June 30, 1975

US Department of State Cable, ROK Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plans

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Summary:

A report on America's discussions with French and Canadian suppliers on the South Korean nuclear program, as well as on U.S. policy towards reprocessing in the ROK.

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Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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TAGS: EFIN, ETRD, MNUC, TECH, PARM, KS, JA, TH, CH

SUBJECT: ROK NUCLEAR FUEL REPROCESSING PLANS

REFS: {A} LONDON 9224; {B} LONDON 9295; {C} STATE 148895; {D} 135500; {E} STATE 13128 {F} SEOUL 5462

L. AS REPORTED IN REFS A AND B₇ BILATERAL TALKS WERE HELD AT LONDON SUPPLIERS' MEETING WITH FRENCH AND CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVES. ATTITUDES OF BOTH COUNTRIES WERE AS FORTH-COMING AS WE HAD THOUGHT POSSIBLE. FRENCH INDICATED CANADIANS INDICATED

2. SITUATION IN CONGRESS, AS REPORTED IN REF C, IS THAT RELEVANT COMMITTEES HAVE AGREED TO POSTPONE HEARINGS ON EXIM BANK LOAN REQUEST FOR KORI II REACTOR ON CONDITION THAT EXIM PRESIDENT CASEY WILL NOTIFY THEM TWENTY-FIVE DAYS PRIOR TO SIGNING AGREEMENT WITH THE ROK THAT EXECUTIVE BRANCH IS SATISFIED WITH NON-PROLIFERATION ARRANGEMENTS

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1.1.1

RELATING TO THE REACTOR AND TO THE USE OF SPENT FUEL. IT IS OUR ASSESSMENT THAT PROSPECTS FOR APPROVAL OF THE LOAN WILL BE SMALL UNLESS ROK HAS AGREED NOT TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL REPROCESSING CAPABILITY. WITH SUCH AN ACTION WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE LOAN COULD BE APPROVED.

3. WE BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD NOW BE TIMELY TO EXECUTE SECOND PHASE OF APPROACH WITH KOREANS ON REPROCESSING OUTLINED IN REFS D AND E. THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN PREPARED ON ASSUMPTION THAT ROK WILL HAVE ALREADY ACCEPTED OUR INTERPRETATION OF AGREEMENT FOR COOPERATION. SINCE REF F INDICATES ROKG CONFIRMATION OF US INTERPRETATION, EMBASSY SHOULD EXPRESS APPRECIATION FOR ROKG AIDE-MEMOIRE BEFORE USING TALKING POINTS IN PARA. 4 AND SPECIFICALLY REQUESTING THE ROKG NOT TO PROCEED WITH ITS PLANNED REPROCESSING PLANT.

4. ACCORDINGLY YOU SHOULD APPROACH ROKG WITH THE FOLLOW-ING POINTS, SLIGHTLY REVISED FROM THE OUTLINE IN REF D:

A. THE US HAS BEEN GIVING SERIOUS ATTENTION TO KOREA'S ASPIRATION TO ACQUIRE ITS OWN REPROCESSING CAPABILITY, STARTING WITH A PILOT FACILITY THAT MIGHT EVOLVE INTO A LARGER-SCALE REGIONAL CAPABILITY. ALTHOUGH RECOGNIZING THAT AT SOME FUTURE TIME THE NATIONS IN THE AREA MIGHT HAVE A COMMERCIAL NEED FOR REPROCESSING, WE HAVE SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT KOREA'S MOVING IN THIS DIRECTION ON ITS OWN.

B. IN PARTICULAR, ALTHOUGH KOREA HAS RATIFIED THE NPT, STEPS TOWARD EVEN A PILOT REPROCESSING FACILITY IN KOREA COULD BE DESTABILIZING AND COULD RAISE SERIOUS APPREHENSIONS WHICH COULD IMPAIR US-KOREAN NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIPS.

C. THERE ARE WIDESPREAD CONCERNS WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AS WELL AS IN THE CONGRESS ON THE SUBJECT OF REPROCESSING AND STORAGE OF PLUTONIUM FROM SPENT FUEL, THAT ARE VERY LIKELY TO AFFECT OUR ABILITY TO MOVE PROMPTLY ON KOREA'S NUCLEAR REQUESTS SHOULD KOREA CONTINUE IN ITS DESIRE TO ACQUIRE AN INDEPENDENT NATIONAL REPROCESSING CAPABILITY, STARTING WITH A PILOT FACILITY.

D. IT IS TO BE NOTED IN THIS REGARD THAT THE ISSUE OF AN EXPORT-IMPORT BANK LOAN FOR THE ROK IS BEFORE CONGRESS. THIS LOAN MAY WELL BE DISAPPROVED UNLESS THESE CONCERNS REGARDING REPROCESSING AND STORAGE OF FISSILE

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MATERIALS FROM SPENT FUELS ARE SATISFIED. WE FRANKLY ANTICIPATE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES UNLESS WE CAN ASSURE CON-GRESS THAT THE ROK HAS TERMINATED ITS PLANS TO ACQUIRE A PILOT REPROCESSING PLANT.

E. ALSO, WE BELIEVE IT MUST BE STRESSED THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A REPROCESSING PLANT IS AN EXPENSIVE, RISKY AND COMPLICATED VENTURE. THERE HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESS-FUL LARGE-SCALE VENTURES BY VERY COMPETENT INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS GENERAL ELECTRIC. FEW COUNTRIES HAVE ENGAGED IN LARGE-SCALE REPROCESSING IN THE PAST, AND THOSE FEW HAVE ALL EXPERIENCED CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY.

F. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE NATIONS OF EAST ASIA, INCLUDING THE ROK, MAY IN TIME HAVE COM-MERCIAL REASONS FOR WISHING TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL RE-PROCESSING CAPABILITY. THE USG IS PREPARED TO COOPERATE WITH THE NATIONS OF THE REGION IN EXAMINING THIS POSSIBILITY. WE BELIEVE IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE RECENTLY RECOGNIZED THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF ESTABLISHING FUTURE REPROCESSING FACILITIES ON A MULTINATIONAL REGIONAL BASIS TO EASE PROLIFERATION CONCERNS.

G. WHILE THERE COULD BE SUBSTANTIAL PLACE FOR ROK PARTICIPATION IN A MULTINATIONAL REGIONAL REPROCESSING FACILITY FOR ASIA, WE QUESTION THE WISDOM OF THE ROK PROCEEDING WITH ITS PROPOSED PILOT PLANT OR CONDUCTING DETAILED PLANNING FOR LARGER PLANTS IN THE ABSENCE OF CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH THE US AND OTHER CONCERNED COUNTRIES -- ESPECIALLY JAPAN -- ON QUESTIONS OF DEMAND, TIMING, TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES, ECONOMICS AND, PARTI-CULARLY, POTENTIAL LOCATION. WE WOULD BE WILLING TO DISCUSS THIS SUBJECT WITH THE ROK AND ALSO THE JAPANESS, AS SUGGESTED BY THE ROK (REF B). HOWEVER, SUCH DIS-CUSSIONS WILL HAVE TO BE FREE TO CONSIDER A NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVE SITES AS WELL AS DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR OWNERSHIP AND OPERATION.

5. FYI.

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