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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Roh Tae Woo of the
Republic of Korea (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
Nicholas F. Brady, Secretary of the Treasury
Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense
Robert Mosbacher, Secretary of Commerce
Carla Hills, U.S. Trade Representative
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President
and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Richard Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State
for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Donald P. Gregg, U.S. Ambassador to Korea
Douglas H. Paal, Director of Asian Affairs,
NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Chang-ho Lie, Interpreter

Roh Tae Woo, President
Choi Ho Joong, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lee Sang Hoon, Minister of Defense
Han Seung Joo, Minister of Trade and Industry
Park Tong Jin, Ambassador of the Republic of
Korea
Hong Sung Chul, Secretary General to the
President
Lee Hyun Woo, Director General, Presidential
Security Service
Kim Chong Whi, Presidential Adviser for
National Security and Foreign Affairs
Roe Chang Hee, Senior Protocol Secretary to
the President, Interpreter

DATE, TIME October 17, 1989, 11:00 a.m. - 1:13 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office/Cabinet Room/Old Family Dining
Room

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Declassify on: OADR

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PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
8/21/2009

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The President and President Roh met for forty minutes in the Oval Office, accompanied by their national security advisers and interpreters. (U)

The President: Welcome to the White House. (U)

President Roh: I appreciate your invitation. I know how busy you are. I would like to raise several issues. You have mentioned a new breeze of peace in your inaugural address. This change in the eastern world comes from our pressure forcing them to change, not from their own willingness. Your leadership and that of President Reagan has made this happen. With U.S. support, Korea has developed economically and socially. We are proud of our progress in democratization. On the security relationship, first, we are reassured by your firm commitment to the defense of Korea. Polls show that 95 percent of the Korean people wish continued presence of U.S. forces in Korea. I think the American people support it as well. (S)

The President: Yes, that commitment is strongly supported. (S)

President Roh: U.S. forces play a critical role. They are a deterrent to North Korea and a major element in the overall balance of power in Asia. If the Asian-Pacific countries are growing rapidly -- and they are as a result of U.S. help -- they will be able to pay a little of this debt to the U.S. We have these security discussions. We will endeavor in them to increase our share of the defense burden. We are concerned with the presence of U.S. soldiers in the center of Seoul. We are discussing all relevant issues in a cooperative way to move them to the south. (S)

The President: I hope our people are being cooperative and that the talks are moving forward. (S)

President Roh: As a small example, the golf course is right in the city center. We have started a new course outside Seoul. It will be ready in about one year. One other thing, our concern about North Korean nuclear activity -- I hope North Korea will soon agree to safeguards and the U.S. will press to have North Korea open to inspections. (S)

The President: We have little influence with North Korea, but if there is something we can do, we are ready. We are suspicious of that facility and certainly are ready to help in any way. (S)

President Roh: May I turn to the Korean domestic situation? I apologize for the trashing of the Ambassador's house in Seoul. (S)

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The President: We understand. You cannot control every crazy bastard and neither can we. Put it out of your mind. We appreciate your thoughts, but do not worry. (S)

President Roh: Thank you very much. As you know, on June 29, 1987, I promised to pursue the course of democracy. We have now exterminated the last traces of authoritarianism. I have found that democratization is easier said than done. All the pent-up demands are bursting out, which makes it difficult to concentrate on all the big issues. But I am determined to continue. The biggest current problem is radical leftist groups which are prepared to use violence. Some are influenced by North Korea. They endanger law and order, throwing molotov cocktails, etc. We have joined with the opposition for new regulations on the possession of firearms, etc. (S)

The President: There is a lot of support in the U.S. for you in the troubles you are having. We see the provocative behavior of the radicals, and public opinion is supportive of what you are trying to do. (S)

President Roh: Thank you for your understanding. I was called the "water president" -- the water against fire president. Can I say more? (S)

The President: We should go next door, but there is still time. And then we go over to lunch. (U)

President Roh: I would like to refer to trade issues until we join the others. I would like to discuss our nordpolitik. Our policy, following the Olympics, has been successful. Our object is to cultivate relations with the socialist bloc to blunt any activities by North Korea. We have established relations with Hungary and hope to do so with Poland and Yugoslavia. We are having contacts with the Soviets. But much Soviet talk has not been accompanied by action. They have taken away old weapons, but replaced them with new, and are providing support for North Korea. In China, the opening to the outside world has been set back. Even in Japan, the weakening of the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) is of concern. So the role of the U.S. in Korean security is of the utmost importance to us. (S)

The President: I agree with your assessment. We are trying to maneuver to get Chinese relations back on track. We watch your relations with North Korea with favor and support. We have no objections to improving your relations with the socialist bloc. I assure you, we will never surprise you with North Korea. (S)

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President Roh: I served for a long time as president of the Olympic Coordinating Committee, and in that capacity I traveled around the world. We have relations with Iran which might be helpful. We want to help in any way we can. (S)

The President: Thank you. Our relations with Iran are moving only slowly. The hostages are very important to us. We concern ourselves about every single life, but we are not discouraged about making some headway with Iran. Now we better join the others before we both get fired. (S)

The two presidents then joined the rest of the party in the Cabinet Room, 11:40 a.m. - 12:20 p.m. EDT. (U)

The President: Welcome everyone. President Roh and I covered about every subject in our meeting except the commercial aspects. At the outset, I want to say welcome. We have looked forward to this visit. It is an opportunity to make clear on this side of the table how this relationship is, and it is in very good shape. I told the President that we view the security aspect as very important. The U.S. is never going to surprise your country. We have not changed our view on the threat to your country. Time is short. The floor is yours, and we can continue at lunch. (S)

President Roh: In order to save time, I would like to repeat what the President said, and I would like to double it. As the President mentioned, we had occasion to discuss the very important security relationship between our two countries. I would like to raise something about trade. First, I would like to express satisfaction that we have resolved some issues between us. I express appreciation for Secretary Mosbacher and Ambassador Hills, who visited us recently. I am particularly satisfied with our results precluding Super 301 sanctions and our recent conclusion of talks on driftnet fishing. We will, of course, continue to liberalize and open our markets more widely in the future, so that by the middle of the next decade we will reach the level in market opening of the OECD countries. Those who have visited Korea recently will fully understand. We are fully engaged in adjusting the economic structure. In a short span of time, we have made some efforts which Japan took the past three decades to accomplish. On the average, the other industrial sectors are going on smoothly and acceptably, with the exception of agriculture. Twenty percent of our people are engaged in agriculture. We have been engaged in industry in our country for not very long. Before departing Seoul, I was briefed by the Minister of Industry and Trade, and I was happy to hear from him. As of the end of August this year, the trade deficit with the U.S. diminished by 33 percent, since the same time last year. I mention this not to be complacent. We will continue on

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this road. If there are any questions on this issue, I will ask the Cabinet members to speak. (S)

The President: You have been most hospitable to Secretary Mosbacher, Ambassador Hills and Vice President Quayle. Their talks gave me great encouragement. Agriculture is difficult for you, but please understand, it is difficult for us. I mean we have got to press on this worldwide. That, telecommunications, intellectual property rights -- you might think that these items would be of less importance to us, but they tie into our overall relationship. They are in the trade area, but spill over into the security area, given the mood in our Congress. Inasmuch as the President offered graciously to respond to questions, has anyone got any questions? (S)

Secretary Mosbacher: The President and his ministers were most kind and gracious to me, and I thank you. I appreciate the progress you have made to date. Aside from the intellectual property rights area, when we -- Minister Han and I -- have talked about continuing progress, we have been very hopeful. We will see some movement in telecommunications, where to date we have not seen opportunities for our companies that we believe we should have seen by now. Whether fiber optics, etc. -- depending on prices -- we hope our companies will have opportunities. (S)

Minister Han: I think we have been rather successful to solve problems through mutual dialogue and consultations. The Super 301 settlement set a very good precedent, not just for us, but for other countries as well. In view of the market opening in Korea, I hope the U.S. will view Korea in the longer term and broader perspective. Korea has done more than other countries at a similar stage of development. In viewing the trade problems of specific countries, we have to look at the general trend. We are working for free trade, even though problems come up from time to time. Some of the specific areas mentioned by Secretary Mosbacher -- IPR, telecommunications, and agriculture -- can be solved satisfactorily based on mutual confidence and taking due considerations of the specific difficulties in each country. (S)

The President: Mr. President, shall we walk to lunch in the White House? (U)

President Roh: Yes, Mr. President, we can go to lunch. Before we do, just one word; I told the same story to Ambassador Hills when she visited. Everything has its own time. If an apple is not ripe enough, it will not taste sweet. We want to enjoy it when it is ripe. (U)

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The President: We don't want to be so old that we won't be able to taste it. (laughter) In private, the President said he was concerned about the attack on Ambassador Gregg's residence. Not to worry. Don Gregg is expendable. (laughter) On the North Korean nuclear program, we see eye-to-eye. As for the Koreans' interest in the communist countries, we certainly understand that. We are keeping our eyes open on changes in the Soviet Union. But we are being realistic, and we will watch for changes that may affect your area. One last point, particularly for the benefit of our guests from Korea, the President expressed his commitment to democracy. There is concern for demonstrators. I see that these demonstrators do not generate sympathy in this country. Those pictures do not undermine our relations in my view. (S)

The party then proceeded to lunch, 12:20 p.m. - 1:13 p.m. EDT.
(U)

The President: Have you had any recent contacts with China? Any feelings about what is happening in China? (S)

President Roh: You know better than I. We have limited contacts with China. In the Chinese cultural tradition, abrupt change will not be welcomed by the Chinese people. I see no basic change. Of course, the ruling circles have difficulty ruling the country with tight control. Our businessmen visit China. We held an ethnic Korean sports festival. Chinese Koreans who came shared the same feelings, that it is a temporary setback. My personal advice is for the U.S. to have some tolerance. Treat them in a generous manner. Give them some time. Let them learn from their mistakes. (S)

The President: We are trying to preserve overall relations -- not set them back any further. I tried not to take steps that would hurt the Chinese people, such as economic measures. We stayed away from that. The right time is important in getting back on track. The human rights violations were so pronounced and visible, that I could not act as if everything was okay. (S)

President Roh: Yes, you are very much right. We have to tackle this patiently. You know the Chinese people well, you were there, so you deal with patience. (S)

Secretary Baker: The Foreign Minister and I remarked that we have met four times in eight months. We have covered in some detail most of the issues between us. I must mention that we will continue to make clear our commitment to the security of Korea. At the same time, we are facing budget pressures, which the Secretary of Defense is subjected to. We need to spend some

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time strategizing how to maintain the strength of the relationship. I should also say that in meetings with the Soviet Foreign Minister in Wyoming, I specifically raised the issue of North Korean nuclear proliferation. I told him how negatively we would react, what the problem is in our eyes, and the problem for South Korea. They profess to be equally concerned, and said they would raise it with North Korea as they had before. I have no reason to doubt that they will raise it nor to believe that it will stop North Korea. The Soviets, of course, answered with questions about nuclear weapons in South Korea. I said this issue was entirely different. It has to do with deterrence against the substantial imbalance that exists. (S)

President Roh: Yes, that is a completely different matter. We have neither confirmed nor denied the existence of nuclear weapons. (S)

Secretary Baker: I did not confirm that either. (S)

President Roh: I am happy you had successful meetings with the Foreign Minister. I hope you will have some influence on North Korea, although I am doubtful. During the Olympics, we asked you to help with North Korea. There was not much effect, by this I mean the terrorists' destruction of KAL 858. (S)

The President: Are any leaders in North Korea reasonable? (S)

President Roh: There may be some, but in practical terms it is almost impossible. Kil Il-sung enjoys god-like status, similar to Mao Zedong. After him, there is some chance for a more reasonable leader. We have some people, for instance, former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of DPRK forces in the Korean War and former Ambassador to Moscow, who was a political exile in Moscow for a long time, who have come to Seoul and told insider stories. Overall, we cannot be optimistic. But there is some possibility after Kim. (S)

The President: Is Kim Chung-il's succession guaranteed? (S)

President Roh: For practical purposes, the son is the number 2 for substantive affairs. Ninety percent of the power over domestic affairs is in his hands. He will succeed, but it is a question of how long he will survive. There are about 300,000 exiled Koreans in the Soviet Union who can be counted as against him. For China, there are two million, of whom 85 percent side with the South against the North. (S)

Ambassador Gregg: Arbatov's man, who was visiting Seoul, called and visited me. He had seen Pyongyang's Youth Festival on

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television. It reminded the Soviets of life under Stalin. He said that his hope is that as U.S.-USSR relations improve, they will provide a role model for North-South relations. (Ø)

The President: The President and I, while in the Oval Office, discussed military relations. Perhaps Secretary Cheney would like to say something. (Ø)

Secretary Cheney: Mr. President, one of the items I will discuss today with Minister Lee is the Korean Fighter Program. Secretary Mosbacher raised this during his visit to Korea. This is an important program, in the security interest of the U.S. and Korea. I might mention we were successful this year in defeating Congressional proposals requiring reductions in Korea. I am fairly confident that the final legislation will require me at least to study this issue. There is no intention to weaken our commitment by anyone in the U.S., but there will be continued debate over how we position our forces and what levels are involved. (Ø)

President Roh: Yes, Mr. Secretary. I hope you have a good conversation with Minister Lee. I would stress one point -- our very unique situation. You liberated us, saved us from destruction, supported us all this time. As a boy in a student's uniform, I joined the army when my country was invaded, and I served in Vietnam. We have shared ideals, including liberty. I am willing to continue in that spirit with the U.S. We miss the Vice President here today, but when he was in South Korea, he reaffirmed your government's firm commitment to our defense. We had very good discussions. I want to talk about his experience in going to the front lines. He insisted on going to the dangerous spots against the advice of his staff. Ambassador Gregg was with him. He had his way and visited your forces on the very front line. The soldiers were encouraged; he set a very good example. (Ø)

Ambassador Gregg: It was a very good experience. It got my tenure as Ambassador jump-started. We went to the National Assembly, as I did in 1982 with you. The four party leaders all said the same things about democracy and security. (Ø)

President Roh: Democratization is very praiseworthy. Some politicians get out of touch sometimes. (Ø)

Ambassador Hills: I am struck at how defense relations are interrelated with success in economic and trade talks. As I mentioned when I was there, Korea built a tremendous wave of appreciation for the way it handled Super 301. I hope what was gained in May will not be lost in the autumn. I hope for

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progress on intellectual property rights, telecommunications and agriculture as a symbol of goodwill and cooperation. We need to maintain that spirit to accomplish all that we accomplish together. (Ø)

President Roh: Mrs. Hills, thank you. I would like to turn to Pacific Basin cooperation. I hope the Foreign Ministers will discuss this. As you know, the Asian-Pacific region is more and more important. Twenty percent of the world's GNP is in the region; forty percent of world trade is Pacific trade. There will be more in the coming decade. During Australian Prime Minister Hawke's visit to Seoul, we discussed this and I said we have to include Canada and the U.S. Now in November there will be a ministerial meeting in Australia. I hope the U.S. will continue to lead the way in Pacific Cooperation. (Ø)

The President: We will lead. More and more Americans recognize that the Pacific rim is important in its economic and political relationships. We are willing to go the extra mile. (Ø)

President Roh: Especially during the Seoul Olympics, that vitality was shown. That vitality is now dampened by some domestic problems. The people of the Asian-Pacific region showed vibrancy. This strengthened my impression of the prospects of the Asian-Pacific region. (Ø)

The meeting ended with a brief exchange between the Presidents on the Olympic Games and on Korea's pleasure at having Ambassador Gregg serve there. (Ø)

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