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KOREA

~~SECRET~~ 131156Z DEC 80 VIA PRIVACY CHANNELS

TO: IMMEDIATE, WHITE HOUSE - EYES ONLY/SENSITIVE - FOR THE PRESIDENT
IMMEDIATE DOD FOR DEPSECDEF CLAYTON
IMMEDIATE STATE DEPARTMENT FOR DEPSECSTATE CHRISTOPHER
IMMEDIATE SECRETARY BROWN'S AIRCRAFT

FROM: HAROLD BROWN

SUBJECT: VISIT TO KOREA - TALK WITH CHUF DOD HWAN

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I DISCUSSED THE KIM DAE JUNG CASE AT LENGTH WITH PRESIDENT HUN DOO HWAN DECEMBER 13, MAKING A STRONG PITCH FOR COMMUTATION OF THE SENTENCE AND DESCRIBING THE SEVERE CONSEQUENCES OF AN EXECUTION FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP. CHUN DID NOT SOFTEN HIS POSITION ON KIM. HE TOLD ME, "THE DECISION OF THE COURT MUST BE RESPECTED. IF THE COURT CONFIRMS THE DEATH SENTENCE THAT SENTENCE SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT." THIS IS THE MOST RESTRICTIVE STATEMENT HE HAS MADE YET ON THE SUBJECT. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHUN WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO STRESS THE DEEP HISTORICAL DEBT OWED THE U.S. BY KOREA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC AND SECURITY TIES. HE ALSO STRESSED HIS WILLINGNESS TO GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO OUR ADVICE. DEFENSE MINISTER CHOO TOLD ME AFTERWARDS TO PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THIS LAST SENTENCE OF CHUN'S REMARKS. I CANNOT STRIKE THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE DISCOURAGING AND ENCOURAGING COMMENTS. HIS REMARKS COULD MEAN ANY OF THREE THINGS:

--CONTRARY TO RECENT EVIDENCE THAT HE IS RETHINKING THE ISSUE AND SEEKING A WAY OF COMMUTING A SENTENCE WITHOUT LOSING FACE, CHUN HAS MADE UP HIS MIND TO EXECUTE KIM.

--CHUN IS SETTING UP THE COURT TO TAKE THE HEAT BY DECIDING THAT KIM SHOULD BE RETRIED.

--CHUN IS POSTURING FOR HIS MILITARY AUDIENCE (WHO HAD WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER LEFT THE ROOM, BECAUSE AT MY INITIATIVE THE SIZE OF THIS PART OF THE MEETING HAD BEEN REDUCED, BUT TO WHOM HE MAY HAVE PREPARED THIS FORMULATION OF HIS POSITION) MAKING CLEAR THAT HE WILL NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO FOREIGN VISITORS, IN AN EFFORT TO PLAY FOR MORE TIME.

FRANKLY, I DO NOT KNOW WHICH OF THE ABOVE IS CORRECT. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE MEETING WAS EXCELLENT, WITH CHUN BEHAVING IN A CORDIAL, CONFIDENT AND EVEN AT TIMES DEFERENTIAL MANNER. I AM SURE OF TWO THINGS, HOWEVER -- THAT THE COMBINATION OF YOUR LETTER AND MY PRESENTATION HAS LEFT NO DOUBT OF THE STRENGTH OF AN AMERICAN REACTION SHOULD KIM BE EXECUTED, AND THAT WE HAVE MADE EVERY EFFORT POSSIBLE TO MAKE OUR POINT. WE HAVE TAKEN OUR BEST SHOT; I HOPE IT IS ENOUGH.

I SPENT MOST OF THE REMAINDER OF MY SIX HOURS IN KOREA DISCUSSING MUTUAL SECURITY ISSUES WITH DEFENSE MINISTER CHOO.

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