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No More Having Your Cake and Eating it Too:
The Nixon Doctrine, South Korea, and the Vietnam War

A Thesis by
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Chapman University
Orange, CA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War and Society

August 2020

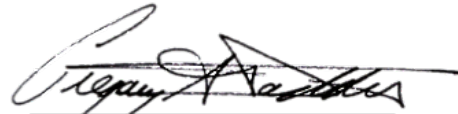
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August 2020

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ABSTRACT

No More Having Your Cake and Eating it Too:
The Nixon Doctrine, South Korea, and the Vietnam War
by Vanessa S. Zenji

The fact that approximately 300,000 South Korean soldiers participated in the Vietnam War is little known to many Americans. The impact of this on the the U.S.-South Korean bilateral alliance is even less known. This thesis examines how, during the period from 1969 until the end of the Vietnam War, the Richard Nixon administration and the South Korean Park Chung-hee administration, balanced their own priorities with those of their bilateral allies. For President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, the foreign policy priority centered on improving relations with the superpowers, particularly the Soviet Union and China. The United States thus sought South Korea's cooperation in helping it extricate itself from the Vietnam War so it could focus on détente with the USSR and the opening to China. The Park administration, already disillusioned with the United States since early 1968, found its participation in the Vietnam War was valued less by the Nixon administration than the Johnson administration. After the United States reduced its military presence on the Korean peninsula and failed to closely consult with Park regarding the opening to China, South Korea began to find its own way, increasingly independent from the United States, and with growing dictatorial powers for Park. This was possible as South Korea had reaped enormous financial benefits from the Vietnam War and was able to evolve away from its client status vis-à-vis the United States. A study of the bilateral relations during this period provides perspective on how we can avoid alienating allies, while at the same time showing that in any bilateral relationship, each side will continue to weigh the costs and benefits of continuing the alliance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
AP	Associated Press
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CY	Calendar Year
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GVN	Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFK	John F. Kennedy
LBJ	Lyndon B. Johnson
MAP	U.S. Military Assistance Program (Department of Defense)
MACV	U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MASH	Mobile Army Surgical Hospital
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (also known as the Viet Cong)
NSC	National Security Council
NSDM	National Security Decision Memoranda
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPCON	Operational Control

POW	Prisoner of War
PRC	People's Republic of China
PX	Post Exchange (on-base military tax-free store)
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
ROKFV	Republic of Korea Forces Vietnam
ROKG	Government of the Republic of Korea
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SVN	South Vietnam
TCC	Third Country Combatants
UPI	United Press International
USFK	United States Forces Korea
USIA	United States Information Agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
VNAF	South Vietnamese Air Force
WSAG	Washington Special Actions Group (one of two operational subgroups of the NSC during the Nixon-Ford eras)

Introduction

On May 12, 1972, a *Washington Post* article by Laurence Stern and Selig Harrison argued that “in Nixon Doctrine terms, Korea is eating its cake and having it too. It has both American troops and a rising level of military assistance dollar aid.”¹ By this time, many in the United States, including lawmakers in Congress, had come to believe that the Republic of Korea (the ROK or South Korea) was getting too much financial aid and military support from the United States and that it had reached a level of military preparedness where the number of American troops stationed in the country, there since the 1953 end of the Korean War, could be decreased.² Yet, complicating the picture were the 20,000 South Korean troops (of over 300,000 Korean troops that would serve over the course of the Vietnam War), not in Korea, but in Vietnam, aiding the South Vietnamese and United States military efforts against North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. While initially a sign of alliance solidarity, the ROK’s participation in Vietnam ultimately would contribute to the souring of U.S.-Korea bilateral relations in the early 1970s.

When Richard Nixon was inaugurated as President in 1969, he inherited a messy Vietnam War that was creating strong fractures in American society. At the same time, Washington policymakers were reassessing the United States’ role as the guarantor of global stability and a Cold War Pax Americana. In response, President Nixon, in collaboration with his

¹ Laurence Stern and Selig Harrison, “U.S., South Korea Fumble for Check on Military Costs,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1972, A14.

² For a sense of the amount of aid South Korea was receiving, according to Westad: “Between 1946 and 1978 South Korea received almost as much US aid as all of Africa put together.” Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 402.

National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, articulated a grand strategy that was more pragmatic than ideological. The United States would aim to forge workable relationships with its two main rivals, the Soviet Union and China, to form a triangulation, that would allow the Nixon administration to play the two communist nations off each other while also reducing global tensions.³ Nixon also hoped that by linking important issues such as arms control to Soviet and Chinese support for ending the Vietnam War, he could pressure Hanoi to the negotiating table. In addition, the Nixon Doctrine asked American allies to defend themselves without direct U.S. military intervention, thereby reducing costly overseas commitments. This was the underpinning of Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy, but this triangular diplomacy also had strong implications for the Republic of Korea. Nixon's conception of his grand strategy left little room for consideration of Cold War strategic alliances that were not directly benefiting the United States. While Pakistan, for example, supported Nixon's opening to China, and Iran and Saudi Arabia provided key natural resources, the U.S. government began to see South Korea as more of a burden than an asset.

With regard to the Vietnam War, the United States failed to consider Korean concerns related to ending the conflict. Instead, leadership in Washington was losing enthusiasm for the many U.S. budget expenditures for Korea's troops in Vietnam, the ROK's military modernization programs, and other aid to its Cold War ally. During the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the ROK's participation in the Vietnam War was greatly appreciated for helping the war appear "multilateral." Yet during the Nixon administration, the ROK military was viewed as "not pulling its weight" in Vietnam by refusing dangerous assignments, as being wildly corrupt and inordinately expensive to U.S. taxpayers. Nixon felt

³ For Kissinger's explanation of "Triangular Politics," see Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 191-194.

strong domestic pressure, particularly from Congress, to wean the ROK off of U.S. economic support, which had grown exponentially during the Vietnam War.

Distrust also grew between the leaders of the United States and South Korea during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Nixon White House misrepresented itself to the ROK government, saying that it would consult the ROK on its Vietnam withdrawal plans and peace negotiations, which it largely did not. In grand language to President Park Chung-hee, Nixon promised that “the United States would stand just as firmly with its allies in Asia.... Our determination to continue honoring those commitments has been made amply clear under the Nixon Doctrine.”⁴ However, in reality, the United States was growing further and further apart from South Korea each time it used its power and weight to impose decisions regarding withdrawal of U.S. (and even ROK troops) from Vietnam onto South Korea. Nixon and Kissinger often avoided the advice of the Secretaries of Defense and State and did not heed the recommendations of the U.S. Ambassador on the ground in Seoul. Perhaps the most disappointing shock to Seoul was the withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) troops from the ROK in June of 1971 despite strong protest by President Park. This led Park to seek to pull the remaining ROK troops out of Vietnam, a move that was strongly discouraged by U.S. leaders. In fact, at the end of the Vietnam War, Korean troops outnumbered U.S. troops.

At the same time, President Nixon sought and achieved an opening with communist China, an ally of North Korea. While U.S. officials were aware of the angst these meetings caused President Park, there was little attempt to assuage his concerns and keep him apprised of discussions. President Park saw the winds of change and, seeing that anti-communism alone would no longer be a strong glue to keep the U.S.-ROK alliance strong, reached out to the North

⁴ Letter, President Nixon to President Park, June 16, 1972, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California. (Hereafter cited as Nixon Library).

Korean leadership to propose peace talks, which ultimately failed. Park's disillusionment with the United States led him to declare martial law in 1972 and the United States lost leverage regarding ROK domestic politics for much of the 1970s.

Under the Nixon Doctrine, the ROK, despite its contributions to the Vietnam War, was downgraded as an ally, not consulted regarding major developments related to ending the Vietnam War, and blocked in its own efforts to end its participation in the Vietnam War. This thesis argues that the actions of the U.S. administration show that, as with South Vietnam, relations with the great Communist powers and management of domestic politics, trumped any considerations of our "free world" allies. As with South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu, the ROK was forced to participate in the end of the Vietnam War in a way with which it did not agree, while also asked to take on more of the burden of fighting its communist neighbor to the North, the DPRK. The U.S. Congress was ready to cut the large-scale funding to the Republic of Korea, believing it ready to become more self-sufficient. Therefore, in South Korean eyes, the benefits of being a United States ally seemed to have been exhausted at the end of the Vietnam War. This would lead to an estrangement that would last until the death of Park Chung-hee in 1979. And finally, for the United States, consideration of its commitments to "free world" allies played little to no role in driving U.S. foreign policy, the emphasis instead being on a grand strategy aiming to position the nation well in the face of the great powers of the Soviet Union and China.

This exploration into Nixon's relationship with South Korea during the Vietnam War's final years relies heavily on White House and State Department high-level memos. I also have examined American press reports related to Korea and their participation in the Vietnam War. Through these documents I will explore how President Nixon and National Security Advisor

Kissinger defined their alliance with the Republic of Korea, how they communicated with the leaders of the ROK, and compare these with the actions they took, specifically in regard to the Vietnam War.

This study uses interdisciplinary methods to explore the wide impact of the Vietnam War on South Korea and on U.S.-South Korea relations. In order to understand the economic impact of the war and how it transformed the Korean economy, I use theories on economic growth and state formation. International relations and political science literature on alliance and strategies helped inform my analysis of how two countries weigh the costs and benefits of their relationship with each other.⁵ Of particular relevance was Glenn Snyder's work on the two stages of an alliance, its formation and its management, and his theories on the costs and benefits of alliances including the wide range of variables that affect "bargaining" within them.⁶ To better understand the motivations that led Korean men to volunteer for war in Vietnam, I looked at the social and cultural context, referring to concepts of military sociology such as basis of service, representation and access, and the military as welfare system.⁷ I explore literature and its use by Korean veterans in understanding their experiences in Vietnam, especially in looking at ideology, corruption, and race.

In chapter one, I will examine the background to the ROK's participation in the Vietnam War, evaluating motivations of both the Johnson administration as well as the Park regime. President Johnson sought to maintain the prestige of the United States by succeeding in Vietnam

⁵ For a definition of alliances, I refer to Kent Calder, *Pacific Alliance: Reviving U.S.-Japan Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 70. He cites a consensus by international relations scholars that the three central elements of alliance are "(1) the parties need to be nation states; (2) the purpose of the relationship should be security enhancement, especially by pooling military strength against a common enemy; and (3) the target of the alliance should be states outside of the alliance itself."

⁶ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁷ For more on military sociology, see David R. Segal and James Burk, *Military Sociology* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011).

yet needed to make the effort look multilateral, or at least regional. By having the Republic of Korea fight on the side of South Vietnam, it could be denied that this was a “white man’s war.” South Korea, while far less than truly democratic, was an ally due to its staunch anti-communism and willingness to support the United States on various issues. Publicly, South Korean President Park Chung-hee said he was repaying a debt to the “free world” allies that participated in the United Nations forces to support South Korea in the Korean War. However, Korea reaped great financial benefits from its participation in the Korean War.

Next, I will describe the Nixon administration’s grand strategy, the resultant “Nixon Doctrine,” and its impact on relations with the Republic of Korea. I will begin by examining what factors caused Nixon and Kissinger to form a grand strategy of “realpolitik” including changes in the Cold War environment, specifically worsening Soviet-China relations, and the ongoing Vietnam War. For Korea, the Nixon Doctrine meant the threat of the reduction or elimination of U.S. troops in the southern half of the peninsula.

How did Nixon’s policy of “Vietnamization” affect the Republic of Korea, its government, and military including the many thousands of troops in Vietnam? Chapter three will look at Vietnamization from a South Korean perspective including frustrations over a lack of consultation regarding peace negotiations and plans for troop withdrawal. In reviewing Nixon administration documents, it is clear that the White House dismissed the ROK’s serious concerns about these processes and failed to consult ROK leaders despite their extensive military commitment in Vietnam.

In chapter four, I will explore how the definition of the ROK as a U.S. ally changed from 1969 to 1973. Economic growth in South Korea, largely attributable to its participation in the Vietnam War, allowed the Republic of Korea to move away from its patron-client relationship

with the United States.⁸ Unfortunately, the ROK's growing independence coupled with the U.S. government's avoidance of entanglements in domestic Korean political issues, led to a sharp rise in Park's authoritarianism, alienating American leaders even further.

Finally, in chapter five, I argue that to understand current U.S.-South Korea relations, it is necessary to have knowledge of South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War and how it altered alliance dynamics. Distrust created from the Vietnam experience led to a legacy of mistrust. The ROK was left to worry if the United States would make foreign policy decisions in the region, and even on the Korean peninsula, without consulting ROK authorities. Yet, at the same time, South Korea has continued to send troops and actively support U.S. military missions from the first Gulf War to Iraq.

Other scholars also have explored the outcomes of President Nixon's policy in relation to Korea and its participation in the Vietnam War. Tae Yang Kwak and Benjamin Engel have reviewed the legacy of the ROK's Vietnam participation on the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship, showing that by 1972, President Park Chung-hee was severely disillusioned with the United States alliance and engaged in extreme measures to bolster his own political strength. Kwak and Engel both argue that the end of the Vietnam War was closely tied to Park Chung-hee's decision to declare martial law.⁹ This distrust had gradually increased with the announcement of the

⁸ Political scientist Robert Kaufman, borrowing from the anthropological concept, describes the "patron-client relationship" as, "a special type of dyadic exchange, distinguishable by the following characterizes: (a) the relationship occurs between actors of unequal power and status; (b) it is based on the principle of reciprocity; that is, it is a self-regulating form of interpersonal exchange, the maintenance of which depends on the return that each actor expects to obtain by rendering goods and services to the other and which ceases once the expected returns fail to materialize; and (c) the relationship is particularistic and private, anchored only loosely in public law or community norms." Robert R. Kaufman, "The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-Politics: Prospects and Problems," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 3 (1974): 285. For an interesting comparison of U.S. patron-client relationships, including how Ethiopia leveraged its participation in the Korean War to gain support for its annexation of Eritrea, see Terrence Lyons, "The United States and Ethiopia: The Politics of a Patron-Client Relationship," *Northeast African Studies* 8, no. 2/3 (1986): 53-75.

⁹ Tae Yang Kwak, "The Nixon Doctrine and the Yusin Reforms: American Foreign Policy, the Vietnam War, and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Korea, 1968-1973," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 12, no. 1/2

Nixon doctrine in 1969, the unilateral withdrawal of USFK troops in 1971, and continued refusal by the United States to include a NATO-style clause in the Mutual Defense Treaty. Kwak argues that the United States purposefully avoided adding this aforementioned clause as the United States believed its absence strongly prevented the South from initiating an attack on North Korea.¹⁰

Historian Bruce Cumings, a specialist in modern Korean history, has summarized his view of the Nixon Doctrine and the ROK as such: “if Richard Nixon was declaring his independence of America’s Cold War commitments in the region, Park would declare Korean independence in politics, economics – and national security.”¹¹ None of these works, though, has placed the end of the Vietnam War and United States- ROK relations in the context of Nixon’s grand strategy and global outlook which is what I seek to do with this study.

An examination of Korea’s participation in the Vietnam War also reveals several themes within the larger War and Studies field of study. Korea was deeply changed as a country by its experiences in Vietnam. Its economic rise changed society and shaped a new national identity for a South Korea that took its place as an important regional and global actor.¹² The experience in Vietnam also affected the social and governmental institutions in South Korea. With Park Chung-hee’s turn to authoritarianism in the early 1970s, democracy in South Korea was set back at least a decade. Looking further back, the effects of the Korean War are also visible, both in how the United States chose to prepare for and fight the Vietnam War, but also in how the

(2003): 54. Benjamin Engel, “Viewing Seoul from Saigon: Withdrawal from the Vietnam War and the Yushin Regime,” *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* 13, no.1 (2016): 79-82.

¹⁰ Kwak, “The Nixon Doctrine,” 42.

¹¹ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 364.

¹² For more on how South Korea’s economic strength has increased its international role see Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *South Korea’s Rise: Economic Development, Power, and Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, July 2014).

Korean soldiers viewed their own place in Vietnam and their relationship with the locals and American soldiers. Finally, there are moral implications, as some claim that the violence learned by soldiers in Vietnam was then turned by the government on its own citizens. I argue that the impact of Korea's participation in the Vietnam War on South Korean society was broad and varied.

1 The Cold War and Asia Before the Nixon Presidency

In this chapter, I will examine the history of the U.S.- South Korea, the background to how South Korea became a participant in the Vietnam War, and events leading up to the Nixon presidency that led to an estrangement between the United States and South Korea. It becomes clear that the United States placed its goals in Vietnam and the welfare of its military members ahead of South Korea's interests, especially Park Chung-hee's instincts towards revenge against North Korea after severe provocations. In these episodes, we begin to see the limits of allies' solidarity and the power of the patron in a patron-client relationship to impose its will on its client.

The Cold War came to Asia in full force with the success of the Chinese Communists in their civil war against the Nationalists in 1949.¹³ With the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), what some call the United States' "loss" of China," fears of a domino-like spread of communism seemed to be coming true. Soon after, in June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, a U.S. ally, ostensibly showing an aggressive and expansionist side of communism.¹⁴ For many, the Korean War served as a lesson book for the war that later came in Vietnam. One of these lessons was an assumption that if American policymakers did not confront Communist

¹³ For more information on the beginning of the Cold War in China, see Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 54-103.

¹⁴ For more information on the Korean War, see Chamberlin, *Cold War's Killing Fields*, 104-157, and Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

expansion, the United States would be weakened globally.¹⁵ However, Vietnam was quite a different war with quite a different ally.¹⁶ In Vietnam, the Communists had by far the strongest nationalist appeal due to their success against the French, while South Vietnamese leaders lacked popular support, with several powerful local factions competing for power.¹⁷

Long before Korean troops reached Vietnamese shores, South Korean President Park Chung-hee, who took office after a military coup in 1961, had sought to strengthen ties with the United States by offering to support anti-communist South Vietnamese forces in their fight against North Vietnam. Sensing a U.S. disengagement from his country and after receiving notice that some developmental funding was being reduced, President Park, during his first visit to Washington in November 1961, offered President John F. Kennedy (JFK) the assistance of South Korean troops to fight communism in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ These initial offers were refused by the United States which itself was not yet sending combat troops to the region. In fact, in 1961, Kennedy was far more concerned with the communist-aligned Pathet Lao insurgency trying to overthrow the U.S.-backed government in Laos than with the conflict brewing in Vietnam.¹⁹

¹⁵ Westad, *Cold War*, 318. Henry Kissinger also expressed later on that instead of lessons from the Korean War, Americans should have been paying closer attention to Chinese messaging. After his time serving in government, he wrote, “Thus it was that, in two separate wars a decade and a half apart, America paid a price for not taking Chinese statements seriously: in Korea, it had ignored Chinese warnings and marched to the Yalu, triggering Chinese intervention; in Vietnam, it had failed to understand strong hints by the Chinese that they would not intervene.” Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement and Extraction from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 40.

¹⁶ One of the mistaken lessons American leaders would take from the Korean War and apply to the Vietnam War was to prepare the South Vietnamese military for an invasion of conventional North Vietnamese military troops across the DMZ, as has happened in Korea. Instead, the real fight would be against guerilla units located at the village level. See Chamberlin, *Cold War’s Killing Fields*, 199.

¹⁷ Westad, *Cold War*, 336. See also Frederik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2014), xix, xxii.

¹⁸ Glen Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey: A Study in Management of the U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 25, no. 2 (2013): 151

¹⁹ “JFK in History: Laos,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/laos>, Accessed May 15, 2020.

After Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) inherited the previous administration's view that domestic and foreign goals were complementary and the United States could continue to spend generously on both.²⁰ He also continued JFK's policy of "flexible response," which sought to give the United States the ability to respond at all levels, "ranging from diplomacy through covert action, guerilla operations, conventional and nuclear war." This was a change from the previous President Dwight Eisenhower's reliance on the threat of nuclear weapons to deter communist aggression abroad.²¹

By 1964, President Johnson had decided that the United States would need to send American troops to Vietnam (to be timed after winning his re-election). According to Odd Arne Westad, Johnson "principally saw this [Vietnam] in alliance terms: if the word of the United States did not stand in southeast Asia, what would allies and potential enemies elsewhere think?"²² With allies on his mind, the administration devised a "Free World Assistance Program," commonly known as "More Flags" to recruit allied countries' support for anti-communist South Vietnam and to make military deployment a multilateral effort. Robert M. Blackburn argues that showing that the United States had international support for his Vietnam policy through the use of the More Flags program became a near obsession for Johnson. Because of this, as the ROK was to see, LBJ was willing to pay just about any price for More Flags support.²³

²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 203. See also Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 256, 265.

²¹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 213.

²² Westad, *Cold War*, 323. Historian Frederik Logevall argues that U.S. leaders, particularly Lyndon Johnson, but also JFK and Robert McNamara, pursued a war in Vietnam, largely to bolster their "personal" credibility. Frederik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Last Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 31, 389, 392.

²³ Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino, and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 133.

In the summer of 1964, the White House tasked embassies in allied countries to aggressively seek humanitarian and other assistance for supporting the anticommunist effort in Vietnam.²⁴ NATO countries demurred, and the overall response rate was underwhelming. The Republic of Korea, however, saw an opportunity to strengthen bonds with the United States as well as support the growth of its economy. Park Chung-hee feared the United States was disengaging from the ROK and sought to strengthen ties and commitments from the United States in return for sending troops to Vietnam.²⁵ Park worried that a disengagement by the United States would invite aggressive attacks from North Korea.

The United States was in fact looking to sharply decrease post-Korean War aid. For example, the United States had begun an interagency review of its U.S. Military Assistance Program (MAP) to Korea in the summer of 1961.²⁶ The MAP was a Department of Defense program to support the militaries of U.S. allies. According to Blackburn, “Through this program, the Department of Defense, using U.S. taxpayer dollars, purchases whatever military supplies and equipment it perceives an allied military needs to upgrade its armed forces, then it donates this materiel to that allied nation. It is expected, however, that when the donor nation’s military reaches a given level of readiness, or their national economy becomes stronger, the financing of these MAP purchase would incrementally transfer to the allied nation’s national budget.”²⁷ In 1965, the US. Department of Defense was planning a \$100 million MAP transfer, meaning that

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ There may have been a sincere aspect of alliance solidarity. According to Chun, “for the R.O.K.-U.S. alliance, there has been a strong, “blood-tied” conception of the alliance, coming from the experience of the Korean War.” Chun also examines Snyder’s theories of balancing of “abandonment” versus “entrapment” between allies, and argues that while mostly the ROK feared abandonment, with the Vietnam War, they also succumbed to “entrapment.” Chae-sung Chun, “Theoretical Approaches to Alliance: Implications on the R.O.K.-U.S. Alliance,” *Journal of International and Area Studies* 7, no. 2 (2000): 80, 83.

²⁶ Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 149.

²⁷ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 42.

the ROK would now have to pay that amount for its military goods out of its own budget instead of having the United States cover it.²⁸

Both sides benefited handsomely from their collaboration in Vietnam. The funds entering South Korea allowed President Park to carry out his economic modernization goals. The United States was able to use the Korean soldiers in the place of American soldiers serving in Vietnam for much lower pay and at significantly decreased domestic political cost. At the same time, the Korean troops supported Johnson's goal of projecting the image of an international and multiracial anti-communist coalition in Vietnam.

However, attaining the agreement of the South Vietnamese for receiving ROK and other third country military support was a sensitive process. When U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) Maxwell Taylor was tasked with telling the South Vietnamese to request ROK troops, the Ambassador cabled Washington back saying, "Before I can present our case to GVN [Government of Vietnam], I have to know what that case is and why. It is not going to be easy to get ready concurrence for the large scale introduction of foreign troops unless the need is clear and explicit." The ambassador anticipated a "sharp debate" with the South Vietnamese government.²⁹

In late April 1965, Taylor presented the case for additional U.S. and new third country combatants to Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat, to which Quat gave an indirect, confusing answer, ultimately accepting what he knew to be the United States' wishes in order to present a more "international" force. According to Taylor's cable, Quat "concluded that since it was the position of his Government that the cause of South Vietnam is really the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Telegram, Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, April 17, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, II, Vietnam, January – June 1965: 259 and Telegram, Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, April 22, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, II, Vietnam, January – June 1965: 271.

cause of the Free World, it would be entirely consistent for him to accept third country units. He noted in passing that he was aware of our US domestic problem and that the presence of other flags would be of assistance to us.”³⁰ Later in a cable on April 28, the Embassy reported that “Quat gave his complete concurrence with the introduction of the U.S. and third country forces.”³¹ While on the face of it, Quat may have agreed, reading between the lines, it seems he concurred mostly because he knew it was what the United States wanted.

During this time, the United States prioritized its own need for the illusion of a grand “international” mission in Vietnam. Negotiations of the exact forms of aid, humanitarian assistance and military troops was done directly between Washington and Seoul, with Saigon only informed afterwards and told what they should “request” from the Koreans.³²

While the economic benefits to South Korea were enormous, most scholars argue that the main reasons for sending troops to Vietnam were political.³³ Seeing Johnson’s desperation for Free World allies, Park knew he could make himself an indispensable ally to the United States, which would disincline the United States from nurturing his opposition.³⁴ Some argue that the Vietnam War helped bolster Park’s anti-communist credentials to his domestic public in light of his flirtation with communism in the 1940s.³⁵ In fact, the country under Park was strongly anti-communist in education and other propaganda. In the summer of 1961, Park passed an anticommunist law, to supplement the earlier National Security Law, defining all socialist

³⁰ Telegram, Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, April 27, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1978, II Vietnam, January – June 1965: 276.

³¹ Telegram, Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, April 28, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, II Vietnam, January – June 1965: 277.

³² Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 33.

³³ For more information on the economic benefits to South Korea from participation in the Vietnam War, see John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 62-66.

³⁴ Min Yong Lee, “The Vietnam War: South Korea’s Search for National Security,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 404.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

countries as enemy states.³⁶ I believe that more than to bolster his anti-communist credentials, Park sought to win favor with the United States.

On the security side, thanks in large part to the Vietnam War, Park was able to modernize the ROK forces, receiving top-level military equipment. Participation in Vietnam could also be seen as a way of having troops be “combat-ready” for any potential crises with North Korea. Park also hoped the United States would feel a debt of obligation to continue to maintain troops in South Korea and provide protection should North Korea seriously attack the South again.

Economically, the benefits are clear by looking at the famous 1966 “Brown Letter” (diplomatic cable) from Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown to Washington listing the U.S. concessions to South Korea for sending troops. From the cable, one can see that the United States financial assistance went well beyond military aid to cover most segments of the Korean economy. Benefits listed in the Brown Letter included the financing and equipping of all new costs of ROK forces deploying to Vietnam, a 30 percent higher overseas allowance for ROK forces, equipment for ROK military modernization, procurement of South Korean goods and equipment for the Korean troops in Vietnam, additional opportunities for South Korean contractors to be awarded construction projects in Vietnam, significant developmental loans, and a pledge to suspend the MAP transfer program.³⁷

According to some historians, all told South Korea received about one billion U.S. dollars’ worth of benefits related to its troop deployment in Vietnam.³⁸ In the words of novelist and Vietnam veteran Ahn Junghyo, “the blood money we had to earn at the price of our lives

³⁶ Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 356.

³⁷ Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 155.

³⁸ Han Hong-koo, “South Korea and the Vietnam War.” In *Developmental Dictatorship and the Park Chung-Hee Era: The Shaping of Modernity in the Republic of Korea*, ed. Lee Byeong-cheon (Paramus: Homa and Sekey Books, 2003). Also see Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 321.

fueled the modernization of the country. And owing to our contribution, the Republic of Korea, or at least a higher echelon of it, made a gigantic stride into the world market.”³⁹ Additionally, Korean soldiers in Vietnam were required to send 85% of their earnings to Korea automatically providing huge remittances.⁴⁰

East Asian scholar Frank Baldwin argues that the “American and South Korean governments constantly concealed, censored, and lied about the U.S. utilization of ROK forces in Vietnam.”⁴¹ The U.S. payments to the ROK were concealed from the public and at times funded indirectly through programs such as the PL-480 and MAP. The PL-480 or Food for Peace program had begun in 1954 under President Eisenhower. It allowed the president to authorize the shipment of excess U.S. foodstuffs to “friendly” nations for free or through grants.⁴² The United States benefited because with the export of excess commodities, domestic prices remained high for American farmers.

Vietnam also allowed the Republic of Korea to bolster its image as a regional and global actor. In January 1965, President Park announced, “We are emerging from the past history of relying on outside help to stand at the crossroads of opening a glorious new chapter in the nation’s history.”⁴³ Economically, Vietnam was used as a test market for South Korean products such as steel, transportation equipment, and nonelectric machinery.⁴⁴ Thus, one could argue President Park was using the Vietnam War to enhance the reach of South Korea’s economic and political influence throughout the region, if not the world.

³⁹ Ahn Junghyo, *White Badge: A Novel of Korea* (New York: Soho Press, 2003), 40.

⁴⁰ Jinim Park, “Colonized Colonizers: Korean Experiences of the Vietnam War,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7, No. 3/4 (1998): 233.

⁴¹ Baldwin, “America’s Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7, no. 4 (1975): 33.

⁴² “US Aid and PL-480, 1961-1969,” *U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/pl-480>, (Accessed May 20, 2020).

⁴³ Park quoted in Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 260.

⁴⁴ Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 141.

Historians have described Park Chung-hee's Korea as a "developmental dictatorship" where political freedoms were curtailed alongside high levels of government management of industrialization which were justified to spur rapid economic growth.⁴⁵ Park had solid support from the ROK Army which also was the strongest and best organized unit within the South Korean government, due to the legacy of the Korea War, American aid and training, and Cold War realities.⁴⁶ With the Army's support, he managed to maintain strong control on South Korea's society and economy. The contradictions of this "developmental dictatorship" are the reason why President Park has such a complex legacy in Korea. On the one hand, he created a South Korea that is now a member of the OECD and an important global player, and whose cars, televisions and cell phones are sold around the world. On the other hand, using the support of his army, Park brutally suppressed any dissent and kept opposition politicians from gaining any power.

Park also had global aspirations for Korea and hoped participation in the Vietnam War would help him fulfill some of these goals. In his view, the deployment of South Korean troops to Vietnam, "demonstrated the bravery of Korean manhood to the world" and showed that Korea was now a "sovereign, adult nation."⁴⁷ Publicly, Park called Vietnam the "second front line" of the Korean War. In October 1965, he said "unless we deter the communist aggression in free South Vietnam, the whole of South East Asia will be lost in the near future, and the security of

⁴⁵ Lee Byong-cheon, "The Political Economy of Developmental Dictatorship," in *Developmental Dictatorship and the Park Chung-Hee Era: The Shaping of Modernity in the Republic of Korea*, ed. Lee Byeong-cheon (Paramus: Homa and Sekey Books, 2003), 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁷ Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 42.

the Republic of Korea could not be assured.” Whether this was for public consumption or he truly believed it, Park seems to have subscribed to the “domino theory.”⁴⁸

For all these reasons, Park complied with Johnson’s requests and the first Korean contingent of a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit and a group of Tae Kwon Do instructors arrived in Vietnam in September 1964. The Republic of Korea did cover costs for this first group. The “Dove Unit” arrived in Vietnam in March 1965, a construction group and a Marine Corp engineer company tasked with building bridges, clinics and other buildings.⁴⁹ The public was led to believe the costs for the Dove Unit were covered by Seoul, however Blackburn argues that money was funneled to Korea through the PL-480 and MAP programs.⁵⁰

While South Vietnam wished to have operational control, South Korea refused to be under any country except the United States. In a compromise, it was decided that the Free World Military Assistance Policy Council would determine the operational functions of ROK forces.⁵¹ In the end, a verbal understanding was agreed upon, wherein command would be retained by the Korean general and General Westmoreland head of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). would have operational control over ROK forces.⁵² This lack of a written agreement on operational control was to help the ROK save “face,” as Westmoreland told Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, Commander of the United States Pacific Command.⁵³

⁴⁸ Park as quoted in Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 259. Han argues that, “the theory of the second front line, as championed by the Park regime, could be regarded as a Korean version of the domino theory.”

⁴⁹ Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 152.

⁵⁰ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵² According to the Department of Defense, the definition of Operational Control (or OPCON) is, “the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, “Operations, Operational Level, Operational Control: Confusion within an Army Service Component Command,” *Purview*, April 1, 2019, <https://purview.dodlive.mil/2019/04/01/operations-operational-level-operational-control-confusion-within-an-army-service-component-command/>, (accessed June 30, 2020).

⁵³ Larson and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 134. According to Graham Cosmas, Koreans avoided the semblance of U.S. command over their soldiers. “The Koreans operated for the most part independently in their coastal enclaves and joined in American offensives only when provided with lavish U.S. helicopter and artillery

Washington knew that Seoul was eager to do still more and receive the related benefits. In December of 1964, President Johnson received a memo from his White House staff notifying him that “the Koreans have not only been willing to send military help to Viet-Nam, but are even anxious to do so, providing we pay the bill.”⁵⁴ In April 1965, President Johnson sent a personal request to President Park for a regimental combat team (approximately 4000 men).⁵⁵ Park, though eager to send troops, drove a hard bargain in order to extract the maximum concession, securing a 75% pay raise for ROK civilian and military services and a suspension of the MAP transfer program so that the United States would continue to provide military aid and these costs would not be transferred to the ROK budget.⁵⁶

In September 1965, two military working agreements were signed, one between the South Vietnamese and ROK forces, and one between ROK forces and General Westmoreland. The agreements stipulated that MACV and the South Vietnamese military would provide logistical support for the ROK troops and that the ROK equipment would be procured through the American MAP program.⁵⁷

The first combat units from South Korea arrived between September and November 1965. These were the Tiger Division and the Blue Dragon (2nd Marine Brigade), totaling 18,212 men.⁵⁸ On their departure from Korea, a patriotic group of 300,000 South Koreans came to bid farewell in a ceremony for the Tiger Unit singing the unit’s signature song, “Let’s defend our fatherland.”⁵⁹ Park used elaborate ceremonies for the troops’ departure and return to boost public

support.” Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV, The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2006), 11.

⁵⁴ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 34.

⁵⁵ Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 153.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁷ Larson and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 122-23.

⁵⁸ Larson and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 128.

⁵⁹ Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 256-257.

patriotism, broadcasting the events on radio and television.⁶⁰ The Vietnam-bound soldiers were glorified by Park as the “descendants of *Hwarang*,” elite warriors of the Shilla Dynasty (57 BC – 935 AD in the southern and central Korean peninsula) around which a militaristic cult had grown in the early twentieth century.⁶¹ South Koreans were once again coming together to fight the “evils” of communism.

UPI reported on a later combat team attached to the Tiger Division, landing in Qui Nhon in April 1966, that came ashore singing “Arirang,” the unofficial song of Korea greeted by young Vietnamese ladies welcoming them with flower leis.⁶² Later in the spring of 1966, as a result of the “Brown Memorandum,” the ROK sent the elite 9th Infantry White Horse Division, for a total of approximately 45,000 Korean soldiers on the ground in Vietnam.

This was to be the last military contingent sent to South Korea.⁶³ While there were discussions of sending additional ROK troops, these plans were cancelled due to Park’s reelection campaign and growing public concern about the ROK’s own safety, especially after the DPRK’s attempted assassination of Park in 1968.⁶⁴ By 1967, the Koreans would be part of free world forces in a highly militarized South Vietnam, along with the South Vietnamese, Americans, and much smaller deployments of Australian, Thai and Filipino soldiers that according to historian Frances FitzGerald, “reached a combined total of 1,300,000 men: one soldier for very fifteen people in South Vietnam.”⁶⁵

The Korean troops were mostly deployed in the coastal regions of Vietnam. The ROK Forces in Vietnam had a headquarters in Saigon and a field office in Nha Trang which controlled

⁶⁰ Lee, *Service Economies*, 42.

⁶¹ Park quoted in Lee, *Service Economies*, 42. Also see Richard Rutt, *Flower Boys of Shilla*, (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 1961), 30.

⁶² “Korean Troops Land in Qui Nhon,” *UPI*, April 18, 1966.

⁶³ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 59.

⁶⁴ Baek, “Park Chung Hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 156.

⁶⁵ Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1972), 342.

operations in the provinces of Quang Nam, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, and Ninh Thuan. Their tactical area of responsibility spanned 6,812 square kilometers.⁶⁶ While U.S. troops had more support helicopters, and therefore were able to move more rapidly to various areas, ROK troops had more or less a “set” area to defend. One of the key missions ROK troops were involved in was keeping highways open.⁶⁷ According to a 1969 publication, “the Korean Capital Division, the 9th Infantry Division and the 2d Marine Brigade carried out orders to protect the Vietnamese population on both sides of Highway 1. Since the ROK troops did not have helicopters and were not highly mobile, they performed clearing and holding operations instead of large-scale offensive sweeps. As Lieutenant General Chae Myung Shin, commander of Korean forces in Vietnam, explained, “We hit and stay, not search and destroy.”⁶⁸

Of the South Korean troops serving in Vietnam, over 60 percent were volunteers.⁶⁹ It is hard to know exactly why individual Korean men volunteered to serve in Vietnam. Eun Seo Jo argues that they did so in order to “provide financial support for their impoverished families” and due to a “cult of militarized valor.”⁷⁰ Through oral interviews with ROK Vietnam War veterans, Jo found that many of them struggled to obtain three meals a day and faced a real threat of starvation, prior to joining the military.⁷¹

⁶⁶ “Asian Allies in Viet-Nam”. *Vietnam Bulletin, A Weekly Publication of the Embassy of Vietnam in Washington D.C.*, March 1970. Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Douglas Pike Collection. (Hereafter cited as Pike Collection)

⁶⁷ Larson and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 143.

⁶⁸ “Aussies, ROKs, and other Allies” *The Vietnam Experience*, Time Life Inc., 1970, Pike Collection.

⁶⁹ Eun Seo Jo, “Fighting for Peanuts: Reimagining South Korean Soldiers’ Participation in the Wöllam Boom,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21, no. 1 (2014): 63.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 58. According to Frank Baldwin, “the U.S. overseas allowance for an ROKA Private was more than twenty-three times his normal base pay.” Baldwin, “Rented Troops,” 38.

⁷¹ Jo, “Fighting for Peanuts,” 69-70.

According to Han Kwan Duk, a future ROK military attaché to the embassy in Washington, speaking in his official capacity in 1993, there were three reasons Korean troops went to Vietnam:

“First, national sympathy for Vietnamese whose life was threatened by the communists. Second, we viewed the war in Vietnam as the Soviet scheme to communize the whole world under their umbrella, and thought if Vietnam fell in the hands of the communists, other countries in Asia would follow the [sic] suit. Finally, Korea went to Vietnam to help another country when the country was threatened. The United States and fifteen other countries had come to help Korea when its freedom was threatened.”⁷²

In reality, soldiers likely joined for both patriotic and economic reasons. Many did remember as youths the foreign, mostly American, soldiers that came to defend South Korea. Yet, given the level of poverty in South Korea at the time, what led so many South Koreans to take action and volunteer to go to Vietnam was primarily the promise of economic gain and the ability to improve one’s standing in society.

While the United States may have sought to send Asian troops to Vietnam to prove this was not a “white man’s war,” South Vietnam’s pride was bruised by the specter of other Asians coming to rescue them.⁷³ Yet in the end, the United States wish to show a strong coalition in the war won out. How did the Korean soldiers themselves view race issues during the Vietnam War? According to Jinim Park, Koreans vacillated between two conflicting views of themselves: one as American allies, and one as the same Asian “gooks” as the Vietnamese.⁷⁴ In the novel *The Shadow of Arms*, when an American soldier tells a Korean soldier about a club that has a “no gooks” policy, the Korean asks, “who are gooks?” The American answers, “Vietnamese. They

⁷² Han Kwang Duk, “A Soldier’s Perspective of the Vietnam War,” *Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive*, April 1, 1993, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/images/2499/24990215001.pdf>, (Accessed April 20, 2020).

⁷³ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 37.

⁷⁴ Jinim Park, “Colonized Colonizers,” 218.

are really filthy. But you are like us. We're the Allies.”⁷⁵ Yet no doubt many Koreans remembered that in the war in their own country less than 20 years earlier, they were the “gooks” to American GIs.

Nearing the end of LBJ's presidency, as the ROK government was mulling over an additional request from the United States to send an additional troop division, a series of attacks both in South Vietnam and on the Korean peninsula in January 1968 were to be a key turning point both for the Vietnam War and U.S.-ROK relations. In January 1968, the United States, Korea, and South Vietnam suffered severe blows: the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, the capture by North Korea of the U.S. Navy ship *Pueblo* with over 30 U.S. sailors on board, and a North Korea commando attack on the presidential palace, the Blue House, in an attempted assassination of Park. These events would cancel any plans by Park of sending additional troops to Vietnam.

During the Blue House raid, North Korean commandos reached within 100 meters of the Blue House, killing 26 Koreans and four Americans in the process. Park was greatly frustrated when the United States disallowed him from responding to the North Korean infiltration and assassination attempt. According to researcher Benjamin Engel, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance told Park in February 1968 that if Park retaliated for the attack on the Blue House, the United States would pull all USFK troops out of the country.⁷⁶ (If Park had been privy to U.S. government cables at the time where Secretary of State Dean Rusk called Koreans the “Irish of the East” and “super sensitive,” he may have been even more upset.)⁷⁷ To add insult to injury, Park also was kept out of the loop regarding secret negotiations between the United

⁷⁵ Hwang Sok-Yong, *The Shadow of Arms* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014), 25.

⁷⁶ Engel, “Viewing Seoul from Saigon,” 90. For more on alliance restraint see Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1-17.

⁷⁷ Telegram, Department of State to Embassy in Korea, February 6, 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. XXIX, Part 1, Korea* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2000), 157. (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*)

States and North Korea on the return of the U.S. sailors captured on the *USS Pueblo*. These series of events left President Park frustrated and disillusioned with the United States. Thus, as Nixon came into office in 1969, the U.S.-ROK relationship was already seriously strained.

2 The Nixon Doctrine, the Great Powers and the ROK

Richard Nixon, a previous congressman and vice president under Eisenhower, was elected president in November 1968, defeating democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey after Johnson decided not to run for re-election, largely due to the challenges of Vietnam. While Johnson was an expert in domestic politics and a master of the U.S. Congress, Nixon throughout his career had focused more on international dynamics. In this chapter, I will show how Nixon's view of global power and politics, particularly his goal to strengthen communication and relations with the Soviet Union and China, led him to increasingly disregard what he saw as less important allies, including South Korea. Nixon, when weighing the costs and benefits of the U.S.-ROK alliance, increasingly saw more costs and less benefits, including less value in South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War. Instead of moving his South Korean counterpart along with his movements towards the Soviet Union and China, Park Chung-hee was excluded and left increasingly nervous and anxious about South Korea's place in the world and the level to which it could rely on the United States.

After becoming president, Nixon would work closely with his National Security Advisor, former Harvard professor Henry Kissinger, to form their own international policies, largely dismissing outside opinions from those such as the State Department or Department of Defense. As historian Daniel Sargent described, Nixon "put the office of the national security adviser at

the heart of the foreign-policy apparatus.”⁷⁸ Nixon and Kissinger accepted that there were limits to U.S. power and they understood and welcomed a change from a world that was bipolar to a multipolar world as a way to keep “balance” in international politics.⁷⁹

Many historians look to Nixon’s October 1967 article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* that called for a U.S. policy that looked “beyond Vietnam” as a preview of what would become his Nixon Doctrine. In the article, he suggested that “if another friendly country should be faced with an externally supported communist insurrection—whether in Asia, or in Africa or even Latin America—there is serious question whether the American public or the American Congress would now support a unilateral American intervention, even at the request of the host government. This makes it vitally in their own interest that the nations in the path of China’s ambitions move quickly to establish an indigenous Asian framework for their own future security.”⁸⁰ Not only was Nixon trying to extricate the United States from its disproportionate burden in Vietnam, but also he was much less interested in “nation building” that had been a hallmark of the Kennedy presidency.⁸¹

Instead, Nixon’s focus as President would be on the “great” powers, often to the detriment of smaller powers, including U.S. allies.⁸² In *Foreign Affairs* he argued that “any discussion of Asia’s future must ultimately focus on the respective roles of four giants: India, the world’s most populous non-communist nation; Japan, Asia’s principal industrial and economic power; China, the world’s most populous nation and Asia’s most immediate threat; and the

⁷⁸ Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

⁷⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 277-279.

⁸⁰ Richard Nixon, “Asia After Vietnam,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967.

⁸¹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 276.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 275. See also Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of A Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

United States, the greatest Pacific power.”⁸³ In order to engage with the “great power” of Communist China, Nixon and Kissinger would move away from a strictly ideological view of threats and cooperation.⁸⁴

What would become the “Nixon Doctrine,” originally labeled the “Guam Doctrine,” was announced during a presidential stop in Guam on July 25, 1969. In a background briefing with reporters, Nixon said that in discussions with the Australian Prime Minister, he had been asked if the United States, after its tough experiences in Korea and Vietnam, would exit Asia as the British, French, and other colonial powers had done.⁸⁵ Nixon replied that leaders in Asia were telling him that they wanted (to borrow a term from the Japanese imperial era) “Asia for Asians” and that he agreed. Answering a journalist’s question on the future U.S. military role in Asia, Nixon responded, “One, we will keep our treaty commitments...but two, that as far as the problems of internal security are concerned, as far as the problems of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, that the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will increasingly be handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.”⁸⁶ Notably, President Nixon also added that he foresaw U.S. military aid to Asian allies receding.⁸⁷

To summarize, the Nixon Doctrine indicated how the United States would maintain its treaty commitments and be willing to use nuclear weapons if needed to defend allies, presumably from a nuclear attack by the USSR. Moreover, the United States would provide military and

⁸³ Nixon, “Asia After Vietnam.”

⁸⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 282.

⁸⁵ Richard Nixon, *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1999), 544-556.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 549.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 552.

economic assistance to its allies, but, learning the hard lesson of Vietnam, not manpower.⁸⁸ Also key to this re-alignment of priorities was a review of the United States' military posture in Asia. The Nixon Administration sought to reduce U.S. troops in Asia, though not in Europe, with Nixon considering a cut of 14.5 divisions in Asia for a potential savings of \$5 billion a year.⁸⁹ According to Sargent, there were also important economic reasons for this as the deficits in the U.S. balance of payments were made significantly worse by U.S. overseas military commitments.

In order to reduce tensions that could potentially lead to conflict in Asia and elsewhere, Nixon and Kissinger sought to exploit tensions in relations between the USSR and China, the Sino-Soviet split. During the same press briefing where Nixon announced the Nixon Doctrine, he had told reporters that he thought a summit with the USSR could only be useful if it discussed one of three topics: the Mideast, arms control, and Vietnam.⁹⁰ To gain additional benefits, Nixon and Kissinger promoted using "linkage" as a part of the détente with the USSR, tying progress on issues of importance to USSR to progress on issues of interest to the United States, such as ending the Vietnam War.⁹¹

Nixon also believed it would be beneficial to bring the People's Republic of China (PRC), an ideological and diplomatic nightmare for both the United States and the USSR since its Cultural Revolution began in 1966, into the community of nations. In his 1967 *Foreign Affairs* essay, Nixon had written that "taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave

⁸⁸ Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, 53.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 55-56. According to political scientist Eugene Gholz, the fear was that the USSR was too powerful, and that Europe could not defend itself if U.S. troops were to leave the continent. Eugene Gholz, "The Nixon Doctrine in the 21st Century," *World Politics Review*, July 22, 2009, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/4106/the-nixon-doctrine-in-the-21st-century>, (accessed June 30, 2020).

⁹⁰ Nixon, *Public Papers*, 550.

⁹¹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 290.

China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation. But we could go disastrously wrong if, in pursuing this long-range goal, we failed in the short range to read the lessons of history. The world cannot be safe until China changes. Thus our aim, to the extent that we can influence events, should be to induce change. The way to do this is to persuade China that it must change: that it cannot satisfy its imperial ambitions, and that its own national interest requires a turning away from foreign adventuring and a turning inward toward the solution of its own domestic problems.”⁹² By 1969, Nixon added that he saw a much smaller threat of China exporting communism to its neighbors, for various reasons but largely due to the strong economic growth in non-communist nations such as Taiwan and Japan.⁹³

Significantly before Nixon’s famous trip to China, in a December 1970 meeting between Kissinger and future ROK Prime Minister Kim Chong Pil, Kissinger admitted that world politics was in a “transitional period.” On China, according to notes of the meeting, Kissinger said, “we had no illusions about China, which we knew was our enemy. However, we had two enemies, the USSR and China, which happened to be fighting one another. Speaking quite frankly, we therefore were trying to see if we could use one enemy against the other. While we realized China was not our friend, the tactical situation required us to see how we might use China in moves vis-à-vis the Soviets. In this, though, it was out of the question that we would sacrifice Korea to China.”⁹⁴ Here Kissinger clearly admits to a plan to play the two communist

⁹² Nixon, “Asia After Vietnam.”

⁹³ Nixon, *Public Papers*, 555.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, December 2, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 81.

superpowers against each other as he tries to reassure the Koreans that they will continue to receive support from the United States.

Sources show that President Park felt he was not consulted sufficiently regarding the United States' opening to China. In a February 1972 NSC memo, NSC staffer John Holdridge wrote, "Park's nervousness over the Peking trip is well known to you...Apparently to try force our hand on a summit meeting, Park has invoked his prime leverage – a threat to pull his two divisions out of Vietnam after next May." Holdridge concluded "I believe it is highly important for you to try to see Kim [ROK ambassador to the United States] at least briefly before we leave for Peking next Thursday."⁹⁵

While Park multiple times requested a meeting with Nixon before his trip to China and was refused, the Chinese kept the DPRK (with whom they had had a falling out during the Cultural Revolution but now had renewed their relationship) closely in the loop. When Zhou Enlai met with Henry Kissinger, he delivered a list of eight points from Kim Il-sung to the American and he traveled to DPRK soon after to debrief Kim Il-sung.⁹⁶ During the period Kim Il-sung traveled to Beijing for consultations once and Zhou Enlai visited Pyongyang twice, while Park Chung-hee found out about the Kissinger visit to the PRC after it happened. Eventually,

⁹⁵ Memorandum from John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), February 12, 1972, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 125.

⁹⁶ Lee Chong-suk, "The Yushin Regime and the National Division Structure," In *Developmental Dictatorship and the Park Chung-Hee Era: The Shaping of Modernity in the Republic of Korea*, ed. Lee Byeong-cheon (Paramus: Homa and Sekey Books, 2003), 229. Kim Il-sung's eight points included the complete removal of U.S. forces from Korea, an end to U.S. surveillance activities on North Korea, an end to joint military exercises between the United States and the ROK, and a promise that the United States would not replace American troops with Japanese troops on the Korean peninsula.

Park also watched as the U.S.'s anti-communist ally Taiwan was sacrificed and replaced in the United Nations Security Council by the PRC.⁹⁷

The other East Asian “giant” that Nixon had identified in his *Foreign Affairs* article was Japan, the growing economic and industrial powerhouse of Asia. Nixon envisioned a future world in which Japan would “play an increasing role” in the region and the world.⁹⁸ According to John Lewis Gaddis, Kissinger became an advocate of “trilateralism” by which Japan would be considered “a major center of world power in its own right, and had to be given attention in the future comparable to that accorded Western Europe.”⁹⁹ Japan also played an important security role in the Pacific hosting a large number of U.S. military bases.

Both Japan and South Korea were anti-communist allies of the United States but as George Kennan said in 1964, “[South Korea] is important, but Japan is more important still.”¹⁰⁰ (Park, though, by participating in LBJ’s More Flags program for Vietnam, was able to gain leverage and increase his importance to the United States under LBJ.) For security and economic reasons, the United States had strongly encouraged President Park of Korea to normalize diplomatic relations with Japan, its former colonial ruler. In 1965, Park pragmatically chose to normalize relations with Japan largely in order to help his country’s economic development.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, many of the legacies of colonialism were not fully dealt with.¹⁰² The diplomatic

⁹⁷ Kwak, “The Nixon Doctrine and the Yushin Reforms,” 49.

⁹⁸ Nixon, “Asia After Vietnam.”

⁹⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 280.

¹⁰⁰ George Kennan quoted in Jung-Hoon Lee, “Normalization of Relations with Japan: Toward a New Partnership,” In *The Park Chung Hee Era*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 447.

¹⁰¹ For more information on economic benefits for South Korea related to the normalization of relations with Japan, see Lie, *Han Unbound*, 58-61 and 66-70.

¹⁰² Lee, “Normalization of Relations with Japan,” 431. Issues that were not dealt with during the normalization of South Korea-Japan relations in 1965 include Japanese apologies for wrongs committed under colonialism, the comfort women issue (though this issue was not widely known to the public at the time), direct payments to Korean victims of forced labor, and the status of the Liancourt Rocks (“Dokdo” in Korean, “Takeshima” in Japanese).

agreement would significantly help the ROK's economy through increased trade. However, there would be tension due to Japan's large economic benefits from the Vietnam War, larger than the ROK's, despite the ROK sending its troops and Japan not doing so.¹⁰³

Of all the countries, however, the USSR, due its influence and military power, became the central focus of Nixon and Kissinger's diplomacy.¹⁰⁴ The Nixon administration continued and emphasized a policy of "détente" (an easing of tensions and increased cooperation on issues of common interest) with the USSR.¹⁰⁵ The White House encouraged to press forward with détente, and ignore an ideological contest against the USSR, due to the opportunities arising from a Sino-Soviet split between the world's two largest communist powers, culminating in a border conflict along the Ussuri River in 1969.¹⁰⁶

One of the signature aspects of détente under Nixon was the concept of "linkage," meaning that the United States would tie progress of issues of importance to the USSR to the priorities of the Nixon administration.¹⁰⁷ The Nixon administration in particular sought to push the USSR to press North Vietnam for a cease-fire and working towards ending the Vietnam War with the USSR priority of Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) negotiations.¹⁰⁸ Nixon and Kissinger also believed that through engagement with the USSR, they could contribute to

¹⁰³ Se Jin Kim, "South Korea's Involvement in Vietnam and Its Economic and Political Impact," *Asian Survey* 10, no. 6 (June 1970): 525. According to Kim, writing while the war was still ongoing, "Also frequently quoted is that Japan, the country which has no troop commitment in Vietnam, is enjoying the lion's share of the Vietnam-associated military purchase by the United States. The ratio of off-shore procurements from Korea and Japan is calculated at about 10 to 1." Gardner and Gittinger write, "It is estimated, however, that on the average Japan profited at least \$1 billion per year from the Vietnam War." Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 181.

¹⁰⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 284.

¹⁰⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 287.

¹⁰⁶ For more information on the Sino-Soviet border conflict, see Chamberlin, *Cold War's Killing Fields*, 247-253.

¹⁰⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 290.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.

minimizing global tensions and the potential for a “hot” war. The USSR was also a key patron of North Korea, and détente was to have implications for the ROK-DPRK relationship.¹⁰⁹

With a thawing of the United States’ relationship with the USSR and China, both Koreas re-calibrated the benefits of dialogue as they saw their respective patrons coming together, and potentially moving further away from them. On August 20, 1971, delegates from both Koreas convened at Red Cross Talks in Panmunjom, the meeting room located directly on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Eventually, however, this dialogue would bear no results nor any warming of relations between the two Koreas.¹¹⁰

During the early to mid 1960s, the DPRK had sought to strengthen itself against real and perceived threats. These included the increasing rift between its two patrons, the Soviet Union and China, the Cuban Missile crisis (perhaps seeing parallels between Cuba’s situation and its own), the military coup of Park Chung-hee in 1961, and the normalization of South Korean and Japanese diplomatic relations in 1965. According to Han Hong-koo, the DPRK saw the normalization of ROK-Japan relations in 1965 “as consolidation of a tripartite military alliance among the United States Japan, and South Korea and as the signal for a resurrection of Japanese militarism.”¹¹¹ In response, the DPRK began to increasingly build up its military power with an

¹⁰⁹ On détente, see also Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Ralph B. Levering, *The Cold War: A Post-Cold War History* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2016). On Nixon’s larger foreign policy goals as related to Vietnam, see David F. Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowhan and Littlefield, 2014).

¹¹⁰ Lee, “The Yushin Regime,” 218. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 22-66. The end of any rapprochement between the two Koreas during this period ended on August 15, 1974, when a Korean-national resident of Osaka, Japan, attempted to assassinate President Park during a public speech, and ended up killing the Korean First Lady instead. The assassin, Mun Se Hwang, confessed to having received instructions from an official with the North Korea-affiliated General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (known as the “Chongryong” in Korean and “Chosen Soren” in Japanese).

¹¹¹ Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 267.

increased defense budget. As a result, the number of DPRK provocations rose sharply during the early years of Korea's participation in the Vietnam War. While in 1965, there were 99 provocations, these numbers reached 784 in 1967 and 985 in 1968.¹¹² The most serious of these provocations against the ROK was the aforementioned Blue House infiltration and assassination attempt on Park in January 1968.

During Nixon's presidency, he also had to decide how to respond to DPRK provocations with the DPRK's shooting down of a U.S. Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan ("East Sea" in Korea) in April 1969.¹¹³ While direct military actions were discussed, in the end, Nixon instead merely announced that reconnaissance flights in the area would continue. To prove his resolve to the Communist world, both North Korea and Vietnam, Nixon stepped up bombing of North Vietnam with Operation Lunch, the second phase of the Menu bombings of Cambodia.¹¹⁴

Due to the messy process of deciding how to respond, Nixon and Kissinger reflected that other advisors had caused them to waiver and abstain from a quick, strong response.¹¹⁵ Kissinger used the opportunity to strengthen and consolidate power in the NSC and created a Washington Special Agency Group (WSAG), an interagency working group where he would be the senior

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ For more information on how Nixon reaffirmed his commitment to South Korea's defense after the EC-121 incident, see Tad Szulc, *The Illusion of Peace: Foreign Policy in the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 143-145. For Nixon's own description of the EC-121 incident, see Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 382-385.

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 144.

¹¹⁵ William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 73.

member. Afterwards Nixon was to make key foreign policy decisions alone or only in consultation with Kissinger.¹¹⁶

As a result of the Nixon Doctrine, therefore, we see that for the United States, the alliance with the Republic of Korea was given less precedence than improving relations with the other great superpowers, notably the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. By not closely consulting with President Park regarding the opening to China, Nixon created a strong sense of insecurity for Park and his government. While the Republic of Korea had become a more valuable ally to President Johnson due to its participation in the Vietnam War, this meant much less to the Nixon Administration. Nixon's sights were already set on a post-Vietnam War world where he believed improved relations with the USSR and PRC would lead to decreased tensions (especially nuclear), and a safer, more stable world.

¹¹⁶ Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 144.

3 The United States, South Korea, and the End of the Vietnam War

During his 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon already had announced his plans for “peace with honor” and an end to the war in Vietnam. His strategy ended up focusing on demonstrations of military strength in unpredictable doses, the so-called “Madman Theory,” peace negotiations, and “Vietnamization.” Vietnamization was the process by which the South Vietnamese military would take over the American combat role in Vietnam with additional training, while at the same time U.S. and allied country troops slowly withdrew. In this chapter I will show how the processes of Vietnamization and peace negotiations increased the estrangement between the U.S. and South Korean governments. South Korea’s concerns were largely ignored, with leaders at the high levels of U.S. government failing to take Park Chung-hee’s position into account. This period also saw the United States preventing South Korea from carrying out its own withdrawal from Vietnam.

Gregory Daddis and David Anderson both argue that Vietnamization was a political strategy decided by the Nixon White House that failed to thoughtfully consider the military and political consequences for the South Vietnamese government.¹¹⁷ According to Anderson, Nixon “despised” South Vietnamese leaders and “exhibited no sense of obligation” towards them.¹¹⁸ Instead, Nixon and Kissinger had their eyes on larger prizes. In *Nixon’s War*, Jeffrey Kimball

¹¹⁷ Gregory Daddis, *Withdrawal: Reassessing America’s Final Years in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10 and David L. Anderson, *Vietnamization: Policy, Strategy, Legacy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 34.

¹¹⁸ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 97.

writes that “to Nixon, a satisfactory ending to the war in Vietnam was a prerequisite to his and others’ goal of a postwar American-led economic, political and military association of ‘free’ Pacific Rim states, with South Vietnam at the apex of an arc curving from New Zealand to Japan.”¹¹⁹ Again, it seems that U.S. political grand strategy trumped commitments to U.S. allies such as South Vietnam and South Korea.

In April 1969, Kissinger, on behalf of the White House, tasked the State Department, Defense Department, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to come up with a plan for “Vietnamizing” the war.¹²⁰ The guidance stated that the United States and third country “free world” allies should move toward support roles only.¹²¹ Once completed, Kissinger passed Secretary of Defense’s Laird’s official response (coordinated with the State Department and CIA) to President Nixon on June 23, noting the possible drawbacks of withdrawing too quickly.

“The longer-term plans on Vietnamization provide a series of alternatives for U.S. troop reductions with varying timetables from 18 months to 42 months, and varying ceilings for the residual American troops in South Vietnam ranging from 260,000 to 306,000. Secretary Laird feels that even a 42 month timetable with withdrawals up to 290,000 forces would probably result in interruption of pacification progress. A much faster withdrawal could result in more serious problems for pacification and allied military capabilities, as well as possible adverse effects on the GVN, in the absence of reciprocal North Vietnamese withdrawals.”¹²²

Clearly there were military concerns of how Vietnamization and troop withdrawals might have negative results for the government of South Vietnam.

Laird understood the political need to withdraw American troops from Vietnam, as his report to the president intimated. “As more of the combat role is assumed by the Vietnamese, the

¹¹⁹ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 38. See also Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

¹²⁰ Kissinger himself, however, remained strongly opposed to Vietnamization because he felt it weakened his hand in peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. For more information, see Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018), 28-36.

¹²¹ Memo, Kissinger to Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and CIA, April 10, 1969, Nixon Library (online).

¹²² Memo, Kissinger to President Nixon, 23 June 1969, CIA Library Reading Room (online).

United States and troop contributing countries gradually will reorient their role to encompass reserve, support, and advisory functions only. This will lead to a phased reduction of US and troop contributing countries forces.”¹²³ Their prediction of how South Korea would react to Vietnamization was that the ROK might offer additional troops due to its interest in “political, economic, and military cooperation” in Southeast Asia and for a chance to position itself well to be a key player in reconstruction efforts after the end of the war.¹²⁴ Leadership in Washington still believed that for Korea the benefits of staying in Vietnam outweighed the drawbacks.

There were many reasons to believe that South Vietnam’s President Nguyen Van Thieu would have serious concerns regarding Vietnamization. Laird visited Thieu in March 1969 and started to prepare the Saigon regime for Vietnamization. However, Thieu was taken aback and felt the conditions had changed dramatically from what he had been “promised” by LBJ. Laird then reportedly gave Thieu a lecture on U.S. politics in what David Anderson says, “conveys a dark tone of neocolonial patronizing in Laird’s approach to an ally whose interests the United States claimed to be defending.”¹²⁵ Unfortunately, the United States appears to have treated its ally in a condescending and dismissive way in regards to a decision that would decide the lives and fates of the Thieu, his government and the population of South Vietnam.

The Nixon administration went on with Vietnamization plans despite Thieu’s protests. In fact, Thieu was even enlisted to help make its public announcement. Nixon met with President Thieu on Midway Island in June 1969 where they jointly described the strategy for what would become known as Vietnamization. Nixon put words in Thieu’s mouth, making it sound like the “troop replacements” were his idea. “President Thieu informed me that the progress of the

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Memo, Kissinger to President Nixon, 23 June 1969, CIA Library Reading Room (online).

¹²⁵ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 23.

training program and the equipping program for South Vietnamese forces had been so successful that he could now recommend that the United States begin to replace U.S. combat forces with Vietnamese forces.” Conveniently, Nixon announced, this also matched the recommendations of the U.S. military.¹²⁶ Together, they told of an upcoming withdrawal of 25,000 U.S. troops.¹²⁷

With the issue of U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam, we see that the United States failed to consult even the government of South Vietnam, the ones with the most at stake, much less the ROK. In 1969, according to Ambassador Bui Diem, troop withdrawal plans “had never been officially submitted to the South Vietnamese for their approval or for some counterproposal.”¹²⁸ Despite these public proclamations of solidarity and unity, historians believe that Thieu was presented with a fait accompli during the meeting at Midway.¹²⁹

Even before the announcement of Vietnamization, the Republic of Korea was concerned about behind left behind as residual troops while the U.S. troops departed. In a conversation with President Nixon in April 1969, ROK Prime Minister Chung Il-kwon reportedly said that “it would be political disaster for the Korean government if the U.S. withdraws its forces and Korea does not do likewise. He stressed the need for close consultation on the question. The President said that we would of course consult closely with Korea on this and other problems of mutual interest.”¹³⁰ Unfortunately, this would not turn out to be the case.

With the president adopting such new policies in Asia, Nixon needed to explain his views on Vietnamization plans, the Nixon Doctrine, and North Korean threats to his South Korean allies. In late August 1969, President Nixon met with President Park in San Francisco to “explain

¹²⁶ Nixon, *Public Papers*, 443.

¹²⁷ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 27.

¹²⁸ Diem quoted in Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 27. See also Diem’s memoir: Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

¹²⁹ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 33.

¹³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, ROK Prime Minister Chung Il-kwon and President Nixon, April 1, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 5.

a few items on my new policy toward Korea.”¹³¹ The President described key issues that worried Park, trying to reassure him. On North Korea, President Nixon said that “if North Korea provokes another provocative incident, we will react, are prepared to react and will take measures harsher than the enemy provocation.”¹³² On the Nixon Doctrine, he reassured Park that “the U.S. will fulfill its treaty obligations with the Asian countries concerned. We will honor the U.S.-ROK Defense Treaty.” Notably, here he does make any promises about maintaining certain levels of U.S. troops on the peninsula. Finally, President Nixon explained Vietnamization. At the time, Park assured Nixon that the ROK would stay in Vietnam as long as needed. President Park said, “It is my thinking that unless we are requested by South Vietnam or the U.S. we will continue to station our troops in Vietnam.”¹³³ Nixon concluded by reassuring Park, “We are partners in our common struggle...I will inform you of all the measures we plan to take on Vietnam as they occur.”¹³⁴ As history would have it, neither would fully keep their promises.

As early as 1970, some of the issues of a fast-paced U.S. military withdrawal already were beginning to show as U.S. military leaders found the South Vietnam military wrestling with long-term problems including a lack of competent leadership.¹³⁵ Anderson finds that key challenges of Vietnamization were training and equipping the South Vietnamese to fully take over engineering requirements and helicopter and signal management.¹³⁶ Between 1970 and

¹³¹ Memorandum of Conversation, President Nixon and President Park, August 21, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 35.

¹³² Memorandum of Conversation, President Nixon and President Park, August 21, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 35.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 37. For problems on implementing Vietnamization at the provincial level, see Kevin M. Boylan, *Losing Binh Dinh: The Failure of Pacification and Vietnamization, 1969-1971* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016) and Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build as Well as Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

¹³⁶ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 39.

1971, the RVNAF took over helicopter responsibilities from the United States.¹³⁷ Helicopter support would become a key issue for remaining ROK troops in Vietnam.

By 1971, the ROK was seriously considering a withdrawal from Vietnam. To compare, the Filipino troops were the first “free world” allies to leave Vietnam with the majority of troops gone by early 1970. Next would be New Zealand who withdraw from Vietnam in March 1971. The Thai military would complete its redeployment in February 1972 followed by most of the Australian troops (not including an Army Training Team) who departed in March 1972.¹³⁸ These countries would leave minimal troops in country in minor and advisory roles.

In April 1971, Seoul informed Washington of their plans to reduce troops strength by one combat division beginning in October 1971. In a memo from John Holdridge of the NSC to Kissinger, he suggests, “we would probably not wish the ROKs to begin their withdrawals until a decent period of time after the GVN elections.”¹³⁹ Holdridge followed up three days later with a report on his trip to South Korea in early March where he reported telling relevant U.S. Embassy staff that “there was no compelling interest in the White House in getting the ROK troops out of Vietnam.” The Ambassador’s take was that Park “felt for political reasons he had to follow the example of other TCCs [third country combatants] carrying out withdrawals from Vietnam, but would probably stop with the removal of the ROK marine brigade” as any further reductions would “mean that the provisions of the Brown Letter on U.S. payment of MAP transfer costs would no longer apply.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Washington seems to have been alright with allowing Park

¹³⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁸ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 159-166.

¹³⁹ Memo, John H. Holdridge to Kissinger, April 13, 1971, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 89.

¹⁴⁰ Report by John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff, “Report on Visit to Korea and Japan,” March 2-5, 1971, April 16, 1971, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 90.

to remove one marine brigade, but would not approve of any further reductions. Washington also assumed Park would not attempt further reductions due to the monetary benefits.

News of ROK troop reductions in Vietnam were no secret to the public. In July 1971, *US News and World Report* disclosed, “discussions are now going on between South Korea and the Saigon Government that are expected to lead to the withdrawal of one Korean division before June 1972.”¹⁴¹ U.S. Embassy Seoul told Washington in August 1971 that the Government of South Korea had told them that “firm plans have been completed for withdrawal 10,000 troops consisting of a marine brigade and “some supporting forces.” The South Korean government source cited pressure “from several quarters” to withdraw more quickly from Vietnam.¹⁴²

As these ROK plans came to light, the United States government needed to decide how to respond and how much they would press for ROK troops to stay in Vietnam. In June 1971, Kissinger forwarded the president the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State’s recommendations for continued ROK troop support in Vietnam.¹⁴³ The views of the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense did not complement each other. While Secretary of State Rogers recommended the continued presence of two ROK division through 1972, Secretary of Defense Laird instead believed all ROK forces should be withdrawn in 1971 in order to allow the funds used to support them to go somewhere else more useful.¹⁴⁴ According to Kissinger, South

¹⁴¹ “Vietnam Pullout: Allies Join the Parade Home,” *US News and World Report*, July 19, 1971, Pike Collection.

¹⁴² Cable, US Embassy Seoul to Secretary of State, August 6, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library. As early as 1966, the opposition party, fairly weak at that point, offered several critiques of Korea increasing its participation in Vietnam including higher per capita participation in the war by South Koreans versus Americans, threats to the homeland from North Korea, possibility to strain relations with neutral nations, other allies receiving positive treatment yet not sending troops to Vietnam (notably Japan), the possibility of North Korea entering the war on the North Vietnamese side thus prolonging the war, the potential to prevent Korean reunification, and no attempts made by the ROK government to assess public opinion on the matter. See Jungwon Alexander Kim, “Korean Participation in the Vietnam War,” *World Affairs* 129, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 32-33.

¹⁴³ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, June 18, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Vietnam had asked the ROK to keep their troops in country through 1972.¹⁴⁵ It is unclear how much the South Vietnamese request to keep Korean troops in Vietnam was their own or the result of U.S. pressure. However, it seems that it was sincere due to the realization that Vietnamization was not truly working and the South Vietnamese were not ready to fight the war on their own.

In the end, Kissinger recommended to the President that the ROK troops stay through 1972, which is the option the President ultimately selected and ordered his Cabinet members to carry out.¹⁴⁶ The White House put forward National Security Decision Memorandum 113 (NSDM 113) on June 23, 1971 directing the U.S. government to “support the continued presence of two ROK divisions in South Vietnam through CY1972.” The White House noted however that the ROKFV would not receive any additional funding and “negotiations [between the Vietnamese and Koreans] should stress the requirement of improved ROK performance in the combat role in South Vietnam.”¹⁴⁷ NSDM 113 would be the key document used to impose the U.S. will on the Republic of Korea and induce them to stay longer in Vietnam than they would have preferred.

Receiving this news, however, did not please Secretary Laird who basically thought the ROK troops were a waste of money. It did not take Secretary of Defense Laird long to dissent, writing three days later that, “General Abrams reported to me last January in blunt and emphatic terms that the ROKs ‘were not pulling their weight...The benefits derived from the ROK’s presence in RVN may be positive, but are almost assuredly small.” Laird added that the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, June 18, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁴⁷ National Security Decision Memorandum 113, June 23, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 96.

approximately \$250-300 million spent on ROK troops “diverted to the RVNAF would in Abrams’ judgment represent a bigger something.” Laird insisted the money be spent elsewhere.

Yet, Laird’s dissent did not sway Kissinger nor Nixon, and Kissinger took the opportunity to discredit Laird’s view as “faulty,” positing himself as Nixon’s most trusted advisor. Kissinger passed on Laird’s views to the President but dismissed Laird as building his argument on a mistaken premise, that North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (NLF) would continue a policy of protracted war.¹⁴⁸ Kissinger additionally quoted a recent cable from U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker saying that Thieu believed it was “important that the Korean troops remain until 1972. He feels quite strongly that the Vietnamese will not have the capability nor the manpower to fill the gap left by the departure of the Koreans earlier.”¹⁴⁹ Thieu it seems was hoping to slow down the process of Vietnamization.

In the end Kissinger recommended a compromise to continue to keep ROK troops through 1972 but to comply with Laird’s suggestion that information be gathered on how funds could be used if freed up by an ROK troop departure (a token gesture, it seems.)¹⁵⁰ As usual, President Nixon was to follow Kissinger’s recommendation over that of his Cabinet.¹⁵¹ Nixon in reply to Laird said simply “my decision reported in NSDM 113 that the U.S. will support the continued presence of two ROK divisions through CY 1972 is reaffirmed,” largely ignoring Laird’s concerns. He did however end by throwing Laird a bone, saying that the ROK redeployments could be considered after the 1971-72 dry season “and I would welcome your suggestions and

¹⁴⁸ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, July 6, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁴⁹ Department of State cable 1971 Saigon 7109 as quoted in Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, July 6, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁰ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, July 6, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵¹ Memo, President Nixon to Secretary of Defense Laird, July 10, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

those from MACV on how additional resources might be used to improve the security situation in South Vietnam.”¹⁵²

Yet, the White House continued to worry that the ROK would redeploy its troops from Vietnam sooner than hoped for. In September 1971, NSC staff reviewing the ROK forces situation in Vietnam warned that “if events are allowed to take their own course, there is a good chance the ROKs [South Korean government] will announce further redeployments [beyond the one marine brigade] in CY 1972 after President Nixon announces our redeployment plans for 1972.” They added that “several signals point to future ROK withdrawals in CY 1972 that may not be consistent with NSDM 113.”¹⁵³ The staff offered two choices to Kissinger: either let the ROK and South Vietnam work it out between themselves or inform the two governments “of the terms of NSDM 113, i.e. we want two divisions to stay through CY 1972 and we are willing to continue our support at past levels accordingly.”¹⁵⁴ How much would the United States intervene to keep ROK troops in Vietnam? A lot, it seems.

Kissinger, replying on behalf of the president, told his rival, Secretary of State Rogers, that the State Department needed to relay a message to South Vietnam and the ROK that it was “the view of the United States government that two ROK divisions should remain in South Vietnam through 1972.”¹⁵⁵ This was done with the assumption that the two countries would feel

¹⁵² Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of Defense Laird, July 10, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 99.

¹⁵³ Memo, K. Wayne Smith and John Holdridge to Henry Kissinger, September 1, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁵⁴ Memo, K. Wayne Smith and John H. Holdridge to Kissinger, September 1, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 105.

¹⁵⁵ Memo, Kissinger to Secretary of State, September 23, 1971, Box H224, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library. According to historian Robert Brigham, “Throughout his time in the White House, he [Kissinger] did what he could to undermine Rogers in the eyes of the president.” Brigham, *Reckless*, 9. Carolyn Eisenberg agrees, writing, “By spring [1970], Kissinger’s rivalry with the Secretary of State was careening out of control. With Nixon’s blessing, the National Security Advisor had taken over large areas of American foreign policy, keeping Rogers in the dark about such crucial items as negotiations with North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.” Carolyn Eisenberg, “Remembering Nixon’s War,” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 266.

obliged to comply with the wishes of the United States. Officials at the highest levels of the Defense and State Departments would be instructing their South Vietnamese and ROK allies on the preferred outcome. Yet, U.S. government authorities may have underestimated Park's desire to get out of Vietnam.

While the U.S. government was deliberating how best to encourage the ROK to stay in Vietnam, a key advisor to Park met with Deputy National Security Advisor Alexander Haig in Washington explaining that "President Park is now disenchanted with his country's involvement in Vietnam." The special advisor to President Park, Pyong-choon Hahm, added that the South Koreans were unimpressed with the South Vietnamese will to fight. "South Korea had assumed the South Vietnamese would fight the threat of a Communist take over as fiercely as they had in the 1950s." Additionally hinting at why the ROK was looking to leave Vietnam, he said that "Korea became involved in large part to satisfy its obligation to the U.S. Now, however, South Korea finds itself on the receiving end of much criticism from abroad – its troops' behavior in South Vietnam has given rise to an international image of Korea as bloodthirsty."¹⁵⁶ Mr. Hahm said that he himself had been advising President Park to get out of Vietnam."¹⁵⁷

Yet the United States did not want Korea to leave Vietnam and would insist it stay, and try to shame them into staying by saying that to withdraw all troops now would be irresponsible. Haig replied to Hahm that they must act responsibly in Vietnam and "leave Vietnam in a way that South Vietnamese forces will be able to defend the country." He told Hahm that "this means that South Korea should plan on leaving its forces there for at least the coming year." Haig warned that "if South Korea precipitously pulls its forces out, thereby undercutting the Nixon

¹⁵⁶ South Korean troops in Vietnam have been accused of multiple atrocities against Vietnamese civilians. For more information, see pages 59-60 of this document.

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Alexander Haig and Pyong-Choon Hahm, September 1, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976: Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 106.

Doctrine's reliance on Asian nations' defending themselves, this action would bring even greater criticism on South Korea." As Haig concluded, "we have all come too far and have invested too much in Indochina to give up the ghost now."¹⁵⁸ While Haig threatened international criticism if Korea were to leave Vietnam, the Koreans must also have sensed greater unsaid threats of various economic and political losses in their relationship with the United States.

Yet Haig's message to the ROK government does not seem to have percolated back to the important players in Seoul, or perhaps it was just a message they did not want to hear. In a U.S. Embassy cable in November 1971, Ambassador Bunker wrote that the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs said to him that while "I [the Ambassador] was undoubtedly aware that GVN had requested two division forces to remain in Viet-Nam through 1972," that was not the ROK government plan. Despite the GVN request, the "ROK plans are to withdraw from Viet-Nam remainder of ROK forces by end of 1972."¹⁵⁹ The Ambassador did his best to explain that this went against the wishes of the U.S. and South Vietnamese government and "closed by repeating the belief that retention of ROK forces in South Viet-Nam through '72 was necessary." While the ROK denied publicizing the additional withdrawals from Vietnam, the Ambassador mentioned that he had already seen newspaper articles with regard to this.¹⁶⁰

Koreans continued to insist on their serious worries related to postponing the redeployment from Vietnam. The acting Foreign Minister Yuk Sok-hon described Korean key concerns in two main areas: the PRC joining the United Nations and potentially using the ROK presence in Vietnam against them and security on the Korean peninsula. While the United States

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Alexander Haig and Pyong-Choon Hahm, September 1, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976: Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 106.

¹⁵⁹ Telegram from the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, November 3, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 114.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

continued to argue that it was not disengaging from South Korea and Asia, the ROK government admitted this was their worry, and especially if this included reductions in U.S. Forces Korea, that this would embolden North Korea.¹⁶¹

In December 1971, South Korea began its planned Vietnam deployment of approximately 11,000 ROK troops including a Marine brigade. This was still at the level that Washington had indicated would be acceptable, but the United States was adamant about preventing further ROK deployments. As these redeployments began, Washington sent guidance to Seoul that this deployment should be the last for a while. “In January 1972, the U.S. Ambassador at Seoul informed President Park that the U.S. desired the two ROK divisions to remain in Vietnam through CY1972.”¹⁶² Yet, Park was not one to quietly take directions from the United States.

Despite the wishes of the United States, the South Koreans continued tough negotiations regarding their troops in Vietnam. In February 1972, the ROK presented the United States with an ultimatum that if it did not receive full assurances of support for Korean troop security in Vietnam, they would begin withdrawing their two remaining divisions starting in June 1972.¹⁶³ Reacting to this news, Kissinger tasked the NSC Under Secretaries to prepare a report. (The Under Secretaries Committee, established in January 1969 when the National Security Council was reorganized by the Nixon Administration, played a key role in creating and implementing National Security Study Memorandums.¹⁶⁴) The report would be on trilateral “ROK/GVN/U.S.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁶³ Memo, John Holdridge and Richard Kennedy to Henry Kissinger, March 28, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁶⁴ “Nixon Library Finding Aids: National Security Council Institutional Files(H-Files),” *Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum*, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/finding-aids/national-security-council-institutional-files-h-files> (Accessed June 10, 2020). The Under Secretary of State chaired the committee which included the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), the Director of Central Intelligence, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also see: “National Security Memorandum 2,” *Federation of American Scientists*, January 20, 1969, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm-2.pdf> (Accessed May 20, 2020).

negotiations concerning the continued presence of ROK forces in South Vietnam.” It was clear Kissinger assumed the United States should play a key role in these negotiations. The United States also sought to keep any other matters from putting President Park in a bad mood. Kissinger warned that “in the interim the President has directed that no steps should be taken vis-à-vis the ROK which could adversely affect its willingness to retain two full divisions in South Vietnam through at least CY 1972.”¹⁶⁵

At the same time, U.S. government staff was evaluating the effectiveness of ROK troops in Vietnam. An NSC study seemed to support Laird’s view that, at least as of late, the ROK performance in Vietnam was less than exemplary. An assessment by the NSC Under Secretaries committee in March 1972 found that “during the first few years in Viet-Nam ROK performance was generally good. For the past several years, however, offensive combat operations declined and they have relied heavily on static defense within their assigned areas of operations. During their deployment in Viet-Nam, ROK forces have taken more than 11,000 casualties of which about 4,000 were killed in action.”¹⁶⁶

Behind the scenes, the Koreans continued to threaten to leave Vietnam. As of March 21, the NSC Under Secretaries committee wrote, “Publicly, the ROKG has served its position, stating that the question of ROK forces in Viet-Nam will be decided in consultation with the United States and GVN. Privately, the ROKG has told us that they are going ahead with plans for redeploying their two divisions to Korea beginning June 1, 1972.”¹⁶⁷ The Koreans were out

¹⁶⁵ Memo, Kissinger to Secretary of State Rogers, February 16, 1972, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 126.

¹⁶⁶ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

to play hardball in their negotiations with the United States, perhaps to see how badly the United States wanted this outcome.

The U.S. government sought to understand the ROKs position and why they were fighting in Vietnam. The NSC committee found the ROK saw Vietnam as payback for aid in the Korean War, a way to deflect communist ambitions from Korea, and as highly profitable. Additionally, “the ROKG also views its assistance to the U.S. and Viet-Nam as placing some obligation on the United States to maintain a U.S. military presence in the Korea and as adding to the general reservoir of good will which exists in U.S. public and government circles toward Korea.”¹⁶⁸ Therefore, South Korea hoped its deployment in Vietnam would earn it credit, both monetary and in favoritism, from the United States. The U.S. government analysis, however, seems outdated. By this point the ROK government seems to have believed that it had exhausted the benefits of sending troops to Vietnam and now hoped to bring them back in order to assuage domestic political opposition and to bolster security against North Korean threats.

In analyzing why the ROK wanted to withdraw from Vietnam, U.S. government leaders understood that the ROK was very worried about a growing international image as “mercenaries” and a worry that continued deployment could negatively affect its relationship with the PRC. This at a time when other nations such as the U.S. and Japan were engaging with the PRC, thus gaining a more favorable position with the PRC who would now have power at the United Nations. Finally, according to an NSC report, “the ROKG is genuinely concerned about the security of its forces in Viet-Nam. It does not have confidence in Vietnamese military forces and has made clear it looks to the United States and not the GVN for support. It does not want to be in the position of taking the brunt of a North Viet-Nam attack once U.S. combat forces have

¹⁶⁸ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

been reduced to minimum levels.”¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, it seems the ROK troops also did not have a very positive view of South Vietnamese forces.

By March 1972, the time of the committee’s report, only two brigades of U.S. troops remained in Vietnam, leading to a larger role for the South Vietnamese and South Korean military.¹⁷⁰ It was around this time that the North Vietnamese leader Le Duan decided to attempt a large-scale operation, this time with his conventional troops invading the South, in order to weaken South Vietnamese morale and disturb President Nixon’s reelection campaign.¹⁷¹ This became known as North Vietnam’s “Spring (or Easter) Offensive.” According to historian Dale Andrade, the Vietnamese military in 1972 had many of the same problems it had had for the past decade. Andrade writes, “the Easter Offensive showed that this partnership [between the United States and South Vietnamese military] could work, but only as long as American firepower remained abundantly available.”¹⁷² Many ARVN soldiers suffered from low morale at this point in the war as they saw their U.S. allies leaving the battlefield.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁷⁰ Hosub Shim, “The Battle of An Khe Pass (1972): The Implications of the South Korean Army’s Pyrrhic Victory in the Vietnamization Phase of the Vietnam War,” *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* 1, no. 36 (2019): 6.

¹⁷¹ Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam’s American War: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 191-194. Nixon’s take on this may have been a bit overly self-congratulating regarding the results of his strategies. In 1985, Nixon wrote, “Our pacification and Vietnamization programs completely transformed the war in Vietnam. The military picture we faced in 1972 was almost entirely different from the one we faced even as late as 1970. We had countered the Communists’ strategy of guerilla war so effectively that they abandoned it.” Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 140.

¹⁷² Dale Andrade, *America’s Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi’s 1972 Easter Offensive* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 487-488. Historian James Willbanks notes that by the early 1970s it was clear Vietnamization had failed. He writes, “Clearly the process of Vietnamization began too late, stifled South Vietnamese initiative and induced dependence on U.S. support, and failed to address the ultimate weakness that led to the ultimate downfall of the RVNAF.” James Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 285. For an important South Vietnamese political view, see Nguyen Cao Ky, *How We Lost the Vietnam War* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002).

¹⁷³ Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 100.

The NSC committee listed its arguments on why the United States should press South Korea to halt its plans for redeployment. “At the present time, however, the ROK presence in four strategic provinces of Central Viet-Nam is important to GVN capabilities to defend its territory and population. For this reason and because the ROKG has gone so far in its plans for withdrawal of ROK forces, we cannot risk waiting for a further assessment of GVN progress but must continue negotiations for retention of ROK forces.”¹⁷⁴ At this point, U.S. troops were not seen as an option to take over these duties. The committee added,

“President Thieu attaches great importance to the retention of the ROK forces...He might become more discouraged if, so soon after the U.S.-PRC summit talks, we were to fail to make a serious effort to persuade the ROK to maintain its troops in Viet-Nam at least through this year. Thieu has told Ambassador Bunker that, if the ROK forces are withdrawn this year, he will ask our support in forming two new ARVN divisions to take their place. This raises questions beyond the scope of this paper such as the unusually high desertion rates and low on-board strengths in the present ARVN combat units, and the strain this additional requirement would place on GVN manpower and economic resources.”¹⁷⁵

A key issue was helicopter support for remaining ROK troops. “While it is possible that the Vietnamese could provide limited helicopter support to ROKFV in an emergency,” the committee wrote, “the provision of such support on a routine basis is not feasible. VNAF requirements to provide helicopter support to RVNAF in all four Military Regions of the RVN, Cambodia and Laos; the modest helicopter mobility capability of VNAF; and the programmed reduction in U.S. helicopter support, already tax VNAF to the limit of its ability.”¹⁷⁶ The South Vietnamese air force, at the time made up of 44 squadrons and approximately 42,000 personnel,

¹⁷⁴ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

was just not ready to pick up the slack of departing U.S. troops that had been providing helicopter support to the ROK troops.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the United States discussed how much American support it was willing to provide to the remaining ROK troops. “As U.S. redeployments continue, retention of U.S. personnel spaces for the support of ROKFV must be weighed against the impact on the security of remaining U.S. forces, Vietnamization, the advisory effort, the air war, and support to RVNAF. U.S. support for the ROKFV could become a sensitive issue in the United States if the remaining U.S. military presence prevent an ROK troop withdrawal.” The committee suggests a compromise plan of U.S. support however adds that when U.S. forces reach a 15,000 level no U.S. support can be provided to ROK troops. Finally, in judging Park’s decision criteria, the committee concluded, “If President Park is to be persuaded to retain two ROK divisions in Vietnam through CY 1972, he must be able to point to specific benefits for the ROK because of the concerns discussed earlier. His decision depends more on political considerations than it does on the satisfaction of the ROK military support requests.”¹⁷⁸

The final alternative, which the committee did not seriously consider, was to offer no objection to ROKs planned withdrawals. Those such as Laird saw benefits of allowing the ROK troops to withdraw as “this would allow the establishment of a balanced U.S. force structure which could concentrate exclusively on the success of Vietnamization rather than dedicating a substantial number of U.S. personnel spaces to support of a force which is marginally effective.”¹⁷⁹ However, the option was not considered because “the disadvantages are the

¹⁷⁷ The South Vietnamese Air Force had however grown since the Tet Offensive in 1968 when it consisted of 17 squadrons and about 16,000 personnel. Major A.J.C. La Valle, *The Vietnamese Air Force: 1951-1975: An Analysis of Its Role in Combat and Fourteen Hours at Koh Tang* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1985), 41-42.

¹⁷⁸ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

psychological impact of withdrawal on the GVN and the inability to reverse the process if the developing military situation would make a ROK troop presence necessary. There is also the strong likelihood that President Thieu would press us for support in the creation of the two ARVN divisions he has already said would be necessary to replace the ROK forces. This support, if provided, would be an added charge to Vietnamization.”¹⁸⁰ The fact was that Vietnamization was already a strained process and the South Vietnamese military were not ready to take on any added burdens. At this point, the United States was also not willing to pick up the slack.

Little by little, the South Korean leadership seems to have eased up on its negotiating strategy. As one example, they lowered their requirements for U.S. troop support. According to a March 27 memorandum from Secretary Laird to the President, “The ROK Minister of National Defense told Michaelis [Commander of U.S. Forces Korea] that he would no longer insist upon the retention of two U.S. infantry brigades while ROK forces remained in Viet-Nam, and that the presence of some U.S. ground combat forces would suffice.” Still, two assault helicopter companies, and the availability of one assault support helicopter company, would be needed.¹⁸¹ Laird added that with this compromise, the United States would be able to continue to provide support for ROK troops until U.S. troops levels went below 30,000.¹⁸²

Finally, Laird told Nixon that Park had shared concerns with him that he “could face severe criticism from his own public if he were to agree to keep ROK troops in Viet-Nam after all other third country troops have departed.”¹⁸³ The Koreans did not want to be the only ones

¹⁸⁰ Memo, NSC Under Secretaries Committee to President Nixon, March 21, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁸¹ Memo Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, March 27, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

left holding the ball. Some of the political fallout for Park's continued deployment of ROK troops to Vietnam found its way into the press. According to the *Washington Post*, "South Korea's Opposition New Democratic Party demanded today an early withdrawal of Korean forces from Vietnam to improve Korea's own defense posture against North Korea."¹⁸⁴

In the end, the United States decided to offer South Korea what it needed to keep its troops in Vietnam. The President decided in April that "in order to facilitate the retention of the two Korean divisions in South Vietnam through the end of CY-1972" the United States would make assurances to support their troops such as providing air support, logistics support, construction materials, and to prepare contingency plans to evacuate ROK troops in the case of a contingency.¹⁸⁵ What the ROK did not know is that they would be asked to do some of their heaviest fighting in the last few months of the war.

With few U.S. troops left, and Vietnamization still a work in progress, Korean troops would face some of their bloodiest battles of the war. In April 1972, Korea would also face its largest battle thus far in Vietnam with Hill 638, and the An Khe Pass near highway 19. The highway was an important road linking supplies between Qui Nhon and the Pleiku-Kontum area. North Vietnamese had set up bases in a nearby hill and had been ambushing the highway. By mid-April the North Vietnamese had blown up a bridge and succeeded in blocking highway 19. This was followed on March 30, 1972, by a North Vietnamese attack on ARVN (South Vietnamese) troops. Finally ROK troops retook Hill 638 and were able to reopen the An Khe

¹⁸⁴ "Vietnam Pullout Urged in Seoul," *Associated Press*, May 7, 1972.

¹⁸⁵ National Security Decision Memorandum 161, National Security Council to Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Laird, April 5, 1972, Box H232, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

Pass on April 26. Official accounts list the number of ROK casualties as 75 killed and 222 wounded, however the actual numbers are likely higher.¹⁸⁶

As the “Easter Offensive” continued in spring of 1972, President Nixon appealed to President Park that “at this moment of great trial for the South Vietnamese people, our two countries have a special responsibility in providing whatever assistance we can in our common efforts to defeat North Vietnam’s aggression.”¹⁸⁷ Nixon praised ROK troops for their brave fighting in the An Khe pass, yet he added politely that it had occurred to him and his advisors that “in this critical and perhaps decisive phase, if your two divisions were to expand their current area of operations it would provide a significant additional contribution.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, we need you to do more. Was this an additional “Koreanization” of the Vietnam War in order to support the “Vietnamization?” By this time, the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam, now mostly advisors to the ARVN, was down to approximately 70,000.¹⁸⁹

Domestically, political pressures mounted and the Park government continued to insist it was working on getting out of Vietnam. In July, South Korea’s Ministry of Defense was still telling the National Assembly that South Korea was trying to withdraw all its troops from Vietnam “as soon as possible.”¹⁹⁰ They also publicly voiced frustration with the United States

¹⁸⁶ Shim, “The Battle of An Khe Pass,” 1-35. Shim identifies several areas where ROK troops missed opportunities to lessen casualties, largely due to flagging morale among ROK troops. He also finds that at this point of Vietnamization, there were serious difficulties in facilitating South Vietnamese and South Korean military cooperation as the role of the United States had been so greatly reduced. For a first person account of the battle from the perspective of an ROK soldier, see Hwang Jin-Soon, “The An Khe Pass Battle,” *International War Veterans Poetry Archive*, March 2004, <https://iwvpa.net/hwangjs/index.php> (accessed July 4, 2020). At the time, the Stars and Stripes newspaper also reported that Korean casualties at An Khe were likely close to twice the official numbers. “ROK Casualties Higher?,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 29, 1972.

¹⁸⁷ Letter, President Nixon to President Park, April 27, 1972, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, Nixon Library.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ William Gardner Bell, *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Year 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1974).

¹⁹⁰ “Seoul Sets Vietnam Pullout,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1972.

regarding Vietnamization. In August, the *L.A. Times* reported that, “South Korean Prime Minister Kim Chong Pil indicated today that the South Korean government was irritated by lack of information from the United States concerning negotiations in Vietnam, where 40,000 Korean troops are serving.” “A one-sided withdrawal of U.S. forces would only hinder what we are trying to do in negotiating with North Korea” said the Prime Minister.¹⁹¹ The ROK did not feel like the United States was involving it sufficiently in the Vietnamization process, despite Nixon’s recent requests for more aggressive combat from ROK troops.

During this time, as we shall see in the next chapter, another key bilateral issue between the United States and South Korea was gaining more and more attention—the issue of the reduction of U.S. Forces Korea. As much as the U.S. government tried to keep the issues of ROK troop withdrawals from Vietnam and U.S. troop reductions in Korea separate, the press continued to link them. The *Washington Post* in September claimed there had been a deal made whereby the South Koreans would postpone the withdrawal of their troops from Vietnam in exchange for a U.S. promise to keep troops in South Korea until at least 1973. The White House and State Department publicly denied this.¹⁹² Yet, there was no denying that some of South Korea’s most elite troops were kept fighting in Vietnam, instead of defending Korea. President Park saw a clear link between a possible withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea and Korea needing to get its troops back from Vietnam to take their place.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Sam Jameson, “Seoul Peeved Over U.S. Moves on War,” *L.A. Times*, August 20, 1972.

¹⁹² Richard Halloran, “Koreans Report Deal on Vietnam: Delay on Troop Pullout Tied to U.S Pledge in Seoul,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1972.

¹⁹³ According to Min Young Lee, after the United States reduced its forces in South Korea from 64,000 to 40,000, President Park became “aware that South Korea could trust only its own military capabilities to protect vital national interests,” and followed the U.S. example of pulling troops out of Vietnam in order to strengthen deterrence against North Korean threats. Lee, “The Vietnam War,” 422.

By the fall of 1972, there were more Korean troops in South Vietnam than American troops. According to the *Associated Press*, there were 38,000 ROK troops and only 35,900 American troops.¹⁹⁴ The war was continuously being “de-Americanized,” as the process of Vietnamization had first been known. ROKs also greatly outnumbered all of the other “free world” forces in Vietnam besides the United States. Blackburn writes that there were 36,790 ROK troops in Vietnam, along with 40 Thais, 130 Australians, 50 Filipinos, and 50 New Zealanders in Vietnam in December 1972.¹⁹⁵ The results of Vietnamization on ROK troops were also often tragic. Benjamin Engel cites figures that while in 1968, 14,561 Americans and 663 Koreans died in Vietnam, by 1972 there were more Korean casualties than American with 132 U.S. dead and 380 Korean dead. Engel argues that these casualties were a “direct result of the manner in which the withdrawal process took place.”¹⁹⁶

Yet soon after, Park decided that it was time to take matters into his own hands and in late 1972 Defense Minister Yu Chae Hung informed U.S. Ambassador Philip Habib that regardless of the outcome of the ongoing peace negotiations in Paris, South Korea was determined to withdraw all its troops from Vietnam by June 30, 1973¹⁹⁷ Luckily, peace was right around the corner, at least for foreigners fighting on Vietnamese soil. On January 27, 1973, the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the NLF’s Provisional Revolutionary Government finally reached an agreement and signed the Paris Peace Accords ending the

¹⁹⁴ “South Korea Force in Vietnam is Said to Top U.S. Level,” *Associated Press*, October 3, 1972.

¹⁹⁵ Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags,”* 158.

¹⁹⁶ Engel, “Viewing Seoul from Saigon,” 98. Kwak adds that by the end of 1972, “Koreans had been left as residual forces in Vietnam fighting a nearly hopeless war, lacking the American logistical support on which they depended heavily in order to minimize casualties.” Kwak, “The Nixon Doctrine and Yushin Reforms,” 48.

¹⁹⁷ Telegram, Embassy in Korea to Department of State, December 16, 1972, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 171.

Vietnam War.¹⁹⁸ The settlement called for a cease fire—which never came—with the United States promising to withdraw all its troops and military advisors within 60 days. By January 31, 1973, South Korea was beginning its pullout from Vietnam and “hailing” its returning soldiers.¹⁹⁹ The formal end of operations for the South Korean expeditionary force to Vietnam was March 15, 1973.²⁰⁰ The last U.S. troops left Vietnam a couple weeks later on March 29, 1973.

Parallel to Vietnamization, a key component of Nixon’s strategy to ending the Vietnam War was peace negotiations. Looking at the Paris negotiations, the process that allowed for the agreement to be signed mostly left the ROK out. As early as April 1966, the ROK had called for its voice to be heard in peace talks regarding the ongoing war. The *New York Times* reported, “Seoul, Citing Troop Aid, Seeks Voice at Vietnam Peace Parley”²⁰¹ The ROK would continue unsuccessfully to seek a voice, while often the views of the South Vietnamese, the country in which the war was being fought, were not fully considered.²⁰² Nor, in many cases, were they kept fully informed. According to historian David Anderson, while Kissinger worked to maintain

¹⁹⁸ Kissinger describes how newly appointed Ambassador to South Korea, Philip Habib, was tasked “to sell the agreement to South Korea.” Kissinger wrote that the peace agreement, “would be considered a victory by our Korean allies” though this is debatable, especially given Park’s early views on peace negotiations. See Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 347. Also in Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1367-1368.

¹⁹⁹ “South Korea Hails Returning Soldiers as Pullout is Begun,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1973.

²⁰⁰ Baldwin, “Rented Troops,” 36.

²⁰¹ Emerson Chapin, “Seoul, Citing Troop Aid, Seeks Voice at Vietnam Peace Parley,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1966.

²⁰² In fact, during the Johnson administration, Park had requested a seat at the peace negotiations with veto power against any “dishonorable” agreement. According to Gardner and Gittinger, *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, 170, Park “sought an assurance from Johnson that the United States and South Korea would continue the war “until the aggressors and the subversive elements realize that all their attempts are futile” and “an honorable peace is achieved.” To Park, the unconditional surrender of the communist forces should be the only war aim of the allies and their condition for peace.”

Thieu as leader of South Vietnam, “he treated Thieu with disdain and kept the Saigon government totally out of the details of the process.”²⁰³

For example, in May 1969, Nixon announced conditions for a potential peace treaty to allow the NLF a political role in South Vietnam’s government and simultaneous U.S. and North Vietnamese withdrawals. These terms came as quite a shock to the South Vietnamese, as the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington said it was all news to his government.²⁰⁴

Anderson argues that throughout the peace negotiations with Le Duc Tho, Kissinger failed to keep Thieu informed or listen to Thieu’s concerns. Even worse, in October 1972 when Thieu objected to a draft peace agreement that allowed North Vietnamese army units to remain in the South, Kissinger ordered his messenger Haig to tell Thieu that if he didn’t go along with the agreement, the United States would unilaterally disengage from South Vietnam.²⁰⁵ If this was the way the United States treated South Vietnam, the country for which it was supposedly fighting to “save,” one can imagine the disregard it gave to its ROK allies regarding peace negotiations. In the end, Thieu would be left with a much weaker and untenable situation than the Koreans at the end of the Korean War.²⁰⁶ This would help lead to the fall of South Vietnam and the Saigon government in 1975, with Thieu living the rest of his life in exile.

²⁰³ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 29. See also Brigham, *Reckless*, 67, 93, 99-100, 103, 121, 152, 196, 198-199. Brigham adds that in return Thieu also did not trust Kissinger (100, 198).

²⁰⁴ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 24.

²⁰⁵ Anderson, *Vietnamization*, 95. While the United States was unlikely to fully abandon South Vietnam, they had become willing to abandon their terms for peace. By November 1972, Nixon writes, “after several tough negotiating sessions [with the North Vietnamese], I concluded that if we were to reach an agreement, we would have to abandon most of Thieu’s major demands.” Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 156.

²⁰⁶ Thieu, according to historian Pierre Asselin, was very upset that unlike Korea and Europe, no U.S. troops were left to protect the peace. According to Asselin, Thieu said, “This is unprecedented in the history of war, because 28 years after peace was restored in Europe, the United States continues to maintain more than 300,000 troops there, and 18 years after peace was restored in Korea scores of thousands of American troops are still there.” Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 140-141.

Looking back at Korea's time in Vietnam, there are many positive as well as extremely critical assessments of Korea's actions. In general, their tactical military skills seem to have been more highly regarded than the much-maligned South Vietnamese military. According to a 1975 U.S. Army report, ROK troops were thorough in planning, their officers spoke excellent English, and their soldiers had become much more independent and self-confident than in the Korean War.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the troops were disciplined and had an "immaculate appearance."²⁰⁸ As noted earlier, however, the ROK troops had many American critics. Westmoreland and Laird, for example, felt the Koreans were taking it "too easy" and not pulling their weight.

The ROK troops appear to have excelled at pacification projects and localized defense. This may have been due to their logistical needs to stay in a certain area, which would allow them to build stronger ties with the locals. According to the U.S. army report, "Korean combat forces had their greatest success with small unit civic action projects and security operations within their Korean tactical area of responsibility. Complete success eluded the Koreans, however, because of their insufficient co-ordination and co-operation, and the initial impression they made in dealing with the Vietnamese."²⁰⁹ And finally, by one of the most misguided standards of judging success in the Vietnam War, the Korean troops "enjoyed" a very high kill ratio.²¹⁰

Yet, this "very high kill ratio" hinted at a severe problem with ROK troops, the allegations of atrocities.²¹¹ Knowledge of irregular acts seems to have come early. According to

²⁰⁷ Larson and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, 143

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 145.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 159

²¹⁰ Ibid., 147.

²¹¹ In addition to atrocities, historian Guenter Lewy implies that the ROK troops' fighting style also led to a higher than needed civilian casualty rate. According to Lewy, "Because of a dictum from President Park, Westmoreland recalls, all Korean units "were sensitive about keeping casualties down, which resulted in a deliberate approach to operations involving lengthy preparations and heavy preliminary fire." South Vietnamese authorities complained to American officials that in this preliminary fire, they often completely destroyed a hamlet or village, resulting in

Frances FitzGerald, writing in 1972, “for at least two years, the generals of Westmoreland’s staff refused to let even the analysts on contract to the Defense Department investigate the wholesale slaughter of civilians by Korean troops in the course of their “pacification” program.”²¹² The atrocities would also be the reason why Korea’s “forgotten war” would return to South Korean public consciousness. In 1999, the left-leaning and independent *Hankyoreh* newspaper published in its sister magazine a series of articles describing a Korean massacre of Vietnamese civilians.²¹³ This led to a wider discussion of the Vietnam War in Korea, and a backlash by ROK Vietnam War veterans who sacked the offices of the *Hankyoreh*.²¹⁴ It is an issue that continues to be discussed by civil organizations, the media, and through lawsuits filed on behalf of the Vietnamese.

Finally, Koreans were often seen as “in it for the money.” Officials in the United States saw the ROK government was seen as milking negotiations on their troop deployments with the United States for as many benefits it could get, while the soldiers themselves were seen as corrupt, particularly in their exploitation of the U.S. military PX system. The large secret

unnecessarily high civilian deaths. See Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 97. Also see Lewy, *American in Vietnam*, 327 for a description of a massacre, similar to My Lai, committed by Korean troops in Quang Nam province in February 1968. For information on a RAND report on ROK atrocities in Vietnam, see Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2010), 189-191.

²¹² FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 366. For more information on ROK-related civilian casualties in Vietnam, see Thomas Thayer and Gregory Daddis, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 129. Thayer served as a systems analyst for the Office of the Secretary of Defense during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

²¹³ Han, “South Korea and the Vietnam War,” 248. According to historian Charles Armstrong, “The *Hankyoreh Sinmun* was born amid the democratic struggles against South Korea’s military regime in the 1980s as a critical and much-persecuted underground alternative to the government-controlled mass media.” For more on investigations in Korea into ROK troop atrocities in Vietnam see Charles Armstrong, “America’s Korea, Korea’s Vietnam,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, vol. 4 (2001): 529.

²¹⁴ Remco Breuker, “Korea’s Forgotten War: Appropriating and Subverting the Vietnam War in Korean Popular Imaginings,” *Korea Histories* 1, no. 1 (2009): 55. Also see Armstrong, “America’s Korea,” 536. According to Armstrong, on June 27, 2000, several members of the “ROK War Veterans’ Association,” dressed in combat fatigues, began a demonstration in front of *Hankyoreh Sinmun*’s headquarters [in Seoul] in the early afternoon. By 4:00 PM the mob was chanting angry slogans and throwing rocks at the newspaper’s windows. Shortly before 5:00 PM, the group stormed the building, trashing offices, destroying computers and printing equipment, and injuring several workers.”

payments the United States had made to the Koreans for their participation in Vietnam came to light during the Symington Hearings.²¹⁵ The Congressional Symington Subcommittee hearings were led by Senators William Symington (Democrat-Missouri) and J. William Fulbright (Democrat-Arkansas) in 1970. They examined secret payments by the United States to its free world allies in Vietnam. The outrage at the excessive payments to South Korea for its Vietnamese service led Symington to question the need for U.S. troops in Korea. Thus, the outcome was increased pressure in Congress to reduce the size of U.S. forces in South Korea.

South Koreans soldiers also became known for their overuse, and sometimes abuse, of the PX system, the tax-free discount stores located on U.S. military bases. Soldiers often spent their earnings on luxury items at the PX that they could send back to their families to resell. Sometimes this also led to black market activity. In the novel, *The Shadow of Arms*, Vietnam veteran and author Hwang Sok-yong describes extensive black market activity by not only Koreans, but also Americans and Vietnamese.²¹⁶ In the novel, the main character is a Korean soldier tasked with investigating black marketeering. The U.S. government was aware of the corruption, with investigations revealing that “substantial amounts of US funds and property have been diverted from their intended purposes by the ROKFV [Korean Forces in Vietnam].”²¹⁷ As a result, ROK troops were banned from PX stores in 1967 due to their extensive purchases.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ The Symington Subcommittee’s report in December 1970 noted, “The extraordinary payment of special allowances to the Korean, Thai and Filipino forces that were sent to Vietnam – particularly the manner in which the allowances were hidden from the American people – had substantial impact abroad as well as in this country. In particular, the ability of the Executive branch to keep such information hidden, not only from the American people but even from Congress, told the foreign governments concerned what they could expect from our Government in its dealing with its own people...” Quoted in Baldwin, “Rented Troops,” 39. Therefore, the Congress suggested that the United States was encouraging secretive actions and abuse of power by our foreign allies. Indeed, Park would go on to centralize all government power during his “Yushin” period in the 1970s.

²¹⁶ Lee, *Service Economies*, 69. Also see Simeon Man, *Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 103-134

²¹⁷ Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), 354.

²¹⁸ Jo, “Fighting for Peanuts,” 74.

While ROK troops may have taken “easier” assignments and avoided combat during their early deployment to Vietnam, by the last year of the war they were engaging in combat with high casualties in crucial battles needed to advance the cause of the South Vietnamese. The fact they were still needed was added proof that Vietnamization had not been a successful strategy. Coming from a poor country still recovering from its own civil war, it is not surprising that many took advantage of the legitimate and illegitimate financial opportunities offered by service in Vietnam. Atrocities are a troubling and difficult legacy of their service in Vietnam and need to be examined more closely. Given the high level of anti-communist propaganda imposed on South Koreans in their own country, it is not unlikely that they dehumanized the NLF enemy. Their relationship with the locals was often more complicated as some saw a reflection of themselves as young children non-combatants during the Korean War.²¹⁹

With the end of the war, American prisoners of war (POWs) came home to a celebratory reunion with their families. More English-research still needs to be done on Korean POWs of the Vietnam War. While in 1973, the ROK commander in Vietnam assured the Korean public that due their bravery, “there was not a single Korean POW,” it was not long before some ROK POWs were found and returned and the ROK government had to backtrack on this statement. According to the left leaning *Hankyoreh* newspaper, some missing Korean soldiers from the Vietnam War were also later identified in North Korea.²²⁰ Many soldiers both in the United States and Korea would also continue to deal with issues related to the war such as trauma and health effects from exposure to Agent Orange. The United States lost 58,220 of its troops in Vietnam, while South Korea lost 4,687 soldiers.²²¹

²¹⁹ Jo, “Fighting for Peanuts,” 81.

²²⁰ 박 태균, “포로 없다더니...베트남 파병 장병이 평양에 나타나,” *한겨레*, December 12, 2014.

²²¹ Armstrong, “America’s Korea,” 532.

Leaders of both countries faced different crises, with Nixon losing his office and Park becoming nearly all-powerful domestically. The Watergate scandal implicated Nixon and would lead to his ultimate resignation in August 1974. Park Chung-hee would clamp down on civil freedoms and lead his country through his most dictatorial period until his assassination in 1979. Park would watch the fall of Saigon, once such a key U.S. ally, left on its own as the Republic of South Vietnam ceased to be.²²² The U.S.-South Korea Alliance along with the place of the two countries in the world had also been forever changed by the Vietnam War.

²²² According to U.S. officials, even after the fall of Saigon, Park remained “anxious to work with us because they see no other option.” Memo, W.R. Smyser to Kissinger, July 15, 1975 in Jeffrey Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004),

4 Changes in the Alliance: The United States Loses Leverage

Under the Nixon administration, the United States relationship with the Republic of Korea would significantly change, yet the bilateral security alliance would remain in place. Due to the United States' diplomatic overtures to the Soviet Union and the PRC, the "ideological" anti-communist glue between the two countries would be questioned. This in turn, made President Park extremely insecure about his country's status and security. Park likely felt his alliance with the United States had been "downgraded" as he received less economic aid in general and less direct and indirect payments for South Korean troops in Vietnam. In this chapter, I will show how issues in addition to the Vietnam War, though indirectly related, led to a weakening of U.S.-ROK relations, especially the withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula. To Park, this was a unilateral move on the part of the United States who failed to consult him properly – though it appears he did not make himself available. At the same time, Park witnessed massive changes in the United States' relationships with two other anti-communist allies, South Vietnam and Taiwan.

In fact, the way South Korea had been treated by the United States in regard to the Vietnam War left many Koreans disillusioned. By May 1972, U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Philip Habib reported, "Since my return to Seoul a few weeks ago I have detected a submerged but real feeling of concern among Koreans that they are being neglected by the United States. Most specifically, they exhibit a degree of unhappiness over events in Vietnam in which they see themselves being swept along by currents concerning which they have no knowledge, and over

which they have no control.”²²³ In the process, though, Korea became much less a “client” state of the United States and Park forged ahead with stronger dictatorial powers for himself. The Vietnam War and the Nixon Doctrine were key factors affecting this change.

For Park, the critical issue signaling the United States’ commitment to the Republic of Korea and its security was the stationing of U.S. troops in Korea. Notably, this was something that did not happen in South Vietnam and perhaps would have made the 1975 North Vietnamese takeover of South Vietnam much more unlikely. Yet, scaling down of U.S. troops in Korea was an idea that Nixon inherited from the Johnson administration and which, for most in senior positions within the U.S. government, the time was ripe.²²⁴

Review of U.S. force levels in Korea began early on in the Nixon administration. At a National Security Meeting in August 1969, Nixon and his key aides discussed the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) issue. White House assessments of ROK troop capabilities were positive, which helped argue the case that the defense of South Korea could be “Koreanized.” The White House group concurred that ROK troops were strong and had good morale. Wheeler added that the ROK Army was “well trained” and moderately well-equipped and that they “can stop a NK [North Korea] attack alone with our support;” however their Air Force was inferior and vulnerable.²²⁵

²²³ Telegram, Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, May 19, 1972, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 141. Habib added, “we are seeing a rising trend of Korean concern that the U.S. takes them for granted and that we also are less than prepared to share in advance those discussions of strategy and actions which we are pursuing in regard to matters directly affecting Korea’s forces and Korea’s future, both military and political.”

²²⁴ In fact, concrete discussions to reduce the U.S. Force Korea presence began under Kennedy. LBJ acted on the issue soon after becoming president. According to Baek, “Only weeks after assuming the presidency, Lyndon B. Johnson authorized his national security team to develop an action plan to assess the implications of reducing both the U.S. and ROK forces in Korea.” See Baek, “Park Chung-hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 151.

²²⁵ Minutes of a National Security Meeting, August 14, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 34.

Financial considerations were also taken to account as the United States was realizing it could not be all things to all allies. For Korea, this meant more self-sufficiency and less reliance on U.S. financial support. Laird argued for moving towards “Koreanizing” the defense of South Korea and to restart the MAP transfer program immediately. Secretary of State Rogers suggested that the Korean troops in Vietnam replace U.S. forces in South Korea. To this Laird replied, “ROK wants to send more forces in SVN. Pay is 10 times as high there.”²²⁶ Laird throughout his tenure as defense secretary seems to have been seriously concerned by the amount of funds spent by the United States government on ROK troops in Vietnam.

The discussion of force levels in Korea was ongoing and would be tied to the Nixon Doctrine. At a meeting of the NSC in February 1970, chaired by Kissinger, the issue of the reduction of USFK forces and the force posture needed to defend against a North Korean or combined North Korean and Chinese attack were discussed. Beyond military readiness, a representative from the U.S. Information Agency raised the issue of the symbolism of U.S. Forces in Korea. “Mr. Kissinger agreed that it was inconceivable that the President would decide to withdraw all U.S. forces from Korea.”²²⁷ The United States needed to be seen as steadfast and committed to its “free world” ally.

Yet, within the government not all thought as highly of the Korean forces’ capability to take on North Korea on its own. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) followed up soon after with an assessment that “the JCS believe that withdrawal, now, of US forces would be untimely.” This was based on the fact that “the JCS do not concur with the judgment in the Korea Study that 12-

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Minutes of an NSC Review Group Meeting, February 6, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 51.

14 ROK divisions could hold an attack by North Korea.”²²⁸ While Asians needed to defend themselves, there was a realization that North Korea remained a formidable threat to its southern neighbor.

Nixon, however, would move forward with implementation of his doctrine. With National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDM) 48 in March 1970, Nixon ordered the withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. troops from South Korea before the end of FY1971.²²⁹ In return, the United States would provide the ROK with a \$1 billion package of military assistance and equipment over five years, with an additional \$50 million of economic aid per year.²³⁰ As with Vietnam, the United States would attempt to woo South Korea with financial benefits in order to comply with its wishes.

Yet, Nixon needed to explain this sensitive decision to President Park. The American commander-in-chief, writing to Park in a letter on May 26, 1970, put the troop reduction in the context of the Nixon Doctrine. He wrote, the “number of American troops in the Republic has not declined from the level which prevailed when the Republic was far less able to assume the primary burdens for its defense.”²³¹ In other words, times were changing and Korea was much stronger than it used to be, so the time has come to take on increased defense responsibilities. While he promised that the United States would maintain its treaty obligations, he also reiterated an explanation of the Nixon Doctrine. “It is also my policy that as the strengths and capabilities of our Allies increase it is reasonable to expect them to assume more of the responsibility for

²²⁸ Memo, Joint Chiefs of Staff Representative to the NSC Review Group (Unger) to the Chairman of the Review Group (Kissinger), February 17, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 52.

Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 352.

²³⁰ Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 352.

²³¹ Letter, President Nixon to President Park, May 26, 1970, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, Nixon Library.

their own defense and specifically to provide the bulk of the manpower required for that purpose.”²³² The bottom line was South Korea was going to have to learn to defend itself.

Park, however, was not satisfied by this explanation and wrote Nixon that the partial withdrawal of USFK troops during 1971 was “impossible” unless the United States met certain conditions. These included the completion of ROK force modernization (at a cost of approximately \$2 billion) and promises that the United States would continue to have a military presence on the peninsula and assist Korea in the case of a contingency.²³³ Park was not shy about sharing his demands with the public if he thought it would help him in his negotiations with the United States. A White House memo to the President also noted that President Park was going public with the news hoping for an outcry.²³⁴

Park did not even want to discuss the topic with any U.S. officials, so the top Americans in Seoul paid him a visit. In August 1970, U.S. Ambassador Porter and General John Michaelis, the Commander of U.S. Forces Korea, met with President Park to discuss the reduction of USFK troops and try to overcome what appears to have been a lack of willingness on the part of Park to discuss troop reductions at all until he had received certain assurances such as that “there will be no outbreak of war in Korea” and promises of additional assistance for the modernization of the Korean military. Ambassador Porter described the scene:

“I then said that we regretted that there is no change in their willingness to talk with us and I would describe problems arising in connection with our discussion to reduce number of our troops. Our planning, which we had unfortunately been compelled to do alone because the ROKG felt it could not participate, provides for reduction of 5,000 spaces by December 1970, of 8,500 more at the end of March 1971, and of 4,900 by June 30, 1971. This apparently was not to Park’s

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, June 28, 1970, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence. Letter, President Nixon to President Park, May 26, 1970, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, Nixon Library.

²³⁴ Memo, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, June 28, 1970, Box 757, NSC Files, Presidential Correspondence, Nixon Library.

liking. As translation proceeded, Park closed his eyes and jiggled his knee as he does under stress, and ordered coffee.²³⁵

Park again placed conditions on his compliance with the troop reduction, replying that he was not open to discussions until the talks on the modernization of Korean forces had concluded. However, due to Congressional constraints on the budget from which ROK military modernization would be funded, Porter told Park, “all this comes down to question of confidence. We have given every possible assurance at our highest level about our intention to modernize their forces, and we have reiterated our commitment to their security. Legally, it is impossible for us to do more than we have done.”²³⁶ Compliance with Park’s conditions was conditional on the agreement of the U.S. Congress, but Porter was telling Park to “just trust us.”

A few of the reasons why Park was so upset become clear later in the cable. Though perhaps due to a misunderstanding, Park felt promises made to him had been broken. In his telegram to Washington, Ambassador Porter wrote that Park recalled when President Nixon had explained the Nixon Doctrine to him the year before, Nixon had “assured him [the] Doctrine would not be applied to Korea” and instead indicated that the U.S. force presence in Korea would be strengthened. Park added that he had also received assurances from U.S. officials that as long as there were ROK troops in Vietnam, there would not be any cuts to U.S. Forces Korea. Porter found Park’s understanding of the situation to be mistaken but refrained from embarrassing him by correcting him in front of others.²³⁷

²³⁵ Telegram, Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, August 4, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 68.

²³⁶ Telegram, Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, August 4, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 68.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* According to Baek, “Under the terms he negotiated with Johnson, Park was under the impression that he had veto rights over future U.S. decisions on troop levels in Korea (despite Washington’s attempts to disabuse him of such a notion.” Baek, “Park Chung-hee’s Vietnam Odyssey,” 160.

Park, still upset, added, “that if U.S. troops were being moved elsewhere for emergency purposes then this hasty withdrawal would be understandable but that is not case and it is based only on U.S. domestic political problems and ROK should be given more time. So far everything is on unilateral basis and U.S. is not respecting or listening to ROK wishes. U.S. troops are merely going home and withdrawal is not for any emergency purpose. What about NATO? Why aren’t troops being withdrawn from there?”²³⁸ In other words, Park was asking why are you doing this to me now? And why are you not listening to my sincere concerns related to security and the North Korean threat? Finally, was Korea and Asia as important to the United States as Europe?

According to Laird biographer Richard Hunt, South Korea was so adamantly against the United States troop departure, it tried using its Vietnam card, threatening to cut down or end their military deployment in that Southeast Asian nation.²³⁹ In the end, it would not come to this. South Korea did receive financial aid but not nearly as much as it had asked for. Of the additional \$2.5 billion of military aid requested by Park, South Korea received only a relatively slight increase from the original offer of \$500 million in aid.²⁴⁰

As with many decisions regarding the Vietnam War, the United made the USFK troop reduction decision unilaterally and the ROK felt it was imposed on them. In a December 1970 meeting with Kissinger, Kim Chong Pil, a South Korean political heavyweight who would become Park’s Prime Minister approximately six months later, revealed that the ROK viewed it as a “sudden unilateral announcement concerning reductions” of U.S. forces in Korea. Kim said the announcement had put the ROK government in an “embarrassing position” at a time when

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 352.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 353.

Park was looking to the next year's election.²⁴¹ Being seen as powerless in the face of the United States had a domestic political cost for President Park.

At the same time, the United States continued to assess the capabilities of the South Korean military. As a December 1970 intelligence review of Korean issues concluded, South Korea's "military strength poses a substantial deterrent to any North Korean invasion. And South Korea's international position is notably stronger than that of the North. The planned withdrawal of one US Army division from South Korea will not of itself significantly alter this balance."²⁴² They believed "South Korea estimates of the impact of the proposed US troop withdrawals on the actual military balance largely parallel our own." South Korea was capable to withstand a North Korean attack, they concluded.

Yet, South Korea still believed they should not have the Nixon Doctrine applied to them. The real issue it seems was "that North Korea might miscalculate the withdrawals, as a sign of diminished U.S. commitment, reflects their own fears that indeed this may be just the beginning of a general disengagement policy." In a reference to events immediately preceding the Korean War, the analysts wrote, along with the giants in their neighborhood (the USSR, China and Japan), "they worry about the Americans who, they feel, once before withdrew troops from Korea too soon." Perhaps because of this history, "South Koreans feel strongly that they are and ought to be an exception to the Nixon Doctrine."²⁴³ Finally, in an astute prediction of what was to come, the report stated, "if President Park, who has staked everything on the US tie, feels 'abandoned' and exposed, it might aggravate his tendency to become more authoritarian in his

²⁴¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Kim Chong Pil, December 2, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 81.

²⁴² National Intelligence Estimate: The Changing Scene in Korea, December 2, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 80.

²⁴³ National Intelligence Estimate: The Changing Scene in Korea, December 2, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 80.

rule and less accessible to the reasoned advice of subordinates in times of stress.”²⁴⁴ In March 1971, the United States went forward and withdrew the 7th Division of the U.S. Army from the Korean peninsula.²⁴⁵

By the end of 1971, Park had announced an “emergency situation” allowing for greater presidential control of the country. The Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research judged that while publicly, the threat of North Korea was cited, “Park’s move is related much more directly to the internal situation.” They judged the factors that Park saw as leading to instability to include his prospects for re-election and his desire to remain in power. Additionally, U.S. troop withdrawals from South Korea, combined with a U.S. Congress more and more inclined to cut funding, “have been the most unsettling aspect of the changing external situation.” Another important factor related to the United States was the economy, with South Korea receiving less favorable trade benefits with “restrictions on textile imports, and declining Vietnam procurement.” Finally, Nixon’s détente and outreach to China made Park insecure as the “clear distinctions between ‘communist’ and ‘free’ worlds threaten to weaken the ideological glue that has long served as a partial substitute for cohesive social institutions.”²⁴⁶

With the USFK reductions (despite desperate pleas by the ROK government to the contrary), the Park administration was greatly disappointed in the United States. Park felt betrayed by the withdrawals, especially since he believed had had received promises from President Nixon that this would not happen.²⁴⁷ In the 1970s, the United States was left with little leverage to push for democratic reforms in Korea and President Park Chung-hee was able to

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Lee, “The Yushin Regime,” 222.

²⁴⁶ Intelligence Note Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “Republic of Korea: Park Increases His Power to Counter ‘Emergency Situation’”, December 10, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972: 118.

²⁴⁷ Kwak, “The Nixon Doctrine,” 46.

suppress any domestic opposition.²⁴⁸ For the South Koreans, many learned not to trust the United States to take ROK priorities into account when it made crucial foreign policy decisions. Similar lessons were learned by other U.S. allies as well. During the prelude to Nixon's historic visit to Beijing, Kissinger had already secretly told the PRC that the United States planned to withdraw troops from Taiwan once the Vietnam War was over and that the administration disagreed with the "two Chinas" doctrine.²⁴⁹ In 1971, Taiwan lost its seat as a permanent member on the United States Security Council and by the end of 1978, there would be no U.S. combat troops left on Taiwan.²⁵⁰ The lesson would be that alliances were not that important if they didn't support U.S. aims fully and unconditionally, or if they conflicted with grand strategy.

In the end, Park would declare a "Yushin" constitution for his last seven years in power, severely limiting civil rights.²⁵¹ The military training gained in Vietnam would at times be turned on its own citizens. According to Hang Hong-koo, "the same commanders, after their mission in Vietnam, returned home and repeated their ritual in the Kwangju Uprising."²⁵² The United States lost much of its ability to influence and curb ROK domestic human rights abuses.

In conclusion, South Korea's economic growth due to the Vietnam War allowed the country to move away from its strictly patron-client relationship with the United States.²⁵³ Unfortunately, South Korea's growing independence, coupled with U.S. government neglect, led

²⁴⁸ Han, "South Korea and the Vietnam War," 264-65.

²⁴⁹ Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 130.

²⁵⁰ Jay Matthews, "U.S. Trims Military Forces on Taiwan by Half in One Year," *New York Times*, November 7, 1978.

²⁵¹ Notably Park's declaration of the Yushin regime came three weeks after Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos also declared martial law and seized control of democratic institutions – with little public censure from Washington. See Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 31.

²⁵² Han, "South Korea and the Vietnam War," 268.

²⁵³ For more information on South Korea's shift away from a patron-client relationship with the United States, see Bae Ho Hahn, "The Korean American Alliance: Its Evolution, Transition, and Future Prospects," *Asian Perspective* 7, no. 2 (1983): 175-209.

to a low point in United States- South Korea relations that coincided with a sharp rise in ROK authoritarianism. In the 1970s, the United States was left with little leverage to push for democratic reforms in Korea and President Park was left with a free hand to suppress opposition.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ For more on how the United States went from handicapping democratization in South Korea to encouraging it, see Andrew Yeo, "Signaling Democracy: Patron-Client Relations and Democratization in South Korea and Poland," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2006): 259-87 and Michael K. McKoy and Michael K. Miller, "The Patron's Dilemma: The Dynamics of Foreign-Supported Democratization," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (2012): 904-32.

Conclusion

The U.S.- South Korea alliance was profoundly affected by the Vietnam War. From being a client state of the United States, the economic growth and leverage gained by the ROK allowed the country to become a far more independent and strong country. At the same time, misunderstandings and conflicts related to the war, as well as to the Nixon Doctrine, led to great strains between the two countries, leading President Park to largely ignore U.S. advice throughout the 1970s. During this period, Nixon viewed his anti-communist alliances as secondary to improving ties with the great powers, specifically the USSR and the PRC. In addition, domestic political concerns caused the Nixon administration to push hard for reductions in USFK troops as well as in U.S. troops in Vietnam, leaving the ROK to take on a much more difficult and dangerous role during the final year of the Vietnam War.

For the United States, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that any strategic advantages probably were not worth the costs in inducing the ROK to participate in Vietnam. While there were some military benefits, they likely did not outweigh the large financial cost, taken from taxpayer funds in a secret manner. The question of whether it was worth it for the ROK to participate in the Vietnam War is much more difficult. Korea's economy grew by leaps and bounds in the 1960s and early 1970s and the country would likely not be the twelfth largest economy in the world today if it had not had the influx of funds due to the Vietnam War.²⁵⁵ Yet,

²⁵⁵ While other factors contributed to Korea's quick economic rise, I argue that without the \$1 billion of direct benefits plus the added benefits of new markets and test markets for its industrial products, South Korea would not have reached such a high economic level. Other positive factors that assisted in South Korea's rapid economic growth include state intervention in the economy based on comprehensive economic policies, labor intensive manufacturing aimed at export markets, free market institutions, a disciplined workforce and the use of the *chaebol* conglomerate system. For more information see John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea*

we likely do not yet understand the full impact of the Vietnam War on South Korea as many of the details have yet to be fully explored. For example, were casualty rates accurate? Do we know the full story regarding Korean POWs? For the individual soldier, injuries, exposure to chemicals, and the horror of participating in or witnessing atrocities likely have remained extremely challenging. Without a full picture, it is hard to say for sure that participating in the Vietnam War was “worth it” for South Korea.

While the economic benefits for Korea were enormous, President Park’s main reasons for sending troops to Vietnam were related to security and politics, hoping to keep the United States a close ally. While this may have been true under President Johnson, under President Nixon, this held less sway. However, several experiences related to the Vietnam War led to a souring of the U.S.-ROK relationship that lasted through the 1970s and have a legacy of a continued ROK worry that the U.S. will make foreign policy decisions in the region, and even on the Korean peninsula, without consulting ROK authorities. President Park felt this occurred both with regards to decisions relating to Vietnam (especially peace negotiations and Vietnamization) as well as the opening to China, a key patron of the ROK’s rival, North Korea.

After the Vietnam War ended, USFK troop levels would continue to be a key bilateral issue, most famously when President Carter sought to remove all U.S. troops from Korea upon entering office. Few U.S. officials agreed with Carter’s policy and by 1979, the plan had died. Today there are approximately 23,000 U.S. soldiers stationed on the Korean peninsula. The current Commander of U.S. Forces Korea, General Robert Bruce Abrams, is the son of General

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), *The Park Chung Hee Era*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 265-402 and Garth Shelton, *Korea and South Africa: Building a Strategic Partnership* (Johannesburg: Institute for Global Dialogue, 2009).

Creighton Adams, who served as the commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam following Westmoreland.

Any scholar, diplomat or other professional working on the U.S.-Korea relationship would profit from having a background in Korea's participation in the Vietnam War to understand current U.S.-Korea relations. The two country's shared experience in Southeast Asia helps us today understand Korean priorities and interests as well as their perception of the United States. Scholars and policymakers should study this history because it tells us something important about the nature of the U.S.-Korea alliance. Unless our allies are consulted on matters directly concerning them, we will continue to sour these relations. As historian Gregg Brazinsky argues, Korean agency does matter and if our partners are treated badly and left out of relevant decision-making processes, their actions are likely to head in directions that we do not like.²⁵⁶

There are still many important areas of research still to be explored as they relate to Korea's participation in the Vietnam War. These include further study of the U.S.-ROK relationship after the Vietnam War and how South Korea has gone on to support the United States in all its overseas wars since Vietnam. Another interesting study would be on the economic relationship between Korea and Vietnam and how its foundations were built during the Vietnam War. For Korean language scholars, I would look forward to seeing a study of the Korean soldiers' experiences and their views on the United States both during and post-war. Also, how has the Vietnam War been taught in the Korean educational system at various levels? Finally, it would be interesting to know if there are any ties between Korean service in Vietnam and immigration to the United States.

²⁵⁶ Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 5.

To this day, both the United States and Korea continue to balance their economic and security relationship.²⁵⁷ In the fall of 2019, after strained talks on sharing military costs (mostly to cover the U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula), the two countries broke off negotiations.²⁵⁸ Current government officials of both countries continue, as have those in the past, to reconsider the costs and benefits of the bilateral alliance. According to Sue Mi Terry of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, South Koreans are again weighing the benefits of the alliance and whether it is worth the costs.²⁵⁹ Yet, given the ongoing threat posed by North Korea, added by the need to maintain a balance in the region due to a rising China, it seems that both countries will likely continue to find a way to continue their close alliance. Both sides may need to compromise on costs and what they are willing to offer the other partner. Unfortunately, neither country will be able to have its cake and eat it too.

²⁵⁷ One could argue that despite the various strains on the U.S.-South Korea relationship, one reason the alliance continues is due to the international relations theory of “alliance equity.” As described by Calder, this is the “sunk investment by a national or sub-national actor in the creation or persistence of a constitutional order between nation-states that is directed at security enhancement in relation to third parties outside the constitutional security arrangement itself.” Calder, *Pacific Alliance*, 73. For the United States in South Korea these sunk costs include military bases and Status of Forces agreements, trade agreements, direct foreign investment, and high-level interpersonal connections.

²⁵⁸ Min Joo Kim, “U.S. Breaks Off Talks with South Korea Over Costs of Military Alliance,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 2019.

²⁵⁹ Sue Mi Terry, “The Unraveling of the U.S.-South Korean Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 3, 2020.

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