March 25, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR:  

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:  

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT:  

Negotiations on Terminating the United Nations Command in Korea

We and the Republic of Korea (ROK) should begin negotiations soon with the PRC and North Korea concerning the status of the United Nations Command (UNC) in view of the certain UNGA debate this fall on the subject. We agreed last year with the PRC to reconsider the future of the UNC in return for PRC help in avoiding a contentious debate in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) when UNCURK was dissolved. Our aim in the negotiations will be to seek substitute arrangements which will not only preserve ROK security but also move the Peninsula toward greater stability.

The principal issues requiring decision are: (1) the content of a negotiating proposal; (2) a strategy for the negotiations; (3) some corollary bilateral issues between ourselves and Korea and Japan; and (4) the level of and roles for our forces in South Korea.

1. The Negotiating Package

If the UNC is ended, we want to keep ourselves and the PRC effectively involved in implementing the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement. At present the Commander-in-Chief of the UNC (CINCUNC) is our side's signatory to the Agreement; both the PRC and North Korean military commanders also signed. We expect North Korea to try to exclude us from further involvement in implementing the Agreement.

The inter-departmental study offers three package options of substitute arrangements for the UNC:

Option 1

- CINCUNC as our side's signatory of the Agreement would be replaced by U.S. and ROK military commanders. The Military
Armistice Commission (MAC) would continue to implement the Agreement with the military representatives of the two Koreas as the principal members of the MAC, and the U.S. and the PRC as additional members.

- Tacit acceptance by the other side of a continued U.S. troop presence in South Korea for at least the short term in the context of Shanghai Communique-like statements offering to reduce and ultimately withdraw U.S. forces.

- A non-aggression pact between the two Koreas.

- UN Security Council endorsement of the agreed-on package of substitute arrangements.

Option 2

- As in Option 1, CINCUNC would be replaced by U.S. and ROK military commanders as our side's signatory, and the two Korean representatives would be the MAC's principal members. But the MAC, which implements the Armistice, would be transferred into a bilateral forum (the South-North Coordinating Committee). In the SNCC the U.S. and the PRC representatives would only monitor North and South Korean actions.

- We would try to induce expanded contacts by the four powers (the PRC, the Soviet Union, Japan, and U.S.) with both Koreas.

- The last three elements of Option 1 (continued U.S. force presence in South Korea, a non-aggression pact, and Security Council endorsement).

Option 3

- Option 2, supplemented by confidence-building measures on armaments together with arms limitation and reduction proposals.

In essence, Options 2 and 3 would greatly reduce U.S. and PRC roles in implementing the Agreement.
Agency Views. State and Defense recommend Option 1. They believe a continued effective U.S. and PRC role in implementing the Armistice is the most effective check on DPRK aggression against South Korea. ACDA prefers Option 2, pointing out it puts responsibility for Peninsula security into Korean hands. CIA gives the ACDA view oblique support, as CIA doubts that North Korea will negotiate on the basis of Option 1 and believes that the PRC will not be able to induce it to do so.

My View. I agree with State and Defense on Option 1. I doubt that Peking's influence in Pyongyang has declined so much as to make an approach along the lines of Option 1 futile. Even if it has, we should still open with our preferred proposal.

2. Negotiating Strategy

All agencies agree that we should carefully coordinate with the ROK first and then pursue a two-track negotiating strategy; we will talk with the PRC and the ROK will talk with North Korea. Everyone also agrees that we should keep the Soviets as well as the Japanese and other concerned allies informed of progress in the negotiations.

My View. I agree, although the major burden in the negotiations should not be on us and the PRC. It should rather be placed on the two Koreas, leaving us and the PRC to backstop and restrain our Korean allies as necessary. We also must consult with other nations which have contributed troops to the UNC in the past and with Japan.

3. Corollary Issues

There are three corollary issues:

a. U.S. operational control of ROK forces. The alternatives to UNC control of ROK forces are: (a) control by the Commander of U.S. Forces Korea; (b) control by a new U.S.-ROK combined command (which would be headed by the U.S. senior officer); or (c) peacetime control by the ROK with a combined U.S.-ROK command in any hostilities. There is a consensus -- with which I agree -- that Option (b) is the most practical and, for the South Koreans, the most reassuring replacement for the UNC.
b. U.S. use of Japanese bases for the defense of South Korea. By virtue of a secret 1961 arrangement with Japan we do not have to consult to use Japanese bases to respond to an attack on South Korea. Although this right attaches to the UNC, State and Defense recommend that we not seek from Japan an explicit extension of this secret arrangement. Both agencies think Japan would agree whenever asked, and want to avoid leaks. I agree with the JCS, however, that such an important right should be unambiguous, and see no reason why an explicit extension of the agreement cannot remain secret.

c. UN Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Japan. All agencies agree that when the UNC lapses, this SOFA, which grants basing rights to third country UN forces defending the ROK, can lapse too.

4. U.S. Force Presence in South Korea

a. Regional contingency role for the U.S. Army division in Korea. Defense has proposed that we assign the Army division in South Korea the additional role of a regional contingency reserve. State objects to any formal regional role for the division, but concurs with Defense's desire to bring the division up to full strength (it now has only 80% of its authorized personnel). State points out that the additional role would imply a longer stay for our forces in Korea, reduced flexibility for U.S. force reductions there, and provoke strongly adverse reactions in Pyongyang, Peking, and Moscow.

I agree with State and the NSDM so provides.

b. Future U.S. force reductions in South Korea. The proposed NSDM at Tab I includes a reiteration of your decision not to reduce our forces in South Korea at least until we have assured ourselves of substitute security arrangements.

Recommendation: Vital to highlight that you authorize me to issue the NSDM at Tab I.

Approve / Disapprove

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE