Mr. Charles E. Saltman
Assistant Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Saltman:

On 4 November 1948, the Director of Plans and Operations Division, requested the Department of State to confirm the date of 15 January 1949 as the date for the completion of the withdrawal from Korea.

Your reply of 9 November indicated that “It would be premature and prejudicial to the interests of the U.S. to enter into the final and irreversible stages of troop withdrawal from Korea before the U.N. General Assembly has had an opportunity at its present session to consider and take action upon the Korean problem. It is assumed that prior to the implementation of the final phases of the withdrawal plan the question of the definitive termination of the occupation will in any event be reviewed by the appropriate agencies and as envisaged in paragraph XIII of the coordinated State-Army message set forth in WASH 1436 of August 27, 1948, to the Commanding General, U.S. Army Forces in Korea.”

Accordingly, the Department of the Army on the 15th of November directed General MacArthur as follows: “Pending receipt of authority to complete final phase of withdrawal of United States Armed Forces from Korea you will retain in Korea for an indefinite period one regimental combat team, reinforced as you see fit, provided total force approximates but does not exceed 7,500 personnel.”

In view of the favorable consideration of the Korean problem by the U.N. General Assembly on 15 December 1948, the Department of the Army believes that a firm decision should be made now to carry out that portion of the U.N. resolution on Korea which calls upon the United States and the Soviet Union to withdraw their occupying troops from Korea “as early as practicable.”

In support of the policy of early withdrawal from Korea, the following opinions are presented:

a. The BBC in a paper of 2 April 1948 advocated the withdrawal of occupation forces by 31 December 1948.

b. The National Military Establishment has previously determined that the U.S. has little strategic interest in maintaining
its troops and bases in Korea and, in the event of hostilities in the Far East, these troops would constitute a military liability.

The deterioration of the situation in the Far East lends added emphasis to the earlier views of the National Military Establishment.

d. General MacArthur, as recently as 6 December 1949, stated that "a small Army force in Korea will be subject to possible destruction in event of a major attack on this vulnerable salient. The force must be considered a liability rather than an asset."

d. The recently demonstrated ability of the South Korean security forces to cope with internal disorders minimizes the need for further retention of U.S. troops in Korea. The current mission assigned U.S. forces prohibits involvement in actions precipitated by any faction in Korea or by any other power in Korea which could be considered a casus belli for the U.S.

e. In line with the policy advocated in SEC 8, the Army made no budgetary provision for the retention of troops in Korea beyond fiscal year 1949.

It is appreciated that the Government of the Republic of Korea has requested the retention of U.S. troops in Korea for a few months. However, it is believed that any commitment for the retention of troops beyond 30 January 1949, the planned date for the completion of the withdrawal, should be specifically delineated with respect to duration.

In consequence of the foregoing, it is now apparent that authority is necessary to confirm the present date or to re-establish a firm troop withdrawal date. Department of the Army plans including logistical and fiscal scheduling arrangements currently being implemented, must be altered accordingly and a mission established for troops remaining in Korea awaiting final withdrawal. It is requested that you agree to the initiation of withdrawal on 1 February 1949 of the Regimental Combat Team remaining in Korea and that the evacuation of this force be completed as early as practicable but not later than 31 March 1949.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) William H. Draper, Jr.

WILLIAM H. DRAPER, JR.
Under Secretary of the Army