

**October 31, 1975**

**Cable, American Embassy Seoul to the Secretary of  
State, 'ROKG Nuclear Reprocessing'**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

The U.S. Embassy in Seoul reports that the South Korean government continues to press forward on purchasing a French nuclear reprocessing plant.

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E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: MNUC K5  
SUBJECT: ROKG NUCLEAR REPROCESSING

REF: (A) STATE 226011 (B) SEOUL 8278

SUMMARY: ROKG'S SECOND REJECTION OF OUR REQUEST THAT THEY CANCEL FRENCH NUCLEAR REPROCESSING FACILITY CONTRACT LEAVES US WITH OPTIONS OF SIMPLY LETTING SITUATION DEVELOP, ACCEPTING ROK OFFER OF INSPECTION, OR APPROACHING PRESIDENT PARK WITH TOUGH POSITION OR EFFORT TO WORK OUR COMPROMISE. I RECOMMEND COMPROMISE APPROACH AS BEST ALTERNATIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS SET FORTH REF (B), ROKG HAS NOW TURNED US DOWN FOR SECOND TIME ON CANCELLATION OF PURCHASE OF FRENCH NUCLEAR REPROCESSING EXPERIMENTAL FACILITY. WE ARE NOW AT AN IMPASSE ON THIS ISSUE. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT DECISION TO REJECT OUR APPROACH WAS APPROVED BY PRESIDENT PARK AFTER FULL AND SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF OUR POSITION.

2. FACTORS UNDERLYING ROKG POSITION ARE COMPLEX, BUT KEY CONSIDERATIONS APPARENTLY WERE:

(A) STRONG ELEMENT OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND EGO, COMBINED WITH RESENTMENT ROKG BEING GIVEN DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT AS COMPARED TO JAPAN.

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(B.) OVERSELL BY KEY KOREAN SCIENTIFIC PERSONALITIES ON ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL VALUE OF REPROCESSING AND THEIR INABILITY TO REVERSE THEIR POSITION WITHOUT UNACCEPTABLE LOSS OF FACE AND POSITION.

(C) KOREAN CONVICTION THAT NUCLEAR ENERGY IS COMPETITIVE MARKET, THAT SUPPLIERS OUTSIDE THE U.S. ARE READILY AVAILABLE, AND THAT ROKG CAN AFFORD, IF NECESSARY, TO DO WITHOUT U.S. TECHNOLOGY AT LEAST FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS.

(D) HOPE, WHICH BORDERS ON EXPECTATION, THAT U.S. WILL EVENTUALLY REVERSE ITS POSITION AND AGREE TO SUPPLY, AND FINANCIALLY SUPPORT THROUGH LOANS, NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS, WITH ROK FILLING INTERIM NEEDS THROUGH OTHER SUPPLIERS.

(E) CONTINUED DEEP CONCERN THAT U.S. COMMITMENT, NO MATTER HOW FIRM AT PRESENT, WILL NOT REMAIN DURABLE, AND THEREFORE ROK MUST NOT ONLY DIVERSIFY SOURCES OF SUPPLY BUT PREPARE FOR DAY WHEN UNILATERAL DEFENSE OF KOREA WILL BE NECESSARY AND WHEN ROK WILL HAVE TO COMPETE ON EVEN BASIS IN NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY WITH JAPAN.

(F) FINALLY, FOR PRESIDENT PARK, CRITICAL FACTOR IS PROBABLY DESIRE TO PROVIDE IF POSSIBLE WHERE-WITH-ALL FOR EXERCISING NUCLEAR OPTION SHOULD U.S. NUCLEAR DETERRENT NOT BE AVAILABLE TO HIM, ALTHOUGH PREPARED TO FOREGO EXERCISING OPTION UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

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4. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE FACED WITH FOUR POSSIBLE OPTIONS, EXCLUDING POSSIBILITY OF PERSUADING FRENCH TO CANCEL SALE OF REPROCESSING FACILITY WHICH STILL

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FEASIBLE AS LONG AS FINAL PAPERS NOT SIGNED. THESE OPTIONS ARE:

(1) WE CAN NOW LET QUESTION LIE FALLOW WITHOUT FURTHER REPLY LETTING ROKS DISCOVER FOR THEMSELVES DIFFICULTY OF PROCEEDING WITHOUT OUR SUPPORT IN NUCLEAR FIELD;

(2) WE CAN ACQUIESCE IN REPROCESSING SALE, ACCEPTING ROK OFFERS OF BILATERAL U.S. AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL INSPECTION;

(3) WE CAN RAISE THIS ISSUE ONCE AGAIN DIRECTLY WITH PRESIDENT PARK SEEKING COMPROMISE OF A MORATORIUM ON REPROCESSING CONTRACT WHICH WE HAVE HEARD MAY BE FEASIBLE; OR

(4) WE CAN CONFRONT PARK PERSONALLY WITH UNCOMPROMISING LINE.

5. OPTIONS 1 AND 2: IT IS POSSIBLE PERHAPS TO TAKE CALCULATED RISK AND LET SITUATION DEVELOP WITH CONSEQUENCES OF ADVERSE PUBLICITY AND CONGRESSIONAL REFUSAL OF KORI II LOAN AS WELL AS QUITE POSSIBLY CUT OFF OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE. UNDER THESE PRESSURES, ROKS MAY EVENTUALLY FALL INTO LINE. BUT WE MUST FACE LIKELIHOOD OF PUBLIC CONFRONTATION, WHICH COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT OUR INTERESTS HERE. IN MEANTIME, MOREOVER, ROKS WILL BE WELL DOWN ROAD ON REPROCESSING AND REVERSING COURSE COULD BE VERY DIFFICULT.

6. SECOND OPTION IS TO ACCEPT ROKG ASSURANCES AND DEVELOP UNILATERAL INSPECTION SYSTEM, OFFERED BY ROKS, TO ENSURE AGAINST DIVERSION. DISADVANTAGE OF THIS IS THAT IT WOULD NOT PROVIDE TOTAL ASSURANCE, PARTICULARLY UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH ROKS WOULD RENOUNCE NPT AND INSPECTION BY IAEA OR THIRD COUNTRY. FURTHER DISADVANTAGE IS, THAT, HAVING UNDERTAKEN SECOND ROUND OF DEMARCHES, WE HAVE PROBABLY GONE BEYOND PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF NO RETURN, WITHOUT LOSING OUR CREDIBILITY WHICH COULD ALSO AFFECT OUR FUTURE INTERESTS HERE.

7. OPTIONS 3 AND 4: AS I HAVE POINTED OUT PREVIOUSLY, I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT ONLY A DIRECT APPROACH TO PRESIDENT PARK HAS PROSPECT FOR SUCCESS. WE HOLD MANY HIGH CARDS AND PARK IS ULTIMATE REALIST; THERE IS THEREFORE A REASONABLE PROSPECT FOR SUCCESS. THE PRINCIPAL QUESTION IS NATURE OF APPROACH TO PARK, WHETHER WE THROW THE GAUNTLET DOWN OR TRY TO REACH

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COMPROMISE AS SUGGESTED IN OPTION 3.

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9. ALTERNATIVE (OPTION 3) IS TO APPROACH PARK, Section 3.4(6)(6)  
of E.O. 12958 IN STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER,  
EXPRESS TO HIM OUR DEEP CONCERNS REGARDING NUCLEAR WEAPONS  
DEVELOPMENT, AND SEEK COMPROMISE. WE WOULD LOOK TO TWO - THREE  
YEAR MORATORIUM ON REPROCESSING PLANT PURCHASE, FRANKLY NOTING  
THAT THIS WOULD NOT FORECLOSE PARK'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS OPTION FOR  
FUTURE. WE SHOULD STRESS THAT THIS APPROACH WOULD PERMIT AN  
EXPANDING FLOW OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM U.S.,  
INCLUDING OFFER OF SOME TRAINING OF ROK TECHNICIANS IN REPRO-  
CESSING FIELD. WE SHOULD DEAL DIRECTLY WITH PARK'S LONGER-TERM  
CONCERNS, STATING THAT IN OUR VIEW ROKS IN STRONG SECURITY  
POSITION AND WE SEE NO NEED FOR CONCERN; BUT, IF THEY ARE INDEED  
WORRIED ABOUT WITHDRAWAL U.S. NUCLEAR PROTECTION, WHICH WE DO  
NOT ANTICIPATE, WE WOULD BE GLAD TO DISCUSS THIS CONTINGENCY.  
WE MUST, AT SAME TIME, MAKE CLEAR THAT SPECTRUM OF OUR RELATIONS  
AND OUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT ROK NOT ONLY IN NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOP-  
MENTS BUT ACROSS THE BOARD WILL BE IMPAIRED WITHOUT PARK'S  
COOPERATION.

10. RECOMMENDATION: GIVEN CONSIDERATIONS SET FORTH ABOVE, I  
WOULD RECOMMEND OPTION 3, SPEAKING MORATORIUM COMPROMISE WITH  
ROKS THROUGH DIRECT AND TO EXTENT POSSIBLE UNABRASIVE APPROACH  
TO PRESIDENT PARK, ASSUMING HE WISH TO CONTINUE DISCOURAGING  
ROKS FROM NUCLEAR REPROCESSING. MORATORIUM WILL PROVIDE  
OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE ROK IN REGIONAL APPROACH WHILE IT  
COULD AVOID NOW MOST DIFFICULT DECISION OF COMPLETELY REVERSING

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POLICY.

11. HAVING SAID ABOVE I WOULD ENTER ONE ESSENTIAL CAVEAT. I DO NOT BELIEVE WE CAN TAKE RECOMMENDED STEP WITH PARK UNLESS WE ARE TRULY SERIOUS ABOUT UNIVERSAL AND STRICT APPLICATION OF OUR MULTILATERAL APPROACH TO NUCLEAR REPROCESSING, TO BE TOUGH WITH KOREANS WHILE GIVING THE APPEARANCE OF LENIENCY TOWARD OTHER COUNTRIES WHICH SEEM TO BE IN SAME POSITION WOULD CAUSE KOREANS TO CONCLUDE THAT U.S. HAS SERIOUS DOUBTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST WHICH UNDERPINS THE ALLIANCE AND WILL PROBABLY CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE TO SPIRIT OF COOPERATION NEEDED FOR ASSURING KOREAN SECURITY.

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