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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 05921

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DECAPTIONED

E.O. 12065: RDS-3 5/10/00 (GLEYSTEEEN, W.H.) OR-M
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, KS
SUBJECT: KOREA FOCUS: MAY 9 CONVERSATION WITH BLUE
- HOUSE SYG KWANG SOO CHOI

REF: (A) SEOUL 5907, (B) SEOUL 5920

1. (S) ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: BLUE HOUSE SYG KWANG SOO CHOI MAY 9 GAVE ME A RATHER SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT OF HOW THE BLUE HOUSE ASSESSES THE STUDENT, LABOR AND POLITICAL PARTY PROBLEMS, AS WELL AS WHAT PRESIDENT CHOI INTENDS TO DO ABOUT THEM. SINCE HE KNEW I HAD SEEN GENERAL CHUN DOO HWAN, HE DID NOT REHASH CHUN'S DISCUSSION OF THE STUDENT PROBLEM, BUT HE WENT EVEN FURTHER THAN CHUN IN STATING THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS DETERMINED TO GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO AVOID USING THE ARMY EXCEPT AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LAST RESORT. (LARGE NUMBERS OF EXTRA COMBAT POLICE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO TOWN FOR A TOTAL 12,000.) HE INDICATED THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PREFER (IF PRACTICABLE) TO CLOSE THE SCHOOLS RATHER THAN CONFRONT THE STUDENTS IN AN ATTEMPT TO ARREST RINGLEADERS OR TANGLE WITH THEM IN LARGE FORMATIONS.

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3. I EXPRESSED UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE NEED TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER AND SAID WE WOULD NOT OBSTRUCT DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY CONTINGENCY PLANS, BUT I EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF TRYING NOT TO HELP STUDENT RINGLEADERS BY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: CHARLES E LAHIGUERA
DATE/CASE ID: 27 JUN 2005 200501785

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ACTIONS THAT WOULD APPEAR EXCESSIVE TO MODERATE STUDENTS AND THE MAN IN THE STREET. CHOI FROWNED ON MY SUGGESTION OF A FURTHER AND CLEARER STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT ABOUT HIS POLITICAL PROGRAM WARNING THAT IT COULD ONLY BE IMPLEMENTED IF PEOPLE COOPERATED IN MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER. CHOI SAID ALL STATEMENTS SO FAR HAD ONLY PROMPTED FURTHER CRITICISM FROM KIM DAE JUNG AND KIM YOUNG SAM "WHO SEEM NOT TO UNDERSTAND THE DANGER OF BRINGING THE SOLDIERS OUT OF THE BARRACKS". END SUMMARY.

4. BLUE HOUSE SYG KWANG SOO CHOI (M-R: CH'OE KWANG-SU) ASKED ME TO CALL MAY 9 FOR A REVIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN OVER STUDENT, LABOR, AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS PRIOR TO PRESIDENT CHOI'S DEPARTURE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST TODAY. SINCE HE KNEW I HAD ALREADY SEEN GENERAL CHUN DOO HWAN (M-R: CHON TU-HWAN) (REF B), HE WAS RATHER SUMMARY IN HIS ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENT PROBLEM AND PROPOSED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS. THE ONLY NOTEWORTHY ADDITIONS TO CHUN'S REMARKS WERE THE FIRMNESS OF HIS ASSERTIONS THAT POLITICAL PROTEST ACTIVITIES BY THE STUDENTS WERE CLEARLY BEING DIRECTED BY A SMALL MINORITY OF MOSTLY REINSTATED STUDENTS. SINCE THE GOVERNMENT COULD NO LONGER OPERATE ON THE CAMPUSES, IT COULD NOT IDENTIFY ALL THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED, LET ALONE ARREST THEM AT THIS STAGE EXCEPT BY MASSIVE ASSAULTS ON THE CAMPUSES -- WHICH WOULD BE DISASTROUS. CHOI SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS DETERMINED TO DO HIS UTMOST TO AVOID THE USE OF THE ARMY IN CONTROLLING THE STUDENTS, ALTHOUGH CONTINGENCY PLANS HAD BEEN MADE. MORE THAN 12,000 COMBAT POLICE HAD BEEN DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT

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SEOUL, MANY OF THEM NEWLY TRAINED OR DRAWN FROM COASTAL GUARD DUTY NOW BEING COVERED BY THE ARMY. THE GOVERNMENT ESTIMATED THAT ONE COMBAT POLICEMAN COULD HANDLE SIX RIOTERS IN A CONFINED AREA BUT ONLY ONE, TWO, OR THREE IN DISPERSED DOWNTOWN CONDITIONS. IF ALL THE GOVERNMENT'S EXHORTATION FAILED TO DETER THE STUDENTS, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER CLOSING THE SCHOOLS IF THIS WOULD FACILITATE POLICE CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

5. CHOI WAS ALSO UNEASY ABOUT THE LABOR SITUATION, PROUD OF THE WAY THE GOVT HAD HANDLED THE SABUT MINE RIOT, AND RATHER PLEASED WITH THE SUCCESSFUL QUASHING OF VIOLENCE AT FOUR MAJOR INDUSTRIAL PLANTS IN INCHON, SEOUL, AND PUSAN. YET THE GOVERNMENT WAS VERY CONCERNED BECAUSE THERE WAS EVIDENCE OF RADICAL TROUBLEMAKERS AND ALL THE SETTLEMENTS

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SO FAR TENDED TO UNDERCUT THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO HOLD
DOWN WAGE INCREASES IN AN EFFORT TO CHECK INFLATION.

6. LASTLY, CHOI LASHED OUT PASSIONATELY AT KIM DAE JUNG
(M-R: KIM TAE-CHUNG), KIM YOUNG SAM (M-R: KIM YONG-SAM),
AND OTHERS FOR CONSTANTLY ACCUSING THE GOVERNMENT OF EVIL
INTENT AND FAILING TO GIVE IT CREDIT FOR HAVING LARGELY
LIVED UP TO ITS PROMISES REGARDING POLITICAL REFORM. HE
SAID THAT THERE WAS NO CHANGE WHATSOEVER IN THE POLITICAL
SCHEDULE AND THAT PRESIDENT CHOI WAS AN HONORABLE MAN WHO
HAD NOT THE SLIGHTEST INTEREST IN PERPETUATING HIMSELF OR
HIS GOVERNMENT IN POWER (NO REFERENCE TO THE PRIME MINIS-
TER). HE REITERATED WHAT HE HAD SAID TO ME PREVIOUSLY
THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S VERSION OF THE CONSTITUTION WOULD
BE READY BY JULY OR AUGUST AND THAT THERE WOULD BE NO

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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 SEOUL 05921

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GREAT CONTEST WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OVER ITS SUB-
STANCE. THERE WAS "NO MIND SET WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT"
AGAINST THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S VERSION. HOWEVER, THE
ISSUE HAD TO BE APPROACHED WITH MORE CARE AND DELIBERATE-
NESS THAN THE ASSEMBLY'S HASTY PRODUCT. IF NOT, THE CON-
STITUTION WOULD TURN OUT TO BE A MEANINGLESS PIECE OF
PAPER AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT LAST MORE THAN A
FEW MONTHS WITH THE MILITARY IN CHARGE OF THE COUNTRY.

7. I COMMENTED THAT WE, OF COURSE, UNDERSTOOD THE GOVERN-

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MENT'S NEED TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER AND TO HAVE CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR USE OF THE MILITARY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LAST RESORT. NEVERTHELESS, I WAS PLEASED TO HEAR THAT PRESIDENT CHOI AND GENERAL CHUN WERE SO RELUCTANT TO USE THE MILITARY BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF KILLINGS AND A RAPID EROSION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT. I URGED THAT THE GREATEST CARE BE USED IN DEALING WITH RINGLEADERS OR POLITICIANS WHO WERE SUSPECTED OF BEING UNHELPFUL. AS LONG AS THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE ITS PRESENT CAUTION, I PROMISED TO DO OUR BEST TO TRY TO TALK SENSE INTO KIM DAE JUNG AND KIM YOUNG SAM.

8. I TOLD CHOI, HOWEVER, THAT I REALLY FELT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT DONE A VERY GOOD JOB IN OVERCOMING GENERAL
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SUSPICION THAT A COMBINATION OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY FIGURES INTENDED TO PERPETUATE THEMSELVES IN POWER. THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM WAS A GOOD ONE BUT HAD SOMEHOW BEEN FUZZED UP BY SUBSEQUENT EVENTS SUCH AS THE CHUN APPOINTMENT, OVERLY BLUNT COMMENTS BY THE MARTIAL LAW COMMANDER, ETC. I ASKED WHETHER CONSIDERATION HAD BEEN GIVEN TO A NEW STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT DISAVOWING FLATLY THE INTENT TO PERPETUATE HIMSELF OR HIS COLLEAGUES IN POWER, TO SET OUT THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE POLITICAL SCHEDULE WITH GREATER DETAIL, AND TO COUPLE THESE WITH A WARNING BY THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF THAT HE COULD NOT STAY ON SCHEDULE IF STUDENTS OR OTHERS TOOK THE LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. CHOI SAID THAT THEY HAD GIVEN THE IDEA MUCH THOUGHT AND WERE DISINCLINED TO DO IT BECAUSE VERY TIME THE GOVERNMENT MADE A STATEMENT IT WAS IMMEDIATELY CONTRADICTED BY OPPOSITION POLITICIANS. THE LATTER WERE SOMETIMES QUITE REASONABLE IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE BLUE HOUSE BUT COMPLETELY UNHELPFUL IN THEIR PUBLIC REMARKS. CHOI ACKNOWLEDGED, NEVERTHELESS, THAT THE GOVERNMENT NEEDED TO DO SOME MORE THINKING ABOUT ITS IMAGE. GLEYSTEN

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