

August 31, 1978
**Record of Conversation with H.E. Mr. William H.
Gleysteen, Jr.**

Citation:

"Record of Conversation with H.E. Mr. William H. Gleysteen, Jr.", August 31, 1978, Wilson Center Digital Archive, "Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea – Republic of Korea – Relations – Diplomatic Competition in Canberra," A1838, 3126/4/4 Part 1, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
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Summary:

Ambassadors Gleysteen and Miller discuss relations between North Korea and South Korea and the regional situation in Northeast Asia in 1978.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan
Transcript - English

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Record of Conversation with H E MR WILLIAM H GLEYSTEN, JR

on 31 AUGUST 1978 SEP 3 3 50 PM

Officers Present MR W G T MILLER

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MAIN SUBJECT(S):

ROK/DPRK RELATIONS : DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH ASIA

Ambassador Gleysteen, who arrived in Seoul at almost exactly the same time as me, ie nearly two months ago, called for a general talk and comparison of impressions. Before his present appointment he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for North East Asia, and he is an East Asian expert.

2. I said that during a recent trip to the south I had been struck both by the consistent prosperity and orderliness of the countryside and by the air of a country very much at peace; Seoul too had very much the feel of a busy civilian city at peace. This sat oddly with the fact of a million armed men facing each other 40 kms away.

3. Gleysteen said that the feeling was very different north of Seoul. (I have not been north yet, but go to Panmunjom next week.) The situation there was very dangerous, too dangerous, and "we" therefore needed to do all we could to encourage contacts and negotiations between the two sides. Very little seemed possible, however. North Korea was very rigid and south Korea, while now "conservative" rather than "rigid", as it had been, was very nervous about the United States. In contrast to Australia, which by recognising north Korea had "broken out of the box", the United States "can't even mention the words 'north Korea'".

4. I mentioned Steven FitzGerald's seminar on Korea at the ANU, and recent "private visitors" from north Korea to Australia. Gleysteen said there were some very limited direct contacts between north and south Korea, and gave an instance which is being reported separately. In his view in these contacts the south was laying the groundwork for developments that might take place in a year or two; the north, he felt, was pursuing specific narrow aims. Gleysteen said that

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Report prepared by

W G T Miller

(W G T Miller)
Ambassador

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JH.
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W G T Miller

although so far the south had moved only from "rigid" to "conservative" in its attitude to the north, if things went well with the south, ie if the economy adjusts successfully to some of the external and internal constraints now evident, if it gets its defence industries right and if it can be reassured that in military terms it is not inferior to the north "as it is now in some ways", "we may be on the threshold" of a period of considerable flexibility and innovation in regard to the south's approach to the north. "But we are not in that period yet."

5. I mentioned that recently a Korean academic had commented that the south "would have to get used" to coming up against northern representatives in various international fora.

6. I said that the Japan/China treaty seemed to have implications for north/south relationships in Korea. Japan had links with both north and south, China with the north, the United States, which was very important to both China and Japan, had close links with the south. There seemed in all this to be the potential for some movement.

7. Gleysteen said that during a recent visit he had made to Peking a Chinese General, who had commanded a Division in Korea during the Korean War, had eventually agreed "as a personal view" with Gleysteen's arguments for contacts by China with the south as well as the north, and for treating both north and south as realities. Apart from this there were, he said, other signs now of the stirring of Chinese interest in south Korea. The ROK Foreign Minister had told him the day before that recent trade contacts with China through Hong Kong had been "a notch higher" than before. (I think this may refer to a recent purchase by the ROK from the PRC, through Hong Kong, of 1000 tonnes of red peppers and 500 tonnes of garlic, on which we will also report separately; we will shortly prepare a report summarising what the Embassy knows about north/south contacts and ROK trade with Communist countries.) The Soviet Union "of course" was "very interested". Although, because of its links with the north, it had to resort to various subterfuges for trade and other contacts, these were not very deeply concealed.

8. I said that pragmatism in East Asia indeed seemed to be spreading widely, judging by the recent press report of PRC gestures towards Taiwan in terms of trade overtures, Thai Airways flights and joint attendance at a scientific conference in Tokyo. In all this pragmatism north Korea seemed to be the anachronism. On the other hand the United States position seemed particularly strong: it was being courted in varying degrees by China, Japan, Viet nam, south Korea, Taiwan, and even north Korea. Gleysteen

agreed with evident satisfaction - "the way to be" - to this description, noting with some regret that Cambodia was not at present among the United States' suitors.

9. Gleysteen commented that "the traumas of the establishment of Asian communist governments seemed nearly over, and we were all probably safer as a result", although north Korea was still obdurate and dangerous. He hoped the United States could maintain its present desirable position, although it would of course have to make certain choices in time. An obvious one was in relation to China and Vietnam. He thought this was really a "management" problem for the United States; important as China was he did not see how its bilateral difficulties could for long hold up the formalisation of United States' relations with Vietnam. China of course needed the United States primarily in relation to the Soviet Union, and in regard to Taiwan. As regards the latter, while the United States and China were reaching an agreement over Taiwan their aims in doing so were different: China was fundamentally seeking means of changing the status quo on Taiwan, while at least in the short term the United States was interested in preserving it.

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Officers Present MR W G T MILLER

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(W G T Miller)
Ambassador

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