

16 FEB 68

T.

SEOUL ACQUIESCES ON PUEBLO TALKS

With the North Koreans
Defers to U.S. on Meetings

By ROBERT TRUMBULL

Special to The New York Times

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb. 15 —South Korea has withdrawn objections to efforts by the United States to obtain the release of the intelligence ship Pueblo and her 82 surviving crew members through secret talks with the North Koreans at Panmunjom.

Meanwhile, a South Korean radio station reported that the sixth in a series of secret meetings took place today between Rear Adm. John V. Smith, the senior American delegate for the United Nations side on the Military Armistice Commission, and the North Korean senior delegate, Maj. Gen. Pak Chung Kuk.

United States spokesmen, following a rule laid down by Washington when delicate negotiations began last month, declined to comment on the reported meeting at Panmunjom, the truce village 30 miles north of Seoul in the demilitarized zone.

Foreign Minister Choi Kyu Ha announced the Seoul Government's acquiescence in unilateral contacts by the United States with North Korea, which the South Koreans had strongly opposed until now, after the disclosure of the new defense accord with the United States today.

However, there were strong adverse reactions here to what the South Koreans considered the "soft" tenor of the joint communiqué on defense issued today at the end of lengthy consultations by Cyrus R. Vance, President Johnson's special envoy in the current Korean crisis.

Critics of the statement felt that it fell far short of meeting hopes held here for some kind of military retaliation against North Korea for the commando raid directed at President Chung Hee Park's official mansion Jan. 21 and the seizure of the Pueblo two days later.

Hope for Return of Injured

There was speculation that the United States had stood firm against South Korea's demands for military action against the North in order to avoid jeopardizing hopes that the North Koreans would soon release at least the injured members of the Pueblo's crew. One crew member among the original 83 has been reported killed and three are said to have been injured.

Kim Jai Sun, the official spokesman of President Park's ruling Democratic Republican party said, "While we must continue our efforts for joint defense and closer relations with the United States and other allies, we urge the Government to change drastically the concept of our national defense to a self-reliant, independent posture."

Foreign Minister Chomi conceded in a statement to Korean newsmen that he was "not fully satisfied" with the agreement.

Indicative of the divergence of views between the United States and South Korea was the fact that the final discussion between Mr. Choi and Mr. Vance began at 9 o'clock last night and lasted until 5 o'clock this morning.

After Mr. Vance left the conference, held in a two-room suite on the 16th floor of the Tower Hotel in Seoul, Mr. Choi continued negotiations for another hour and a half with Ambassador William J. Porter.

The joint statement declared that the "grave situation" had resulted from "increasingly aggressive and violent actions of the North Korean Communists over the past 14 months."

North Korean commando incursions and other "aggressive actions," the communiqué warned, "seriously jeopardize the peace of this area and, if persisted in, can lead to renewed hostilities in Korea."

Referring to President Johnson's request to Congress for \$100-million in special military aid to South Korea, the communiqué hinted at American assistance in President Park's plan to organize 2.5-million veterans into an armed national militia.

Mr. Vance left for the United States this afternoon, after spending five days on a mission that he had expected to take only a few hours, according to an informed American source.

Before boarding his plane, the Presidential envoy described his talks with Mr. Park and other officials as "good and very useful." Asked if there had been any additional agreements, he replied, "None that are not in the communiqué."