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978-0-521-12544-4 - America's Commitment to South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine

Joo-Hong Nam

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LSE MONOGRAPHS IN
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America's commitment to South Korea

This book diagnoses problems of power and stability in Northeast Asia by analysing the strategic rationale of the American security commitment to South Korea, and its forward base there. Since the Korean War the US–South Korean alliance had constituted a major pillar of peace and stability in the region, but with the palpable failure of US containment strategy in Indochina the alliance was exposed to renewed critical examination. The dilemma for successive United States Administrations was how to prevent the Korean situation from degenerating into another Vietnam, and yet preserve its commitment to its old ally. Military and political support were necessarily disengaged, and the Nixon Doctrine thus served as both the end and the means of containment strategy in Asia.

The purpose of this book is to identify and elucidate the principal conditions that have influenced changing American perspectives on South Korea, and to illuminate the overall intellectual and practical problems of collective security in the region as represented by the US–South Korean alliance. As Korea has become the only part of the world in which the Soviet Union, China and the United States are directly engaged, the significance of this study extends far beyond its immediate theme. The nature of the American commitment to South Korea bears directly upon the achievement, or otherwise, of peace and stability throughout East Asia and the Western Pacific.

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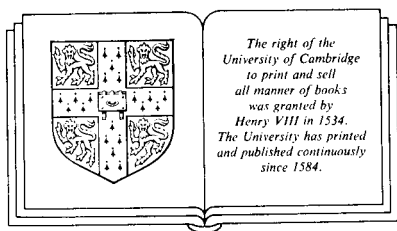
AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO SOUTH KOREA

The first decade of the Nixon Doctrine

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PREFACE

For thirty-five years since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the Korean peninsula has been a focus of East–West confrontation in Northeast Asia. Its root cause, the division of the peninsula into North and South Korea, was a direct consequence of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The ensuing bitter doctrinal enmity and military confrontation between the two Koreas reflected conflicting interests between the US and the USSR (and the People's Republic of China – PRC). Since the armistice of 1953, a state of neither peace nor war has obtained on the Korean scene among the contending parties. The forward basing of US forces in South Korea is one symbol of the entangling conflict.

Amongst the variables that affect the peace and security of the peninsula, this study chose to emphasize the role of the American security commitment to South Korea as a key determinant. This is because the presence of sizable US forces in South Korea ever since the end of the Korean War has been the single most important factor in preventing recurrence of war between the contending Koreas. Accordingly, this study examines in particular the role of US forces in South Korea and those interests (both US domestic and international) which have pressed for and against a US military presence.

This book is a revised edition of a doctoral dissertation which was presented to the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1983. The scope of major investigation is confined to the 1970s because it was largely the legacy of Vietnam which prompted successive US Administrations to reassess the degree of American commitment to South Korea during that decade. The major problems of that commitment during the seventies arose from the attempt to reconcile the imperative of post-Vietnam military disengagement from the Asian periphery with the political necessity to preserve the alliance system because of the global rivalry with the Soviet Union.

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x *Preface*

The reconciliation of these seemingly contradictory priorities was sought through the Nixon–Kissinger strategy embodying the Nixon Doctrine. Carter's policy of withdrawing US troops from South Korea was a logical extension of the Nixon Doctrine, although Carter's policy emphasized more the military disengagement than the preservation of a strong alliance with South Korea.

In writing this book, I have benefited greatly from the advice and assistance of a number of individuals. I would like to acknowledge gratefully the following: my supervisors, Mr Michael Yahuda and Dr Michael Leifer of the Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, who have offered extremely valuable comments, candid evaluations, and editorial suggestions for individual chapters; my former colleagues and staff of the Harvard Centre for International Affairs, especially Professor Samuel Huntington and Professor Gene Sharp for the stimulus of many hours of conversation; Vice-Chairman Lim Chang-Wook of MI-WON Industrial Group and Lim Byung-Woon, executive director of SAE LIM Foundation, Korea, for their encouragement and support throughout the research period; and finally to my wife Mi-Sook and all the family members who have furnished spiritual sustenance in the preparation of the manuscript.