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President Jimmy Carter to Senator Robert Byrd, 20 July 1978

Jimmy Carter
To Senator Robert Byrd

I understand that concern about the program for careful and phased withdrawal of U.S. ground combat forces from South Korea has prompted some in the Congress to propose placing restraints on my ability to redeploy these forces. Apparently that concern results largely from the incorrect impression that withdrawal will follow a rigid timetable not subject to modification in the light of changing circumstances. This has never been the case.

The withdrawal policy should be seen in the context of the international environment in Northeast Asia and the rapidly growing economic strength of the Republic of Korea. It is natural and appropriate that South Korea assume a greater share of the burden of its own defense. However, that burden must be assumed prudently and carefully. For this reason, I decided last April to defer a significant portion of the first phase of U.S. troop withdrawals until next year in order to give the Congress sufficient time to deal with the important question of equipment transfer authority.

It is my view that withdrawal phased over a four-to five-year period will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate developments on the peninsula. I expect the withdrawal program to be carried out in a manner which preserves a military balance and thus protects the security of the Republic of Korea. Should circumstances affecting the balance change significantly, we will assess these changes in close consultation with the Congress, the Republic of Korea and our other Asian allies. Our plans will be adjusted if developments so warrant.

Reports issued by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House International Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee propose that the Administration undertake full reviews of the impact of our plans, the force balance, and the international environment in connection with further ground force withdrawals from Korea, and report to the Congress on the results of these reviews. I endorse the Committees' aim and look forward to sharing our assessments with the Congress.
Meanwhile, it is most important that I have the necessary authority to begin equipment transfers and training operations which will safeguard the military balance on the peninsula. I hope the Congress will promptly enact the equipment transfer authority and foreign military sales credit authorizations already recommended by both the Senate Foreign Relations and House International Relations Committees.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510