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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0085

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SEOUL 002357

E.O. 12958: DECL: (AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION)  
TAGS: PREL, KS, KN  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SECRETARY ALBRIGHT'S VISIT TO  
SEOUL

CLASSIFIED BY THE AMBASSADOR. REASONS: 1.5 (B, D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) YOUR VISIT MAY 1-2 CONTINUES AN INTENSE ROUND OF  
HIGH-LEVEL ROK-U.S. DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS WHICH BEGAN WITH  
UNDER SECRETARY PICKERING'S RECENT TALKS IN SEOUL AND  
CULMINATES WITH PRESIDENT KIM DAE-JUNG'S STATE VISIT TO  
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REVIEW AUTHORITY: Paul Blackburn, Senior Reviewer

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WASHINGTON IN JUNE. THIS SERIES OF VISITS WILL ENABLE US  
TO SOLIDIFY OUR EXCELLENT WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE  
NEW ROK ADMINISTRATION, REAFFIRM THE STRENGTH OF OUR  
ALLIANCE, AND ENCOURAGE KIM DAE-JUNG AND HIS KEY ADVISORS  
TO PRESS ON WITH THE ECONOMIC, TRADE AND FOREIGN POLICY  
INITIATIVES THEY HAVE BEGUN TO FLESH OUT.

2. (C) AS THE FIRST CABINET-LEVEL MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KIM SINCE HIS INAUGURATION, YOUR VISIT WILL BE AN IMPORTANT STEP IN FORGING A CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PARK AND WITH NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR LIM. YOUR MEETINGS HERE CAN ALSO IMPRESS UPON THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE ROKG THAT PLANS FOR THE JUNE SUMMIT SHOULD FOCUS NOT ONLY ON CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL CANDOR AND TRUST (OFTEN LACKING IN OUR RELATIONS WITH PREVIOUS ROK ADMINISTRATIONS), BUT ON CONCRETE RESULTS AS WELL. PUBLICLY, WE WOULD EXPECT PRESIDENT KIM TO LAY TO REST ANY LINGERING DOUBTS ABOUT KOREA'S COMMITMENT TO KEDO, FREE TRADE AND OPEN MARKETS. PRIVATELY, THE TWO PRESIDENTS COULD MOVE BEYOND IMMEDIATE CONCERNS TO CONSIDER KIM'S EFFORTS AT RAPPROCHEMENT WITH JAPAN AND HIS CONCEPT OF A "NATO FOR NORTHEAST ASIA."  
END SUMMARY.

A LULL IN THE CRISIS  
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3. (C) THE PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE SEEN A PALPABLE EASING OF THE SENSE OF CRISIS THAT HAD GRIPPED KOREA SINCE DECEMBER, WHEN THE COUNTRY DRIFTED TOWARD FINANCIAL COLLAPSE AND POLITICAL PARALYSIS. ON THE SURFACE, AT  
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LEAST, SIGNS ARE ENCOURAGING: THE CURRENCY HAS REGAINED OVER HALF ITS LOST VALUE, FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES HAVE STEADILY INCREASED AND SOUTH KOREA'S TRADE BALANCE HAS BEEN WELL IN THE BLACK FOR FOUR MONTHS RUNNING. THE ROKG HAS ALSO REACHED AGREEMENT WITH FOREIGN BANKERS ON A RESTRUCTURING OF OVER \$21 BILLION OF SHORT-TERM DEBT AND SUCCESSFULLY FLOATED A \$4 BILLION SOVEREIGN BOND ISSUE.

4. (C) POLITICALLY, KIM DAE-JUNG HAS MOVED ASSERTIVELY TO FILL A YEAR-LONG POWER VACUUM, CONFOUNDING SKEPTICS BY EMBRACING THE RIGOROUS IMF REFORM PROGRAM WHILE REACHING OUT TO DOMESTIC FOES WITH A "POLITICS OF INCLUSION" UNPRECEDENTED IN KOREA. THOUGH PREOCCUPIED WITH DOMESTIC CONCERNS, PRESIDENT KIM HAS NONETHELESS OUTLINED AMBITIOUS FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES, INCLUDING LESS CONFRONTATION AND GREATER ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH NORTH KOREA, RAPPROCHEMENT WITH JAPAN AND DIALOGUE WITH NORTHEAST ASIAN POWERS ON REGIONAL SECURITY.

5. (C) BENEATH THE SURFACE, HOWEVER, KOREA HAS JUST BEGUN TO REMEDY THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS THAT

BROUGHT ON THE "IMF CRISIS," AND MOST OF THE IMPROVED ECONOMIC SIGNS CAN BE TRACED TO THE MASSIVE INFUSION OF IMF-LED ASSISTANCE OR UNSUSTAINABLE BELT-TIGHTENING DRIVES BY BOTH INDUSTRY AND THE PUBLIC. AND WHILE KIM DAE-JUNG'S PERFORMANCE HAS SO FAR ECHOED THAT OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT -- REPLACING DRIFT WITH DECISIVE LEADERSHIP, CALMING PANIC, AND PROPOSING PROFOUND EVOLUTIONARY CHANGES TO SOLVE A NATIONAL CRISIS -- HE IS ALSO A LEADER WITHOUT A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WHO COULD FACE SERIOUS DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGES IN THE COMING MONTHS.  
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6. (C) KIM HAS SO FAR URGED KOREANS TO EMBRACE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ESSENTIAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE WAY IT DOES BUSINESS, REMOVING BARRIERS TO THE FREE FLOW OF FOREIGN GOODS AND INVESTMENT, IMPLEMENTING MODERN LENDING AND ACCOUNTING PRACTICES, AND FORCING LABOR TO ACCEPT THE END OF LIFETIME JOB TENURE. HIS DETERMINATION WILL BE SORELY TESTED THIS YEAR AS THE ECONOMY LIKELY CONTRACTS BY AS MUCH AS THREE PERCENT, HEALTHY AND WEAK COMPANIES ALIKE GO INTO BANKRUPTCY, AND UNEMPLOYMENT SOARS TOWARD DOUBLE-DIGIT LEVELS. AS THE ECONOMIC TOLL CONTINUES TO RISE RATHER THAN RECEDE, AND PRESSURE BUILDS ON KIM TO THROTTLE BACK ON THE MOST STRINGENT REFORMS, HE WILL NEED BOTH SYMBOLIC AND TANGIBLE SUPPORT FROM THE USG -- BOTH TO SHORE UP HIS POLITICAL STANDING AND TO STEEL HIM TO THE TASK.

7. (C) SOME OF PRESIDENT KIM'S MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGES WILL LIKELY ARISE FROM POLICY DISPUTES WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WHERE THE OPPOSITION GRAND NATIONAL PARTY HOLDS AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY. WHILE KIM DAE JUNG HAS SO FAR HAD RELATIVE SUCCESS IN PASSING LEGISLATION AFFECTING THE ECONOMY, HE WILL LIKELY FACE TOUGHER OPPOSITION ON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 SEOUL 002357

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ECONOMIC ISSUES IN THE FUTURE, AS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
MEMBERS SHOW NO SIGNS OF RESOLVING THEIR POLITICAL  
DIFFERENCES. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, IT WILL BE  
PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO PERSUADE THE ASSEMBLY TO  
SUPPORT SOME ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S., SUCH AS  
THE MAJOR OUTLAYS REQUIRED FOR KEDO AND THE LIGHT WATER  
REACTOR PROJECT, AS WELL AS MARKET OPENING MEASURES.

WORKING TOWARD AN ENDURING BILATERAL ALLIANCE  
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8. (C) PRESIDENT KIM WILL LOOK TO YOU FOR ASSURANCE OF STEADFAST U.S. SUPPORT FOR KOREA IN THIS CRISIS AND OF OUR FIRM BELIEF THAT IF HIS GOVERNMENT FULLY IMPLEMENTS ITS REFORM AGENDA, KOREA WILL EMERGE IN THE MEDIUM TERM AS A MUCH STRONGER, OPEN AND INTERNATIONALLY COMPETITIVE COUNTRY. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO NOTE AS WELL RISING PROTECTIONIST PRESSURES IN CONGRESS AND U.S. INDUSTRY IN THE FACE OF A LIKELY SURGE OF ASIAN EXPORTS. WE WILL NEED HELP FROM OUR ASIAN PARTNERS -- ESPECIALLY KOREA -- IN DEMONSTRATING THAT OUR FOREIGN MARKET ACCESS CONCERNS ARE BEING ADDRESSED. IN THIS REGARD WE LOOK FORWARD TO RESOLVING, QUICKLY AND QUIETLY, A NUMBER OF PENDING TRADE ISSUES, ESPECIALLY AUTOS. KOREA'S STRICT ADHERENCE TO DATE TO THE IMF AGREEMENT AND PRESIDENT KIM'S DETERMINATION TO PUSH AHEAD WITH DIFFICULT STRUCTURAL REFORMS HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE U.S. TO PROVIDE DIRECT ASSISTANCE AND MARSHAL A RAPID INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS. AT THE SAME TIME, OUR FIRM RESOLVE TO STAND BY KOREA IN CONFRONTING A DANGEROUS AND UNPREDICTABLE ENEMY TO THE NORTH REMAINS UNDIMINISHED.

9. (C) IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO EMPHASIZE THE VALUE OF OPENNESS, CANDOR AND TRUST WHICH WE SHARE WITH THE ROK AND TO WELCOME THIS NEW GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO UNIVERSAL DEMOCRATIC AND FREE MARKET VALUES. THE POLICIES KIM HAS ENUNCIATED GIVE US STRONG REASON TO HOPE THAT THESE VALUES ARE INDEED GENUINELY SHARED, AND THAT THE REQUISITE LEVEL OF TRUST EXISTS. HE IS EVER CONSCIOUS OF THE FACT THAT THE USG SAVED HIS LIFE ON TWO  
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OCCASIONS, AND HAS GIVEN HIS OFFICIALS STRICT INSTRUCTIONS TO WORK AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE WITH US. IN DOING SO, HE HAS PUT HIMSELF OUT ON A LIMB, AND IT IS INCUMBENT ON US TO JUSTIFY THE TRUST HE PLACES IN US.

NORDPOLITIK, FOUR PARTY AND NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE  
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10. (C) AS THE FOUR PARTY PLENARY WAS DEADLOCKING IN GENEVA, THE ROKG BEGAN TO LAY OUT A SWEEPING NEW POLICY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DPRK THAT BEARS A CLEAR RESEMBLANCE TO WEST GERMANY'S COOPERATIVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES TOWARD EAST GERMANY. KIM DAE-JUNG, AN ACKNOWLEDGED ADMIRER OF WILLY BRANDT, IS FOCUSING ON LIFTING RESTRICTIONS ON ROK BUSINESS INVESTMENT IN THE NORTH, AS WELL AS ON TRAVEL BY SENIOR CITIZENS AND DIVIDED FAMILIES. THESE POLICY CHANGES COULD HELP

IMPROVE THE CLIMATE FOR PRACTICAL COOPERATION AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. THEY SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, CONSTITUTE THE ONLY LINE OF APPROACH TO THE NORTH. AS THE MOST RECENT FOUR PARTY PLENARY IN GENEVA AND THE UNSUCCESSFUL NORTH-SOUTH TALKS IN BEIJING DEMONSTRATE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE PYONGYANG SIMULTANEOUSLY THROUGH SEVERAL CHANNELS, AS AT LEAST ONE IS CERTAIN TO BE BLOCKED AT ANY GIVEN TIME.

KEDO FUNDING CRISES  
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11. (C) THE ONE SPECIFIC ISSUE WE BELIEVE YOU SHOULD RAISE WITH PRESIDENT KIM (AND IN MORE DETAIL WITH HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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ADVISORS) IS OUR GROWING CONCERN THAT KEDO'S CONTINUING FINANCIAL PROBLEMS COULD LEAD TO A MAJOR CRISIS WITH NORTH KOREA IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] THE CONSEQUENT DELAYS IN LWR CONSTRUCTION AND HEAVY FUEL OIL DELIVERIES RISK FUELING HARD-LINE ARGUMENTS IN PYONGYANG THAT THE DPRK WAS DECEIVED BY THE U.S., AND THAT THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM SHOULD BE RESTARTED.

12. (C) IN HIS RECENT VISIT HERE, U/S PICKERING LAID OUT THE DETAILS OF OUR PLAN TO SEEK UP TO \$50 MILLION DOLLARS STARTING IN FY2000 TO FUND SAFETY-RELATED SYSTEMS FOR THE LIGHT WATER REACTOR. IN RETURN, THE ROKG WOULD MAKE A ONE-TIME CONTRIBUTION OF \$14 MILLION TO HELP RETIRE KEDO'S HEAVY FUEL OIL-RELATED DEBT. ROK OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED SERIOUS DOUBTS ABOUT GAINING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVAL GIVEN KOREA'S CURRENT FINANCIAL CONDITION AND COMMITMENTS TO FUND 70 PERCENT OF THE LWR. WE UNDERSTAND FOREIGN MINISTER PARK WILL ASK FOR THE USG TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE LIGHT WATER REACTOR. THIS WOULD PROVIDE A USEFUL OPPORTUNITY TO REITERATE OUR PROPOSAL FOR HELPING TO RESOLVE BOTH OF KEDO'S OUTSTANDING FUNDING

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CONCERNS.

BEYOND UNIFICATION: NATO FOR NORTHEAST ASIA?  
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13. (C) SO MANY URGENT ISSUES DOMINATE OUR BILATERAL  
AGENDA THAT THE VITAL QUESTION OF WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP  
MIGHT GO AFTER THE NORTH-SOUTH CONFRONTATION IS RESOLVED  
OFTEN GETS SHORT SHRIFT. PRESIDENT KIM IS ONE OF THE FEW  
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KOREAN POLITICIANS TO HAVE GIVEN THIS SERIOUS THOUGHT, AND HE HAS BEGUN TO SPEAK OUT ON THE NEED FOR A CONTINUED U.S. SECURITY PRESENCE IN NORTHEAST ASIA EVEN AFTER REUNIFICATION -- AND BEYOND THAT, FOR A BROADER REGIONAL SECURITY STRUCTURE THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY INCLUDE ALL THE MAJOR REGIONAL POWERS. MUCH OF THIS IS SIMPLY PRAGMATIC: KOREA WILL PROBABLY NEVER BE ABLE TO AFFORD TO MATCH THE MILITARY POWER OF ITS GIANT NEIGHBORS. BUT WHATEVER THE IMPETUS BEHIND IT, KIM'S STRATEGIC VISION FITS WELL WITH OUR OWN. YOU MIGHT BEGIN TO EXPLORE THIS WITH HIM, AND IT SHOULD BE A KEY PART OF HIS DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON IN JUNE.

14. (C) YOU WILL COME HERE DIRECTLY FROM BEIJING, A FEW DAYS AFTER THE VISIT TO SEOUL BY PRC VICE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO. THIS COINCIDENCE OFFERS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO COMPARE NOTES ON CHINA'S APPROACH TO KOREAN ISSUES, THE ROLE EACH OF US ENVISAGES IT PLAYING ON THE PENINSULAR AFFAIRS, AND HOW BOTH OF US CAN ENCOURAGE CHINA'S MATURATION INTO A RESPONSIBLE MAJOR PLAYER IN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS. OF COURSE, A CLOSE JAPANESE-KOREAN RELATIONSHIP IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO REGIONAL SECURITY. THE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAS PLEDGED TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO THE IMPORT OF JAPANESE GOODS AND CULTURE, TO NEGOTIATE A NEW FISHERIES AGREEMENT, AND TO SEEK A FINAL RESOLUTION OF COLONIAL-ERA WRONGS, SUCH AS THE MISTREATMENT OF "COMFORT WOMEN." WE SHOULD WELCOME PRESIDENT KIM'S EFFORTS TO MOVE PAST THESE LONG-STANDING DISAGREEMENTS.

GLOBAL ISSUES

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15. (C) GIVEN KIM DAE-JUNG'S DEEP COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS, WE MAY FIND THE NEW GOVERNMENT MORE WILLING TO WORK WITH US ON SUCH ISSUES AS BURMA, CAMBODIA, IRAN, AFGHANISTAN AND CUBA, ON WHICH IT TRADITIONALLY HAS KEPT A LOW PROFILE IN ORDER TO BOOST TRADE AND WOO THE DPRK'S THIRD WORLD SUPPORTERS. YOU MIGHT NOTE THAT THE ROK'S SIGNIFICANT TRADE TIES WITH COUNTRIES LIKE LIBYA AND IRAN GIVE IT LEVERAGE THAT SHOULD BE USED TO PRESS THOSE COUNTRIES TO ABANDON THEIR SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM AND OPPOSITION TO THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS.



16. (C) ON OTHER GLOBAL ISSUES, WE SHARE SIMILAR VIEWS ON THE NEED FOR LANDMINES ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA AS LONG AS NORTH KOREA POSES A THREAT OF INVASION. BUT WE ARE AT ODDS OVER UN SYSTEM REFORM: THE ROKG ARGUES THAT MID-SIZED COUNTRIES NEED A STRONGER VOICE IN UN AFFAIRS, AND HENCE THAT THE SECURITY COUNCIL SHOULD BE EXPANDED TO 25 OR 26 SEATS.

PRESIDENT KIM, FOREIGN

MINISTER PARK AND NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR LIM HAVE NOT YET VOICED STRONG VIEWS ON THESE ISSUES, AND YOUR UN EXPERIENCE MAY PROVIDE A GOOD OPENING TO ENCOURAGE THEM NOT TO IMPEDE OUR REFORM EFFORTS. WITH THE BUENOS AIRES CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE SET FOR THIS SUMMER, IT WILL ALSO BE USEFUL TO ENCOURAGE THE ROKG AS AN OECD MEMBER TO MAKE FIRM COMMITMENTS TO REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.

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