

Carter plays 'China card' in S. Korea

Pressures Seoul to resolve dispute with North to secure anti-Soviet alliance

Lost in the shadow of the Tokyo economic summit and the much-publicized discussions on energy that took place there was a three-day visit to South Korea by President Carter, from June 29-31. The talks between Carter and South Korean President Park Chung-hee were the first since a series of controversies, including the Korean "bribery scandal" and the Carter plan to withdraw American troops in Korea, shook the very foundations of the relations between the two countries. Advance publicity by both countries billed the talks as an opportunity to set the course of relations back on the right track.

On the surface, the president's visit seemed to accomplish this goal. During their talks the two presidents reaffirmed the "friendly" relations between the United States and South Korea and emphasized, in particular, the importance of the security guarantees provided to Seoul by Washington. Moreover, President Carter praised the tremendous economic progress achieved in South Korea, and seemed to give backing to the government of President Park—despite his insistence that the government improve its record on "human rights."

As is often the case with surface pictures however, the truth lies far below. Informed sources have revealed that during Carter's visit, the United States heavily pressured South Korea to enter into a "dialogue" with Pyongyang, North Korea, which is designed to weaken the Park government and pave the way for an expansion of the "Washington-Tokyo-Peking axis" against the Soviet Union. This pressure resulted in a call for three-way talks between the United States, North Korea and South Korea to "resolve" the Korean dispute, issued jointly by Washington and Seoul in the June 31 final communiqué.

Though touted as a "bold, new" initiative by the administration, the pressure on Seoul to enter three-way talks is little more than a rehash of Henry Kissinger's early 1970s plan for talks involving the two Koreas, the United States and China. Then, as now, the concern of the "China card" players was that an effective military and political alliance against the Soviet Union, involving Japan, China and the United States

could not be established or maintained as long as China—allied with North Korea—lines up on one side of the explosive Korean conflict, and the United States—allied with South Korea—lines up on the other side. From the earliest days of "ping-pong diplomacy," Washington and Peking have worked together to resolve this problem most importantly by prodding Pyongyang to end its privileged middle position between Moscow and Peking and to enter a full-scale alliance with China.

At this time, the Park government in Seoul is a major obstacle to these plans. North Korea's bizarre leader Kim Il-sung has stuck to his demand that the United States reduce support for Park before North Korea fully enters the Peking camp. Moreover, the government in Seoul is known to oppose the entire strategic thinking behind Washington's "China card," fearing the establishment of an anti-Soviet bloc in Asia will drastically increase tensions on the Korean peninsula and throughout the entire region.

The three-way talks proposal pushed by Carter in Seoul is a virtual declaration by the administration of its willingness to use South Korea as a bargaining chip with Pyongyang and Peking. The prospect of direct relations between Washington and Pyongyang, the eventual withdrawal of American troops from South Korea, and the "human rights" criticisms of the Park government are all being waved before North Korea as incentives to join the anti-Soviet camp.

Already, the United States has sent a memorandum on the proposed talks to North Korea via an unnamed third country—the first "official" direct communication between Washington and Pyongyang in over 25 years.

By reducing its strategic commitment to Seoul in this way, the Carter administration is now basing its entire policy toward the Korean peninsula on the whims and fancies of two of the most unpredictable and xenophobic governments in the world—China and North Korea. The same strategic logic employed by the Carter administration last year in trying to force Vietnam to accept the political dictates of Peking resulted in a war in Indo-China and the threat of global con-

frontation. Handing the Korean peninsula to Peking poses an equal, if not more serious, threat to world stability and peace.

U.S.-China plan

Over the last six months, numerous signals have appeared which make clear that the United States and China have worked out a plan for "resolving" the Korean dispute, including cooperation on convening the proposed three-way talks. The pattern of signs shows that enormous amounts of effort went into the Carter proposal and the great importance with which Washington and Peking view Korea.

The first bit of evidence surfaced last February, during the visit to Washington of Chinese Vice Premier Deng Hsiao-ping. It is well-known that American officials discussed Korea with Deng at that time and informed sources have reported it likely that an agreement to promote "dialogue" between the two Koreas was reached. The same sources have noted that the decision to alter Kissinger's original call for four-way talks and exclude China was probably decided at that time as well.

China is extremely cautious in its dealings with Pyongyang, fearing that too much pressure on its neighbor could provoke the unpredictable Kim Il-sung to tilt his country toward Moscow. Aside from being a political defeat, Peking fears such a tilt by Kim could give the Soviet Union a massive military opening toward Manchuria, China's heavy-industry zone bordering North Korea. Deng apparently thought it would be better for the United States to take the lead in the Korean dialogue, with China quietly urging North Korea to go along.

Just days before Deng's February arrival in the United States, a series of statements were made by the two Korean governments, which led to a brief flurry of talks in February. The South Koreans anticipated that Washington would provide Deng with a forum to present North Korea as a peace-loving nation, so President Park Chung-hee in late January preempted the prospects for such a presentation by proposing the reconvening of the stalled bilateral North-South talks "any time and at any place." North Korea, some believe on the advice of China, accepted Park's call for talks.

Though the flurry of talks that followed quickly broke down, they gave credibility to the claim that North Korea had "moderated" its radical position toward South Korea and was genuinely prepared for dialogue.

Even a quick analysis of those talks, however, reveal that North Korea's radical position toward the South has not changed. In the initial reopening of the talks, which began in 1972, but broke down shortly thereafter, the Pyongyang representatives demanded that the talks be expanded beyond the government level to include

opposition political parties and "social organizations." The Seoul government contended that this proposal, for years the official position of Pyongyang, was an attempt to avoid dealing with the proper authorities of the South.

The pattern of signs became clearer during this past April and May, as leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Henry Kissinger conducted separate tours of Asia. Following the Foreign Relations Committee visit to Peking, North Korean sources in Japan issued an unprecedented invitation to the senators to visit Pyongyang. At the same time, the North Korean sources, speaking through the *Baltimore Sun*, endorsed the "friendship" treaty signed last year by Japan and China, which amounted to backing by Pyongyang of Peking's anti-Soviet policies.

Upon his return home, one of the leading members of the Senate delegation, Zionist lobby Sen. Jacob Javits, told reporters in Washington that China wanted the United States to take the leading role in "resolving" the Korean dispute. Javits also indicated at that time his belief that China and North Korea had flexible policies concerning dialogue with the South.

Meanwhile, Henry Kissinger had completed his tour of China in early May and traveled on to Korea. Having arrived in Seoul no more than 10 minutes before, Kissinger proceeded to tell reporters gathered at the airport that he still favored four-party talks—which exclude the Soviet Union—to resolve the Korean dispute.

It was also at this time that a new round of "ping-pong diplomacy" took place. North Korea had won the right to host the world table tennis championships in Pyongyang on the agreement that arch-enemies South Korea and the United States would be free to participate in the games, but it shifted its policy and excluded the South Koreans. Despite protests from Seoul, the State Department rendered legitimacy to Pyongyang's decision by allowing the American team to participate in the games. Carter administration spokesmen claimed this decision was entirely "nonpolitical," but this claim had little credibility with the many who recall Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai negotiating over the ping-pong table just eight years ago.

Curiously, perhaps the most telling of all the signals from Washington received little publicity. In early June, the Carter administration suddenly changed the terms on which it would agree to diplomatic recognition of North Korea. Whereas the traditional American position stated that recognition of North Korea was dependent on similar recognition of South Korea by the Soviet Union and China, the June statement said that American recognition of North Korea was contingent on recognition of the South by China or the Soviet Union. This change, of course, has set the stage for the

exclusion of the Soviet Union from the entire negotiating process concerning the Korean peninsula.

North Korean response

As of now, the North Koreans have issued several official rejections of the proposed three-way talks, but these rejections are considered only lukewarm by informed observers. At the time the proposal was issued, few observers or officials expected the North Koreans to accept the proposal outright. Instead, Pyongyang has staked out a tough bargaining position.

Pyongyang has said that reunification talks can take place between "proper authorities, political parties and social organizations" of the two Koreas, but no "alien" interference can take place. At the same time, negotiations on the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea—a precondition for unification—must take place between the United States and North Korea only, since South Korea did not sign the 1953 Armistice Agreement ending the Korean War. These two conditions for separate negotiations with the United States and South Korea are designed to divide Washington and Seoul and, while these responses are just initial bargaining stances in response to the Carter proposal, it is by no means certain that Washington will not abandon Seoul and accept one of Pyongyang's formulas.

Pressure on Seoul

With the American and Chinese plan so clear, the question arises just why Seoul accepted the same three-way talks proposal during the Carter visit that it often rejected in the past. The answer lies in the heated pressure applied by the administration during the talks in Seoul, involving both the still-unresolved security arrangements between the two countries, as well as the threat of Iranian-style destabilization of the Park government through dissident and opposition organizations controlled from abroad.

To the South Koreans, security of their country is still uppermost and Seoul clearly hoped that the talks with Carter would resolve the remaining outstanding issues. The withdrawal of American troops at any point in the near future could result in an outbreak of new hostilities on the highly explosive peninsula. The South Koreans wanted Carter to announce an indefinite halt to the withdrawal, which has been frozen for some time.

Throughout the talks, the administration used the issue as political leverage. Carter refused to announce a halting of the troop withdrawal and instead announced his intention to "eventually" withdraw the troops.

For the time, it appears the administration will keep the troops in Korea, as Carter made several highly publicized visits to U.S. Army bases and delivered

speeches to the troops. For more than a year, carefully released intelligence estimates on the growing strength of the North Korean armed forces has combined with noises from Henry Kissinger about American weakness around the world, pressuring the administration to postpone the withdrawal. Under Kissinger's influence, the administration decision to postpone the withdrawal has stepped up pressure on Moscow by increasing the direct American involvement in the anti-Soviet axis.

At the same time, the refusal of the administration to announce a definitive halt to the withdrawal has the effect of keeping the security issue hanging over the head of South Korea as the threat exists that withdrawal can begin again at any time Seoul "steps out of line."

'Human rights'

In addition to the security issue, administration officials also used their "human rights" campaign as leverage against the Park government. Throughout his trip, Carter called for the "improvement" of the "human rights record" in Korea, urging the government to lift several internal security laws and going so far as to present President Park with a list of 300 jailed dissidents whom Carter said should be released. The list, later made public by Secretary of State Vance, was virtually identical to the one entered into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Edward Kennedy just days before Carter's visit. Kennedy also urged a change in several of Korea's domestic laws.

These dissidents are primarily organized by church groups controlled from abroad by the terrorist-supporting World Council of Churches. Through their "community" organizing of poverty-stricken areas in Korea, these organizations represent an ongoing threat of destabilization of the Park government. Carter, in fact, met with the leader of the Korean National Council of Churches, Rev. Kim Kwan-suk.

Carter also met with the leader of the opposition New Democratic Party, Mr. Kim Young Sam. Kim only recently assumed his post as chairman of the NDP, having defeated his moderate rival, Lee Chul-seong, at a party convention. He has, however, been an outspoken critic of the government since his election. Kim has regularly stated that an Iranian-style destabilization could take place in Korea and recently said that he would be willing to meet with North Korean chieftain Kim Il-sung "any time and any place" to discuss reunification. This statement, which the government charged had severely weakened its negotiating position with the North Koreans, is believed to have been used by the Carter administration as additional pressure on the Park government to enter a "dialogue" with the North.

—Peter Ennis