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WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

August 18, 1976

Time and Place: 3:47 pm - 4:43 pm White House Situation Room

Subject: Korea

Participants:

Chairman: Henry A. Kissinger

State: Charles Robinson  
Philip Habib

Defense: William Clements  
Morton Abramowitz

JCS: Adm. James L. Holloway  
Lt. Gen. William Y. Smith

CIA: Enno Knoche  
Evelyn Colbert

NSC: William G. Hyland  
William Gleysteen  
Michael Hornblow

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Secretary Kissinger: There is a practical problem I would like to point out. The attack occurred at 9:43 last night and I was not notified until 9:00 this morning.

Mr. Knoche: That was poor performance on our part and we will take the blame.

Mr. Clements: There is no reason for CIA to take the blame - why not DOD and State who also received messages in these channels.

Mr. Habib: The information came in at midnight last night but I did not learn about it till this morning.

Secretary Kissinger: It was in my take this morning along with some fifty other cables.

Mr. Habib: It was 8:30 this morning when I first knew about it.

Mr. Abramowitz: ISA did not learn about it until 9:30 this morning.

Mr. Knoche: There was discussion between the operation centers but nobody alerted the principals.

Secretary Kissinger: Wasn't there another incident where this sort of thing happened recently? Of course, there was the Mayaguez.

Mr. Habib: We should have been informed at 12:01 am. The machinery did not work properly.

Mr. Knoche: The various operation centers talked with each other but did not send it up to the principals.

Secretary Kissinger: I am not blaming CIA. Each department should be organized to inform its principals. Let's begin the briefing.

(Knoche begins briefing. Attached)

Secretary Kissinger: Were photographers taking pictures? Why don't we see any North Koreans' dead bodies?

Adm. Holloway: Stilwell doesn't believe that there were any North Korean casualties.

Mr. Robinson: Did the North Koreans report on the incident?

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Mr. Knoche: Yes, but there was no mention of casualties.  
(Knoche continues and finishes briefing.)

Secretary Kissinger: What does the South have in terms of  
manpower?

Mr. Knoche: They have 523,000 men in their army, 280 jet fighters,  
175 patrol craft and no submarines. In our judgment a military action  
by the North to be effective would have to be a surprise attack. We,  
therefore, do not believe that the North had a major attack in mind.

Secretary Kissinger: Can somebody provide me with an analysis  
of how the two sides forces balance?

Adm. Holloway: The North Korean ground forces have good hitting  
power, but the South Korean army is well led and backed by the U.S.  
The North Korean air force is larger, but the South Koreans are  
better trained. There is also the confidence factor. The South  
Koreans are confident because the U.S. backs them up. The North  
Korean submarines are not worth very much. Each country has a  
military force which is well designed to support its own strategy and  
position. In my judgment, it is a military stand-off. I do not think  
that at the present time the North Koreans could mount an effective  
military invasion.

Mrs. Colbert: Were you factoring in the U.S. forces?

Mrs. Knoche: That is a key judgment. We believe there are two key  
elements. One is the US-South Korean Mutual Defense Treaty and the  
other is the presence of US forces. If the US forces withdraw, then  
the North Koreans would have the military advantage.

Secretary Kissinger: Why was the reaction force so late in getting  
into the area?

Adm. Holloway: Stilwell has avoided answering that.

Secretary Kissinger: He sure mentioned the photo coverage. Why  
was it necessary to prune that tree?

Adm. Holloway: It obstructed the line of view between the observation  
post and the tower. On this chart I can only find one of the two positions  
cited.

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Mr. Clements: Wasn't that a routine operation - keeping the area clear?

Secretary Kissinger: This cable which was just handed to me makes it sound as though there was a lot of backing and forthing about this.

Mr. Hyland: They told us not to do it. (The North Koreans)

Adm. Holloway: Stilwell's report says that the original plan was to cut the tree down but the North Koreans said no. We then decided to prune it. An eyewitness account says that when the North Korean officer arrived on the scene he asked what they were doing. He was told "pruning" and answered "good".

Mr. Habib: There are some differences in the reporting of that.

Secretary Kissinger: Why do the North Koreans have the right to object to our cutting down or pruning a tree?

Mr. Habib: The whole area is a joint area.

Secretary Kissinger: If the North Koreans decide to prune a tree do they ask our permission?

Mr. Habib: No. We don't care. Each side has its own area within the joint area.

Secretary Kissinger: Can each side order the other side around?

Mr. Habib: They can't force each other but there is a lot of argumentation.

Secretary Kissinger: Well there are two problems as I see it. The first problem is that two American officers have been beaten to death. The second problem is to review the procedures we are following in the DMZ. Now, regarding the first issue, I agree with the CIA analysis. My impression is that it was a premeditated attack. There were some fifty other things they could have done to stop us from pruning the tree.

Now this letter Stilwell wants to send to Kim. Why should he send a letter to Kim? What standing does he have?

Mr. Habib: Well Stilwell is the Commander of the UN Forces and Kim is the Commander of the North Korean Army. Kim also signed the original peace agreement.

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Secretary Kissinger: There have already been White House and State Department statements deploring these murders. Why do we now also need a Stilwell statement? Does he have the authority to make a statement?

Mr. Abramowitz: No. He needs Washington approval.

Secretary Kissinger: Well lets put that in abeyance. I have talked to the President today about this. He feels that some sort of strong action is necessary but does not know precisely what it should be. Now there are two things that come to my mind. A few weeks ago we turned off a B-52 exercise because it would be provocative to the Chinese. We might resurrect that exercise. The second possibility would be to alert all forces in Korea.

Adm. Holloway: We could go from DEFCON 4 to DEFCON 3.

Secretary Kissinger: What would that do?

Adm. Holloway: Unless we had a specific plan in mind or the North Koreans felt we had a specific plan in mind they probably would not react at all.

Secretary Kissinger: Well on that basis you could not threaten anything.

Mr. Abramowitz: Stilwell recommends that we finish pruning the tree.

Mr. Clements: I am in complete accord with that and think we should cut the God damn thing down.

Secretary Kissinger: I am in favor of that too but I don't think we should do anything about the tree until after we do something with our forces. What is the meaning of the DEFCON alert stages?

Adm. Holloway: 5 is normal and 1 is war. Stage 2 means that war is inevitable and stage 1 is when the shooting starts.

Mrs. Colbert: If the alert were moved up to 3 how would the media and the U.S. people react to that in this campaign year.

Secretary Kissinger: That has nothing to do with it. The important thing is that they beat two Americans to death and must pay the price.

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Mrs. Colbert: The North Koreans are looking for indications that they can create another Vietnam type mentality in this country. Therefore to disabuse them of this it is important to have the right kinds of expressions of support from the media and opinion makers.

Secretary Kissinger: What about resurrecting the B-52 exercise? The State Department hereby withdraws its objections to it. This is now the best time in the world to run it.

Mr. Habib: It was a training exercise.

Mr. Abramowitz: Would it scare the Americans or the Koreans?

Mr. Gleysteen: There is another exercise planned.

Secretary Kissinger: But everybody already knows about that one.

Mr. Clements: Is it true that in the exercise we would fly the B-52s over Korea and then go back?

Adm. Holloway: Yes.

Secretary Kissinger: How long would it take?

Lt. Gen. Smith: We could get it going in 72 hours - possibly less.

Secretary Kissinger: The quicker the better.

Mr. Clements: Do we wish to drop live bombs?

Secretary Kissinger: If that is part of the program, do it. If not then don't do it.

Mr. Clements: Well let me play Devil's Advocate. Why not drop live bombs?

Secretary Kissinger: If it is part of the plan do it.

Mr. Clements: I can make it part of the plan.

Mr. Abramowitz: The exercise would be well below Nightmare Range and they were not scheduled to drop live ordinance.

Mr. Habib: Those planes will come within easy range of North Korea. Distances there are close.

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Secretary Kissinger: Okay. That will be a good lesson for them.

What I would like to do now is to go over possible courses of actions and meet again tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. to discuss them. The President wants to explore the possibility of taking one military step. What can we do? You may wish to think about it overnight. Whatever we do must be commensurate.

Adm. Holloway: There are several possibilities: we could lay mines, we could seize a North Korean flag vessel or a fishing boat. But seizing a fishing boat might be beneath /<sup>our</sup> dignity. The North Koreans have 34 commercial flag vessels. None of them are in our ports or allied ports. We have only been able to locate 9 of them so the remainder are probably in North Korean waters.

There is also the possibility of a combined exercise with the South Koreans. It would take a minimum of four days to set this up. We could also send in a carrier task group. The Midway could be there between 48-72 hours. It is in Yokosuka now. They could have a missile-shoot off the coast.

Secretary Kissinger: I like the idea of cutting the tree down. We should generate /<sup>our</sup> forces first and then cut it down. We should also go on a higher alert. Let's put our forces on DEFCON 3 tonight and get a plan for cutting down the tree from Stilwell. (to Adm. Holloway) Can you start gearing up the B-52 run?

Adm. Holloway: Yes.

Secretary Kissinger: We need to know what forces Stilwell needs to cut the tree down.

Adm. Holloway: There are two difficult decisions before us. At what point do we stop putting in reinforcements? In the past when we have moved in men they have acted reciprocally and vice versa. At what point would we stop? The next question is the use of firearms. In this recent incident both sides had firearms that were not used.

Secretary Kissinger: If I had been one of those men and was being beaten to death, I would have used a firearm.

Mr. Habib: They were attacked from behind and had no chance.

Adm. Holloway: Most of these men are Vietnam veterans. They were taught there to die before violating the rules of engagement.

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Mr. Habib: Stilwell knows the estimated forces and that we can't move men without violating the agreement. If there was a fight there would be a need for reinforcements from outside of the zone.

Mr. Hyland: Should we reinforce the company?

Mr. Habib: The Koreans are the main force in the Zone. Stilwell will have to tell us what to do.

Secretary Kissinger: Who consults with the South Koreans?

Mr. Habib: Stilwell.

Mr. Hyland: We need to send a message to Stilwell telling him not to go ahead with the letter and to prepare a plan for cutting down the tree.

Mr. Habib: The troops could be prepositioned and he could bring them up the road and have them move in as he requires them.

Secretary Kissinger: It will be useful for us to generate enough activity so that the North Koreans begin to wonder what those crazy American bastards are doing or are capable of doing in this election year.

Mr. Abramowitz: We should consider putting more U.S. forces into Korea.

Secretary Kissinger: That might be desirable.

Mr. Habib: There is also the question of the Northwest Islands. They are highly vulnerable.

Secretary Kissinger: How about our forces? Should they go on alert tonight? We should also get that training exercise laid on. I would like for tomorrow morning to have a list of U.S. forces which could be moved into Korea. We should consider moving F-111s and F-4s in. Then on Friday morning we can move to cut that tree.

Perhaps we should decide now to move the F-4s and decide on the F-111s tomorrow.

Lt. Gen. Smith: We can do it from scratch in twelve hours.

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Mr. Habib: We have to consult <sup>with</sup> the Japanese.

Secretary Kissinger: Well then do it. Get the process started.

Mr. Abramowitz: To temporarily move our aircraft does not require us to consult with the Japanese.

Mr. Habib: We do have to advise them.

Secretary Kissinger: I would like to get a working group started. Phil will you set one up?

Mr. Habib: Yes - we will need representatives from State, Defense, JCS and the CIA.

Secretary Kissinger: Who will inform Park?

Mr. Habib: The Charge and Stilwell should go jointly.

Mr. Gleysteen: A lot of this will soon become public knowledge.

Secretary Kissinger: Yes. We have to decide on press guidance. It should be low key. We can admit to going onto DEFCON 3 because of the premeditated murders.

Mr. Clements: Do we have to notify the UN?

Mr. Habib: No. We have gone to DEFCON 3 before without notifying them.

Adm. Holloway: Stilwell takes his orders from the JCS, not the UN.

Mr. Habib: I think there is a procedure for the JCS to inform the UN.

Secretary Kissinger: For tomorrow's meeting there should be a chart prepared of what everybody has to do.

Mr. Abramowitz: What about the War Powers Act?

Secretary Kissinger: That is a valid point. There should be one central plan for consulting with Congress.

Adm. Holloway: We will look at it. I have it right here.

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Mr. Habib: Your lawyers and our lawyers can study it.

Secretary Kissinger: By early/<sup>this</sup> evening we should have:

1. What we want to do about the War Powers Act
2. Press Guidance - "we are taking these precautionary moves because of the premeditated murder of American soldiers" which raised the question of what the North Koreans might be up to.
3. Consultations with South Korea, Japan

Mr. Abramowitz: What about the North Korean allies?

Secretary Kissinger: I am seeing the Chinese at 5:00.

Mr. Habib: The North Koreans have already come out with their version of the story. They have not agreed to a meeting tonight. Eventually they must come to a meeting.

Mr. Hyland: The proposed statement is not very strong.

Mr. Habib: Stilwell must be told not to submit a letter at the meeting.

Secretary Kissinger: For the 8:00 meeting tomorrow I want a spread sheet. We should also alert the task force to the possibility they may need to move. Tomorrow we can concentrate on four things:

1. Additional military deployments to Korea
2. What military action we might take
3. Possible Diplomatic actions; whom we should notify and brief.
4. Congressional activity

The meeting ended at 4:43 p. m.

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18 August 1976

DDCI BRIEFING FOR  
18 AUGUST WSAG MEETING

NORTH KOREA

- I. We are virtually certain that the violent incident in the Joint Security Area this morning was a deliberate provocation. We believe it was primarily intended to agitate American public opinion over the issue of our troops in Korea in the context of the US election campaign.
- II. Since early this spring, North Korean propaganda has charged almost daily that the US is introducing new weapons into the South, conducting provocative military exercises, and keeping South Korean armed forces on a war footing.
- Pyongyang has warned that these developments have created a "grave situation" in which war may break out at any time.
- On August 5 -- only a few hours after an exchange of fire between ROK and North Korean troops on the DMZ -- North Korea, in an unusually high level statement, alleged that

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the US and South Korea have now "completed" war preparations. The statement was the first issued at this level since 1969 that was directed specifically at US actions in the South.

III. North Korea's efforts have most recently been focused on the Non-Aligned Conference in Colombo, now drawing to a close.

-- Their efforts in Colombo, in turn, were intended to affect favorably their prospects in the UN General Assembly debate. A resolution has now been introduced that once again calls for American withdrawal from Korea.

IV. While the North Koreans have made gains in the international forum, their propaganda efforts have won them little or no return in the American political forum. They may now be raising the ante in hopes of stimulating American opposition to a continued US troop presence. This morning's incident seemed deliberately intended to produce American casualties.

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- The Joint Security Area is one of the very few places where North Koreans have direct, continuing contact with US military personnel.
- In June, there were several similar incidents in which US forces in the Joint Security Area were harassed by North Korean personnel. No casualties resulted, however.
- According to the account of today's incident issued in Seoul, a North Korean officer at the scene was heard to tell his troops to kill the UNC (i.e., US) personnel.
- A North Korean radiobroadcast shortly after the incident occurred described it as a US provocation that forced North Korean security personnel to take defensive measures. The broadcast warned that future incidents of US aggression would be met in this fashion, but otherwise signaled no major change in Pyongyang's policy.

V. North Korea's next moves will undoubtedly be conditioned by the American reaction.

- Should the response to this probe lead them to believe that they can play effectively on American sensitivities by further con-

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trolled acts of violence, we would expect them to pursue this course.

- VI. But we believe that their principal immediate objective is to improve upon their 1975 success in the General Assembly. Accordingly, we believe that they are extremely unlikely to embark upon a course that would run the risk of major US reprisals or portraying North Korea as significantly raising the threat of instability on the peninsula.

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