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The United States and South Korea traded criticisms yesterday in the latest diplomatic fallout from influence-buying investigations.

In Seoul, Information Minister Kim Seong Jin declared that South Korea will conduct its own investigation and take unspecified "appropriate measures" against any illegal acts unless the U.S. publicly clarifies whether or not American agencies "bugged" the executive mansion there.

"Such acts, if committed, would not only cast doubt on the American morality but also adversely affect the friendly relationship" between the two countries, said Kim, who is former press secretary to President Park Chung Hee.

Several hours later in Washington, State Department spokesman John Trattner refused substantive comment on the "bugging" reports, repeating the standard "no comment" on questions about U.S. intelligence practices.

The United States has told South Korea that the information minister's statement and an earlier public complaint by the Park government relating to the U.S. bribery investigation were "not helpful," Trattner disclosed.

"At the same time, our basic relationship, including our security interests in Korea, remains unchanged," Trattner added. However, the unusual exchange of criticisms between official spokesmen in Seoul and Washington brought a new dimension to the hard feelings arising from the investigation of payoffs.

The Washington Post reported Oct. 27 that "highly sensitive" intelligence reports—apparently including tape records of meetings inside the Blue House, the presidential mansion in Seoul—formed the basis of allegations that President Park personally ordered the bribery of U.S. congressmen, according to informed federal sources.

The United States has never officially denied that report, although some officials in informal conversation have sought to dispute it. Others have given private hints that bugging did occur in South Korea.

Extensive U.S. bugging of President Nguyen Van Thieu in the South Vietnamese presidential palace, headquarters of another Asian ally, has been reported by several former officials who had access to transcripts.

The South Korean government had been informed well in advance that the United States would make no comment on the "bugging" allegation and an earlier official statement to this ef-

fect left no room for doubt, State Department officials said. For this reason, they appeared puzzled by the information minister's challenge, which was issued to news services in Seoul without notice to the United States.

Given minister Kim's close relationship to Park and the previous official silence on the U.S. investigation, the Seoul statement yesterday and an earlier criticism the day before were taken as signs of growing irritation on the part of the South Korean leader.

A Korean government official who refused to be named—but is believed here to be the information minister—demanded in Seoul Wednesday that his government be given access to Kim Sang Keun, a former Korean CIA employee in the Washington embassy who has refused to return home and is reported to be giving detailed information to U.S. investigators.

The Seoul statement, also issued in Tokyo and Washington, demanded the "prompt release" of the disaffected diplomat and suggested that he is being held against his will.

The State Department said yesterday that the KCIA employee is being protected by U.S. marshals at his request, but "chose freely" to remain in the United States and is not in custody. Officials said he has said "a number of times" that he does not wish to see a representative of the South Korean government, and that this has been passed on to Seoul.

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