

July 16, 1979
**Letter from J. Perez de Cuellar to the
Secretary-General**

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Summary:

J. Perez de Cuellar describes his recent conversations with the Permanent Observers from North Korea and South Korea on the possibility for a new round of dialogue between the two Koreas.

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Transcript - English

16 July 1979

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

I am attaching, for your information, a memorandum on the most recent developments at Headquarters with regard to the Korean situation, subsequent to the North Korean statement on the U.S.-South Korean proposal for tripartite talks.

Yours sincerely,
(signature)

J. Perez de Cuellar
Under-Secretary-General for
Special Political Affairs

Mr. Kurt Waldheim
Secretary-General

[...]

DATE: 16 July 1979

TO: The Secretary-General (signature)

THROUGH:

FROM: J. Perez de Cuellar (signature)
Under-Secretary-General
for Special Political Affairs

SUBJECT: Korea

1. On Tuesday, 10 July, I received the Permanent Observer of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to discuss North Korean reaction to the United States-South Korean joint proposal for tripartite talks to "promote dialogue and reduce tensions in the area".

2. The Ambassador stated that the DPRK did not feel that this proposal was motivated by a sincere desire for reunification and found it to be "a confused proposal". He stated that some issues are two-way issues between the two Korean parties and others are two-way issues between the Americans and the DPPK. Two different questions could not be mixed at three-way talks. With regard to reunification only North and South Korea could participate. With regard to troop withdrawals only North Korea and the United States could participate since South Korea is not a signatory to the Armistice Agreement. South Korea could participate in these latter talks only when matters directly concerning them arose.

3. The DPRK however "leaves the door open" for a dialogue with South Korean authorities and political parties and social and public organizations. The door is also left open to a dialogue with the United States which would concern withdrawal of U.S. troops and replacement of the Armistice Agreement by a peace agreement.

4. The Ambassador then stated as a DPRK initiative and not in response to a question that if the United States should insist upon this point South Korea could participate in the U.S.-DPRK talks as an observer. Even in this case talks should begin first of all between North Korea and the United States. This proposal has also been published in the official statement made public by the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pyongyang.

5. A subsequent press conference was followed by a question on the role of an observer. The Ambassador answered that this was a matter to be settled between the United States and North Korea. The role of a South Korean observer could be defined once agreement had been reached on talks between the U.S. and the DPRK. A South Korean observer could not negotiate, he would not be a negotiator. The Ambassador did not directly say however, or indirectly imply, that a South Korean observer would be unable to comment or make suggestions.

6. The foregoing would seem to indicate some degree of flexibility on the part of North Korea with regard to South Korean participation in the proposed tripartite talks. The publicly stated comments of the DPRK Permanent Observer were much milder in tone than the official press release, which contains some very strong language.

7. On Thursday, 12 July, I received the Permanent Observer of the Republic of Korea. The Ambassador appeared extremely aggravated by the North Korean response to the South Korean-American proposal for tripartite talks and uninterested in signs of moderation indicated by the DPRK Ambassador's public use of diplomatic language at his press conference.

The Ambassador stated that whereas North Korea speaks of two separate sets of issues, South Korea regards the two sets of issues as inextricably intertwined. South Korea regarded the North Korean statement as a rejection of the joint Republic of Korea-American proposal. Also, the ROK regarded an observer role for South Korea during separate DPRK-American talks as completely unacceptable.

8. In general, the South Korean Ambassador took a hard line and refused to see any nuances in the North Korean statement. However, he stated that the ROK-United States joint proposal of 1 July remained valid and "open for acceptance by the North Korean authorities". He also stated that the ROK proposal of 19 January for bilateral talks remained valid.

9. On Friday, 13 July, I received the Political Counsellor of the United States Mission and asked her for the American reaction to the North Korean statement with regard to the proposal for tripartite talks. The Political Counsellor said that the United States Mission had not been in close touch with the State Department on this matter, but she was willing to say that the U.S. Mission did not regard the North Korean statement as an outright rejection of the United States-South Korean proposal. In a preliminary way, the Political Counsellor agreed with me that there were some signs of moderation and flexibility in the North Korean statement and in the press conference which North Korea had held. In response to a suggestion from myself, the Political Counsellor also agreed that signs of flexibility on the part of the North Koreans were probably due to Chinese influence.