U.S. Accredited Korean Operative Believed Involved in '67 Kidnaping

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The background of South Korea's top security operative in Washington—which is widely believed to have included the kidnaping of Korean students from West Germany in 1967—was known to the U.S. government when he was accredited to this country nearly six years ago, official sources said yesterday.

The abduction of the Korean students caused widespread indignation in West Germany at the time and resulted in a deterioration of relations between Bonn and Seoul.

Neither U.S. nor South Korean officials would confirm that the man who masterminded the German kidnapings, Yang Doo Won, is now serving in the embassy in Washington under the cover name Lee Sang Ho.

Park Kun, charge d'affaires at the South Korean embassy, said at a press conference yesterday that he was "not familiar" with Lee's background and would not divulge it.

However, private Korean sources in Washington who oppose the internal policies of President Park Chung Hea in Seoul, said Yang and Lee were the same man.

The slim, golf-playing Lee is now at the center of a controversy involving the activities of Korean security agents, and the Korean CIA, in the United States and elsewhere.

U.S. officials said yesterday that they have no direct information linking Lee or other diplomats with the kidnaping in Japan last week of opposition politican Kim Dae Jung. (Kim is now at his home in Seoul, and it is uncertain whether he will be permitted to leave the country to take up a post as visiting fellow at Harvard University this fall).

However, State Department officials said that South Korean diplomats in this country have engaged in "harassments" of Korean residents which are not appropriate in this country."

Embassy charge Park labeled accusations about Korean diplomats as "fantastic."

"As far as I can find, out there has been no illegal activity, no physical threats and no violence to any resident, Korean or American," he said.

Dissidents here claim Lee is the main figure behind wide-ranging activities of Korean agents in this country, involving the surveillance and threatening of Korean dissidents.

In the press conference yesterday, Park said that if it was learned that "subversive elements," including foreign agents, were attending a rally held in this country, "then we might attend."

A spokesman in this country for the opposition leader Kim said that six Korean diplomats in the United States may have been involved in the kidnaping. Kim was spirited out of Japan, beaten, and smuggled into Korea.

The abduction recalled the 1967 kidnaping in Germany. Seventeen young persons opposed to President Park's regime were forced to Korea for trial. They were sentenced to long prison terms and several were condemned to death. The intervention of the Bonn government finally obtained their freedom.

Referring to the possible involvement of Lee in that event and his subsequent accreditation under a different name to the United Nations in 1967 and Washington in 1970, a State Department official said: "People can be declared persona non grata in one country and still be assigned elsewhere."