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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3131

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 19044

NODIS            **DECAPTIONED**  
CHEROKEE

E.O. 12065:RDS-1 12/18/99 (GLEYSTEEEN, W.H.) OR-M  
TAGS:    PGOV, PINT, MORG, KS, US  
SUBJECT:    KOREA FOCUS - MY MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER  
-            DECEMBER 18

1.    (S) ENTIRE TEXT.
  
2.    BEGIN SUMMARY:    I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER SHIN DECEMBER 18 OSTENSIBLY TO CONGRATULATE HIM BUT ACTUALLY TO CONVEY A BLUNT MESSAGE ABOUT THE EXTENT OF OUR CONCERN OVER THE DECEMBER 12/13 INCIDENT AS WELL AS TO OFFER TO BE HELPFUL IN COUNSELLING A RETURN TO PROPER BEHAVIOR BY THE MILITARY, PATIENCE AMONG THE OPPOSITION, AND SUPPORT OF THE NEW CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT.    I WARNED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF RECENT EVENTS ON CONTINUED COOPERATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY AND FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN, AND ALSO NOTED THE URGENT NEED TO FIND WAYS TO LOWER TENSIONS AMONG THE MILITARY AND TO SEND CLEAR SIGNALS TO THE PEOPLE THAT THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD CARRY ON WITH A PROCESS OF STEADY POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION.    SHIN SEEMED TO AGREE WITH MUCH OF MY PRESENTATION, DESCRIBING THE EVENTS OF LAST WEEK AS "DANGEROUS" AND "MOST REGRETTABLE".    HE SAID HE DID NOT THINK IT WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN AND ALLEGED IT WOULD HAVE NO ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE POLITICAL PROGRAM

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: DONALD A JOHNSTON  
DATE/CASE ID: 23 JUL 2003 199502728

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ANNOUNCED NOVEMBER 10. ASKED WHAT I CONSIDERED A REASONABLE PERIOD FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, I TOLD HIM THAT I THOUGHT THE AVERAGE OF KOREAN OPINION WAS ABOUT A YEAR. SHIN COMMENTED THAT "OFFICIALLY AND PERSONALLY I AGREE WITH YOU". AS OF NOW, SHIN LOOKS LIKE THE STRONGEST MAN IN A FRAIL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY

3. I BULLIED MY WAY TO AN EARLY MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER SHIN HYON-KWACK DECEMBER 18 DURING WHICH I SPOKE FROM NOTES ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES: WE HAVE BEEN DEEPLY WORRIED BY THE DECEMBER 12/13 INCIDENT WHICH (A) SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT OF INSUBORDINATION WITHIN THE ROK MILITARY AND CREATED BOTH SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM PROBLEMS THAT COULD ONLY UNDERMINE THE ROK'S ULTIMATE LINE OF DEFENSE; (B) VIOLATED COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS AND RAN ENORMOUS RISKS IN TERMS OF THE ROK'S DEFENSE AGAINST NORTH KOREA; AND (C) THREATENED TO DISRUPT THE PROCESS OF ORDERLY POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION BEGUN BY THE CHOI GOVERNMENT. I SAID THAT THE ROK COULD NOT SURVIVE IN ITS PRESENT FORM WITHOUT TIES TO THE OUTER WORLD AND THESE DEPENDED ON SOUTH KOREA'S INTERNAL PERFORMANCE. IF THE U.S. MILITARY, WHO WERE ANGRY AND DISTURBED OVER WHAT HAPPENED, CEASED SUPPORTING THE ROK MILITARY THE RESULT WOULD BE DEVASTATING. PERHAPS MORE PERTINENT TO THE PRIMIN WITH HIS SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, SOUTH KOREA COULD NOT SURVIVE WITHOUT THE CONFIDENCE OF FOREIGN TRADERS, INVESTERS, AND BANKERS. THESE MEN WERE WORRIED AND HAD GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO BRING THEIR WORRIES TO OUR ATTENTION. WHAT WAS NEEDED NOW WAS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WAS EFFECTIVELY IN PLACE AND AGAIN CATCHING THE STRIDE IT HAD PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT.

4. I TOLD SHIN WE WOULD TRY TO BE HELPFUL IN THREE  
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DIRECTIONS. FIRST, ASSUMING THAT IT WAS AGREEABLE TO THE ROKG, WE WOULD CONTINUE TO COUNSEL PATIENCE WHEN WE MET WITH OPPOSITION AND DISSIDENT FIGURES. SECOND, WE WOULD USE OUR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ROK MILITARY TO UNDERSCORE OUR DISTRESS OVER WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND OUR BELIEF THAT THEY SHOULD GET BACK TO THEIR MAIN TASK OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, LEAVING POLITICAL AFFAIRS AS MUCH AS

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POSSIBLE TO THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THIRD, WE WOULD TRY IN ALL APPROPRIATE WAYS TO HIGHLIGHT OUR SUPPORT FOR THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT SO LONG AS IT MOVED IN WAYS TO RECEIVE THE SUPPORT OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE.

5. FINALLY, I MENTIONED TWO URGENT PROBLEMS. I SAID THAT I WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE REAL DANGER OF FURTHER MILITARY INFIGHTING. IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT VARIOUS STEPS BE TAKEN TO LOWER THE TEMPERATURE WITHIN THE MILITARY COMMUNITY AND TO PUSH THE NEW ARMY AUTHORITIES TO SHOW ENOUGH TOLERANCE AND COMPROMISE. THE OTHER URGENT PROBLEM WAS FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO CONVEY THE CLEAREST POSSIBLE SIGNAL TO THE GENERAL POPULACE THAT IT WOULD GET ON WITH THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION -- HOPEFULLY THROUGH PRESIDENT CHOI'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

6. SHIN, WHO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE VICE FOREIGN MINISTER AND TWO SECRETARIES (I WAS ALONE), SAID HE TOO WORRIED ABOUT THE INCIDENT'S EFFECT ON THE UNITY OF THE ROK MILITARY AND DEFENSE AGAINST NORTH KOREA. THE MEASURES USED TO ARREST FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF CHUNG SEUNG HWA

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CHEROKEE

WERE IMPROPER, "MOST REGRETTABLE" AND DANGEROUS. BUT HE SAID HE CONSIDERED HIMSELF WELL INFORMED OF WHAT WAS GOING ON NOW, AND REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT IT WOULD NOT HAPPEN AGAIN. AS FOR MY "THIRD WORRY", HE STATED FLATLY

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THAT THE INCIDENT WOULD HAVE "NO ADVERSE EFFECT" ON THE PROGRAM PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED BY PRESIDENT CHOI NOVEMBER 10. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE VALIDITY OF MY POINTS ABOUT THE ROK'S DEPENDENCE ON U.S. MILITARY COOPERATION AND FOREIGN ECONOMIC CONFIDENCE, AND HE SAID HE WAS DOING EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO BRING THIS HOME TO THE MILITARY. IN GENERAL, HE EXPRESSED GREAT APPRECIATION FOR THE ROLE THE U.S. PLAYED ON OCTOBER 26/27 AS WELL AS DECEMBER 12/13, STATING THAT OUR ACTIONS HAD BEEN HELPFUL AND APPROPRIATE.

7. SHIN ASKED ME POINT BLANK WHAT PERIOD OF TIME THE U.S. THOUGHT WOULD BE REASONABLE TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL REFORM. NOTING THAT I HAD ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS WITH PRESIDENT CHOI, I SAID THE U.S. HAD NO OFFICIAL VIEWS ON SUCH AN OBVIOUSLY DOMESTIC QUESTION, BUT I COULD PASS ON MY PERSONAL ESTIMATE OF WHAT THE KOREAN PEOPLE WOULD CONSIDER REASONABLE: I.E. I THOUGHT MOST VIEWS AVERAGED OUT TO ABOUT ONE YEAR WITH ANY EXTENSION TAKING PLACE ONLY IF AGREED BY A CONSENSUS OF ALL MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPS. IF PRESIDENT CHOI

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WERE TO ANNOUNCE SOMETHING ALONG THESE LINES, SOME WOULD SAY IT WAS TOO LONG AND OTHERS TOO SHORT, BUT I SUSPECTED A MAJORITY WOULD CONSIDER IT REASONABLE. SHIN REPLIED "OFFICIALLY AND PERSONALLY I AGREE WITH YOU". HE IMPLIED THE DECISION WILL BE TO TRY TO COMPLETE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IN 1980 AND COMPLETE NEW ELECTIONS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE DAY, AUGUST 15, 1981.

8. COMMENT: I INSISTED ON SEEING SHIN PROMPTLY BECAUSE I SENSE THAT HE MAY PROVE THE STRONGEST MAN IN THE GENERALLY WEAK CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. I WAS IMPRESSED BY HIS PERFORMANCE. ALTHOUGH HE HAD TO MUFFLE SOME OF HIS OBVIOUS CONCERN OVER MILITARY BEHAVIOR, HE WAS FAR FRANKER THAN THE PRESIDENT AND QUICKLY PICKED UP MY POINTS ABOUT CONTINUED MILITARY AND BUSINESS COOPERATION. FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, CHUNG IL KWON TOLD US LATER AT LUNCH THAT IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PEOPLE ARE PRIVATELY CALLING SHIN "THE PRESIDENT". GLEYSTEN

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