

June 4, 1979

US Department of State Cable, Coordination of Initiative with President Park to Reduce Tensions on the Korean Peninsula

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Summary:

U.S. Ambassador to Korea William Gleysteen reports on his meeting with Park Chung Hee about the possibility of tripartite talks taking place between the U.S., South Korea, and North Korea.

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DATE 06/20/79//171

SITUATION: NODIS IN OLD
 SUBJECT CATEGORY: FE

MESSAGE / ANNOTATION:

MESSAGE:

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SECRET SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 08087

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E.O. 120651 RDS-3 6/4/99 (GLEYSTEN, WILLIAM) OR=M

TAGS: PPR, KS, KN, US, OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: COORDINATION OF INITIATIVE WITH PRESIDENT PARK
 TO REDUCE TENSIONS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

REF: STATE 139719

1. (S) ENTIRE TEXT.

2. BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT PARK TOLD ME HE WOULD REVIEW WITH HIS STAFF AND THEN RESPOND TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S PROPOSAL THAT THE US AND ROK JOINTLY PROPOSE A NORTH KOREA/SOUTH KOREA/US TRIPARTITE SUMMIT MEETING TO TEST PYONGYANG'S INTENTIONS. PARK INDICATED THAT HE WOULD BE LESS TROUBLED BY A TRIPARTITE MEETING IN WHICH THE US AND ROK WERE "ON THE SAME SIDE" THAN BY ONE WHERE THE US WAS AN "INTERMEDIARY." HE BELIEVES THERE IS NO CURRENT PROSPECT FOR PROGRESS WITH NORTH KOREA EVEN THOUGH THERE MAY BE MERIT IN A DIPLOMATIC GESTURE TO TEST NORTH KOREAN INTENTIONS. HE INDICATED THAT THE LACK OF A US DECISION ON THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE WOULD COMPLICATE HIS CONSIDERATION OF A DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE, AND HE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER NORTH KOREA'S CONTINUING EFFORTS TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE US AND ROK. ALTHOUGH PARK TOOK THE PRESENTATION IN A FRIENDLY, MATTER-OF-FACT WAY, I THINK WE WILL HAVE AN UPHILL BATTLE IN TRYING TO CONVINCING THE ROKG OF THE UTILITY OF A DRAMATIC PROPOSAL AND TO DAMPEN SUSPICION THAT OUR POLICY TOWARD PYONGYANG IS ON THE EVE OF CHANGES. TO THE EXTENT WE CAN EMPHASIZE OUR ROLE AS AN ALLY, OUR TASK WILL BE EASIER. END SUMMARY.

3. AS INSTRUCTED I SAW PRESIDENT PARK TODAY TO TELL HIM THAT PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD LIKE HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO KOREA TO RESULT IN A JOINT US/ROK PROPOSAL FOR TRIPARTITE SUMMIT TALKS WITH NORTH KOREA TO TEST PYONGYANG'S WILLINGNESS TO REDUCE TENSIONS. I STUCK CLOSELY TO THE FORMULATIONS USED REFTEL, STRESSING THE CONSTANCY OF OUR BASIC

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POLICY ON NEGOTIATIONS AND OUR DETERMINATION TO PREVENT NORTH KOREAN EFFORTS TO UNDERCUT THE ROK'S POSITION. IN ADDITION, I (A) REVIEWED BRIEFLY WITH PARK RECENT DISCUSSIONS IN PYONGYANG AND PEKING WHICH HAVE LED VISITORS TO BELIEVE THAT THE NORTH KOREANS ARE BEING LESS UNREASONABLE, IN PART TO ENCOURAGE DIRECT US/NORTH KOREAN TALKS; (B) ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE PRINCIPAL AGENTS FOR REDUCING NORTH/SOUTH KOREAN TENSIONS WOULD HAVE TO BE THE ROK AND DPRK WITH THE US PLAYING A SUPPLEMENTARY ROLE AS AN ALLY WITH MILITARY FORCES STATIONED IN THE ROK; AND (C) NOTED THAT A TRIPARTITE SUMMIT MEETING WOULD BUILD ON PARK'S OWN INITIATIVE OF JANUARY 19 IN WHICH HE OFFERED TO MEET WITH NORTH KOREANS AT ANY PLACE, ANY TIME, ANY LEVEL, WITHOUT CONDITIONS.

4. PARK APPEARED TO TAKE MY PRESENTATION AS A FRIENDLY, STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPLORATION. BASICALLY HE SAID THAT HE HAD NOT GIVEN THE MATTER ENOUGH THOUGHT AND WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT WITH HIS STAFF BEFORE GIVING US HIS REACTION. HE SAID HE HAD HIMSELF MADE AN OFFER ON JANUARY 19 EMBRACING THE IDEA OF A NORTH/SOUTH SUMMIT MEETING. SINCE THAT TIME HE HAD SEEN NO EVIDENCE OF ANY BASIC CHANGE IN THE NORTH KOREAN STAND. FROM WHAT THE NORTH KOREANS HAD TOLD WALDHEIM AND CORRESPONDENTS AS WELL AS WHAT I HAD TOLD HIM OF CHINESE COMMENTS TO HOLBROOKE, HE SUSPECTED A TRIPARTITE SUMMIT PROPOSAL WOULD PROVE FUTILE. NEVERTHELESS, HE RECOGNIZED WHY WE MIGHT WANT TO TEST NORTH KOREAN ACTIONS THROUGH A DIPLOMATIC GESTURE, AND THAT THE PROS AND CONS OF DOING SO SHOULD BE WEIGHED VERY CAREFULLY.

5. PARK NOTED THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO KINDS OF TRIPARTITE MEETINGS: THE KIND ARRANGED BY PRESIDENT CARTER BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL WHERE THE PRESIDENT WAS ESSENTIALLY AN INTERMEDIARY AND THE KIND WHERE PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD BE "ON OUR SIDE." IN RESPONSE TO HIS QUESTION AS TO WHICH WE HAD IN MIND, I SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE BEST IF I OBTAINED AN AUTHORITATIVE WASHINGTON STATEMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE ROK AND US WERE ALLIES AND I COULD NOT ENVISAGE A SUMMIT WHERE OUR BEHAVIOR WOULD NOT ALWAYS REFLECT THIS BASIC FACT. WE WERE FULLY CONSCIOUS OF NORTH KOREAN EFFORTS TO UNDERCUT THE ROK'S STATUS BY TRYING TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH US.

6. PARK ALSO ASKED WHETHER WE HAD IN MIND BEGINNING WITH A TRIPARTITE SUMMIT MEETING OR PERHAPS "TITO-STYLE," BEGINNING WITH LOWER LEVEL MEETINGS LEADING TO A SUMMIT.

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MESSAGE:

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I SAID THAT OUR CURRENT CONCEPT WAS A TRIPARTITE SUMMIT. THIS DID NOT MEAN WE WOULD NOT ENTERTAIN ROK SUGGESTIONS FOR SOME OTHER TRIPARTITE FORUM. MOREOVER, WE RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE CONTINUING ARRANGEMENTS FOR NORTH/SOUTH KOREAN BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS.

7. PARK PROMISED TO STUDY OUR PROPOSAL PROMPTLY AND CONVEY HIS REACTIONS TO ME ON WASHINGTON IF HE HAD ANY DEFINITIVE VIEWS BEFORE MY RETURN TO SEOUL. HE SAID HE WISHED TO REMIND ME OF THREE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS: FIRST, HE FELT THAT THE PROPER US APPROACH TO NORTH KOREA WOULD BE TO MAINTAIN THE SAME FIRM POSITION WE HAD TAKEN SO FAR. THE US SHOULD NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO NORTH KOREA BUT SHOULD INSTEAD CONTINUE TO TRY TO PERSUADE THE PRC AND SOVIETS TO ENCOURAGE A MORE MODERATE NORTH KOREAN STAND. SECOND, WHILE IT WAS TRUE THAT THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE WERE CONSIDERABLY REASSURED ON THE SECURITY QUESTION, THERE WAS STILL CONTINUING CONCERN. ALMOST ALL SOUTH KOREANS SHARED PARK'S OPINION THAT THE US SHOULD NOT WITHDRAW ANY FURTHER GROUND FORCES. YET, IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT WE HAD NOT REACHED A DECISION ON THIS MATTER. THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO UNDERTAKE A DRAMATIC DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE. FINALLY, HE REITERATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD FOUND NO GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM IN THE RECENT DIALOGUE AT PANMUNJOM. WHATEVER THEIR PROPAGANDA, THE BASIC THRUST OF PYONGYANG'S POSITION WAS TO IGNORE AND REPUDIATE THE ROK AND SEEK TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN US. FORTUNATELY THE US HAD BEEN VERY ALERT TO THIS AND SO FAR, SOUTH KOREA HAD BEEN VERY REASSURED. I TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT MY INSTRUCTIONS WERE VERY CLEAR ON THIS POINT AND THAT HE COULD REST ASSURED.

8. COMMENT: I CANNOT AT THIS POINT PREDICT JUST WHAT PRESIDENT PARK'S MEASURED RESPONSE WILL BE. ON THE ONE

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HAND, HE WAS MORE RELAXED THAN I HAD EXPECTED AND ON THE OTHER HIS DEEP SUSPICION AND FEAR OF NORTH KOREAN MANIPULATION WERE MANIFEST. OUR DIALOGUE HAS GOTTEN OFF TO A CALM START AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL WITH EXPLANATIONS WHICH SHOULD HELP CALM CERTAIN FEARS. WE ARE, HOWEVER, FIGHTING AN UPHILL BATTLE. AMONG THE OBSTACLES THAT WE MUST OVERCOME ARE: (A) THE ANXIETY THAT WE ARE DELIBERATELY SEEKING TO CREATE A DIPLOMATIC/POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE TO JUSTIFY OUR ORIGINAL TROOP WITHDRAWAL SCHEDULE OR INADVERTENTLY OPENING OURSELVES TO PYONGYANG PRESSURE ON THE SECURITY ISSUE; (B) FEAR THAT THE US WILL BE COMPELLED BY THE SWEEP OF EVENTS TO ARRANGEMENTS DENEGRATING THE EQUAL STATUS OF THE ROK IN RELATION TO THE DPRK; (C) CONVICTION THAT LESS DRAMATIC MEASURES ARE CALLED FOR TO RESOLVE SUCH A LONG, BITTER CONFRONTATION.

9. I WILL BE PREPARED TO AMPLIFY ON RETURN TO WASHINGTON. GLEYSTEN

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