

**March 4, 1975**

**US Department of State Cable, ROK Plans to  
Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles**

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**Summary:**

American officials in Washington, D.C., conclude that South Korea is in the initial stages of developing a nuclear weapons program.

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TAGS: MRUC, K9

SUBJECT: ROK PLANS TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND MISSILES

REF: (A) SEOUL 8023; (B) STATE 271124; (C) SEOUL 1239

1. WASHINGTON AGENCIES CONCUR FULLY IN EMBASSY ASSESSMENT

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THAT ROKG IS PROCEEDING WITH INITIAL PHASES OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. SUBSEQUENT INTELLIGENCE REPORTING ON THIS HAS ADDED FURTHER CONFIRMATION TO EMBASSY'S EXCELLENT SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE CONTAINED IN REF A. INTERAGENCY STUDY ON SOUTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CAPABILITY HAS BEEN FINISHED AND INDICATES THAT ROKG COULD DEVELOP LIMITED NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND MISSILE CAPABILITY WITHIN TEN YEAR TIME FRAME. (COPY OF STUDY POUCHED TO EMBASSY.)

2. IN THE CASE OF KOREA OUR GENERAL CONCERNS ARE INTENSIFIED BY ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION AND BY THE IMPACT WHICH ANY KOREAN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH NUCLEAR CAPABILITY WOULD HAVE ON ITS NEIGHBORS, PARTICULARLY NORTH KOREA AND JAPAN. ROK POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD HAVE MAJOR DESTABILIZING EFFECT IN AN AREA IN WHICH NOT ONLY JAPAN BUT USSR, PRC, AND OURSELVES ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED. IT COULD LEAD TO SOVIET OR CHINESE ASSURANCES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS SUPPORT TO NORTH KOREA IN THE EVENT OF CONFLICT. FURTHER

ROK EFFORTS TO SECURE A NUCLEAR WEAPON CAPABILITY WILL INEVITABLY IMPACT ON OUR BILATERAL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP. THIS IMPACT WILL BE COMPLICATED BY FACT THAT ROK NUCLEAR WEAPON EFFORT HAS BEEN IN PART REFLECTION OF LESSENERED ROKG CONFIDENCE IN U.S. SECURITY COMMITMENT, AND CONSEQUENT DESIRE ON PARK'S PART TO REDUCE HIS MILITARY DEPENDENCE ON U.S.

3. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFICULTIES AND A LONG TIMEFRAME BEFORE ROKG WOULD BE ABLE ACTUALLY TO PRODUCE NUCLEAR WEAPONS. TEN YEAR ESTIMATE WOULD SEEM A REALISTIC ONE. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT ROKG IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH NUCLEAR CAPABILITY WILL INEVITABLY BECOME MORE WIDELY KNOWN WELL BEFORE EXPLOSIVE DEVICE OR WEAPONS ACTUALLY COME INTO BEING AND WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL IMPACT IN ITSELF ON THE ROK'S NEIGHBORS.

4. IT REMAINS USG POLICY TO OPPOSE THE FURTHER SPREAD OF NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES AND, WHILE CONTINUING TO PROVIDE POWER REACTORS AND FUEL UNDER IAEA SAFEGUARDS FOR NECESSARY ENERGY PROJECTS, TO CONTROL THE SPREAD OF SENSITIVE

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TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT WHICH WOULD ENHANCE THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY OF OTHER COUNTRIES. WE ARE ENDEAVORING TO IMPLEMENT THIS POLICY NOT ONLY BILATERALLY IN OUR DEALINGS WITH NON-NUCLEAR WEAPON STATES SUCH AS THE ROK, BUT ALSO IN A MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK WHICH WILL CONTROL THE WORLDWIDE AVAILABILITY OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS. STRICTLY FYI: WE HAVE PROPOSED A CONFIDENTIAL CONFERENCE AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT SUPPLIERS OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS (U.S., U.K., CANADA, FRANCE, FRG, JAPAN, AND USSR) TO DEVELOP COMMON EXPORT POLICIES WHICH WOULD SEEK TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR RESTRAINT ON SENSITIVE ITEMS AND REMOVE THE PROBLEM OF SAFEGUARDS FROM THE COMMERCIAL BARGAINING PROCESS. ALL EXCEPT FRANCE HAVE AGREED WITH U.S. TO BEGIN SUCH A CONFERENCE AND WE ARE AWAITING A REPLY FROM FRANCE. IN RECENT U.S.-FRENCH CONTACTS, THE QUESTION OF FRENCH WILLINGNESS TO SUPPLY A RE-PROCESSING PLANT OR TECHNOLOGY (TO EXTRACT PLUTONIUM FROM SPENT FUEL) TO THE ROK WAS RAISED. THE FRENCH INDICATED THAT THEY HAD NOT YET SIGNED A PROPOSED AGREEMENT FOR A SMALL PILOT RE-PROCESSING PLANT AND WERE SEEKING TO HAVE IAEA SAFEGUARDS PROVIDED IF THE DEAL DOES GO FORWARD TO COMPLETION. END FYI.

5. THEREFORE, OUR BASIC OBJECTIVE IS TO DISCOURAGE ROK EFFORT IN THIS AREA AND TO INHIBIT TO THE FULLEST POSSIBLE EXTENT ANY ROK DEVELOPMENT OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE CAPABILITY OR DELIVERY SYSTEM. WE ARE CON-

SIDERING SEVERAL COMPLEMENTARY POLICY COURSES TO GIVE EFFECT TO THIS OBJECTIVE. THESE POLICIES WILL BE DEVELOPED WITHIN, OR IN CONSONANCE WITH, THE MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK JUST DESCRIBED. USING THIS APPROACH, WE HOPE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO FORMULATE A CLEAR POLICY ON THIS QUESTION TOWARD THE ROK.

6. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE POLICY COURSES WE ARE NOW ACTIVELY CONSIDERING:

A. INHIBIT ROK ACCESS TO SENSITIVE TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT, BOTH THROUGH UNILATERAL U.S. ACTION AND THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON SUPPLIER NATION POLICIES. AS

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REGARDS UNILATERAL U.S. ACTIONS, WE WOULD, IN ADDITION TO APPLYING FULL IAEA SAFEGUARDS TO THE SALE OF POWER REACTORS AND FUEL, ALSO SEEK TO WITHHOLD FROM THE ROK, OR TO PROVIDE ONLY UNDER APPROPRIATE SAFEGUARDS, ANY TECHNOLOGY OR EQUIPMENT WHICH WE WOULD JUDGE TO BE SENSITIVE IN TERMS OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACQUISITION OF SELF-CONTAINED NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY. THIS WOULD BE DONE IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH THE CRITERIA IN 18 CFR 110 (WHICH INCLUDE THE APPLICATION OF SAFEGUARDS), WITH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY, AND WITH AVAILABILITY FROM OTHER SOURCES. WE ARE ALSO LOOKING AT EXISTING AGREEMENTS TO SEE IF THERE IS ROOM FOR TIGHTENING CONSTRAINTS TO INHIBIT DIVERSION OF WEAPONS-USEABLE MATERIAL. AS REGARDS COMMON SUPPLIER NATION POLICIES, WE ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED WITH ENRICHMENT AND REPROCESSING TECHNOLOGIES, AND WITH ANY ROK ACQUISITION OF CANDU REACTORS, WHICH PRESENT FEWER OBSTACLES FOR CLANDESTINE DIVERSION OF PLUTONIUM BEARING FUEL RODS THAN DO THE MORE COMMON LIGHT WATER REACTORS.

WE REALIZE THAT IN SOME CASES ROKG MIGHT WELL HAVE PLAUSIBLE RATIONALE OTHER THAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT FOR PROCURING CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF SUCH TECHNOLOGY OR EQUIPMENT. NONETHELESS, WE WOULD NOT INTEND TO PROVIDE TECHNOLOGY AND/OR EQUIPMENT WHICH WE WOULD FEEL MIGHT BE HARMFUL TO OUR OWN INTERESTS AND THE STABILITY OF THE AREA. SUCH AN APPROACH WOULD ALSO PROVIDE AN INDIRECT SIGNAL THAT WE ARE AWARE OF ROK INTENTIONS, AND WOULD NOT SUPPORT THEM UNDER ANY GU SE. RESTRICTION OF SUCH TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT WOULD ALSO SLOW THE PACE OF ROK EFFORTS IN NUCLEAR AREA AND INCREASE COSTS SIGNIFICANTLY WHILE NOT HARMING LEGITIMATE POWER NEEDS, WHICH COULD BE MET THROUGH REACTORS FUELED BY ENRICHED URANIUM IMPORTED FROM ABROAD. EVEN IN THOSE INSTANCES

WHERE ROKG MIGHT BE ABLE TO GO TO OTHER SUPPLIERS, THIS WOULD COST MORE BOTH IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TERMS. AND ANY SIGNIFICANT ROKG EFFORTS TO PROCURE SENSITIVE NUCLEAR RELATED EQUIPMENT OR TECHNOLOGY WOULD OVER LONGER RUN, BE VISIBLE AND HEIGHTEN SENSITIVITIES OF OTHER POSSIBLE SUPPLIERS, INCLUDING THE FRENCH. FINALLY,



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RECOGNIZING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE CAPABILITY AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS, WE ARE EXAMINING WAYS IN WHICH ACCOUNT CAN BE TAKEN OF LATTER IN OUR GENERAL NON-PROLIFERATION STRATEGY.

B. PRESS THE ROK TO RATIFY THE NPT. THE CANADIANS ARE ALREADY PRESSING THE ROK TO DO SO. THE ROK SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN RESPONSIVE TO OUR OWN INITIAL APPROACH, BUT WE WILL WANT TO FOLLOW UP ON THIS, PREFERABLY IN COOPERATION WITH THE CANADIANS. WE WOULD ALSO INTEND TO SUPPORT THE CANADIAN INTENTION TO DEFER THEIR FINAL DECISION ON THE SALE OF RESEARCH REACTORS.

C. IMPROVE OUR SURVEILLANCE OF ROK NUCLEAR FACILITIES, AND INCREASE OUR INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT STATE OF ROK TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THIS AREA. WE WOULD INTEND TO UNDERTAKE A STUDY OF APPROPRIATE WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD ON THIS COURSE. TENTATIVELY, WE ARE CONSIDERING A PROGRAM FOR MORE REGULAR VISITS TO ROK NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTALLATIONS AND INSPECTIONS BY TECHNICALLY TRAINED PERSONNEL.

7. REQUEST EMBASSY SEOUL'S COMMENTS ON THE APPROACH OUTLINED ABOVE.

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