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DEC 04 2019

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Minister of Defense, Suh Jyong-chul
Director of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lt Gen Yu Pyong-hyon
Assistant Minister for Installations and Logistics, Maj Gen
Paek Sok-chu
Secretary of Defense, James R. Schlesinger
Principal Deputy Assistant to Secretary of Defense, Amos Jordan
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Morton I. Abramowitz
Military Assistant to Secretary of Defense, Maj Gen John A.
Wickham

TIME & PLACE: August 26, 1975, Minister Suh's Office

Minister Suh:

I appreciate the encouraging remarks that you made in the meeting this morning. During that meeting, we covered all essential areas, and, in fact, left almost nothing for us to discuss now. But there are five subjects which I would like to take up with you this afternoon.

U.S. COMMITMENT

Minister Sub:

First, I would like to mention the U.S. commitment to Korea. This morning we talked about your commitment to Korea and deterrence against the outbreak of the war. I appreciated your strong statements and believe they should be included in the joint communique, so that the Korean people can gain as much encouragement as I have. As I said this morning, if we receive enough appropriate aid from the U.S. we can take care of the fighting on the ground. By appropriate aid, I mean fire power, including [REDACTED] the 51st air, and logistics support. Since our naval and air forces are inferior to that of North Korea we need U.S. air and naval support. We have a dedicated armed force of 600 thousand men, 2 million reserve soldiers, plus a population of 35 million. We are united and will not give up one inch of territory.

As you know, China and the USSR have bilateral military alliances with North Korea. They are located close to North Korea and can send support rapidly to Pyongyang in case of war. Thus we expect rapid countermeasures from the U.S. in case of war. We need reassurances from the U.S. in case of war. We need reassurances from the U.S. so that there is no chance of miscalculation on the part of North Korea.

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What I said about taking care of the ground war ourselves does not mean that we do not need the Second Division. The Second Division is a firm deterrent against war, especially from the standpoint of the USSR and China. U.S. forces must continue to be stationed in Korea at the current level.

In this regard, I would like to raise the question of the defense of the Northwest Islands. They are so located that Kim Il-song may be tempted to probe our common resolve in this area. We feel that in the initial stage in any war we must act clearly and steadfastly so that we demonstrate our resolve. Currently, General Stilwell and I are reviewing the defense of the Islands. He is awaiting, however, a political decision from higher authorities. So far he has not received this decision. I hope that the occasion of your visit will furnish a favorable response on this question.

It is easy to think of the Islands as being distant and local in nature, but they are important. The initial reaction to any aggression in this area is vital. You should not let the North have any doubts about your commitments. If we fail to react during the initial stages of aggression, we will see serious repercussions.

It is also important with regard to the U.S. deterrent to increase joint training exercises. Such exercises will help forestall any miscalculations from the North. For example, elements of the Seventh Fleet could engage in joint exercises with the ROK Navy. Such exercises as FOCUS RETINA could also be intensified.

Secretary Schlesinger:

As a general observation, I would say that we have strongly reinforced our deterrent in recent months. Given the present political climate, neither China nor the USSR is concerned about our troop presence. We cannot tell for certain how long this climate will continue, but if I had to guess, I would say that China would continue to be worried about the USSR and would see the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia as a counterbalance against Moscow. Peking would thus not be inclined to join in any action against the U.S. in Korea. The Soviets seem to be interested in detente. We should, of course, be alert for any changes in this climate; but for the time being it appears that it will continue for some time to come.

Neither China nor the USSR has given any overt sign of supporting North Korean ambitions. Of course, absence of overt signs is not necessarily conclusive, and there could be covert support. Nevertheless, I do not believe China is inclined to aid North Korea because of the need for U.S. presence in the area as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. Kim Il-song, during his visit to Peking evidently found that China not only refrained from supporting a move against the South, but discouraged such a move. It is hard to judge Soviet intentions over the long run. For the immediate future, however, we should worry not about encouragement to Pyongyang on the part of China or the Soviet Union, but about the problem of North Korea running amok on its own.

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The heart of the problem, then, for the immediate future is North Korea. Detering North Korea depends on two things: the state of our forces and Pyongyang's perception of the adequacy of our logistics. The state of our forces needs improvement. The perception by the North that those forces can not only defend the South, but can also inflict damage on North Korea will preserve our deterrence. We must have sufficient munitions on hand and be ready to move in more by air. We must keep up open lines of communications. This is one aspect of the complementarity that I spoke about this morning. It presents no difficulty in my judgment. We can keep the lines of communication open. North Korea will not act to interfere with U.S. shipping. It would be our responsibility to provide these supplies and to keep open the lines of communications.

In addition, in the event of major aggression across the DMZ our reaction would be covered by the inherent powers of the U.S. President in light of the presence in the area of U.S. forces. Moreover, under the terms of the mutual defense treaty, we would be prepared to take appropriate action, including the deployment and employment of tactical air units. With respect to what I said about the inherent powers of the President, I am not sure it is advisable to publicly advertise this point. This could lead to criticism in the Congress concerning this issue.

This brings me to the consideration of less direct, more ambiguous challenges which require lesser action to insure deterrence. The Minister mentioned exercises. I think we should move in the direction of greater exercise activity. For example, U.S. air units could come to Korea for exercises. These could be useful because they would be visible and would be factored into the calculations of North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union.

With respect to the offshore islands, these present a less clear-cut problem than a move across the DMZ. I have discussed this issue with the President. He said that the U.S. would object strongly to any North Korean action of this type. However, as opposed to a major aggression across the DMZ in the face of U.S. forces and in the face of our treaty commitment, there would be constitutional problems in our making an advance commitment with respect to the islands. We will have to explore with the ROK what are the options and how we might respond to moves against the islands.

We must continue to develop all options in this area. We must develop joint contingency plans. We will reinforce General Stilwell's own inclinations to plan jointly for the defense of the islands. Since this is a more difficult area for us constitutionally, circumstances will have to determine the implementation of our plans. Such circumstances will include the question of exactly how aggression occurs. We would be best served in this regard if the fact of aggression can be clearly demonstrated to the Congress and the American public. We would hope, in this regard, that the ROKG will act with discretion and not be perceived by the U.S. public as acting precipitously. In the meantime we should proceed with a build-up of the islands' defense so that the North would view a move against the islands as being excessively costly.

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With regard to deterrence in general, it may be desirable for me to restate our position on U.S. Forces. We plan no adjustment in forces in Korea in the period immediately ahead. I must explain what I mean by "immediately ahead". Sometimes this phrase is misinterpreted to mean that some changes will take place after the immediate future. We do not plan any fundamental changes in U.S. support. Over the long run, we may make some adjustments to advance future complementarity. Such adjustments would in fact be aimed at strengthening deterrence. We should feel free in our partnership to make those adjustments which are necessary for efficiency. Such changes do not symbolize any change or weakening in deterrence. If necessary, we could take simultaneous steps to make it thoroughly clear to North Korea that our adjustments were aimed at reinforcing deterrence.

Minister Suh:

I understand your strong statements reiterating your support and the continuation in U.S. policy. However, we are concerned that in the event of major aggression by North Korea the U.S. would have to go through various time-consuming processes. There would be communications between General Stilwell and yourself; the question would be referred to Congress. And while all this was going on, our capital, which is only one hour's drive from the DMZ, would be endangered by a lightning war. We believe that the JMC Commander, who also has operational control of our forces, should be vested with the authority to do something immediately to blunt major aggression and only then have to submit to the various procedures required by U.S. law.

Secretary Schlesinger:

Mr. Minister, you are dealing with a theoretical and not a practical problem. There is no question in my mind as to what the President would authorize to be done in the case of major aggression. I believe the reaction would be immediate.

Minister Suh:

We have no doubt of that with regard to an attack across the DMZ, but such a response should also be the same with respect to the offshore islands. Kim Il-sung is no fool. He knows about the treaty and about your statements and of support, but he may ask, as a result of Vietnam, whether this commitment is reliable. He may be inclined to attack the islands in order to test the U.S. commitment. If U.S. planes and ships do not immediately participate in the defense of the islands, Kim may think the U.S. might not participate in the defense of Seoul. Therefore, the U.S. must react instantaneously in the event of an attack on the islands. You must remember that OPCON of the UN Commander applies to the ROK in its entirety, including the islands which are under the military control of the UNC.

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General Stilwell and I have visited the islands together. We have agreed that they can be defended against surface attack. They are more vulnerable to attack from the air. An air attack on the islands would justify a strong demonstration of joint U.S.-Korean action at the initial stages.

Secretary Schlesinger:

In the event of a move towards Seoul across the DMZ, U.S. forces would come under immediate threat. The President in such a situation can authorize General Stilwell to react in self-defense. There is no problem of constitutional authority in such a situation. The islands present a different situation. I am aware that if Kim Il-song took the islands it would be a psychological blow to Korea and might also embolden him to move across the DMZ. Therefore, we must be prepared to deal with this problem. The islands are part of Korea, like Seoul, and must be defended. The circumstances differ however from an attack across the DMZ. As I have said, we cannot make an advance commitment in the case of the islands. We can, however, plan together and our response to an attack on the islands should be firm. We must in the future undertake a discussion of the nature of our response.

Minister Suh:

What would you think of the idea of sending a small UNC liaison group to the islands? There are already small UNC combat support teams with PROKA. Such a liaison group could maintain communications between the island and UNC and could aid in ground-air communications.

Secretary Schlesinger:

I think the Minister has laid bare this problem. It is clear that the islands are a potentially vulnerable area and that we must work together in planning their defense. I will discuss this matter with the President, and in a general review of the issue, the suggestion the Minister has just made with regard to a UNC liaison group will be examined. I urge, in any case, that you not be unduly concerned. This is not a problem that would be referred to Congress. U.S. action would be firm and speedy, and the issue would not be submitted to Congress for debate.

Minister Suh:

I would like to go over a few of your points. It is my understanding that there will be no changes in the level of U.S. forces in the foreseeable future. Concerning the exercises, I understand that you have endorsed the idea of increasing them.

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Secretary Schlesinger:

On the force issue, we plan no changes of a fundamental nature. There might be some changes in detail, but none of a fundamental nature. This is the President's decision. Of course, the subject could be reopened by 1977, but I do not think any successor administration would take steps to weaken the U.S. commitment to Korea.

MOD AND FORCE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Minister Suh:

The second subject I would like to discuss involves the MOD plan and the five year force improvement plan. We appreciated your statements this morning that you will do your best with regard to these plans. I would like now only to reiterate our need for the unfunded portion of the MOD Plan, that is, \$460 million dollars. We hope that this will be funded by FY-1977 at the latest.

Secretary Schlesinger:

That certainly is our intention. We will be seeking credit to the extent that grant aid is not available. There have been shortfalls in the MOD Plan, but we have made substantial progress. You should not lose sight of this progress.

Minister Suh:

This morning you endorsed the general direction of the force improvement plan. I would like only to emphasize our need to alleviate our foreign exchange problem. We estimate that during the five year period we will need \$1 billion dollars of FMS credit.

Secretary Schlesinger:

I would like to bring up some specific issues in equipment.

[REDACTED]

With respect to air, the U.S. of course, provides a complementary force. We are prepared in any case to move ahead with the F4's and F5's in reflection of the desires of the ROKG. Over the longer run we will examine upgrading close air support, for example, the A-10, but this is subject for later discussion.

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Regarding the force improvement plan, we have noted certain items which we do not believe have high priority. For example, we have noted submarines. These are expensive and in view of North Korean land communications lines, do not seem particularly useful. They may reflect some tendency to seek a mirror image of North Korean forces. As for your lines of communications, we can keep them open. North Korea sees some use for submarines to try to interdict your lines of communications, although I think they are mistaken. In any event, from the ROKG standpoint, submarines should have a low priority.

On the question of foreign exchange I can not give you a definite answer but have taken note of your desires and we will do our best to meet them.

One additional item. As I said this morning, the Vietnam cloud has had some silver linings, and one of them is the possibility of equipment spill-out. We are ready to make available to you about 18 A-37's on an as-is where-is basis at very low cost. We are also prepared to provide 2 F5A's and, at no cost, a number of O-1's. Our MAG people will discuss the details of this equipment with your people.

Minister Suh:

I have heard that there are 21 F5-E's available. Aren't they included in what you are offering?

Secretary Schlesinger:

They are not part of the package.

Minister Suh:

-I must go back to reiterate that the 1 billion dollars of EMS credit needs your strong support.

Secretary Schlesinger:

The billion dollar figure has registered.

WAR TIME LOGISTICS SUPPORT

WAR TIME LOGISTICS SUPPORT

Minister Suh:

My third topic is the issue of war time logistics support. We are concerned about war reserve munitions. We are authorized a 45-day supply. We are now short about 70 thousand tons. We would also like to authorize war reserve munitions for 10 additional reserve divisions. This would require around 90 thousand tons. Thus we have the need for an additional 163 thousand tons of additional WRM.

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Secretary Schlesinger:

As I said this morning I regard logistics support as an item of highest priority because the strategy of blunting drive towards Seoul. We therefore, should closely examine what our requirements are. It is our intention to support the ROKG in this area to the greatest extent possible. We are operating however, under legislative restrictions in this area-- the so-called Kennedy amendment to the foreign assistance act. We are attempting to have this legislation changed.

Minister Suh:

[REDACTED]

Secretary Schlesinger:

You are right. [REDACTED]

Minister Suh:

[REDACTED]

Secretary Schlesinger:

I agree with the thrust of what you have said. We must review the situation in order to insure a rapid flow of material. When I reviewed our position on this issue in Honolulu I was not satisfied with where we stood and saw some anomalies and contradictions in our planning for logistics. We will straighten this planning out.

Minister Suh:

I appreciate your comment.

Secretary Schlesinger:

We both agree that our logistic plans should be consistent with our strategy.

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DEFENSE INDUSTRIES

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Minister Suh:

My fourth topic today concerns defense industries. We hope that your support in this field will continue especially in electronics and guided missiles. We will need technical data and training. We must also study the possibility of a division of labor in defense industries between the U.S. and the ROK. There are some things which we could produce more economically than you in view of our low labor costs, e.g., M-60 tanks, helicopters, and light aircraft. We might also cooperate in the field of arms sales. Items which are no longer produced in the U.S. could be manufactured and exported by the ROK, subject to U.S. approval.

Secretary Schlesinger:

I don't think we can resolve these matters in detail at this moment, although in general we would be prepared to be cooperative.

We are also prepared to give sympathetic consideration to the production of items no longer manufactured in the U.S. In general, however, we would want carefully to review defense production in Korea and the whole question of the division of labor. We would view the Korean role to involve items not at the high technology end of the spectrum.

We are prepared to provide a team of experts to consider what should be done in the missile area. We are prepared to sell PGM's to Korea, some of the laser guided weapons, which will enhance your weapons capabilities.

Sorting out those areas in which Korea has a comparative advantage represents a considerable undertaking. We are prepared to proceed to a review of this matter on a cooperative basis.

U.S. BASES IN KOREA

Minister Suh:

My fifth and final topic is the question of U.S. strategic bases in Korea. Last year I raised this matter with you when I visited the Pentagon. We offered Cheju Island as a site for a U.S. base and said that the ROK would provide the real estate and share expenses. Now, given the situation in Southeast Asia with Thailand and the Philippines advocating a withdrawal of U.S. bases and the possibility that Japan might do likewise, our offer of Cheju Island is even more timely.

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Secretary Schlesinger:

We much appreciated your offer and will take it under careful advisement. Regarding Thailand and the Philippines, it is evident that they either were not entirely serious about U.S. withdrawal in the first place or are now having second thoughts. As for Japan, we can not rule out the withdrawal possibility, but will be in a better position to judge this matter after my talks later this week with the Japanese.

I should point out that military construction is a very difficult area as far as funding is concerned. You know that Senator Mansfield is chairman of the Senate subcommittee in charge of this area. New base acquisitions therefore must be relatively costless.

SCM

Minister Suh:

What do you think about the timing of next year's SCM?

Secretary Schlesinger:

We can leave the details of the time and exact place to an exchange of correspondence. We will of course be the hosts.

NUCLEAR MATTERS

Secretary Schlesinger:

I think that at next year's SCM we probably want to discuss the fundamental question of nuclear deterrence. We want to examine the role nuclear weapons can play and cannot play. The U.S. Government has already welcomed the ratification of the NPT by the ROKG. The question of non-proliferation is of great significance both in strategic and political terms. One finds the deepest and most persistent concern regarding this problem in Congress. Thus, the ratification of the NPT helps us enormously in our relationships with Korea. It is also of great importance to the Japanese, who are very sensitive about this issue. If the ROKG had decided to move ahead with nuclear weapons development, it could have undermined the basis of our political relationship. Thus, I endorse the politically sound decision you have made.

Minister Suh:

I greatly appreciate the useful and lengthy talk we have had this afternoon. I am very happy to have had this exchange of views which was frank, straightforward, and most informative.

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Secretary Schlesinger:

I am grateful for the extended amount of time you have devoted to our talk this afternoon and I agree that the exchange was very helpful.

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