on July 13, 1970 listed the sectors of the Korean economy which would be affected by the withdrawal: transportation, freight, laundry, security services, entertainment, and agriculture. He noted in particular how the withdrawal would harm farmers who sold hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of vegetables to the US Army (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 309-310).

These Level II negotiations among the ROKG, National Assembly, media, and Korean public had a profound impact on the negotiations between the US and ROK. Ma Sang-yoon (2007) argues that the ROKG had been planning from the beginning for the eventuality that it could not resist the US policy and would have to eventually negotiate with the US to maximize the benefits it could receive from the military modernization package the Nixon administration was offering. And the transition from seeking to block the withdrawal to negotiating the military modernization package did follow Nixon's sternest letter of July 7, 1970 which left no room for doubt about the upcoming withdrawal.³³ However, this review of domestic developments within the ROK suggests that the timing of the transition from denial to negotiations was not purely a product of negotiations on Level I. The issue went public at the end of May and became an issue during deliberations at the National Assembly in July. Consequently, the Park regime earnestly entered into negotiations with the US on the military modernization package in late July in Honolulu.

That public opinion was weighing heavily on Park Chung Hee's mind is clear from an August 3 discussion between Park and Ambassador Porter. Park complained bitterly about the lack of domestic support for US policy, noting that all of Korea was against the reduction. Park also continued to rail against the unilateral US decision to withdraw troops and the constant use of exclamation marks in the memorandum of conversation suggests it was a heated discussion. However, Porter seems to have recognized Park's weakness and implored him to agree to the withdrawal policy and quickly conclude the negotiations on the modernization package.³⁴ In other words, the US recognized the Level II pressure on Park and sought to use it to its advantage in the Level I negotiations.

From this point on the domestic political environment only deteriorated for Park Chung Hee. Opponents of the Park regime including Kim Dae Jung were arguing that the US force reduction was impacting Korean national security and economic development, *both pillars* of Park's political strength. Park Chung Hee had grounded his legitimacy in resisting communism and leading Korea's economic modernization since taking power following the coup of 1961 (Park 1970). Thus the issue of US force reduction provided an excellent opportunity for the opposition party to attack Park

³³ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.181-182, MoFA DA.

³⁴ "Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 1 gibonmunseo, 1970.4-8 [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.1 Basic Documents, April-August 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.03.252-261, MoFA DA.

Chung Hee in areas normally reserved as his strengths. And indeed the New Democratic Party made it known that the US withdrawal policy would be a central issue during the 1971 presidential campaign (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1970d).

Although many observers expected Kim Young Sam to win the New Democratic Party nomination, it was Kim Dae Jung who won the majority of votes after the second round of voting, securing the nomination for president on September 29, 1970 (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970e). Throughout the month of October, the opposition party continued to press the government through the National Assembly to release policies to respond to the Korean people's concerns resulting from the withdrawal of US forces. They demanded answers as to why the Korean government was unable to halt the departure of US troops as it said it could do and also asked why the ROK continued to station troops in Vietnam despite the US withdrawing from the ROK (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 1970g). In this sense the Korean public was almost asking for the Park regime to take a stronger stance against the US policy via brinksmanship diplomacy. However, such a strategy would be risky. If brinksmanship diplomacy failed to force the US into adopting the ROKG's preferred policy, US-ROK relations could deteriorate further. Then the Park regime would be in an even graver situation both in terms of bilateral relations and in terms of domestic politics.

Following his nomination as presidential candidate, Kim Dae Jung began to make things even more difficult for Park Chung Hee. Beginning in October 1970, Kim began touring the country drawing large crowds to hear him speak. He proposed new policies such as talks with China, the Soviet Union, and the US to ensure that Kim Il Sung would be unable to invade the South, a policy he had asked Nixon to endorse in his letter earlier in the year (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1970e). Kim also sought to position himself as a better steward of ROK-US relations. During a speech on October 30, 1970, he again stated his agreement in principle with the Nixon Doctrine while adding the caveat that he believed its hasty implementation may invite a communist invasion. He stated his desire to work with the US to ensure that the goals of the Nixon Doctrine were reached while at the same time the security concerns of the Korean people were satisfied. He called for transitioning the ROK's "dependent" relationship on the US into a "partnership" in which the defense of the ROK was seen as critical to that of Japan and the Pacific region (Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 368).

Kim Dae Jung also promised to do what Park Chung Hee was failing to achieve: supplement the US-ROK Security Treaty with stronger language that guaranteed a US response in the case of an attack on the ROK (*Chosun Ilbo* 1970; Yeonsedaehakgyo Kim Dae Jung doseogwan 2019, 381). Although Kim was unlikely to be more successful on this issue vis-à-vis the US than Park Chung Hee had been, his campaign rhetoric nevertheless highlighted Park's failure. If Park used brinksmanship diplomacy in an attempt to block the withdrawal and the Nixon administration responded by openly defying the threats, Park would be at the mercy of Kim Dae Jung in what was shaping up to be a close election.³⁵ Amid the domestic political competition between Park and Kim, the ROKG slowly acquiesced to the US withdrawal beginning in November 1970. The

³⁵ As the election drew nearer in April 1971, Park's closest advisers begged him to make a promise not to run for a fourth term arguing that if he did not do so he risked defeat. See Jo 2006 (185-187).

final game of “chicken” was, as shown above, short-lived and was never made public. Had it been the incident would likely have been an embarrassment for Park seeing as how quickly he capitulated.

The debates on Level II within Korea on the troop withdrawal issue narrowed the space in which the Park regime could operate. By framing Park Chung Hee as mismanaging the US-ROK alliance, the opposition party and Kim Dae Jung made it difficult for Park to stimulate a security crisis. Brinkmanship diplomacy would have been a risky proposition. Had his attempts failed and been leaked to the public, Park would have been further criticized for aggravating tensions between the ROK and US and compounded the fact that he had been caught in a lie about his supposed “veto” over US troop policy. Park would have been seen as antagonizing the US, while on the contrary Kim Dae Jung was promising harmonious relations based in partnership. Kim Dae Jung’s strategy thus played to the dominant opinion that the US was central to guaranteeing the security of the ROK from another North Korean invasion and Park Chung Hee was endangering that crucial relationship. Taking it a step further, Kim Dae Jung argued that Nixon’s détente policy could reduce tensions in Northeast Asia and allow for more cooperative relations between the two Koreas which could eventually lead to unification (Ma 2012, 77). The only option available left for Park to adopt given the domestic political context was to enter into negotiations with the US to maximize gains in the military modernization package and smooth over tensions to project the image of properly managing the alliance most Koreans felt was vital to their security.

For this reason, the Park regime continued seeking more solid security commitments from the US. In late October 1970, the ROKG prepared a document arguing its position of “Why is it necessary to reaffirm [the] US commitment” to the ROK’s security. Again we can see the Park regime’s concern for public opinion as it requested the US government reassure the “Korean people with the reaffirmation of its defense commitment” and to “impress the Korean people with the image of the US as a staunch ally.”³⁶ The Nixon administration recognized this as well and felt little need to back down from its already steadfast decision to withdraw troops. Following Park Chung Hee’s capitulation in November 1970, Secretary of State Rogers acknowledged the impact of the two-level game when reporting to Nixon: “In making his decision President Park was probably motivated by the need—for both domestic and diplomatic reasons—to show satisfactory results in his negotiations with us.”³⁷

³⁶ “Hanguganboe gwanhan han-migan hyeobui (gukgunhyeondaehwa 5gaenyeon gyehoek mit juhanmigun gamchuk) jeon8gwon V. 2 gibbonmunseo, 1970.9-12” [Korea-US Negotiations regarding Korean Security (Five Year Korean Military Modernization Plan and USFK Reduction) Total 8 Volumes V.2 Basic Documents, September-December 1970]. 1971 (2002).G-0020.04.248-252, MoFA DA.

³⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler, and Erin R. Mahan (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 78.

CONCLUSION

Using the two-level game framework theorized by Putnam as framework for the discussion, this analysis shows that the ROKG was unable to threaten or instigate a security crisis as a means to prevent the 1970-71 US troop withdrawal due to constraints placed on it by domestic political considerations. On the international level (Level I), the US government was a formidable foe as its strong posture from the beginning of the negotiations presented the ROKG with few options. The only viable option for the Park regime to halt the withdrawal was a resort to drastic brinksmanship tactics such as creating a security crisis on the Korean Peninsula. However, on the domestic level (Level II), Park Chung Hee was facing perhaps his strongest political foe in the upcoming 1971 presidential election in Kim Dae Jung. In the lead up to the election, Kim and the opposition party harangued Park Chung Hee for his failure to adequately manage ROK-US relations. If Park had resorted to brinksmanship tactics in an effort to prevent the US withdrawal, he not only risked a deterioration in relations with the US government but also angering the Korean people and losing the 1971 presidential election.

This conclusion is important for two reasons. First, given the authoritarian nature of the Park Chung Hee era, domestic politics are often an omitted variable in analyses of US-ROK relations, or ROK foreign relations in general. However, this analysis shows that Park was indeed sensitive to the demands of the Korean people and the opposition party was able to constrain the options available to Park when negotiating with the US. Second, debates about why Park Chung Hee resorted to promulgating the Yusin Constitution in October 1972 often focus on whether domestic or external factors weighed more heavily in his decision (Chung 2016). For example, Ma (2003) argues that the changing security environment in the early 1970s factored into Park's decision to implement the Yusin regime.³⁸ While the findings here do not contradict such a conclusion, I argue that the changing security dynamics in East Asia at this time were also leading to domestic political trouble for Park Chung Hee. Through this analysis we can see that domestic politics were influenced by external factors and vice versa. By recognizing this, understanding Park Chung Hee's decision to implement the Yusin system becomes less complicated. It was not an either-or question of domestic politics or external difficulties solely weighing on Park's mind; these factors were complexly interrelated and both worked to constrict Park's options in 1970-71 and helped contribute to his decision to implement the brutal Yusin regime in 1972. Yet regardless of what Park's rationale may have been, the Yusin era was an extremely dark period of

³⁸ The continued presence of US tactical nuclear weapons may lead readers to wonder if Park Chung Hee really considered the partial withdrawal of US troops from the Korean Peninsula was truly a security crisis. However, as previous literature has pointed out (Shin 2005), the partial withdrawal of 1970-71 was perceived to be just the beginning of a complete withdrawal of US troops given Vice President Spiro Agnew's comments in August 1970. Furthermore, Korean officials would likely have perceived that the inevitable withdrawal of all US troops would mean the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons as well, as was the case with the Carter administration's withdrawal plans in the late 1970s. Therefore, Park Chung Hee could not have assumed the continued presence of US nuclear weapons without the indefinite stationing of US troops in the ROK.

South Korean history filled with egregious human rights violations which in the end made the ROK less secure due to its deteriorating image on the international stage and led many Americans to demand an end to the US-ROK alliance.

This case study supports the notion that Korean domestic politics should be more carefully considered when trying to understand US-ROK relations during the Park Chung Hee period. Although many rightfully point out that Park ruled the country as a dictator, even during the period in which he submitted himself to elections, he was still sensitive to public opinion and the pressure of opposition political forces. Although the domestic politics variable is considered heavily in studies of the 1960s, in particular in research on the normalization of relations with Japan, this variable cannot be ignored during the lead up to the Yusin regime and the détente period of the early 1970s.

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