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18 February 1977

MEMORANDUM OF RECORD OF CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CARTER

The President told me that he was happy to spend a few minutes with me and would like to get a quick review of the situation in Korea. He asked about the relative military balance between the North and South. I told him that the North had in the last four or five years put great effort into building a strong offensive capability. That it had twice the number of jet combat aircraft that the ROK had. It had more than twice the tanks that the ROK had and that its tanks individually were superior to those of the ROK. He asked about anti-tank weapons and if we had anti-tank weapons that we did not permit the ROK to acquire. I told him that the ROK was building its anti-tank force over the next several years. That it had the same major anti-tank weapon that we had - TOW. I told him that they had elected not to buy our other new anti-tank missile system - the DRAGON, but had chosen instead to equip their force with the 90mm recoilless rifle, our weapon that the DRAGON was replacing. The ROK had made this move because of the cost of the DRAGON, and because they could produce the 90mm cheaper than they could buy it from us.

He then asked what weapons the Republic of Korea was producing. I told him M-16 rifles, small arms ammunition, 105 and 155 cannons (just getting started), and the 90mm recoilless rifle. That they would soon have a coproduction (assembly) agreement for Hughes helicopters and that they had a substantial industrial operation being organized to rebuild and modernize tanks. I also told him that they would like to produce almost every kind of armament - some that would perhaps not be economical for them to produce. But that they had some troubles in getting license agreements from the United States.

I told him that the economy was the great success story of Asia, that the GNP had grown at the rate of 15% in 1976, that its fundamental strength, its economy and its population should eventually make it much stronger than North Korea. That the Republic was attempting in its Force Improvement Program to build a force that would deter attack without the presence of US ground forces. That the Force

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Improvement Program would not be complete until after the material purchased with the five year plan had been delivered, at least two years after the five years had ended. I told him that I believed that we needed to continue to provide a security umbrella under which that economy could continue to grow in order to permit the Republic to be able to defend itself. I told him that there was an air of concern in Korea over our commitment, particularly concerning the possibility of withdrawal of troops. I also told him that I thought the tentativeness of our commitment to Korea's defense over the years, including our annual debate about troop presence in Korea, might be one of the causes for alleged Korean actions that has brought a great deal of unfavorable publicity to Korea.

The President asked what the Force Improvement Plan would cost and how much of it we would have to fund. I told him that the plan as originally drawn called for four to five billion dollars being added to the Korean government's defense budget over the period of five years. That the Korean Government should fund all of the program and that we would be involved in foreign military sales credits. He asked how much of the program would require foreign exchange. I told him that about 65% of the program would require foreign exchange and that of that foreign exchange, the Koreans had hoped to get about 1.5 billion in foreign military sales credits from the United States.

We discussed Congressional reductions of FMS credits last year. The President said that he thought he could get support from the Congress for expanded FMS credits for Korea if he could get some initial move from President Park in the human rights area and as long as he showed a plan for withdrawal of our ground forces.

I told him that our forces were the forces that deterred war in the area. That Kim Il Sung hoped to reunify the peninsula under communism during his lifetime. That Kim Il Sung appeared to believe his own propaganda and appeared to be confident that he would win his objective. That his strategy involved trying to create political instability and a climate of physical insecurity in the Republic while trying to gain support in the third world for the legitimacy of North Korea's actions - all the while building and threatening to use an offensive military force. I told him I thought Kim Il Sung would like to achieve the

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objective of unification without war, but that he would use his military force if need be. I told him that both our ground forces and our air forces were necessary to deterrence. I also reminded him that the United Nations Command was the Western signator of the armistice agreement and that the United States was the agent of the UN in that matter. That I had operational command of all the Republic of Korea armed forces committed to defense against the North Korean attack and that I had that command by virtue of being United Nations Command Commander. That I believed that at least in the near term a minimum of one division of our ground forces was needed to continue that command arrangement. That our American forces did three things in Korea: (1) deterred war, (2) covered certain operational deficiencies in the ROK armed forces, and (3) provided additional support, particularly air support, if war started. For the immediate future we should not withdraw those forces that deter war, but if we make reductions, make them in the forces that cover operational deficiencies in the ROK armed forces as the ROK forces pick up those missions. The President said he understood the point about the armistice and the command arrangement and acknowledged the importance of the division.

The President asked about the effect of withdrawing our division and turning over the equipment to the ROK. I told him that such a move would make only marginal increase in ROK capability in contrast to the greater reduction in US capabilities. That the addition to ROK capabilities would be very far from the loss in total combat capability. I also told him that in some respects we would be adding maintenance and support burdens to the ROK forces by giving them items of equipment which were not standard for them, such as M60 tanks. I told him that there would be some real additions in capability, for example, the addition of ground surveillance radars to ROK forces. I told him that our division was not simply additional equipment but was combined power of US training, doctrine, equipment, and the inherent flexibility of US ground forces supported by air.

The President mentioned that he had heard of the possibility of the Koreans building us a base on an island, Cheju. He asked about the effectiveness of an air base on Cheju. I told him it would reduce the time of the airplanes over the battle area if there were a fight and would add nothing to deterrence.

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The President asked if I had a close relationship with President Park. I told the President that the answer was no. That I had been in Korea four months, had seen the President four times, but that one of the times had been for almost six hours. He then asked what sort of a man President Park was. I told him that President Park was a lonely man, that he had been a Major General in the Army before the coup, that his wife had been assassinated several years ago in an attempt on the President's life. That he was in good health but seemed to me to be withdrawing more and more unto himself. That he seemed to have a good grasp of what was going on in his country, particularly the economic planning as well as an excellent grasp of the military situation and plans for coping with a North Korean attack.

President Carter asked me if I thought that there were any chance of the human rights situation improving. I told him that I believed President Park viewed the civil liberties situation as being directly connected with the security situation. That the human rights issue was probably little understood and somewhat overstated in this country. The President said he was sure that was correct. I reminded him that modern Korea had never had a peaceful change of government. That President Park believed he could not tolerate political instability and still have the country continue to grow economically and in its ability to defend itself. That Korean society had grown from a completely different philosophical background from the US. That the background of Confucianism was one which expected an individual to subordinate his own liberty to the good of the society, the building block of which was the family whereas our background had formed our stress on individual freedom. I told him that I believed there was opportunity for individual liberties to be expanded in Korea if the security situation continued to improve but not if we made moves that appeared to threaten the security climate.

The President asked about North Korea - whether it got its support primarily from China or the Soviet Union. I gave him a short rundown on the history of North Korea, its sponsorship by the Soviet Union and later connections with the PRC, and a bit of the history of the recent support of both nations. I told him that recent military support from the Soviets had to lead me to believe that the Soviets were exercising restraint and that we could probably say the same thing about the Chinese. The President then said

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that he believed that to be so but that he thought Kim Il Sung probably believed that he was in a good position, having the Soviets and Chinese compete for his favor. I told the President that I thought Kim Il Sung probably believed both his Communist allies would be forced to support him if he got into trouble.

The President told me that he wanted to consult with President Park sometime but that he thought he should send some other person to talk to him first. He asked me who the Koreans would trust and respect. I told him that Korea would certainly respect anyone that he, the President of the United States, selected but that the name of Dr. Schlesinger had to be raised because of the great respect that the Koreans had for him. That Dr. Schlesinger would certainly get a warm welcome and a sympathetic ear from President Park and all in the Korean government. The President then asked if there were other names. I said that certainly Secretary Vance or the Vice President would be good candidates because of their positions in government and that the Koreans knew Secretary Vance through his previous service. I also told him that there had been confidence in the defense relationship between our two countries and that Secretary Brown should also be considered. I reminded him that the agreed upon mechanism for consultations on security problems was the annual Security Consultative Meeting at which the defense ministers of the two countries represented their governments. The President said that he wanted the first talks to go beyond defense talks, that he wanted to go beyond the security situation and include economics as well as human rights. I agreed that the SCM was not the proper forum for those topics, but I told him that an early SCM where the Koreans had an opportunity to present their views on the security situation should be considered before any change in our troop program was announced.

The President thanked me and told me that he would be considering this problem over the next weeks and months, that he would not make any moves without consulting with President Park, with me and with others involved. He said that if I had any further thoughts or ideas on the matter, I should communicate them either directly to him or through Secretary Brown. He then told me to go see President Park on my return to Korea. To greet President Park for the President. To tell President Park that President Carter respected him and that we would continue to honor our security obligations to his country and that the US would make no moves concerning troop strengths without thorough consultations with him.

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The sequence of topics in this MFR is not necessarily the same sequence in which they were discussed during my talk with President Carter.

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JOHN W. YESSEY
General, USA

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