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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 4, 1980

Dear Mr. President:

I have noted with great interest the program you set forth in your speech on December 21. It will be the policy of the United States Government to assist you and your government in every appropriate way as you undertake the important tasks of political reconciliation and constitutional change. The forging of a responsive, democratic political system that will serve sustained national development and stability is an undertaking of the highest importance.

Neither our capacity nor our determination to support our friends and allies in East Asia has been diminished by our concerns elsewhere. I am pleased to note that North Korea has not acted belligerently in recent weeks and that, in fact, we are hearing somewhat more moderate statements from Pyongyang--although their basic positions have not altered. Ambassador Gleysteen has briefed Foreign Minister Park on a recent message I received from President Tito and on discussions Secretary Vance has had with the Chinese regarding North Korean positions. I have also ordered that you be informed promptly of any relevant discussions in Beijing during Secretary Brown's forthcoming trip there. We continue to make it clear to North Korean interlocutors that any dialogue must include the Republic of Korea as a full and equal partner. In this connection, I was pleased by your recent reaffirmation of the tripartite proposal that President Park and I initiated in July.

While I welcome evidence of your determination to meet the goals set out in your recent speech, and while I wish to maintain solidarity in our common defense efforts, I must emphasize that I was deeply distressed by the events of December 12-13. Ambassador Gleysteen and General Wickham have made

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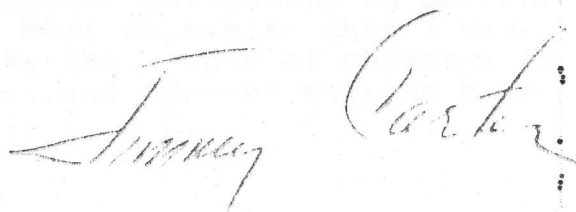
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clear to you and senior members of your government why the United States has been so concerned over strife within the Korean Army. It could easily lead to further turbulence within your armed forces, jeopardize the effectiveness of your defenses against North Korea, and undermine the prospects for political progress in your country. Such division could also destroy the external confidence which is so critical to Korea's security and economic well-being. I know that you share these concerns. Please be assured that we will work with you to try to minimize the political damage.

I have been particularly disquieted by the breach of the chain of command in the ROK Army. General Wickham has already discussed our concern with former Minister Ro and now with Minister Choo, but I wish personally to emphasize to you the serious implications of the breach of responsibility entrusted to the Combined Forces Commander by both of our governments and the dangerous precedent set by the direct actions taken by some ROK officers outside the normal military framework. The Combined Forces Command is a critical element in our mutual cooperation for the defense of Korea. Any further disregard for these arrangements and the commitments they embody would have serious consequences for our close cooperation. I hope that you will convey my sense of profound concern in this regard to your colleagues.

Mr. President, again please accept my warmest wishes as you embark on your historic tasks. We wish you and your new government success in meeting the objectives laid out in your December 21 speech, objectives which we shall continue to support.

Sincerely,



His Excellency
Choi Kyu Hah
President of the
Republic of Korea
Seoul

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