



Contribution ID: 191

Type: **Paper Abstract (Closed Panels)**

Military intervention in foreign policy-making: Principal-agent analysis of US troop withdrawal from Korea, 1977–1979

After the Vietnam War, the United States attempted to reduce its troop levels, which led to a deterioration of the South Korea-US alliance. However, little attention has been paid to the Carter administration's ultimately unsuccessful attempt at withdrawal. This paper examines why civil-military preferences clashed and how this led to the failure of President Carter's complete withdrawal of US ground forces from Korea. Previous studies suggesting that US foreign policy patterns and strategic interests determined the withdrawal of US forces stationed abroad have not provided a coherent account of the domestic determinants of withdrawal failure, in particular the intervention of military elites. An alternative but essential factor to consider is civil-military relations. Even in mature democracies such as the United States, the foreign and national security policy preferences of civilian leaders and military elites can differ significantly. In such cases, military elites have resisted presidential foreign policy leadership through various political tactics and alliances with Congress. This paper develops a dual principal-agent model and causal process tracing to trace the trajectory of strategic interactions between the president, Congress, and military elites. In doing so, this paper demonstrates how US military elites can undermine presidential supremacy over US foreign policy.

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

Politics and International Relations

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Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

Yes

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Session Classification: Military Interventions

Track Classification: Closed Panels: Military Interventions