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Viewing cable 07SEOUL3539, FOREIGN MINISTER AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS HANDLING

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Table with 5 columns: Reference ID, Created, Released, Classification, Origin. Row 1: 07SEOUL3539, 2007-12-14 07:24, 2011-08-30 01:44, CONFIDENTIAL, Embassy Seoul

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DE RUEHUL #3539/01 3480724 ZNY CCCCC ZZH O 140724Z DEC 07 FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7754 INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3593 RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3729 RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003539

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2017 TAGS: KS KN PGOV PREL ABLD SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS HANDLING OF U.S.-ROK ISSUES DURING END OF ROH ADMINISTRATION

Classified By: Ambassador Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Song Min-soon told the Ambassador during a December 13 meeting that he wanted to continue close coordination with the USG during the remainder of President Roh Moo-hyun's term...

-- renewal of the Iraq Zaytun detachment could be problematic because of dynamics in the National Assembly, but that he would try to persuade UNDP legislators to support the renewal;

-- he expected the National Assembly to ratify the KORUS-FTA before the end of February, but that the beef market opening remained politically difficult;

-- the DPRK could be hesitating about issuing a complete declaration out of concern that a declaration could lead to increased, rather than reduced, scrutiny of its nuclear programs.

The Ambassador pressed the Minister to address the U.S. proposal for an alternate site for a new U.S. Embassy compound, given the five-year delay in USFK's departure from the Camp Coiner site.

----- TRANSITION PERIOD -----

¶2. (C) At the outset of their December 13 meeting, the Ambassador thanked Foreign Minister Song Min-soon for establishing a solid foundation of U.S.-ROK cooperation that would persist after a new ROK government came into office.

SIPDIS that he did not foresee "any of the candidates" for ROK president substantially changing direction on foreign policy, nor failing to see the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance, although a "slight change in style" was inevitable.

¶3. (C) Song said he expected the transition period to be smooth, since the ROK was a small country where people knew each other well. Song expected MOFAT to work closely with the president-elect's transition team, as had been the case

after past elections. The Ambassador noted that the USG had a lot of important business that it would continue to do with the current administration, but that it was also important for him to meet informally with the president-elect and for the Embassy to engage informally with members of his transition team. Song said he agreed with that approach.

ISSUES FOR DECEMBER-FEBRUARY

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked for FM Song's assistance with important bilateral issues during the remainder of President Roh's term, citing the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS-FTA) and the related reopening of the beef market, and the extension of the Zaytun detachment in Iraq. We would also need continued close coordination on the Six-Party Talks and inter-Korean engagement, and there would be further Visa Waiver Program consultations in late January.

-- FTA/BEEF

¶5. (C) Song said that he thought the National Assembly would vote to ratify the FTA before the end of President Roh's term. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. hoped to submit the FTA to the U.S. Congress in the first months of 2008, but this required that the ROK first resolve the beef-importation issue. Song replied that beef was a "precarious issue because of the National Assembly election." Prospective candidates did not think they could gain votes by favoring importation of U.S. beef, but many knew they could lose votes by doing so.

¶6. (C) Referring to recent discussions between USTR Susan Schwab and ROK Trade Minister Kim Jong-hoon, Song said that there should be symmetry between what both sides asked each

other to do. The Ambassador noted that the USG was asking the ROKG to take steps in line with the international standards established by the OIE. While we understood the logic of the ROK's two-stage proposal, it would require too much time to achieve a full market opening, making it difficult for us to move forward with FTA ratification in a timely manner. He urged the Roh Administration to bite the bullet and relieve the next Administration of the burden, so that the FTA -- a key part of Roh's legacy -- could advance.
-- IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN/SUDAN

¶7. (C) Song said he was not sure whether the ruling UNDP party would allow a vote on the extension of the Zaytun detachment after the presidential election, because they were already looking ahead to the April 9 legislative elections. With the opposition GNP in favor of extension, Song said MOFAT would work to persuade individual UNDP members to vote for extension, regardless of the party's official position against it.

¶8. (C) Song added that the ROKG was continuing to work to set up a provincial reconstruction team in Afghanistan. He said some National Assembly members objected to having any military medics stationed there, but he believed this to be an objection that could be overcome.

¶9. (C) Asked about the prospect of providing helicopter support in the Darfur area, Song said he had been eager to reply to UNSG Ban Ki-moon's request for such assistance, but that the ROKG did not have the needed transport helicopters. The ROKG would have to reduce funding for defense projects at home to be able to support such international efforts. He added that UNIFIL had asked the ROKG to provide vessels for use off the coast of Lebanon, but the ROKG was unable to fulfill that request.

NORTH KOREA

¶10. (C) Turning to North Korea, Song suggested three reasons that the DPRK may be hesitating about issuing a complete declaration of its nuclear programs. First, he said, the DPRK could be "once bitten, twice shy," remembering that its uranium enrichment comments to former Assistant Secretary James Kelly in 2002 and its admission that the DPRK had abducted some Japanese citizens had both resulted in the DPRK's problems in these realms getting worse rather than better. Second, since the USG was entering a transition year, the DPRK could be assessing whether there was enough time to achieve its normalization goals with the current U.S. administration. Third, the DPRK was generally not ready to come in from the cold and join the international community. "We have to make them more confident" to take that step, he added. Asked about possible high-level ROK engagement with

the DPRK, Song said he had recommended to the Blue House that Seoul not get in the way of Washington's direct talks with Pyongyang on the declaration. He was also dismissive of suggestions by the ROK NSC that we should open alternative channels of communication with the DPRK on nuclear issues.

OIL SPILL

¶11. (C) Song thanked the Ambassador for the offer of US Coast Guard assistance with the west coast oil spill, noting that he wanted the U.S. efforts to get media attention. He said that MOFAT had established a task force to coordinate assistance from not only the U.S., but also China, Russia and Singapore.

EMBASSY SITE

¶12. (C) Noting that the USG had been trying to build a new embassy compound (NEC) in Seoul since 1978, the Ambassador asked FM Song to address the issue during his remaining time in office. The 2004 agreement to build the NEC at Camp Coiner was premised on USFK's planned departure from the site at the end of 2008. Now that USFK's move to Pyeongtaek has been delayed by five years, the ROK should help us find an alternative solution that would permit construction to begin in 2009 as originally planned. The Ambassador explained that the USG was seeking ROKG agreement to "Site B," adjacent to

Camp Coiner, because USFK had agreed to vacate its portions of this site soon so that embassy construction could begin. This would in turn speed up USG relinquishment of housing areas on the Yongsan Army Base, which would permit the Koreans to proceed more quickly with the conversion of Yongsan Garrison into a public park. (The Ambassador noted that moving USFK out of Camp Coiner ahead of schedule would be much more expensive given the large concentration of personnel housed there; the ROK could consider financing that as another option, but Site B was our preferred approach.) Song's response was non-committal: he agreed that the problem had persisted for much too long, and said he would look into the issue.

VERSHBOW