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E.O. 12065: RDS-1 5/17/00 (GLEYSTEN, W.H.) OR-M
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, KS
SUBJECT: MY 17 MEETING WITH BLUE HOUSE SYG CHOI KWANG SOU

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. NOTE: PLEASE SEE PARA 9 BELOW FOR UNHAPPY NEWS RECEIVED TWO HOURS SUBSEQUENT TO MEETING RECORDED IN THIS TELEGRAM. BEGIN SUMMARY: I VISITED BLUE HOUSE SYG CHOI MAY 17 TO URGE THAT PRESIDENT CHOI USE THE QUIET OF THE NEXT FEW DAYS TO MAKE WHATEVER CONCESSIONS HE COULD ON MARTIAL LAW AND THE POLITICAL SCHEDULE AND DO SO WITH MAXIMUM POSSIBLE CLARITY. I ACKNOWLEDGED THE DILEMMA OF APPEARING TO CAPITULATE TO PRESSURE BUT STRESSED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL CREDIBILITY WAS BADLY IN NEED OF REFURBISHING. IT WOULD BE BETTER TO ACCOMMODATE NOW THAN AFTER THE STUDENTS RETURNED TO THE STREETS AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SUBMITTED EXTREMIST DEMANDS. CHOI COMMENTED THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD MAKE AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT, WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, IN WHICH HE WOULD COUPLE HIS "FINAL CONCESSIONS" WITH A TOUGH WARNING AGAINST FURTHER CHALLENGES TO LAW AND ORDER. THE PRESIDENT MIGHT ACCELERATE HIS POLITICAL SCHEDULE BY ABOUT THREE MONTHS; HE WAS ALSO SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING ACCEPTING THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER SHIN AND MAKING SOME STATEMENT ABOUT THE

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- Cat. A - Caption removed; transferred to O/FADRC
- Cat. B - Transferred to O/FADRC with additional access controlled by S/S
- Cat. C - Caption and custody retained by S/S

Reviewed by: Elijah Kelly Jr.

Date: 7/19 19 88

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY:
ROBERT H. MILLER

DATE/CASE ID: 7 MAR 2001 199604577

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TEMPORARY NATURE OF CHUN DOO HWAN'S APPOINTMENT. CHOI DOUBTED THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE BLE TO SAY MUCH ABOUT MARTIAL LAW BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND STRONG CRITICISM FROM THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT'S SOFT TACTICS TOWARD THE STUDENTS. I USED STRONG LANGUAGE TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT LETTING THE MILITARY DICTATE HARD LINE POLITICAL POLICIES. I ALSO WARNED THAT THE ARREST OF KIM DAE JUNG OR OTHER POLITICIANS COULD PROVE INCENDIARY. END SUMMARY.

3. KNOWING THAT PRESIDENT CHOI AND HIS ADVISORS WERE IN THE MIDST OF AN IMPORTANT POLICY REVIEW, I ASKED TO SEE BLUE HOUSE SYG KWANG SOO CHOI (M-R: CH'OE KWANG-SU) ON MONDAY AS A PRELUDE TO TRYING TO SEE THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. CHOI, WHO LUNCHEDED WITH THE PRESIDENT, CALLED ME TO SAY HE WOULD PREFER TO SEE ME TODAY. I COMPLIMENTED CHOI ON THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, NOTING THAT I HAD WATCHED THE POLICE MYSELF AND, LIKE MANY OTHER OBSERVERS, FELT THAT THEY HAD GENERALLY PERFORMED SKILLFULLY AND MODERATELY IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. I THEN SAID THAT I HOPED THE GOVERNMENT WOULD USE THE NEXT FEW DAYS OF QUIET TO MAKE THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE CONCESSIONS ON THE QUESTION OF MARTIAL LAW AND POLITICAL SCHEDULE. I ACKNOWLEDGED THE DANGER OF APPEARING TO CAPITULATE TO STUDENT/POLITICIAN PRESSURE BUT THE GOVERNMENT'S CREDIBILITY WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC WAS, QUITE FRANKLY, IN POOR SHAPE AS A RESULT OF AMBIGUITY ABOUT ITS POLITICAL SCHEDULE AND MOVES SUCH AS THE APPOINTMENT OF CHUN DOO HWAN (M-R: CHON TU-HWAN). THE NEXT FEW DAYS OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE POSITIVELY WITHOUT APPEARING CAPITULATIONIST. CHOI GENERALLY AGREED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA AS I DESCRIBED IT, AND STATED THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD MAKE AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT (POSSIBLY AS EARLY AS MONDAY BUT

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MORE LIKELY MID-WEEK) IN WHICH HE WOULD COMBINE HIS "FINAL CONCESSION" ON THE POLITICAL SCHEDULE WITH A TOUGH STATEMENT THAT FURTHER MASS CHALLENGES TO LAW AND ORDER WOULD NOT BE TOLERATED.

4. CHOI EXPLAINED IT WOULD BE LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET DEMANDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT COMPLETE THE POLITICAL SCHEDULE WITHIN THIS YEAR BUT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE OF SIX MONTHS, I.E., A NEW GOVERNMENT IN PLACE BY THE END OF THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1981. THE PRESIDENT WAS ALSO SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING A CABINET RESHUFFLE. PRIME MINISTER SHIN, WHO HAD BEEN IN OFFICE FOR ABOUT SIX MONTHS, DID "BEAR SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRESENT SITUATION AND RECOGNIZES THIS FACT." THERE MIGHT ALSO BE SOME OTHER CABINET CHANGES. CHUN DOO HWAN WOULD NOT BE RELIEVED AFTER SUCH A SHORT TIME AT KCIA, BUT THE PUBLIC MIGHT BE TOLD MORE CLEARLY THAT THE APPOINTMENT WAS TEMPORARY AND WOULD BE REVIEWED SERIOUSLY WITH THE LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW. AS FOR MARTIAL LAW, CHOI SAID THE GOVERNMENT ORIGINALLY HAD IN MIND LIFTING IT ABOUT JUNE 15. THAT DATE WAS NOW UNCERTAIN AND HE DOUBTED IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE ANY VERY FORTHCOMING STATEMENT ON THE SUBJECT. I ASKED IF IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO ANNOUNCE A JUNE 15 TARGET DATE AND COUPLE IT WITH WARNINGS THAT IT COULD NOT BE MET IF THE STUDENTS TOOK TO THE STREETS AND THAT MARTIAL LAW MIGHT HAVE TO BE REIMPOSED IF THE SITUATION GOT OUT OF CONTROL. CHOI REPLIED THAT THEY HAD THOUGHT ABOUT SUCH A PROPOSITION BUT FOUND IT FULL OF PROBLEMS.

5. CHOI TOLD ME ABOUT TWO MEETINGS, WHICH HAD JUST CONCLUDED TODAY, HIGHLIGHTING CONFLICTING PRESSURES ON THE BLUE HOUSE. THE FIRST WAS THE LARGE MEETING IN WHICH

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STUDENT LEADERS DECIDED THEY WOULD WAIT UNTIL MAY 22 TO SEE HOW THE GOVERNMENT ADDRESSED FOUR DEMANDS OF (A) LIFTING MARTIAL LAW BY M X 20, (B) COMPLETING THE POLITICAL TRANSITION BY THE END OF 1980, (C) ANNOUNCING A DATE FOR THE RETIREMENT OF PRIME MINISTER SHIN AND GENERAL CHUN, AND (D) IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF "PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE." IF NOT SATISFIED, THE STUDENTS WOULD LAUNCH A FIERCE STRUGGLE. CHOI POINTED OUT THAT ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT COULD GO PART WAY TOWARD ACCOMMODATION OF THESE DEMANDS, IT COULD NOT POSSIBLY MEET THEM ALL. MOREOVER, IF IT WERE TO TRY, THE DEMANDS WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY A FURTHER ROUND OF PRESSURES. THE SECOND MEETING ON WHICH HE HAD ONLY A PRELIMINARY READOUT WAS A MEETING OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER AND ALL MAJOR MILITARY LEADERS WHICH HAD TAKEN A VERY HARD LINE STANCE CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S TOLERANT POLICY TOWARD THE STUDENTS THIS PAST WEEK. CHOI COMMENTED THAT THIS MILITARY VIEW WAS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAD TO KEEP IN MIND.

6. I URGED AGAIN THAT THE GOVERNMENT SPEAK WITH AS MUCH CLARITY AS POSSIBLE, MAKE THE GREATEST POSSIBLE CONCESSIONS, AND AVOID NEGATING THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS BY ACTIONS SUCH AS THE ARREST OF KIM DAE JUNG (M-R: KIM TAE-CHUNG) OR HIS FOLLOWERS. I SAID THAT I HAD HEARD MANY REPORTS FROM MILITARY AND SECURITY QUARTERS THAT KIM

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SHOULD BE ARRESTED BECAUSE OF ALLEGEDLY HARD EVIDENCE THAT HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS HAD INCITED AND FINANCED STUDENT UNREST. IF THE GOVERNMENT IN FACT HAD LEGAL EVIDENCE AGAINST CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH KIM, THEY COULD CONSIDER ACTION AGAINST THOSE INDIVIDUALS BUT STRIKING AT KIM HIMSELF COULD BE INCENDIARY. ARRESTS OF ANY POLITICIANS SEEMED ILL ADVISED DURING THE FORTHCOMING PERIOD.

7. IN CONCLUSION, I USED VERY, VERY STRONG LANGUAGE TO STRESS THE DANGER OF LETTING KOREAN MILITARY LEADERS DETERMINE HOW THE GOVERNMENT WAS GOING TO COPE WITH POLITICAL DECISIONS AT THIS STAGE. IF THE MILITARY FORCED THE GOVERNMENT INTO A HARD-LINE POLITICAL CLAMPOWN, THE RESULTS COULD PROVE DISASTROUS FOR KOREA'S RELATIONS WITH US, UNDERMINING THE PROGRESS IN SHORING UP OUR SECURITY RELATIONSHIP OVER THE PAST YEAR. I EMPHASIZED THAT I WAS NOT MAKING ANY THREAT ABOUT OUR SECURITY POSTURE, BECAUSE I DID NOT BELIEVE IN THREATS. I WAS ONLY STATING THE POLITICAL FACTS OF LIFE AS I UNDERSTOOD THEM.

8. COMMENT: SOME SENSIBLE THINKING IS TAKING PLACE IN THE BLUE HOUSE, ALTHOUGH WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHETHER THE PRESIDENT HAS THE TOUGHNESS TO GO AS FAR AS HE PROBABLY SHOULD. CHJI HAS PROMISED TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH ME OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AND IF WE GET FURTHER SIGNS OF HARD LINE TALK FROM THE MILITARY, I INTEND TO MAKE SOME CALLS ON MILITARY LEADERS TO URGE RESTRAINT. IF I DO SO, I MIGHT WANT TO BE REINFORCED BY WASHINGTON INSTRUCTIONS, BUT I DO NOT REPEAT NOT WANT INSTRUCTIONS ORDERING ME TO MAKE SUCH APPROACHES UNTIL I HAVE A BETTER FEEL FOR THE SITUATION.

9. BAD NEWS JUST RECEIVED. HOPE UNDERWOOD, AT YONSEI
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UNIVERSITY, HAS INFORMED US THAT RIOT POLICE HAVE ENTERED THE EHWA CAMPUS AND BEGUN TO REMOVE (NOT NECESSARILY ARREST) STUDENTS ATTENDING A MEETING. IF THIS PROVES TO BE WHAT IT APPEARS, WE MAY BE FACED WITH A QUITE CRITICAL SITUATION IN A VERY SHORT TIME. GLEYSTEN

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