P 310835Z JUL 80
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8107
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
SA CINCUNC KS
CHUSMAC SEOUL KS
COMUSKOREA SEOUL KS/BJ-IS

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NOFORN

E.O. 12065 DOD 07/31/00 (MONJU, JOHN C.) OR-M
TAGS: PINS PGOV SHUM KS US

SUBJECT: ASSESSES THE MOOD IN KWANGJU

REF: SEOUL 6841 (NOTAL)

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. THE FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN CHOLLANAMDO WAS WRITTEN:

IT IS BASED ON A FOUR-DAY PRIVATE VISIT TO CHOLLANAMDO TWO WEEKS AGO. DURING THIS PERIOD, I TALKED WITH A VARIETY OF PEOPLE. THE SAMPLE WAS CERTAINLY WIDE; WHETHER IT WAS GENERALLY REPRESENTATIVE IS LESS CERTAIN. WHILE THIS IS LESS FORMAL AND PERHAPS MORE SUBJECTIVE AND CATEGORICAL THAN MOST FOREIGN SERVICE REPORTS, WE BELIEVE CONFIDENTIAL

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IT SERVES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECORD OF WHAT HAPPENED IN KWANGJU IN MAY, AND TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCARS THAT REMAIN.

3. IT IS TWO MONTHS SINCE THE KWANGJU INCIDENT, AND KWANGJU IN MANY WAYS HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL. PRIVATELY, HOWEVER, PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY ARE STILL DEEPLY DISTURBED BY WHAT HAPPENED AND THAT NO ONE IS EXEMPT FROM A PERVASIVE SENSE OF HORROR.
HOUSEWIFE SHE KNOWS. A WOMAN PREVIOUSLY BORED BY POLITICS, WHO SAW A SOLDIER DRIVE HIS BAYONET THROUGH THE CHEST OF A YOUNG MAN; NOW SHE TALKS ANGRILY OF POLITICS. DETAILED ACCOUNTS OF WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE INCIDENT ARE STILL CIRCULATED WITH INTEREST, BUT THE REASON FOR THIS SEEMS TO BE CHANGING: DURING AND JUST AFTER THE INCIDENT, WORD OF MOUTH ACCOUNTS SUBSTITUTED FOR THE UNRELIABLE MEDIA AS SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON WHAT WAS HAPPENING. NOW SUCH ACCOUNTS ARE ORAL HISTORY, RECOUNTED AS A MEANS OF KEEPING CONSCIOUSNESS AND INDIGNATION ALIVE. IT IS AS THOUGH KWANGJU SEES REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED TO IT AS A DUTY. MANY PEOPLE ARE LESS INTERESTED IN THE FACTUAL CONTENT OF THESE STORIES THAN IN THEIR INTERPRETATION. THEY LISTEN GRIMLY TO DISCUSSION OF THE INCIDENT WITH OCCASIONAL NODS THAT AFFIRM NOT ACTS BUT RATHER THEIR INTENT NOT TO FORGET. AND THEY BLUNTLY SAY THAT TO FORGIVE IS ALSO IMPOSSIBLE.

4. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT PEOPLE ARE DETERMINED TO HAVE REVENGE WHEN TALKING OF THE FUTURE, AND WHETHER VIOLENCE MIGHT ERUPT AGAIN, THEY ARE UNCERTAIN. THE BRUTALITY OF THE PARADES HAS BRED CAUTION, AND CONFRONTATION AS A POLITICAL TOOL HAS BEEN DEVALUED BECAUSE IT IS SO DANGEROUS. ONE MAN QUOTED A KOREAN PROVERB TO THE EFFECT THAT IF YOU TRY TO GET A RAT OUT OF A KIMCHI JAR BY THROWING A ROCK AT IT, YOU BREAK THE JAR. PEOPLE FEEL THAT A HUGE CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL

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MORAL DEBT IS OWED KWANGJU, AND THAT SOMEDAY THE DEBT MUST BE PAID, BUT THEY ARE NOT SURE WHEN OR HOW THAT CAN BE DONE. FOR NOW THEY ARE WILLING TO WAIT. THEY TALK OF THE GREAT CAPACITY OF KOREANS TO ENDURE HARDSHIPS AND PERSEVERE DURING DIFFICULT TIMES, AND SAY THAT NOW IT IS TIME TO ENDURE, NOT ACT.

5. PEOPLE ASSERT, HOWEVER, THAT THE RIGHT SPARK COULD SET OFF ANOTHER VIOLENT CONFRONTATION. AND IF THIS HAPPENS, IT COULD BE WORSE THAN THE MAY DISTURBANCES. IN KWANGJU AND MOKPO THERE IS A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BOLD MEN WHO MIGHT BE WILLING UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES TO RISK GRAVE PERSONAL DANGER TO LEAD ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, AT THE MOMENT THEY SHARE THE GENERAL DETERMINATION NOT TO STIR THINGS UP, AND LIKE MOST PEOPLE THEY ARE TRYING TO BE HOPEFUL: PERHAPS THE ELECTIONS THIS FALL WILL BE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, AND MAYBE THE ECONOMY WILL IMPROVE.

6. THE VERY DETERMINATION TO SIT TIGHT AND ENDURE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES COULD, IF PROPER LEADERSHIP APPEARED, CHANGE QUICKLY AND BECOME A WILLINGNESS TO ENDURE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY. KOREANS SAY THAT THE MOST PROBABLE CAUSE OF MAJOR DISTURBANCES WOULD BE THE EXECUTION OR SERIOUS PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT OF KIM DAE-JUNG (M-R: KIM TAE-CHUNG). WHILE PEOPLE IN OTHER REGIONS MIGHT EXPRESS AMBIVALENCE OR EVEN DISLIKE FOR KIM, IN CHOLLA, ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THEY SUPPORT THE EX-PRESIDENTIAL
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CANDIDATE. KIM'S PAST BEHAVIOR OR CHANCES OF ACTUALLY BECOMING PRESIDENT SEEM LESS IMPORTANT THAN HIS MEANING AS A SYMBOL OF CHOLLA AND DECENT GOVERNMENT.

7. A SHARP IRRITANT TO MANY PEOPLE ARE THE STRICTURES ON FREE SPEECH AND THE PRESS. THEY RESENT NOT BEING ABLE TO

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TALK OPENLY AND LEARN WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING, AND THEY REGARD THE SHALLOW REPORTING AND SIMPLISTIC EXHORTATIONS OF THE MEDIA AS INSULTING. IT MAY BE, TOO, THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S BRIEF RELAXATION OF MEDIA CONTROLS LAST WINTER HAS MADE THE PRESENT RESTRICTIONS ALL THE MORE GALLING. WORD DOES GET AROUND, HOWEVER, AND DESPITE THE RESTRICTIONS THERE IS A SURPRISING SIMILARITY IN WHAT PEOPLE HEAR AND THINK IN DIFFERENT PLACES. SIMILAR RUMORS ARE CURRENT IN BOTH KWANGJU AND MOKPO; SIMILAR CONVICTIONS AND SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS.


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AT WORK HERE IS A LONG-STANDING KOREAN CONVICTION--BREAKING DOWN SOMEWHAT IN RECENT YEARS, BUT STILL APPLICABLE--THAT THE U.S. IS SO DEEPLY INVOLVED IN KOREA AND SO POWERFUL THAT IT IS PERFORCE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAJOR HAPPENINGS. THIS CONVICTION LEADS KOREANS WHO OTHERWISE DISTRESS THE MEDIA TO ACCEPT AT FACE VALUE REPORTING THAT REFLECTS UNFAVORABLY ON THE U.S.

9. BUT PEOPLE RESERVE THEIR STRONGEST INVECTIVE FOR CHUN...
DOD-HWAN. THEY FLATLY REJECT ALLEGATIONS THAT COMMUNIST AGENTS WERE AT WORK IN KWANGJU AND HOLD CHUN HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED THERE. PEOPLE REGARD HIS DECISION TO SEND PARATROOPERS TO KWANGJU--TROOPS TRAINED ONLY FOR COMBAT, NOT TO CONTROL CIVIL DISTURBANCES--AS EVIDENCE THAT CHUN IS INCAPABLE OF MODERATE OR SENSIBLE LEADERSHIP. IN BOTH KWANGJU AND MOKPO PEOPLE LIKENED HIS METHODS TO THOSE OF THE NAZIS. IN MOKPO A MAN QUOTED AS FOLLOWS A POEM HE HEARD AND THAT HE THINKS WAS WRITTEN BY HAHM SOK-HUN: IN KOREA WHEN A MAN KILLS A SINGLE COW WE CALL HIM A BUTCHER; WHAT WORD CAN WE POSSIBLY FIND FOR THE MAN WHO KILLED HUNDREDS OF OUR PEOPLE IN KWANGJU? THIS POEM STIRRED THE FIVE OTHERS PRESENT TO BITTER DENUNCIATIONS OF CHUN.

10. IN KWANGJU PEOPLE ASSERT THAT CHUN'S EXCESSES AND INADEQUACIES ENGERDED SOMETHING AKIN TO NATALGIA FOR THE PARK ERA, EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO ONCE HAD ONLY CRITICISM FOR PARK: NOTHING LIKE KWANGJU EVER HAPPENED UNDER PARK, AND AT LEAST HE KNEW HOW TO RUN THE ECONOMY. THEY CLAIM THAT THE REPRESSIVE IS WORSE IN CHOLLADO THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, AND THIS IS BECAUSE THE KWANGJU INCIDENT FRIGHTENED PEOPLE AWAY FROM ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. THUS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCONTENT JOIN, AND CHUN IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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BOTH.

11. THE INTENSITY OF FEELING AGAINST CHUN IN CHOLLADO HAS RISEN SO THAT IT NOW WEAKENS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE BASIC ORTHODOX ANTI-COMMUNIST. NO ONE SAYS THAT THE THREAT FROM THE NORTH IS A FABRICATION; INDEED, ALL KOREANS AGREE THAT TO DENY THE THREAT BORDERS ON TREASON. BUT WHILE AFFIRMING THE THREAT IN A PERFUNCTORY WAY, THE NEXT BREATH MANY KOREANS SAY IT IS OVERSTATED AND COMPARE TODAY'S SITUATION WITH VIETNAM BEFORE THIEU'S FALL. IN KWANGJU TODAY, PEOPLE ARE DISSPIRITED AND UNABLE TO RAISE MUCH ENTHUSIASM FOR ANTI-COMMUNIST, PURIFICATION OR ANY OF THE OTHER PROGRAMS THE GOVERNMENT IS URGING ON THEM.

12. SURPRISINGLY, PEOPLE DON'T TALK MUCH ABOUT REGIONAL DISCRIMINATION. IT EXISTS, OF COURSE, AS A FEATURE ON THE LANDSCAPE, BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE KWANGJU INCIDENT. LEFT ALONE TO EXPLAIN THEIR OWN VIEW OF THE CAUSES OF THE INCIDENT, NONE OF THE PEOPLE SPOKEN TO BROUGHT UP DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHOLLADO. WHEN ASKED POINTEDLY WHETHER DISCRIMINATION WAS A FACTOR, SOME PEOPLE SAID NO, SOME SAID ONLY A MINOR FACTOR. THEY FEEL THAT THE GOVERNMENT PROPAGATED A REGIONALIST INTERPRETATION OF THE INCIDENT TO UNITE ALL OTHER PROVINCES WITH IT IN A COMMON VIEW, AND THEY SPECULATE THAT FOREIGN NEWSMEN OVERPLAYED THE REGIONALIST THEME BECAUSE IT IS SO
HANDY; IT SEEMS TO ANSWER SO MANY QUESTIONS. KOREANS
OUTSIDE CHOLLADO, BADLY FRIGHTENED BY THE INCIDENT, MAY
HAVE ACCEPTED THE REGIONALIST VIEW EAGERLY, EVEN TAKEN
COMFORT FROM IT, BECAUSE IT ASSURED THEM THAT THE INCIDENT
AROSE BECAUSE OF THE PECULIARITIES OF CHOLLADO AND
THEREFORE WOULD NOT LIKELY SPREAD TO OTHER PROVINCES.

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13. People said that in fact regional antagonisms have
been subsiding in recent years, and while the Kwangju
incident was, for the moment, fanned those antagonisms, it
was not caused by them. One man, trying to put the
discussion back on track, pointed out that regional
antagonism existed during the Park regime, but no incident
like Kwangju occurred then; the problem is the government,
he said.

14. A final word about what happened in Mokpo during the
strife in Kwangju. No troops were dispatched to Mokpo and
no confrontation occurred. Rallies in front of the train
station and one long march were fairly orderly. An attempt
to set fire to the local K.C.I.A. office was foiled. Altogether
some 30 people were arrested and several political
activists went into hiding to avoid arrest, including the
owner of a Chinese apothecary, who is a longtime supporter
of Kim Dae Jung and whose shop remains suspiciously
closed. There was little or no violence. The police
stood back. During the mid-May disturbances, a large
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BANNER WAS ERECTED IN FRONT OF MOKPO TRAIN STATION THAT
READ IN BOLD CHARACTERS, "CHUN DOO-Hwan, GET OUT". THE
BANNER WAS PLACED NOT 100 YARDS AWAY FROM A POLICE STATION,
BUT NO ONE MOVED TO TAKE IT DOWN. ITS DEFIANT MESSAGE
REMAINED IN FULL VIEW FOR NEARLY A WEEK. MONJO

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