

August 27, 1979

Interoffice Memorandum from Javier Pérez de Cuéllar to the Secretary-General, 'Korea'

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Summary:

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar describes efforts to revive dialogue between the two Koreas in the aftermath of US President Carter's trip to Korea.

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DATE: 27 August 1979

TO: The Secretary-General

THROUGH:

FROM: Javier Pérez de Cuéllar
Under Secretary-General
for Special Political Affairs

SUBJECT: Korea

Prior to our departure for Havana, I would like to provide a brief survey for you of the principal events which have occurred with regard to the Korean question, since President Carter's visit to South Korea. I should also like to reiterate a few ideas as to how we might proceed at Havana, since the North Korean Foreign Minister will be in attendance at the Conference of the Non-Aligned:

1. 1 July: Issuance of the joint Carter-Park communiqué at the conclusion of President Carter's visit to South Korea. It was in this communiqué that tripartite talks between North and South Korea and the United States were proposed.

2. 10 July: The North Korean Ambassador visited me, at his initiative, to convey the DPRK reaction to the tripartite talks proposal. The Ambassador indicated that from the North Korean point of view, two different questions could not be intermingled with three-way talks. With regard to reunification, only North and South Korea could participate. With regard to troop withdrawals or any other military matters stemming from the Armistice Agreement, only North Korea and the United States could participate, since South Korea is not a signatory of the Agreement. South Korea could participate in these latter talks only when matters directly concerning them arose. The Ambassador, however, offered as a DPRK initiative that South Korea could participate in the entire proposed DPRK-United States talks as an Observer. In defining the role of the Observer, the Ambassador at no time indicated that the proposed Observer would be confined to a completely silent role. In commenting on all these matters at a subsequent press conference, the Ambassador adopted the use of very consilatory and diplomatic language in explaining the proposals.

3. 12 July: I received the South Korean Ambassador, who completely rejected any proposed Observer role for the ROK at DPRK-U.S. talks. The South Korean Ambassador also stated that the ROK regarded the North Korean statement of two days previously as a rejection of the South Korean-United States proposal. The Ambassador further indicated that the Republic of Korea did not agree that there were two separate sets of issues; from the South Korean point of view, the two sets of issues were inextricably intertwined.

4. 20 July: Dr. Brzezinski issued a statement from the White House indicating that there would be no further withdrawals of United States combat forces (which number 32,000) at this time from South Korea. Amongst the principal reasons offered for this alteration of President Carter's original decision was a stated increase in the size of armaments of the North Korean armed forces. Conversely, the United States indicated that it wished to provide time for the Republic of Korea to augment its self-defense efforts. In sum, the United States offered four reasons for the modification of the withdrawal plans, including a) the maintenance of their security commitment to South Korea, b) the preservation of an adequate deterrent to any breach of the peace, c) the stabilisation of a favourable United States strategic position in East Asia, d) the nurturing of a resumption of a serious North-South dialogue.

5. 26 July: On this date, the Americans made available a statement of the official United States position concerning the North Korean reaction to the joint U.S.-ROK proposal for tripartite talks. The United States statement consisted of four parts, the first of which was the most important:

A. The American view is that while the North Korean statement was negative in tone, they do not consider it to be a final response – (this is very much in accord with my own interpretation);

B. The United States rejects separate U.S.-DPRK talks;

C. The joint U.S.-ROK proposal for tripartite talks remains open to acceptance;

D. The United States endorses the North Korean position that only direct bilateral talks between North and South Korea can lead to reunification.

6. 30 July: I proposed to the North Korean Ambassador that perhaps an informal meeting could be arranged between the Ambassador, the Americans and myself, in an informal setting – perhaps even outside the Headquarters building. I suggested that, after a suitable interval, a South Korean representative might join the meeting. I myself might then withdraw or stay, entirely as the parties themselves chose. The idea of the meeting with the Americans was naturally well received by the Ambassador. The idea that a South Korean representative might subsequently join us was less received, but did not obtain a totally negative reaction. Subsequently, this proposal was rejected by the Americans, after what appeared to be consultations with their South Korean allies. The United States view was that to separate themselves from their ally, even for five minutes, would have a symbolic effect injurious to their relations with South Korea and damaging to South Korean standing in the eyes of the DPRK.

7. 30 July: During the course of your meeting on this day at the White House with President Carter, the President stated that he “very much hoped” that you would continue with your efforts to act as a channel of communications between the two parties.

8. 15 August: I received the Permanent Observer of North Korea, at his request, in order that he might convey the official North Korean response to your offer to act as interlocutor between North and South Korea. In essence, though the North Korean response was very carefully phrased in order to avoid giving any cause for offence to yourself, the North Koreans reinterpreted your offer of good offices in a general sense to an offer of good offices to achieve reunification. They then stated that the atmosphere for talks to achieve reunification was not propitious, since the South Koreans did not sincerely desire such talks. Consequently, the North Koreans did not feel it possible to accept your proposal at this time. However, the Ambassador then conveyed the North Korean “expectation and hope” that both you and I would continue our efforts. It should be noted that the North Korean response dealt only with your proposal to act as a channel of communications – and then only as a channel of communications with regard to reunification – and there was no response whatsoever to your other proposal that the United Nations have an Observer at any talks taking place at Panmunjom.

9. 20 August: The South Korean Red Cross proposed a resumption of the so-called Red Cross Talks between North and South Korea, to take place in September. The North-South Red Cross Talks, which have occurred earlier and which are only suspended rather than terminated as with other negotiating bodies, is the only remaining format for direct communication between North and South on substantive

issues. The issues in question are generally understood to consist of the whole spectrum of humanitarian issues, such as the bringing together of members of separated families (which are estimated to total about 10,000,000 people), the resumption of telephone service between North and South and the resumption of some form of mail service between North and South.

10. This South Korean initiative occurred subsequent to my memorandum to you of 16 August, in which I put forth similar proposals for your consideration, as a way of continuing your initiative. This would seem to indicate that the South Koreans have also concluded that in this completely non-political format lies the only possible vehicle for direct substantive communication between North and South.

It might be useful, therefore, at Havana, for you to consider speaking to the North Korean Foreign Minister along these lines of channeling your offer of good offices into purely humanitarian sectors (as of this date, the North Koreans have not accepted the South Korean proposal for resumption of the Red Cross Talks).

Taking into account the low-key nature of the early United States-China exchanges in the early 1970's, you might wish to consider the use of some such similar device - such as a completely non-controversial cultural exchange, which might include reciprocal expositions of remaining objets d'art from the ancient Korean past. Such a device might be utilized either prior to or subsequent to the arrangement of humanitarian talks which would utilize your good offices.

Note: Mr. Perez d.C. forwarded a copy of this to the S-G. Mr. Perez d.C had asked for a meeting with the DPRK foreign minister before the [illegible] received a [illegible] reply. [Illegible] therefore [illegible] not to [illegible] the minister for the time being.

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(Signature)