

In Search of Diaspora Connections: North Korea's Policy towards Korean Americans, 1973-1979*

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Since the 1950s, North Korea considered the “overseas compatriot” or *haeoe dongpo*** issue an important policy agenda under the perception that they could provide political and ideological support and legitimacy for the regime. From the early 1970s, North Korea began to expand the diaspora policy that went beyond the Koreans in Japan to the United States to promote a “worldwide movement of overseas compatriots.” Concomitantly, North Korea launched a public diplomacy campaign toward the U.S. to gain American public support for its political and diplomatic agendas during this period. This public diplomacy towards Americans intersected with the development of a policy towards Koreans residing in the United States.

This study explores the development of North Korean policy towards Korean Americans that began to evolve in the 1970s. The historical background behind the evolution of this policy as well as specific policy objectives and strategies are depicted. Ultimately, this policy was focused on engaging with Korean Americans who could act as a link between the two countries with the aspiration that they convey North Korea's policies to the United States, improve its international image and increase global support for Korean reunification on North Korean terms. I argue that the efforts in the 1970s laid the groundwork that contributed to a formulation of a more tangible policy starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s that included hosting family reunions, group tours to North Korea, cultural and religious exchanges and promoting the establishment of pro-North Korea associations in the United States.

Keywords: North Korea, Korean Americans, Korean diaspora, public diplomacy, U.S.-DPRK relations

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** Note on transliteration: The Romanization of Korean words and names in this article is based on the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR), released by the ROK Ministry of Culture and Tourism in July 2000.

I. Introduction

Since the 1950s, North Korea considered the “overseas compatriot” or *haeoe dongpo*¹ issue an important policy agenda as it was pertinent to its domestic, foreign and inter-Korean policies. The Korean community abroad was perceived valuable in terms of influencing foreign relations with the resident country as well as inter-Korean relations, as these communities maintained a connection to the homeland—both South and North Korea for some—and domestic policy with a perception that they could provide political, ideological and economic support and legitimacy for the regime. In particular, North Korea began to pay special attention to Koreans residing in the United States, as North Korea began to explore ways to mend relations with the United States from the 1970s. This was in line with the public diplomacy campaign that targeted the American public to support the North Korean political and diplomatic agenda.²

North Korea’s diaspora³ policy is multilayered. It is a policy towards overseas Koreans as well as a combination of strategies designed to create a global network of supporters for its unification policy as well as foreign, domestic and economic policies. Currently, the Korean diaspora is dispersed into four major areas including the United States, Japan, China, and the Commonwealth of Independent States

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1. *Haeoe dongpo* literally in Korean means overseas compatriot, brethren or people of the same ancestry derived from the Chinese character 同 “dong” and 胞 “po” where *dong* means “same” while *po* means the “womb.” Hence, literal translation of *haeoe dongpo* is brothers from the same womb from overseas. In South Korea, *jaewae dongpo* is more commonly used as seen in the Overseas Koreans Foundation (*Jaewae Dongpo Jaedan*) with the emphasis placed on *jaewae* for residing outside of the homeland.
 2. Ralph N. Clough, “North Korea and the United States,” in *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspective*, eds. Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh and Tae-hwan Kwak (Boulder: Westview, 1987), pp. 260-269.
 3. Diaspora in a contemporary sense refers to a dispersion of people from their homeland to another country or foreign land. In this article, I refer to Koreans living abroad as overseas Koreans, overseas compatriot and Korean diaspora interchangeably.

(CIS). North Korea has had a diaspora policy⁴ since the 1950s. For the first two decades, this policy was limited to Koreans in Japan; however, starting in the early 1970s, North Korea began to expand the policy to include Koreans living in the United States. North Korea considered Koreans in America as an invaluable resource and agent to build a friendlier relationship with the United States that could act as a liaison between North Korea and the United States as well as South Korea, as a group with potential impact across both Koreas. Without a formal diplomatic relationship with the United States, North Korea needed to explore other channels of communication and access to the United States. Korean Americans that spoke both languages with shared ethnic and cultural connections represented an attractive solution. The 1970s were an exploration of such options.

The literature on North Korea's policy towards the Korean diaspora is limited in scope and number. Earlier literature focused on North Korea's policy towards Koreans in Japan and the pro-North Korea organization, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (also known as *Chosen Soren* in Japanese, *Chochongryon* in Korean, hereinafter referred to as *Chongryon*).⁵ In addition, a number of comparative studies examined the differences in policy between North and South Korea.⁶

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4. In recent years, diaspora scholarship uses the term diaspora policy more frequently than the terms such as overseas Korean policy or overseas Chinese policy. However, as North Korea translates the term *haeoe dongpo* policy as an "overseas compatriot movement," I will interchangeably use overseas Korean policy, overseas compatriot policy and diaspora policy.
 5. Samyeol Yoo, "Bukhanui Jaeilgyopo Jeongchaekgwa Jochongryeon [North Korea's Policy towards Koreans in Japan and Choongryon]" (Ph.D. dissertation, Sogang University, 1993); Hee-gwan Chin, "Jochongryeon Yeongu [A Study of General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon)]" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dongguk University, 1998).
 6. Yong-chan Kim, "Nambukhanui Jaeodongpo Jeongchaek [Overseas Korean Policy of South and North Korea]," *Minjok Yeongu*, vol. 5 (2000); In-jin Yoon, "Nambukhan Jaeodongpo Jeongchaekui Bigyo [A Comparison of South and North Korean Policies of Overseas Koreans]," *Hanguk Sahoe [Journal of Social Research]*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005); Young-gwang Kim, "Nambukhanui Jaeogyomin Jeongchaek Daehan Bigyoyeongu [A Comparative Study of South and North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, Hanyang University, 1980).

However, more recent studies since the 2000s began to take note of North Korea's expanded policy and compared North Korea's policy towards overseas Koreans in China, Japan, CIS and the United States.⁷ These studies are meaningful in that they explicated the different strategies taken for each diaspora communities and revealed a policy expansion from a regional to global level; however, it takes a piecemeal approach and Korean American policy is often treated as a subsidiary policy in comparison to other regions like Japan. In addition, these studies are limited due to a lack of a clear depiction of when and why Korean American policy first appeared and how it has changed over the years in a systematic way. In addition, it also fails to provide an in-depth analysis on factors that attributed to the formation of such policy.

In addition to the literature on North Korean overseas Korean policy, North Korea's initial engagement with Korean Americans was also discussed scarcely in connection to North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States in the 1970s.⁸ These studies revealed that

7. Hee-gwan Chin, "Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu: Jaejung Chongryeon, JaeCIS Dongpo, Jaeil Chongryeon Gurigo Jaemidongpo Jeongchaek Bigyo Yeongureul Jungsimeuro [North Korean Overseas Korean Policy: A Comparison of Policy towards Overseas Koreans in China, CIS, Japan, and the United States]," *Tongil Munjae Yeongu* [*The Korean Journal of Unification Affairs*], vol. 23, no. 1 (2011); Jin-wook Choi, *Nambukhan Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaekgwa Tongilgwajeongeseo Jaeoedongpoui Yeokhal* [*Overseas Korean Policies of North and South Korea and the Role of the Overseas Koreans in the Unification Process*] (Seoul: Korean Institute of National Unification, 2007); Jeong-nam Cho, Ho-yeol Yoo and Man-gil Han, *Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaek* [*North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy*] (Seoul: Jipmundang, 2002); Ki-man Son, "Bukhanui Jaeoedongpo Jeongchaekui Daehan Yeongu [A Study on North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, University of North Korean Studies, 2001); Dong-su Koo, "Bukhanui Haeoedongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu [North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy]" (master's thesis, Korea University, 2000).

8. North Korea's public diplomacy with the U.S. during the 1970s can be traced to the involvement with the American-Korean Friendship Information Center (AKFIC), Communist Party of USA (CPUSA), and the Black Panther Party. See Brandon Gauthier, "The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center and North Korean Public Diplomacy, 1971-1976," *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2014), p. 147; Benjamin Young, "Juche in the United States: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971," *The Asia-*

North Korea's mollified attitude toward the U.S. targeted not only Americans but also Koreans that resided in the United States.⁹ North Korea applied similar tactics of inviting influential Americans to Pyongyang to individuals such as Korean American professors, pastors, journalists and community leaders who were considered prominent from as early as 1971.¹⁰ There are no records of such visits prior to 1971. Other tactics included promoting the creation of pro-North Korea organizations by Americans and Korean Americans as well as the dissemination of North Korean propaganda materials such as the *Selected Works of Kim Il Sung*, *Rodong Sinmun* and *Pyongyang Times* to U.S. institutions, selected Americans and Korean American organizations.¹¹

However, most scholars describe North Korea's newly sparked interest in Korean Americans during the 1970s only in terms of North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States and do not elaborate on specific goals and strategies behind the outreach to the Korean community in the U.S. These studies have overlooked the fact that such tactics were also a part of North Korea's larger overseas Korean policy. I argue that North Korea's approach towards the Korean Americans in the 1970s encompasses both North Korea's public diplomacy towards the United States and as well as North Korea's expansion of its overseas Korean policy to the United States.

This study provides a deeper narrative of North Korea's policy towards Korean Americans. When did they first reach out to Korean

Pacific Journal, vol. 13, issue 12, no. 2 (March 30, 2015); Cha-jun Kim, "1970 Nyeondae Jeonbangi Bukhanui Daemi Jeopgeun [North Korean Approach to the United States in the Early 1970s: Focus on Activities of the American-Korean Friendship Information Center (AKFIC)]," *Hyeondae Bukhan Yeongu [Review of North Korean Studies]*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2017), p. 137.

9. Jae Kyu Park, "Bukhanui Daemiguk Jeongchaek [North Korea's U.S. Policy]," in *Bukhan Oegyoron [North Korean Foreign Policy]*, eds. Byung Chul Koh, Se Jin Kim, and Jae Kyu Park (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1977), pp. 123-124.

10. Myong Joon Roe, "North Korea's Diplomacy toward the United States and Japan," *Korea Observer*, vol. 10, No. 2 (1979), p. 151.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 151; Tae Tong Chong, "Midaetongryeong Seongeowa Bukgoeui Daenamjeonryak [American Presidential Election and North Korea's Strategy toward South Korea]," *Bukhan [North Korea]*, no.54 (1976), p. 227.

Americans and for what reasons? What were their goals and objectives? What tactics were used? What factors attributed to the formation of such a policy towards Korean Americans? By analyzing North Korea's official and public documents as well as personal and official documents from South Korea and the United States, I explain that initial efforts in the 1970s served as an exploratory stage to build a concrete policy in the 1980s and 1990s.

This historical analysis of North Korea's Korean American policy in the 1970s can provide a new perspective on understanding inter-Korean relations and inter-Korean competition towards the overseas Korean community as well as North Korea and U.S. relations in terms of Pyongyang's diversified efforts to engage with Washington during the 1970s. In addition, this study can serve as a preliminary study for enhancing the understanding of North Korea's diaspora policy and diaspora relations in a multidimensional perspective. North Korea's global aspirations from the 1970s were objectified in various ways. The exploration of new diaspora connections around the world was pursued as an effort to build a global support base for its unification and economic policies that could also act as a channel of communication to improve relations with the resident country of the diaspora.

II. Historical Overview of North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy

Overseas Korean Policy: From Inception to the 1960s

North Korean diaspora policy or policy towards Koreans living abroad is referred to as the "movement of overseas compatriots" (or *haeoe gyopo undong*).¹² North Korea describes the overseas compatriot issue as a "special component of our nation's problem which was created by imperialists that invaded the weak nation-state...and forced

12. North Korea does not use the term policy. Instead it uses the word *undong* that means movement. The Encyclopedia Publishers, *Joseonmal Daesajeon [The Great Korean Encyclopedia, 24]* (Pyongyang: Encyclopedia Publishers, 2001), p. 643.

overseas migration that imposed unspeakable and brutal political repression and economic plunder.”¹³ North Korea attributes the onset of the Korean diaspora problem to the invasion by imperialists and colonial rule that forced overseas migration and oblige the overseas compatriots to work for the “revolutionary feats for the country.”¹⁴ In essence, this movement started with the creation of *Chongryon* in May 25, 1955.¹⁵ Therefore, North Korea’s policy towards Koreans in Japan focused on mobilizing all Koreans under *Chongryon*. The main objective was to provide protection as North Korean citizens,¹⁶ advocate national rights, provide educational support, and “repatriate” Koreans in Japan to the homeland (North Korea) and in return demand “patriotic acts” from the overseas Koreans to support North Korea’s national unification policy, anti-South Korean movements, and an overall pledge to support the regime.¹⁷

The three overarching goals of North Korea’s overseas Korean policy are: provide national rights as North Korean citizens, contribute to the state development, and participate in the national reunification movement.¹⁸ The details of the strategies are outlined as follows.

13. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *Widaehan Suryeong Kim Il Sung Dongjiui Bulmyeolui Hyeokmyeongupjeok 18: Haeogyopo Munjaeui Bitnaneun Haegyol [Immortal Revolutionary Achievement of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung 18: A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues]* (Pyongyang: Pyongyang General Printing Factory, 1999), p. 16.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

15. In-jin Yoon, “Nambukhan Jaeodongpo Jeongchaekui Bigyo [A Comparison of South and North Korean Policies of Overseas Koreans],” *Hanguk Sahoe [Journal of Social Research]*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005), p. 38.

16. This is the most prominent difference between Korean diaspora in Japan with other countries. Most Koreans abroad eventually took the citizenship of the host country; however, many resident Koreans in Japan did not, and if they did not take South Korean citizenship, they were considered *chosenseki* or *joseonjeok* which was basically a stateless status as Japan does not recognize North Korea as a state.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

18. Son, “A Study on North Korea’s Overseas Korean Policy,” p. 34.

Table 1: North Korea's Major Goals and Strategies towards Overseas Koreans

Policy Goals	Strategies
National rights as North Korean citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education Support - Visit fatherland campaigns - Repatriation to fatherland - Citizenship granted to those that move to North Korea
Contribution to state development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize the achievements and capabilities of overseas compatriots - Support the fatherland in all means - Encourage investment by overseas compatriots - Incorporate overseas compatriot to strengthen diplomacy towards the West
Promotion of the National reunification movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support Anti-U.S., Anti-ROK government activities - Promote dialogues on reunification and exchanges between overseas compatriots - Form organizations and associations to support the fatherland - Strengthen international solidarity among compatriot organizations and international supporters

Source: Ki-man Son, "A Study on North Korea's Overseas Korean Policy," p. 34.

Global Expansion of Overseas Korean Policy: 1970s to 1990s

North Korea's policy towards overseas Koreans which was exclusive to the Korean diaspora in Japan from 1950 to 1960s began to expand to the West including the United States and Europe in the 1970s. This eventually expanded to the former Soviet Union and China from the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This expansion of North Korea's overseas Korean policy can be divided into four major periods: 1) The 1950s that focused on creating the *Chongryon*, 2) The 1960s where policy was focused on solidifying and strengthening *Chongryon*, 3) The 1970-1980s expansion of policy to the United States and Europe, and 4) The 1990s onwards in a global expansion of the policy to include the diaspora in the former Soviet Union and China.¹⁹

From 1970s, North Korea newly identified the overseas compatriot

19. Kelly Hur, "Bukhanui Jaemidongpo Jeongchaek Yeongu: 1973-1994 [North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States: 1973-1994]" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Korean Studies, 2016), p. 45.

issue in the United States and Europe as a problem “engendered by the Japanese imperialists and colonialism along with reactionary “immigration” and “labor export” policies of the South Korean puppet faction under the influence of the U.S. imperialists.”²⁰ As for the goals of the overseas compatriot movement, Kim Il Sung obliged the overseas Korean community to: 1) embrace the patriotism of unification, 2) unite under the great national unity under the banner of national reunification, and 3) organize liberal overseas compatriot organizations with the goal of national unification.²¹ This depiction of the overseas compatriot movement as stated by Kim Il Sung overzealously emphasized national unification; however, a key policy agenda is the creation of “liberal overseas compatriot organization” like *Chongryon* to also form in the U.S. and Europe domestically, but also for these organizations to unite internationally.

In essence, North Korea’s expansion of diaspora policy was necessary to create a global network under the banner of “great national unity” and “enhance international support and solidarity”²² to revolutionize South Korea and achieve reunification under North Korean terms as well as gain the upper hand in inter-Korean competition. With the goals of increasing international support and solidarity for its unification policy, North Korea needed as many diaspora connections as possible and reaching out to Koreans in the U.S.—where North Korea had no diplomatic relations—was vital for resetting tactics towards the United States in the 1970s. The next section examines the factors that influenced this change.

III. Influencing Policy Change: External, Internal and Diaspora Factors

The climate of international politics was in a state of rapid change in

20. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p. 327.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

the early 1970s and North Korea's cold war hostilities towards the United States also began to ease. This was a period of détente between the United States and China after President Nixon's visit to China. North Korea attempted a new diplomatic offensive toward the United States and launched various public diplomacy campaigns that separated its policy towards the American government from the American people. This is evident from Kim Il Sung's interviews with two American journalists, Harrison Salisbury from *the New York Times* and Selig Harrison from *the Washington Post* who were invited to Pyongyang in 1972; the North Korean leader repeatedly emphasized, "we oppose the reactionary policies of the U.S. government but we do not oppose the American people. We want to have many good friends in the United States."²³ From the early 1970s, this change in tactics and North Korea's new peace offensive extended to approaching liberal Americans.²⁴ In line with this tactic towards Americans, Korean Americans were also utilized as a part of this public diplomacy and a targeted contact point for a group that North Korea could use to deliver various messages from the regime to American and Korean American communities.

North Korea also joined the U.N. system in 1973. After joining the World Health Organization (WHO) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in May 1973, North Korea opened U.N. permanent observer missions in Geneva and New York. The doors of its New York office opened on September 5, 1973.²⁵ There is no coincidence in that North

23. Kim Il Sung, "Talk with Journalists of the U.S. Newspaper, *New York Times*, May 26, 1972," in *For the Independent Peaceful Reunification of Korea* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 172; Kim Il Sung, "Talk to a Journalist of the U.S. Newspaper *Washington Post*, June 21, 1972," *Kim Il Sung Works*, vol. 27 (1986), p. 271.

24. Before 1970, delegation of the Communist Party of U.S. (CPUSA) and the Black Panther Party are reported to have visited Pyongyang. The U.S. communist party (CPUSA) was reported to have visited Pyongyang on August 20, 1969 (*Rodong Sinmun*, August 21, 1969). However, the U.S. sent delegations illegally to Pyongyang from 1968. See Brandon Gauthier, "The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center and North Korean Public Diplomacy, 1971-1976," *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2014), p.151.

25. *Rodong Sinmun*, September 13, 1973.

Korea's policy towards Korean Americans appeared in the same year. The presence of a North Korean delegation on the American soil had provided direct access to American and Korean American communities. This favorable condition permitted North Korea to engage the overseas Korean community in the U.S. and establish American connections. Also, the dissemination of North Korean propaganda materials and promotion of North Korea's policy agendas were made possible from this point forward.²⁶

Internally, North Korea also began to report the activities of Korean American organizations in the *Rodong Sinmun* and the *Korean Central Yearbook* as separate from Koreans in Japan. Before 1973, North Korea's reference to Korean Americans was non-existent. However, from July 1973, North Korea began to separate *Chongryon* from Koreans in the United States and report various political protests, rallies, and petitions, appeals and statements made by Korean American organizations.²⁷ Such news appeared in the form of articles and editorials that cited Korean American newspapers from Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C.—*Sinhan Minbo*, *Haeoe Hanminbo* and *Hanmin Sinbo* were three major Korean American newspapers quoted in the *Rodong Sinmun*.²⁸ The *Rodong Sinmun* featured stories of Korean American organizations that condemned the South Korean government and

26. This has alarmed the South Korean government and they responded by tracking North's activities as well as by launching propaganda activities of their own. The U.S. House of Representatives, *Investigation of Korean American Relations: Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 31, 1978), p. 43.

27. In *Rodong Sinmun*, the first article on Koreans from the United States was mentioned from May 1973. From 1973 to 1979, over 128 articles appeared in news that dealt with the political activities of Korean Americans in the U.S.

28. *The New Korea (Sinhan Minbo)* was started in 1909 but it was taken over by Kim Un Ha in 1974 and published as a monthly publication, with its office located in Los Angeles. The *Overseas Korean Journal (Haeoe Hanminbo)* was started in New York City and operated from 1973 to 1985. *Hanmin Sinbo* was started in Washington D.C. and operated from 1970 to 1984. *Hangukminjok Munhwa Daebaekgwaja Sajeon [Encyclopedia of Korean Culture]*, <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed October 9, 2018).

expressed support for an anti-military government, anti-dictatorship, and pro-democracy movement in South Korea. For example, Korean American community's political activities that criticized the Park Chung Hee's Yushin regime²⁹ and protests for the withdrawal of U.S. troops in South Korea³⁰ frequently appeared in the *Rodong Sinmun*.

The *Rodong Sinmun* is targeted for the domestic audience. This new tactic also had a domestic agenda to propagate to the domestic audience that there was international support for the North Korean government and unification movement even in the United States. In addition, it served as a platform for the North Korean regime to encourage the overseas Korean communities for propagation as well as of legitimization and validation for the overseas Korean organizations. Table 2 demonstrates that 128 of the 136 (94 percent) *Rodong Sinmun* articles on Korean Americans were political in nature.

Table 2: Reference to Korean Americans in the *Rodong Sinmun* by subject from 1973-1979

Subject	Number of Articles
Political	128 (94%)
Social/cultural	8 (6%)
Economic	0
Total	136

There was also the diaspora factor. The 1970s saw significant growth in Korean immigration to the U.S. after the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965 that lifted immigration restrictions from Asia. Consequently, Korean immigration to the U.S. skyrocketed from 39,000 in 1970 to 290,000 by 1980.³¹ This growth in the size of the Korean community in the U.S. in

29. *Rodong Sinmun*, July 31, 1973; January 9, 1974; February 12, 1975; May 7, 1977; May 11, 1977; June 16, 1977; August 17, 1977; February 12, 1978; September 26, 1978; September 29, 1978; August 28, 1979; December 6, 1978.

30. *Rodong Sinmun*, August 2, 1973; March 11, 1976; February 12, 1977.

31. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Korean Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, February 8, 2017, <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>

combination with Pyongyang's peace offensive towards Washington in the 1970s is likely to have played a significant role in North Korea's new perception of Korean Americans as an attractive and influential diaspora force to be utilized for foreign and domestic policies.

Korean Americans who spoke both languages and shared the cultural and historical connections were uniquely advantageous. In addition, most of the Koreans during this period were first generation that remained keen to the political situation of their homeland—Korean Peninsula—than the U.S. domestic politics. These characteristics were favorable for North Korea to push and establish political and ideological ties with “liberal” Korean American organizations and promote the creation of organizations that were sympathetic to North Korea's perspectives and agendas. Without a formal diplomatic relations with the United States, building an unofficial channel of communication to deliver its message to the U.S. was imperative.

IV. North Korea's Strategies towards Korean Americans (1973-1979)

Influencing the Influential Koreans (1973-1978)

One of the first tactics that North Korea used for public diplomacy towards the U.S. was inviting Americans to Pyongyang. This same tactic was also used for Korean Americans. However, the invitation of Korean Americans to North Korea can be divided into before and after 1977. Before 1977, the United States had restricted travel to North Korea, as well as Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia.³² U.S. citizens faced a travel ban

article/korean-immigrants-united-states/> (date accessed October 1, 2018).

32. Travel ban to communist countries, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia and North Korea was lifted by the Carter administration in March 1977. Lee Lescaze, “US Lifting Travel Bars,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1977, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/03/09/us-lifting-travel-bars/ade5f7f5-59be-4c26-916a-b81b34421707/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a116dc0fafbe> (date accessed November 1, 2017).

to North Korea after the Korean War with exceptions made for journalists, members of the U.S. Congress, scholars, public health officials, athletes and humanitarian workers.³³ The Carter administration stressed that the decision in March 1977 to lift the travel ban to North Korea did not mean a change in U.S. policy toward North Korea; however, the South Korean government remained sensitive and did all it could to deter Korean Americans from visiting North Korea.³⁴ However, North Korea started to publicly and actively invite Korean Americans to North Korea through legitimate contact points since this law was lifted.

North Korea has invited Korean Americans in similar number to Americans, but they did not disclose visitation records in the 1970s. Visits to North Korea were made known only after returning to the United States, or revealed years later. Not everyone who went to North Korea returned as a North Korea sympathizer. An example is Dr. Andrew Nam (Korean name, Changwoo Nam), professor at the University of Michigan who confessed to the South Korean public in 1976 that he was conned into going to Pyongyang in 1974.³⁵ His confession revealed some key strategies behind North Korea's invitation campaign towards Korean Americans. He confessed that North Korean authorities asked him to widely disseminate North Korean reunification plans to the Korean American community and Americans as well as to a wider American public vis-à-vis seminars and conferences.³⁶ Nam acknowledged that prominent Korean Americans were invited to

33. *Ibid.*

34. Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, "United States Lifting the Travel Ban to North Korea," 725.1 US, Roll 2007-23, File 17, Frames 1-229. According to this document, in response to U.S. travel ban lift, the South Korean government established four policies including: 1) Prevent North Korea's contact with Koreans with U.S. citizenship, 2) Observe if U.S. policy towards North Korea changes, 3) Exert diplomatic efforts to prevent other countries' North Korea policy that supported the travel ban lift, and 4) Continual requests to extend the travel ban to North Korea.

35. "Korean American Professor Andrew Nam Reveals His Visit to North Korea," *Dong A Ilbo*, June 9, 1976, p. 7.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Pyongyang for a week or two, stayed at a luxurious guesthouse like the Moranbong Guesthouse and offered cash gifts in some cases³⁷ in exchange for agreeing to disseminate North Korea's unification policy and as well as relay a message to the U.S. authorities on their aspiration to sign a bilateral peace treaty with the United States.

Most Korean Americans invited by North Korea were contacted individually. In addition, the majority of the invitees were considered influential in the Korean American community. Most of them were university professors, pastors, and former politicians from South Korea. During this period, Byung Chul Koh visited Pyongyang twice in 1971 and 1972,³⁸ and Professor Kim Young-jin of George Washington University met with North Korean officials and scholars in the summer of 1973 and 1974³⁹; Professor Cho Young-hwan of University of Arizona and Professor Dae-Sook Suh of the University of Hawaii were allowed to visit in 1974.⁴⁰ Some of those that visited North Korea in the 1970s detailed their visits to Pyongyang in their memoirs and autobiographies.⁴¹ In the case of Choi Duk Shin, North Korea also revealed that Choi Duk Shin visited North Korea for the first time in 1978 by publishing his conversation with Kim Il Sung years later. However, three years later in

37. Andrew Nam also disclosed North Korea's bribery attempt to him where he was offered an envelope with \$10,000. He confessed that he did not accept the bribe. "Korean American Professor Andrew Nam Reveals His Visit to North Korea," *Dong A Ilbo*, June 9, 1976, p. 7.

38. Korean Central News Agency, *Joseon Jungang Yeongam* [Korean Central Yearbook] (Pyongyang: Korean Central News Agency, 1973); "Korean American Meets Kim Il Sung and Reveals North Korea's Scheme to Attack the South in the Latter Half of 1975," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, June 3, 1972, p. 1; "An Interview with Ko Byung Chul Who Turned to Kim Il Sung Critic from Pro-Kim Il Sung," *Dong A Ilbo*, October 1, 1974, p. 3.

39. "1974 Security Order of Korean Peninsula," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 1, 1974, p. 5.

40. Park, "North Korea's U.S. Policy," p. 124.

41. Lim Chang-yong, Kwang Wook Rowe, Changboh Chee, Harold Hakwon Sunoo and Rev. Lee Seung-man later revealed their trips in their personal memoirs or publications. Kwang Wook Rowe, "Nau'i Pyeongyanghaenggwa Migukeseo Bon Jeongsanghoedam [My Trip to Pyongyang and Inter-Korean Summit Seen from the U.S.]," *Yeoksa Bipyong* [Critical Review of History], no. 52 (2000), pp. 17-24.

1981, his visit to Pyongyang received a public welcome and ceremony, which demonstrate that North Korea's policy change towards Korean American visits became public and official from the 1980s.⁴²

North Korea targeted Korean Americans whose hometown was or had families remaining in North Korea. In addition, North Korea was very selective in deciding who to invite. American visits to the country were widely advertised domestically; however, North Korea was careful about disclosing Korean American visitors.⁴³ It is also meaningful that there is a clear distinction between foreign visitors to North Korea versus "overseas compatriot" visitors to the country.⁴⁴ Korean compatriots are invited and managed by a separate agency which is both a party and cabinet institution. The Korean Committee for Aiding Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo wonho wiwonhoe*)⁴⁵ is under the Workers' Party of Korea's United Front Department that oversees the entire overseas Korean policy and is responsible for: handling travel visas, contacting/recruiting overseas Koreans, organizing family reunions between Korean Americans with families in the North, and issuing various statements on overseas Korean issues. This organization oversaw the entire policy involving overseas activities. However, the Bureau of Reception of Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo yongjopkuk*, formerly known as *kyopo saup chongguk*) and Agency of Overseas Korean

42. Kim Il Sung, "Jaemigyopo Choe Deok Singwa Han Damhwa [Talk with Choi Duk Shin, Korean from the United States, November 18, 1978]" (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishers, 2000). However, Choi Duk Shin's visit to Pyongyang on June 23, 1981 was widely reported with his Pyongyang Arrival Declaration printed across page 3 and 4 of the *Rodong Sinmun*. *Rodong Sinmun*, June 23, 1981.

43. However, from 1980, North Korea began to publish the names and pictures of Korean American visitors to North Korea in the *Rodong Sinmun*.

44. Charles Armstrong, *The Koreas* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 72.

45. It is unclear when the Korean Committee for Aiding Overseas Compatriots (*haeoe dongpo wonho wiwonhoe*) was first established. However, this organization was first mentioned on April 25, 1957 as the organization responsible for delivering educational funds and scholarships to the Central Educational Committee under the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon). "Educational Aid and Scholarship Was Sent for Children of Korean Residents in Japan," *Choson Minbo*, April 25, 1957.

Table 3: Korean Americans that Visited North Korea in the 1970s⁴⁶

Date	Name of Visitor	Affiliation/Occupation	Purpose of Visit
1971, Aug. 1973	Kwang Wook Rowe	Dentist/Chairman for the Committee in the U.S. for Peaceful Unification of Korea	
Oct. 1971	Byung Chul Koh	Professor/ University of Illinois at Chicago	Meeting with Kim Il Sung
Apr. 12, 1972	Byung Chul Koh	Professor/ University of Illinois at Chicago	Meeting with Kim Il Sung
Apr. 15, 1972	Changboh Chee	Professor/Long Island University	
Jan. 1, 1974	Young Chin Kim	Professor/ George Washington University	
1974	Chang Young Lim	Professor and Chairman of <i>Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap</i>	
Mar. 1, 1974	Young-hwan Cho	Professor/University of Arizona	
Mar. 16, 1974	Changwoo Nam	Professor/University of Michigan	
Apr. 29, 1974	Dae-Sook Suh	Professor/University of Hawaii	
1975	Harold Hakwon Sunoo	Professor/Central Methodist College	
August 10, 1975	Young Jin Kim	George Washington University	Invitation
1978	Seung-man Lee	Reverend/ Presbyterian church	
1978	Duk Shin Choi	Former ROK foreign minister and ambassador to West Germany	
April 1979	Table tennis players, coaches, interpreters, journalist, and staff -In Sook Na (player) -Hye Ja Park (player) -Dal Joon Lee (coach) -Young Il Ko (interpreter)		35 th World Table Tennis Championship
April 1979	"Overseas Compatriot Visitors from the United States" -Hyong Sik Kim and Young Il Ko		35 th World Table Tennis Championship

Source: Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, "Timeline of U.S.-ROK Relations 1968-1982," 725.1 U.S., Roll 2012-0026, File 4, Frames 1-73; The Institute for East Asian Studies, *North Korean Handbook*, Seoul: The Institute for East Asian Studies, 1980, p. 236; Jae Kyu Park, "North Korea's U.S. Policy," in *North Korean Foreign Policy*, eds., Byung Chul Koh, Se Jin Kim, and Jae Kyu Park, Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1977, p. 124; *Rodong Sinmun*; *Dong A Ilbo*, and *Kyunghyang Shinmun*.

Affairs (*haeoe dongpo saupguk*) is a cabinet institution that handles the domestic duties and internal activities involving overseas Korean work.⁴⁷

The 35th World Table Tennis Championship in Pyongyang (1979)

The 35th World Table Tennis Championship was held in Pyongyang from April 25 to May 6, 1979. This was the first international sports event held in North Korea that invited the U.S. team. In addition to American players, there were a handful of Korean American players, coaches, interpreters and journalists that participated in this event. This event is significant as the first international sports event in North Korea with American participation. It was also the first public invitation for Korean American group under the name, "Group Visitors from Koreans in the United States to the Fatherland" that was widely covered for several weeks in the *Rodong Sinmun*.⁴⁸ This was the first group of visitors from the United States that included ethnic Koreans who were either permanent residents or citizens of the U.S.

The American team and visiting group consisted of players, coaches, interpreters, journalists, and a homeland visiting group from the United States. Jeon Chung Rim, in his memoir, *Over the Hill of Time*, reminisced about his participation at the 1979 World Table Tennis Championship where he confessed that although he was there under the journalist status, his main purpose was reconnecting with his family in North Korea that he was separated for nearly three decades.⁴⁹ Na In-sook and Park Hye-ja attended as U.S. female players while Lee Dal-jun was a coach and Ko Young-il participated as an interpreter. The

46. This table was created based on personal accounts and declassified diplomatic documents.

47. Kelly Hur, "North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States," p. 45.

48. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 26, 1979; Diplomatic Archives of Republic of Korea, "Timeline of U.S.-ROK Relations 1968-1982," 725.1 US, Roll 2012-0026, File 4, Frames 1-73.

49. Chung Rim Jeon, *Saewolui Eondeok Wieseo [Over the Hill of Time]* (Seoul: Hankyoreh Newspaper, 1996).

group was taken to major tourist attractions and met with various North Korean authorities from various party organizations.⁵⁰ Furthermore, during their visit, North Korea held a public rally⁵¹ and a banquet at the People's Cultural Palace in Pyongyang, to launch a widely propagated public welcome for the group.⁵²

The details of the family reunion of Ko Young-il deserve special attention. As mentioned above, Ko attended as an interpreter, but his main objective for the trip was to reunite with his family in North Korea.⁵³ For North Korea, this served as a good opportunity to propagate the event to the North Korean domestic audience as a victory that Koreans from the U.S. were visiting the homeland as a group specially formed "to achieve reunification of the fatherland."⁵⁴

The 35th World Table Tennis Championships in 1979 can be regarded as a turning point for North Korea's policy towards the Korean Americans. After this event in 1979, North Korea began to openly recruit "homeland group visits" for the purpose of organizing reunions for separated families and homeland tours for Koreans residing in North America from 1980. Between 1970 and 1978, the average number of Korean American visitors to North Korea was about three, but after the

50. "U.S. Team Interpreter Ko Young Il Visits North Korea with a Dream of Reuniting with His Family," *Dong A Ilbo*, April 10, 1979.

51. In the rally, there were the following officials that attended: Ho Jong Suk, General Director of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of Fatherland; Hong Ki Moon, Chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland; Kim Sok Jun, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Democratic Party of Korea; Kim Chol Min, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chondoist Chongu Party; Kim Song Ryul, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Christian Federation; Han Byong Hwa, General Director of the General Bureau of Overseas Compatriots; Pak Tae Ho, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Buddhist Federation; and Wang Kyong Hak, Vice Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the Pyongyang City Council. "There Was a Rally that Welcomed the Visiting Delegation of Overseas Koreans from America," *Rodong Sinmun*, May 6, 1979, p. 5.

52. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 26, 1979; May 5, 1979; May 20, 1979.

53. *Rodong Sinmun*, April 29, 1979 and May 6, 1979.

54. *Rodong Sinmun*, May 6, 1979.

World Table Tennis Championship in 1979, this number grew to about 17 and displayed a steady upward trend in the 1980s. The disclosure of these visits is also worth noting. Before 1978, North Korea did not divulge information on Korean American visitors. However, from 1980, North Korea began to publicly announce and promote visits by Korean Americans to North Korea. The invitation was also opened to a wider group of people, where in the early 1970s, only influential figures in the Korean community were invited. In addition, many of them were born in the North, meaning they had a familial connection in the North. According to the International Strategy and Reconciliation Foundation's survey conducted in 2007, the number of Korean Americans separated from families in the North is estimated to be over 100,000.⁵⁵ North Korea targeted these groups first as it was easier to reach out to a Korean American with a familial connection and make the invitation to Pyongyang less political and ideological under the veneer of family reunion. North Korea was cautious in promoting the visits to North Korea and did not accept everyone that applied for visits. However, 1979 was marked as the start of group visits for Korean Americans and launched a new period that began to widely report these visits in the *Rodong Sinmun* from 1980s to 1990s.

Building a Pro-North Korea Association in the United States

North Korea called the national unification movement a "South Korean revolution" and a "struggle of overseas Koreans" for the purpose of the "realization of the reunification of the country."⁵⁶ Thus, it is linked with anti-movements toward the U.S. and South Korean government. To do so, North Korea has instructed for the "establishment of overseas Korean organization" to carry out these revolutionary

55. "There are 104,000 Korean Americans who have Separated Families in North Korea," *NK Chosun*, March, 23, 2007, <http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/06/17/2015061702346.html> (date accessed on March 31, 2017).

56. Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p.329.

struggles and fight for the national unification movement.⁵⁷ In the 1960s, there were anti-Rhee Syngman movements by Koreans in the U.S.; however, these did not develop at an organized level. However, in the 1970s, as the immigrant population grew along with Korean American communities across the United States, various political organizations and Korean newspaper companies also began to form around major U.S. cities.

Along with the growth in the number of Korean immigrants in the 1970s, the democratization and unification movement of the Korean American community became more prominent. North Korea took notice of this change and began to approach the progressive organizations that were critical of the South Korean government. North Korea also encouraged Korean Americans to form such organizations and to model them after the *Chongryon* and follow its examples.⁵⁸

One of the first two organization formed in the U.S. was the Committee in the U.S. for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland (*Joguk Pyeonghwa Tongil Jaemi Chokjin Wiwonhoe*) formed in June 1972.⁵⁹ North Korea acclaimed that this group was formed “under the special care of Comrade Kim Il Sung,” and contributed to the formation of other overseas Korean organizations in later years. The Committee in the U.S. for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland was evaluated as the first Korean American organization that actively promoted the national peaceful reunification movement in the U.S.⁶⁰

North Korea also took great interest in the creation of the “Korean Congress for Democracy and Reunification in North America” (*Hanguk Minju Hoebok Tongil Chokjin Kukmin Hoei* or *Hanmintong* for short) that formed in July 1973. The *Hanmintong* Japan branch later formed in Osaka on August 13, 1973.⁶¹ This organization is significant in the sense

57. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 329; *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*. <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed on October 9, 2018). There is a discrepancy in the order of formation.

that it was formed by former South Korean government officials and politicians that left South Korea during the May 16 military coup and took political asylum in the United States from the 1960s. Former President Kim Dae-jung who came to Washington, D.C. in 1971 served as the first chairman of *Hanmintong*. This marked the beginning of the democracy movement by Koreans in the United States. Furthermore, it is also significant that this was the first nationwide Korean American organization that formed with branches established around major U.S. cities with a large number of Korean American communities.⁶² However, after Kim Dae-jung was abducted by South Korea's Korean Central Intelligence Agency in Japan, *Hanmintong* came to a deadlock. In 1977, the remnants of *Hanmintong* along with other small organizations combined to form the United Movement for Democracy in Korea (*Joguk Minjuhwa Yeonhap Undong*). People that served as chairman of this organization were Kim Sang Don (former Seoul Mayor), Kim Jae Jun, Cha Sang Dal, Guk Young Gil, Kim Un Ha, Hong Dong Geun, Eun Ho Gi, and Yang Eun Shik.⁶³ However, *Hanmintong* did not simply merge into the United Movement for Democracy in Korea but instead, fissured into two groups. If the United Movement for Democracy in Korea was considered "rightist" in the sense that it opposed both North and South Korean regimes as dictatorship and promoted democratization to precede unification, the Democratic National Union in North America (*Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap*) was considered "leftist" in that it advocated unification before democratization and demanded the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* was formed as union of 15 different organizations led by Lim Chang

While North Korea claims that the *Hanmintong* Japan Branch formed first, most South Korean literature reveals that the Washington, D.C. branch opened first in July 1973.

62. *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, <<http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>> (date accessed on October 9, 2018).

63. Jong Hwan Cha, Bong Su Lee, Sang Won Park, *Miju Dongpodeului Minjuhwa Mit Tongil Undong* [Democracy and Unification Movements of Overseas Koreans in the United States] (Seoul: Nasan Publishers, 2004), p. 31.

Young, Rowe Kwang Wook, and Chi Chang Bo.⁶⁴ With these two groups at the center, the Korean American society fissured into two different ideological groups with *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* and affiliated individuals earning the reputation as a pro-North Korea group in the United States. This was the beginning of ideological and political division of the Korean American community that further intensified in the 1980s with the expansion of the democracy movement in South Korea.

North Korea also took notice of this movement, and while it is not clear whether these organizations were formed under the direct orders of the North Korean regime, the individuals that headed the *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* were visitors to North Korea in the early 1970s (Table 2). It is a reasonable conjecture that these individuals were informed of North Korea's unification, South Korea and U.S. policies during their visits and well understood North Korea's agenda. These early visits to North Korea are likely to have influenced their views on unification and inter-Korean relations. The activities of these organizations were often reported through the mouth of Korean American newspapers, *Sinhan Minbo*, *Haeoe Hanminbo* and *Hanmin Sinbo* and cited in the *Rodong Sinmun* from 1973 to 1979.⁶⁵ North Korea also began to report these activities in the *Korean Central Yearbook* from 1974 under the heading "Actualization of Independent Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland" and reported the unification movements of Koreans in the United States in isolation from Koreans in Japan and *Chongryon*.⁶⁶

North Korea described this effort as the outcome of Kim Il Sung's order to achieve "national unity" and realize the Korean American's dream to achieve national reunification. This can be confirmed in this passage:

The great comrade Kim Il Sung announced the 3 principles of the

64. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

65. Kelly Hur, "North Korea's Policy toward the Korean Diaspora in the United States," p. 96.

66. Korean Central News Agency, *Joseon Jungang Yeongam* [*Korean Central Yearbook*] (Pyongyang: Korean Central News Agency, 1975).

reunification of the country. In order to support and meet the esteemed intentions and demands of the patriotic unification of the overseas Koreans of this region (United States), it is crucial that we achieve national unity under the banner of national reunification. In addition, with the love of the country and the nation with strong desires for national reunification by the overseas compatriots in this region, I (Kim Il Sung) decided to establish progressive overseas Korean organizations.⁶⁷

These efforts in the 1970s served as the foundation for North Korea to further develop its strategy to target Korean American organizations. Although *Miju Minju Kukmin Yeonhap* was considered a pro-North Korea organization, it denied this allegation. The first official pro-North Korea organization acknowledged by both North Korea and Korean Americans was the “National Reunification Association of North America” (*Joguk Tongil Bukmiju Hyeophoe* or *Tonghyup*), which was not established until 1986. This organization later contributed to the establishment of the Korean American National Coordination Council (KANCC) in January 1997, which earned the nickname of “Second *Chongryon*” in the United States that continues to operate to this day.

V. Conclusion

North Korea’s policy towards Korean Americans evolved under the influence of a changing international environment and Pyongyang’s foreign and domestic policies in the 1970s as well as increased Korean immigration to the United States. While the formation of a pro-North Korea organization was difficult to achieve until the late 1980s, North Korea’s various strategies and tactics to engage with the Korean Americans in the 1970s played a crucial role.

After the cold war, North Korea’s policy towards Korean Americans was modified with changing regional and international political situations. North Korea’s engagement with Korean Americans was

67. Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House, *A Brilliant Solution to Overseas Korean Issues*, p.329.

highly political in the 1970s, but from the 1980s and the 1990s, North Korea subdued the political agenda and began to emphasize non-political and humanitarian issues. North Korea began to reduce its political color in order to reach out to a wider group of Korean Americans and focused on family reunion campaigns for separated families; organized group tours to North Korea as well as planned various sports, religious, and cultural exchanges between North Korea and the U.S. from the late 1980s. North Korea considered the capital, network, and expertise of Korean Americans an important resource; consequently, the goal to gain political and ideological support began to shift to a more pragmatic goal of promoting economic, social and humanitarian exchanges and cooperation by the late 1980s.

The policy goals and strategies implemented during the 1970s were critical in establishing the early relationship and the future direction between North Korea and the Korean American community. This contributed to a decade-long “Unification Dialogue” between North Korea and overseas Korean organizations in the 1980s and the creation of the Pan-National Alliance for Korean Reunification in the 1990s where Korean Americans also demonstrated initiatives to join and actively shape the direction of the North Korea’s “worldwide movement of overseas compatriots” in the United States.

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