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Mr Cortazzi

Primi Minister

(2)

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KOREA: ATTEMPTED MILITARY COUP?

1. There appears to have been an unsuccessful attempt at a military coup in Korea. In the absence of the Ambassador on tour in the South, the Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy in Seoul telephoned at 1430 (2330 local time) to say that shooting had been heard in the vicinity of the home of the Minister of National Defence. The Defence Attache's information was that there had been an attack on the Minister's home; that the Minister had escaped unharmed; but that the Martial Law Commander, General Chung might have been killed. The rumour was that the Chief Military Prosecutor in the current court martial of President Park's assassins was responsible.

2. Mr Tallboys said that this was the sum total of the information so far available; the Embassy would telegraph further details tomorrow. He stressed that the situation in the city was normal so far as could be seen: traffic was running smoothly. It therefore appeared that the attempted coup - if that was what it had been - had failed.

[Handwritten signature]

12 December 1979

R J T McLaren

PS: I have been in touch with the US Embassy who have received a similar but vaguer message.

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