

# THE AMERICAN-KOREAN FRIENDSHIP AND INFORMATION CENTER AND NORTH KOREAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, 1971-1976

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*While scholars of the “new diplomatic history” have extensively analyzed the role of culture and ideology in the history of American foreign relations, the historiography of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) reflects a complete lack of understanding of the cultural, intellectual, and political narratives that have long shaped how Americans imagine North Korea in a domestic and global context. Specifically, historians have yet to consider how American attitudes about North Korea were increasingly informed by a transnational flow of ideas in the 1970s. With this understanding, this paper details the history of the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center (AKFIC) in New York City, a North Korean funded “anti-imperialist peace organization,” that sought to generate public support for the DPRK and force the withdrawal of American troops from the Korean peninsula. Utilizing interviews with former members of the group and its journal: Korea Focus, this paper makes two arguments: first, the DPRK used its close relationship with the AKFIC—alongside other “friendship societies” across the world—to harness the power of globalization for its own ends in the 1970s; second, members of the AKFIC sought to manipulate public anger over the Vietnam War and promote North Korean demands that US forces should withdraw from the Republic of Korea (ROK).*

## Introduction

“Why not team up with us!” exclaimed the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center in February 1974.<sup>1</sup> “We are an anti-imperialist peace organization, devoted to friendship between the peoples of the United States and Korea, especially the people of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea...”<sup>2</sup> The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center (AKFIC), in close cooperation with the North Korean government, sought to foster public support for the withdrawal of all US troops from South Korea from 1971-1976. Established by members of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), as well as university professors sympathetic to the North Korean cause, this group attempted to redirect public anger over the war in Vietnam towards the United States’ continued military presence in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Its organizers repeatedly told the American public over the first half of the 1970s—through advertisements and their journal, *Korea Focus*—that a horrific new war would erupt in East Asia if the United States did not end its military and financial support for South Korea.

The AKFIC was part of a broader North Korean diplomatic offensive in the 1970s to find new friends and allies beyond its borders. After years of isolation outside the socialist world, from 1971-1978 the DPRK established diplomatic relations with more than sixty new countries.<sup>3</sup> From Madagascar in 1972 to the tiny island republic of Cape Verde in 1975, North Korea expounded on the success of its *Juche* ideology across the globe and sought to portray Kim Il-sung as an intrepid leader for the Third World.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, Pyongyang financed the creation of some 200 “friendship” organizations in fifty countries to promote its interests and lobbied foreign governments for support at the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> In Korea, the DPRK entered into unprecedented negotiations with the ROK and signed a dramatic Joint Declaration on reunification on July 4, 1972.<sup>6</sup>

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1 “Why Not Team Up With Us,” *Korea Focus* 3, no. 2 (November 1974): 65.

2 Emphasis added. *Ibid.*

3 See: Charles K. Armstrong *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 178-179; Dae-Sook Suh, Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 262; Byung-Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 11-12.

4 For a collection of speeches from an atypical “International Scientific Seminar on the Juche Idea” in Madagascar, see: *Juche: The Banner of Independence* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977).

5 Dae-Sook Suh, Kim Il Sung: *The North Korean Leader*, 267.

6 On events surrounding the 1972 Joint Declaration, see: Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 23-26.

At the same time, Kim Il-sung's government launched a public diplomacy campaign in the United States to influence how Americans viewed the North Korean state.<sup>7</sup> In 1972, the North Korean leader sat for unprecedented interviews with Harrison Salisbury of the *New York Times* and Selig Harrison of the *Washington Post*. Over and over, Kim Il-sung emphasized that the removal of American forces from Korea would rapidly improve US-DPRK relations.<sup>8</sup> From 1973-1976, North Korea purchased full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* reiterating that message and—rather predictably—the greatness of the “Respected and Beloved Leader Kim Il-sung.”<sup>9</sup> At the center of this public relations effort, the AKFIC worked closely with North Korea and implored the anti-war movement of the period, as well as Americans at large, to protest against the continued presence of US troops in South Korea.

The AKFIC remains all but forgotten in the study of US-DPRK diplomatic history.<sup>10</sup> Older works on North Korean foreign policy focus too narrowly on traditional state-to-state diplomatic contacts and ignore the role of such third party organizations.<sup>11</sup> More recent books on the subject, like Charles K. Armstrong's *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*, have vastly improved our understanding of North Korea's diplomatic efforts in the First and Third Worlds.<sup>12</sup> But the full-extent of the DPRK's relationship with the American far-left in the late 1960s and 1970s remains unknown.<sup>13</sup> The

7 Public diplomacy, as Nicholas Cull has noted, consists of “listening” (ascertaining and examining the feelings of a foreign public); “advocacy” (directly advocating a policy position to a foreign populace); “cultural diplomacy” (using cultural contacts to influence a foreign public's perceptions of the initiating country); “exchange diplomacy” (engaging in reciprocal exchanges); and “international broadcasting” (using state funds to disseminate news to a foreign public). See: Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xiv-xvi.

8 See: “Excerpts from Interview with North Korea Premier on Policy towards US,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1972; Selig S. Harrison, “Kim Seeks Summit, Korean Troop Cuts,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 1972. For Harrison Salisbury's personal notes on this trip, see: Columbia University Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Harrison Salisbury Papers 1927-1999, Box 329, Folder 2: “Travel: North Korea Trip.”

9 See, for instance: “Display Ad 828: Talk of the Respected and Beloved Leader President KIM IL SUNG,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1975, E6.

10 The organization is briefly mentioned in: Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 392 endnote 41; Andrew C. Nahm, “The United States and North Korea since 1945,” in *Korean-American Relations, 1866-1997*, eds. Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 112.

11 See, for instance, Wayne S. Kiyosaki, *North Korea's Foreign Relations: the Politics of Accommodation, 1945-1975* (New York: Praeger, 1976); Byung-Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

12 See: Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 168-207; Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 253-268.

13 Benjamin R. Young, however, has recently shed light on the DPRK's fascinating relationship with

AKFIC, in this regard, has endured as a historiographical orphan for far too long. Vituperative denunciations of the group by conservative publications, like *National Review* and *Human Events*, provide the only information about it in the historical record apart from the organization's own publications.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing this gap in the historiography, this paper argues that the AKFIC's history is significant for two reasons. First—even though the group's influence in the United States was never more than marginal—its story further demonstrates how North Korea, the so-called “hermit kingdom,” sought to capitalize on an ongoing process of globalization in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> The DPRK continued to wall off its own society from foreign influences, but it embraced transnational relationships with the hope of using “people-to-people diplomacy” to achieve what it could not do militarily: force the United States to remove its soldiers from Korea. Just as Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale had sought to “internationalize the Algerian question” in its quest for independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s<sup>16</sup>, North Korea aimed to “re-internationalize” the Korean conflict in the 1970s and create a global outcry against the continued maintenance of the United Nations Command in South Korea.<sup>17</sup>

Second, the AKFIC's activities demonstrate how a domestic group may reformulate a foreign public diplomacy campaign through the lens of a unique national experience.<sup>18</sup> As North Korea called on Americans to demand the removal of their forces from South Korea, its supporters promoted

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the Black Panthers; see: Young, “The Enemy of Your Enemy is Your Friend: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971” (M.A. Thesis, State University of New York, College at Brockport, 2013); idem., “Our Common Struggle Against Our Common Enemy,” North Korea and the American Radical Left,” North Korea International Documentation Project, E-Dossier #14, February 2013.

- 14 Linda Bridges, “On the Left,” *National Review*, September 5, 1975, B130; Francis J. McNamara, “Will North Korea's 5<sup>th</sup> Column defeat U.S.?” *Human Events*, August 2, 1975, 609; U.S. Representative Richard H. Ichord, “Advertisers and Agitators,” *Washington Report*, April 12, 1970, WR 71-7.
- 15 North Korea, as Charles Armstrong states, pursued a “peculiar and limited kind of globalization... *avant la lettre*” in the 1970s that was a precursor to South Korea's *seggyewha* policy some twenty years later. See: Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 168.
- 16 On Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale, see: Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 17 The DPRK first began this diplomatic effort in the early 1960s, see: Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 140-145.
- 18 Other scholars have shed light on the ways that domestic publics engage with foreign public diplomacy campaigns through their own experiences, see: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism As Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: the Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

that message in the context of the Vietnam War. US “neo-colonial imperialism,” the AKFIC argued, had produced a tragic conflict in Southeast Asia and now threatened to ignite a new horrific war in Korea; only the complete withdrawal of American forces from both states could ensure peace in those long-suffering lands. That message, as the group explained it, sought to appeal to a burgeoning anti-war movement and capitalize on domestic anger over US foreign policy in Asia. While scholars have analyzed American public diplomacy in South Korea and beyond, the forgotten legacy of the AKFIC suggests the need to reexamine how Kim Il-sung’s government waged its own “people’s diplomacy” in the United States during the long 1970s.<sup>19</sup>

### The Creation of the AKFIC

Starting in 1968, North Korea began to host visitors from the American far-left for the first time.<sup>20</sup> The origins of the AKFIC stemmed from one such visit to Pyongyang by a delegation of the Communist Party of the United States in October 1970. During that trip, the *Washington Report* noted in April 1971, Kim Il-sung “welcomed as ‘comrades’” members of the CPUSA, including Henry and Fern Winston, Joseph Brandt, and Victor and Ellen Perlo.<sup>21</sup> Henry Winston, Chairman of the National Committee of the CPUSA, reportedly informed DPRK officials “that ‘the US people and the US Communist Party support the cause of the struggle of the Korean people.’”<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter, Joseph Brandt—formerly the editor of the CPUSA’s *Daily World*—joined Professor Howard Parsons of the University of Connecticut, Bridgeport, in organizing the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center.<sup>23</sup>

Four months later, on February 24, 1971, Brandt and Parsons announced the creation of that organization from a newly leased Fifth Avenue office

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19 On US public diplomacy in Korea, see: Wol-san Liem, “Telling the ‘truth’ to Koreans: US Cultural Policy in South Korea during the early Cold War, 1947-1967,” (PhD dissertation, New York University, 2010).

20 *The Guardian*—a self-described “independent radical newsweekly” in the US—sent multiple American delegations to the DPRK illegally from 1968-1970; see, for example: Lionel Martin, “Exclusive interview: Pueblo commander urges Apology to North Korea,” *Guardian*, September 28, 1968, 1, 12-13; William Rose, “Korea: next battlefield?” *Guardian*, September 21, 1968, 1, 16; Irwin Silber and Carl Davidson, “Precedented Glimpses: Letters to the Editor,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1972.

21 Ichord, “Advertisers and Agitators,” *Washington Report*, WR 71-7. Ellen Perlo later discussed parts of this trip in an article for the AKFIC’s journal, see: Ellen Perlo, “Happy Children: Asia’s Future is in Their Hands,” *Korea Focus* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 37-38.

22 Quoted in Ichord, “Advertisers and Agitators,” *Washington Report*, WR 71-7.

23 For Joseph Brandt’s correspondence, reports, and speeches from the 1960s to the 1990s, see: NYU Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, CPUSA Records, TAM.132, Series IX, Subseries A, Box 152, Folder 13.

suite in Manhattan. There, at an inaugural press conference, they released a list of 78 initiating sponsors that supported their efforts to create public pressure on the US government to remove its forces from Korea. At least 27 of those members claimed membership in the CPUSA, but the rest were professors, attorneys, artists, religious figures, and progressive activists from all walks of life. While these sponsors, the group acknowledged, “represented different philosophical and political beliefs,” they were all motivated by “an anti-imperialist conviction which unites them in a deep feeling of opposition to the US government’s continued presence in South Korea...”<sup>24</sup> From Howard Zinn to Jeanne Quan—an Asian-American activist who currently serves as the mayor of Oakland—the organization boasted a diverse array of supporters.<sup>25</sup> The reality, however, is that most of these sponsors had little involvement other than lending their names to the group’s publications.<sup>26</sup>

### On Behalf of the DPRK

The AKFIC described itself as an “anti-imperialist undertaking” to educate Americans about the DPRK and arouse public opposition to U.S. involvement in South Korea.<sup>27</sup> To achieve those ends, the group published a periodic journal: *Korea Focus*, hosted public forums and college lectures on North Korea, and participated in anti-war rallies. In all of these efforts, the group’s leadership made clear that it actively supported Kim Il-sung’s government and sought to convince other Americans to do so as well. “We are partisan...,” they stated openly, “we support 100 per cent...the people of the DPRK under a socialist system and we are 100 per cent behind the efforts of the DPRK to reunify the Korean nation...”<sup>28</sup> If the organization sought to “enlighten” the American people, it made clear that it endeavored to do so on behalf of the cause of the North Korean government.

### The Question of Funding

The AKFIC claimed not to speak for, or represent, the DPRK or any foreign state. Donations from supporters, they stated, financed all of their activities. “Operation Shoe String” in the spring of 1971, for example, reported a \$1,000 donation from “Mrs. Bertha L.J.” as well as smaller donations—like

24 AKFIC pamphlet, “Korea: Uneasy truce in the land of the morning calm” (1976): 3.

25 Mayor Quan’s office did not respond to the author’s request for an interview about her participation in the AKFIC.

26 Robert S. Cohen, telephone interview by the author, December 10, 2013.

27 AKFIC, “Operation War Shift: Position Paper,” Second Revised Edition, 1971, 3.

28 “[About the] AKFIC: American-Korean Friendship and Information Center,” *Korea Focus* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 63.

five dollars from “Jack in Florida” or two dollars from “Lulu Safforn” in Illinois.<sup>29</sup> These contributions supposedly paid the organization’s rent on Fifth Avenue.

Dae-Sook Suh, a renowned scholar of Korean communism, has dismissed these claims. In a recent interview, he stated that Kim Il-sung’s government certainly funded the AKFIC.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Suh, who never joined, remembers teasing its members over their financial ties as they screened a North Korean film at the University of Hawaii. “Please don’t do a half-ass job,” he told them, “North Korea does not have that much money.”<sup>31</sup> John Woodford, a former Vice Chairman of the organization, wholeheartedly agrees that North Korea provided cash for the AKFIC’s activities.<sup>32</sup>

Funding aside, the DPRK worked closely with the AKFIC in numerous other ways—providing literature, pamphlets, and films for its activities; hosting delegations in its capital; and even arranging an interview with Kim Il-sung.<sup>33</sup> The North Korean leader, for his part, expressed appreciation for the group’s efforts in “giving wide publicity to our people’s struggle...exposing the fascist dictatorship of south Korean reactionaries...as well as U.S. aggression in Korea...”<sup>34</sup> Clearly, Pyongyang supported the group enthusiastically and hoped its members would succeed in convincing the American public to support the withdrawal of US forces from the Korean peninsula.

### Through the Lens of the Vietnam War

To achieve that goal in the United States, members of the AKFIC—rather wisely—chose to minimize their hagiographic praise of Kim Il-sung. Instead, the group used the Vietnam War to promote North Korea’s argument that

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29 “Operation Shoe String,” *Korea Focus* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971): 63.

30 Dae-Sook Suh, telephone interview by the author, February 25, 2014.

31 Ibid.

32 John Woodford, former editor-in-chief of *Muhammad Speaks*, recently explained that he was quite surprised when Joe Walker—a friend and fellow Vice Chairman of the AKFIC—somehow acquired the funds to travel to the DPRK with Joseph Brandt and Howard Parsons in August 1971. John Woodford, telephone interview by the author, February 25, 2014.

33 The DPRK received two official AKFIC delegations in Pyongyang. For articles on those trips, see: “A Visit to the DPRK,” *Korea Focus* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 23-29; Fred Carrier (Co-Chairman AKFIC), “North Korean Journey: A View of Workers’ Democracy,” *Korea Focus* 2, no. 3 (Jan.-Feb. 1974): 18-21. Fred Carrier, a professor at Villanova University, later authored a full-length book on his experiences, entitled: *North Korean Journey: the revolution against colonialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1975). James Bergquist, Professor Emeritus of History at Villanova University, recently told the author that Carrier’s outspoken support for North Korea nearly led to his termination from Villanova; James Bergquist, personal communication by the author, April 11, 2014.

34 AKFIC Pamphlet, “KOREA MUST BE REUNIFIED: A Call for Friendship between the Peoples of the United States and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea by KIM IL SUNG: An Exclusive Interview with the President of the DPRK” (New York, 1974), 5.

the continued stationing of American soldiers in Korea would provoke a new war—“a second ‘war [in Asia] that nobody wants,’” as the organization put it.<sup>35</sup> In February 1971, the AKFIC published a sprawling advertisement in the *New York Times* equating America’s presence in South Korea with its ongoing war in Southeast Asia. A large, bold headline exclaimed: “Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos – AND KOREA AGAIN?”<sup>36</sup> U.S. policies in these countries, the advertisement argued, sought to crush anti-colonial revolutions and further American hegemony throughout Asia. There was only one-way to bring peace and stability to the region: “BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!”<sup>37</sup> These arguments—coming after years of frequent DMZ firefights between American and North Korean soldiers in the 1960s, as well as the seizure of the USS *Pueblo* by North Korea in 1968—appealed to the anxieties of a war-weary public disillusioned by America’s disastrous war in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup>

The group’s first position paper, “Operation War Shift,” also compared America’s military presence in Korea to its war in Vietnam. “Will the decade of the 1970s witness a new Vietnam in Korea?” the publication asked forebodingly.<sup>39</sup> American “neo-colonialism” in Korea, contended “Operation War Shift,” sought to remove Kim Il-sung’s government and allow a revitalized Japan to control Korea for America’s financial benefit. Far from advancing U.S. interests, however, these efforts would precipitate “a new holocaust”—a war that would “take the lives of thousands...in Korea—and the lives of thousands of young Americans.”<sup>40</sup> The U.S. public, from this perspective, had no choice but to pressure the White House to end its support for the regime of Park Chung-hee in the south and remove its troops altogether. The AKFIC, as it stated in *Korea Focus*, thus needed “millions of peace-loving people...” to “...engage with us in the struggle to remove U.S. troops from Korea and leave Korea to the Korean people as Vietnam is now being left to the Vietnamese people.”<sup>41</sup>

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35 Emphasis added. “Display Ad 39: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos – AND KOREA AGAIN,” *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1971, 41.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 See: Mitchell Lerner, “‘Mostly Propaganda in Nature’: Kim Il Sung, the Juche Ideology, and the Second Korean War,” North Korea International Documentation Project, Working Paper #3, December 2010; idem., *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Major Daniel P. Bolger, “Scenes from an Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966-1969,” Leavenworth Papers, Number 19, July 1991; Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, “The Quiet War: Combat Operations Along the Korean Demilitarized Zone, 1966-1969,” *The Journal of Military History* (April 2000): 439-458.

39 Emphasis added. AKFIC, “Operation War Shift: Position Paper,” Second Revised Edition, 1971, 3.

40 Ibid.

41 “Korea Focus Executive Board” *Korea Focus* 2, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1971): 1.



## Appealing to the Anti-War Movement

The American public had risen up in the streets to protest war in Southeast Asia, and now mounting tensions in Korea necessitated a similar effort according to North Korea's US supporters. This was the message that the AKFIC brought to the "Vietnam War Out Now" peace rally in Washington, D.C. on April 24, 1971. Distributing literature and soliciting donations from an estimated half-a-million protestors that day, the group sought to unfurl its sails into the anti-Vietnam tempest and inspire a public outcry over the continued stationing of U.S. GIs in Korea. The group's fundraising bid at that protest yielded a relatively paltry \$365 in contributions.<sup>42</sup> While not wholly insignificant, that number speaks to the organization's struggles in enlisting a vast U.S. peace movement behind its cause. The Communist Party of the United States, not hundreds of thousands of young Americans, would remain the group's main support base. Joe Brandt—recalled former Communist Party Vice Presidential Candidate Jarvis Tyner—energetically promoted the organization at party meetings and ensured CPUSA bookstores carried North Korean literature.<sup>43</sup>

## To the Halls of Congress

Alongside these efforts to gain the backing of anti-war activists, the AKFIC and the North Korean government jointly lobbied the US House of Representatives. On April 6, 1973, for instance, North Korea's nominal legislative branch, the "Supreme People's Assembly," sent the American legislative body an unprecedented letter, calling for US-DPRK negotiations and an end to the presence of foreign troops in Korea.<sup>44</sup> After Congress declined to respond, the AKFIC mobilized a letter-writing campaign demanding that US representatives take action against the White House's continued support for South Korea.<sup>45</sup> The United States—the group noted—had reached a peace agreement with North Vietnam on the withdrawal of American troops from southeast Asia; but still: "US troops armed with destructive atomic weapons remain entrenched in South Korea, violating the will and sovereignty of the Korean people."<sup>46</sup> Korea would never know lasting peace until American sol-

42 "Operation Shoe String," *Korea Focus* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971): 63.

43 Jarvis Tyner, telephone interview by the author, March 4, 2014. For a biographical sketch of Tyner's work with the CPUSA in these years, see: NYU Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, CPUSA Records, TAM.132, Series II, Subseries C, Box 115, Folder 52.

44 For the text of the letter, see: "Letter to the Congress of the United States," *Korea Focus* 2, no. 2 (September 1973): 28-29.

45 *Ibid.*, 34.

46 *Ibid.*, 27.

diers left the divided peninsula according to the AKFIC.

After the DPRK's Supreme People's Assembly sent a second letter to Congress without any response on March 25, 1974, the AKFIC reiterated its arguments and wrote to every US Senator and Representative. In doing so, the group expressed its dismay at the "shockingly discourteous" response of America's legislative body. Its silence, the group decried, was "an incomprehensible refusal to explore a welcome opportunity to create a meaningful state of peace in a most critical area of Asia."<sup>47</sup> Though yielding few results—beyond attracting the attention of the House Committee on Internal Security<sup>48</sup>—the AKFIC and North Korea hoped to shape US foreign policy from the ground-up through this type of grassroots lobbying.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of the group's energetic initiatives, it quickly faced serious financial problems by 1976. The last edition of *Korea Focus*, published in the spring of that year, blamed declining donations on a deteriorating American economy. It "seems," the group added with a hint of bitterness, "ironic in this post-Vietnam era, when anti-imperialist sentiment in the US is at its highest, that [the] AKFIC...[is] under pressure of a serious economic pinch..."<sup>50</sup> Shortly thereafter, the organization permanently closed its doors in mid-1976.

## Conclusion

The DPRK's efforts to foster public support in the United States through the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center failed. The US anti-war movement, and the American public in general, had little interest in its arguments on American imperialism in Korea, as well as its warnings of imminent war. As Bruce Cumings and Jon Halliday once noted, college students would never run "through the streets of Berkley shouting, 'Kim, Kim, Kim Il-sung.'"<sup>51</sup> Whatever the similarities between Ho Chi Minh and the North Korean leader—and their intensely nationalistic brands of communism—the

47 A copy of this letter was enclosed as "A Letter to Congress" in *Korea Focus* 3, no. 1 (August-September 1974).

48 During internal security hearings, the House Committee denounced the AKFIC in the congressional record as a front organization for the CPUSA. See: *Hearings Before the Select Committee on Committees: House of Representatives, Ninety-Third Congress, Vol. 1 of 3, Part 2 of 2* (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1973), 485-486.

49 Congressman Michael Harrington of Massachusetts, however, argued on the House floor on April 9, 1974 that the DPRK's efforts represented a "dramatic change in the North's position on peace talks" and that the US government "should look into the letter." See: *Congressional Record, Ninety-Third Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 120, Parts 7-8* (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1974), 10419.

50 "Speaking Frankly," *Korea Focus* 4, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 1976): 1.

51 Bruce Cumings and Jon Halliday, *Korea: the Unknown War* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 204. Quoted in Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006), 134.

presence of US forces in South Korea largely failed to inspire the passions of Americans of any ideological stripe beyond the far-left. The murky Cold War origins of the North Korean state, as well as extraordinarily bitter memories of the Korean War, dampened Americans' sympathy for Kim Il-sung's pleas to "leave Korea to the Koreans."<sup>52</sup> North Korea would continue to contact the American government throughout the late 1970s—President Jimmy Carter even sought to withdraw US ground forces from South Korea for a time.<sup>53</sup> But the public, as a whole, never proved receptive to the argument that the withdrawal of American troops from Korea would bring lasting peace to that divided peninsula.

The dissolution of the AKFIC in 1976 corresponded with a precipitous decline in North Korean funding for similar friendship societies across the world.<sup>54</sup> By the end of the 1970s, the DPRK had become frustrated with its inability to translate expensive public relations efforts abroad into concrete results on the Korean peninsula. North Korea gained heightened diplomatic support from developing countries at the United Nations, as well as admission to the Non-Aligned Movement. But—without public support in the US for the withdrawal of American forces from Korea—these victories did little to advance Pyeongyang's central objectives: the removal of foreign forces from their country and reunification under Kim Il-sung's regime. By the early 1980s, the North Korean leader lost interest in pursuing diplomatic offensives in the First and Third Worlds and turned anew to the Soviet Union and China for assistance.

Regardless, North Korean public diplomacy in the 1970s, and the brief history of the AKFIC, demonstrates how the allure of globalization led even North Korea to participate in the international community as it never had before. Its transnational efforts at "people-to-people" diplomacy in the United States and beyond suggests the need for historians to continue to study how foreign states and third party organizations—regardless of their ideological backgrounds—have coordinated public diplomacy campaigns in "private-public partnerships."<sup>55</sup> In turn, the AKFIC's attempts to create a public out-

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52 Charles K. Armstrong has noted that "the history of the DPRK was too ambiguous—neither a Soviet 'satellite nor a clear-cut case of indigenous revolution—to appeal to the far-left vanguard of the West." See: Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 177.

53 See: William H. Gleysteen, Jr., *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 41-42.

54 None would survive long without Pyeongyang's patronage. See: Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 267-268.

55 See: Kenneth Osgood, ed., *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 8-9, FN 17.

cry against the presence of US forces in South Korea through invoking the Vietnam War is a reminder that domestic organizations are never devoid of their own agency and will often reformulate foreign messages in a uniquely national context.