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CORRECTED COPY (TEXT - PARA 4)

E.O. 12065:RDS-3 3/12/00 (GLEYSTEN, W.M.) OR M
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, MILI, KS
SUBJECT: YET ANOTHER ASSESSMENT OF ROK STABILITY AND
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

NODIS REVIEW

Cat. A - Caption removed; transferred to O/FADRO/C

Cat. B - Transferred to O/FADRO/C with additional access controlled by S/S

Cat. C - Caption and custody retained by S/S

Reviewed by: *SK* Elijah Kelly Jr

Date: 4-28-93 19

1. (S) ENTIRE TEXT.

2. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC-MINDEDNESS IN THE ROK DURING 1980 ARE FAIR, ALTHOUGH THE GOING WILL GET ROUGHER RATHER THAN EASIER AS THE YEAR CHURNS ON. THE STUDENTS COULD PROVE SPOILERS, BUT CIVIL UNREST WILL PROBABLY BE HELD IN CHECK. DISSIDENTS HAVE NOT FOUND THEIR BALANCE IN THE FACE OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS RELAXING RESTRICTIONS, WHILE POLITICIANS ARE BEHAVING CIRCUMSPECTLY FOR FEAR OF PROVOKING THE MILITARY AND DESTROYING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR POLITICAL PROGRESS. FOR THE SHORT TERM WORKERS MAY TAKE A TEMPORARY REDUCTION IN REAL INCOME RATHER THAN RESORT TO STRIDENT DEMANDS AS A RESPONSE TO DEPRESSED ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. THE GOVERNMENT IS OPERATING WITH ENOUGH COMPETENCE TO COPE WITH THE NATION'S PROBLEMS -- AT LEAST TO THE POINT OF NOT PROVIDING A CONVENIENT EXCUSE FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT WISH TO TERMINATE ITS PROGRAM OF "ORDERLY DEMOCRATIZATION".

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IS/FPC/CDR *TRB* Date: 9/12/93

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3. THE ODDS OF AN EARLY MILITARY COUP SEEM TO HAVE RE-CEDED -- IN PART BECAUSE MILITARY OFFICERS ARE COMING TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY OF KOREA'S ECONOMY, THE DELICACY OF KOREA'S FOREIGN RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE QUITE APPARENT CONSENSUS OF MOST KOREANS OPPOSING A DIRECT MILITARY ROLE IN POLITICS. THE THREAT OF EARLY INTERNECINE STRIFE WITH- IN THE ROK ARMY DOES NOT SEEM AS GREAT AS A FEW WEEKS AGO-- LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE SUBSTANTIAL SHIFT OF KEY TROOP COMMANDERS AND AWARENESS THAT THE USG WOULD NOT SUPPORT AN EFFORT TO UPSET THE CURRENT EQUILIBRIUM.

4. WITHIN THE CONTROL STRUCTURE A PARTICULARLY WOR- ISOME PHENOMENON IS THE GREAT POWER OF CHUN DOO HWAN, WHO HAS SPREAD HIS INTELLIGENCE SECURITY NET THROUGHOUT THE MILI- TARY STRUCTURE, AND, DESPITE FLAT ASSURANCES AGAINST IN- VOLVING HIMSELF IN POLITICS (AS HE DEFINES POLITICS), GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN BIDDING HIS TIME TO TAKE OVER CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT EITHER DIRECTLY OR BEHIND SOME FACADE. SHOULD HE TRY TO EXTEND HIS FORMAL POWER TO IN- CLUDE THE KCIA OR MANIPULATE THE STRUCTURING OF THE NEXT ELECTIONS, HE COULD PRECIPITATE DANGEROUS PUBLIC UNREST AND REACTIVATE STRESSES WITHIN THE ROK ARMY -- EVEN HIS DECEMBER 12 COLLABORATORS MIGHT TURN ON HIM.

5. ANOTHER SOURCE OF SERIOUS CONCERN IS THE DEPTH OF DISTRUST OF THE SENIOR MILITARY LEADERSHIP TOWARD KIM YUNG SAM AND KIM TAE CHUNG. SINCE THIS CANNOT BE ERASED IN THE SHORT TIME BEFORE ELECTIONS, THE MILITARY WILL BE TEMPTED TO JOIN A BUREAUCRATIC/BUSINESS COALITION TO PRE- JUDICE THE CONTEST AND POSSIBLY TO REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE RESULTS IF THE NOP SHOULD WIN. FORTUNATELY, SOME SENIOR OFFICERS RECOGNIZE THAT THE ARMY WOULD JEOPARDIZE ITS

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KINDS OF PEOPLE IN A MANNER SUGGESTIVE OF A NATIONAL LEADER RATHER THAN SECURITY OFFICER. GENERALLY, HE GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN BIDDING HIS TIME TO TAKE OVER POWER -- EITHER DIRECTLY OR BEHIND A CIVILIAN FACADE. BOTH PICTURES PORTRAY IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF SOUTH KOREA'S CONTEMPORARY REALITY. ULTIMATELY THE INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS WILL HAVE TO BE RESOLVED; YET NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY HOW AND WHEN THIS WILL OCCUR, AND MOST PEOPLE'S JUDGMENT IS COMPLICATED BY UNCERTAINTY, IGNORANCE, AND RUMOR-MONGERING.

B. HOW STABLE IS SOUTH KOREA?

GRANTING THAT THE TOUGHER TESTS LIE AHEAD, THE PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC-MINDEDNESS THROUGH 1980 ARE NOT BAD. THE ODDS OF A DANGEROUS DISRUPTION, SUCH AS A MILITARY COUP OR MASSIVE STUDENT/WORKER UPRISING DO NOT SEEM HIGH. AMONG THE MILITARY, THE PROSPECT OF COUNTERACTIONS WITHIN THE ROK ARMY AGAINST THE DECEMBER 12 GROUP HAS RECEDED WITH THE ASSIGNMENT OF NEW (AND FOR THE MOST PART COMPETENT) OFFICERS INTO KEY TROOP COMMANDS. IN RETROSPECT, HOWEVER, THOSE OFFICERS WHO PROBED OUR REACTION TO POSSIBLE COUNTERACTION APPARENTLY HAD FEW TROOPS AT THEIR READY DISPOSAL. DISGRUNTLED FORCES ARE NOT LIKELY TO COALESCE DANGEROUSLY UNLESS SERIOUS SOCIAL UNREST

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DEVELOPS. DESPITE HIS FLAT ASSURANCES TO THE CONTRARY, CHUN DOO HWAN MAY TRY TO EXTEND HIS STRING-PULLING ROLE FROM THE MILITARY TO THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY, BUT HOPEFULLY WILL STOP SHORT OF CAUSING FEAR AND ANTAGONISMS OF DANGEROUS PROPORTIONS.

9. ON THE CIVIL SIDE, KOREAN SOCIETY WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO CONTAIN THE POTENTIAL THREAT FROM STUDENTS WHO ARE SO SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT THEIR "HISTORICAL ROLE" AND OFTEN INSENSITIVE TO THE DANGERS OF EXCESS. OTHER POTENTIAL SOURCES OF UNREST SEEM EITHER OFF BALANCE OR CHASTENED BY FEAR OF MILITARY INTERVENTION. DISSIDENTS ARE GROPING RATHER UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR TARGETS TO ATTACK. POLITICAL OPPOSITION LEADERS -- IN FACT ALL POLITICAL LEADERS -- ARE CONSTRAINED BY LATENT THREATS AND PRE-OCCUPIED BY INTERNECINE WARFARE, WHILE WORKERS AND OTHERS WHO CREATED TROUBLE AT THE TIME OF THE PUSAN/MASAN RIOTS SEEM PREPARED TO ACCOMMODATE TO KOREA'S VERY DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES BY TAKING SOME REDUCTION IN REAL INCOME RATHER THAN TAKING TO THE STREETS.

10. WHO IS REALLY IN CHARGE?

POWER IN KOREA TODAY IS DIFFUSED. THE MILITARY CONTROL THE RAW POWER WITHOUT THE BUFFER OF A POWERFUL LEADER TO KEEP THEM IN THE TRENCHES; AND WITHIN THE MILITARY CHUN DOO HWAN IS CLEARLY THE MAN TO WATCH. YET THE MILITARY ARE NOT "RUNNING THE COUNTRY". EVEN THOUGH THEY CAN OBTAIN BLUE HOUSE RATIFICATION FOR DECISIONS IN THE MILITARY AND SECURITY AREAS, A CIVILIAN COMPLEX OF BUREAUCRATS, BUSINESSMEN, AND POLITICIANS ARE MAKING AND EXECUTING MOST OTHER DECISIONS. MOREOVER, THE LONGER THESE CIVILIANS REMAIN IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, THE MORE INFLUEN-

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THERE ARE TWO GREAT PROBLEMS AMONG MILITARY OFFICERS GENERALLY. FIRST, THE UNDISGUISED DISTRUST OF ALL SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS -- PRE- AND POST-DECEMBER 12 HIERARCHIES AS WELL AS RETIRED OFFICERS -- TOWARD KIM TAE CHUNG (BECAUSE OF HIS ALLEGED SOFTNESS AND LEFTISM) AND KIM YONG SAM (BECAUSE OF HIS ALLEGED GENERAL INADEQUACY). A DISTURBING NUMBER STATE FLATLY THAT THEY WOULD NOT PERMIT EITHER KIM TO COME TO POWER AND WOULD MOVE TO PREVENT IT IN ADVANCE OF AN ELECTION OR BY COUP AFTER THE ELECTION. FORTUNATELY, OTHERS RECOGNIZE THAT THE ARMY COULD DESTROY ITS CRUCIAL RAPPORT WITH THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IF IT WERE TO ARBITRARILY ANNUL THE RESULTS OF A MAJORITY DECISION. SECOND, KOREAN MILITARY OFFICERS VIEW THE PROCESS OF "DEMOCRATIZATION" THROUGH A YUSHIN FILTER, MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO TOLERATE THE DEGREE OF FREE CHOICE AND CRITICISM ASSOCIATED WITH A MODICUM OF DEMOCRACY. DESPITE THESE POWERFUL PREJUDICES, I CONCLUDE HESITANTLY THAT THE MILITARY HIERARCHY: RECOGNIZES WITH SUFFICIENT REALISM THAT A PRE-ELECTION COUP WOULD PIT THE ARMY AGAINST THE PEOPLE IN AN UNACCEPTABLE WAY? WILL THIS BE STRONGLY ATTRACTED TOWARD ANY POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT WHICH MIGHT REDUCE THE PROSPECT OF AN NDP VICTORY? AND, IF THE NDP WERE NEVERTHELESS TO COME INTO POWER, MORE OR LESS UNDERSTANDS THAT THE NDP -- POSSIBLY EVEN KIM TAE CHUNG -- WOULD HAVE TO BE GIVEN TIME TO PROVE ITSELF CAPABLE OR INCAPABLE OF GUIDING THE ROK. IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, THE THREAT OF MILITARY INTERVENTION WILL REMAIN A DAMOCLES SWORD OVER KOREA'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SOME TIME.

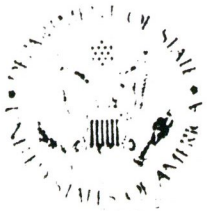
(2) CHUN ODU HWAN:

WE -- AND I SPECIFICALLY INCLUDE MYSELF -- SHOULD RESIST

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OVERSIMPLIFYING KOREAN POLITICS BY MAKING CHUN DOO HWAN THE SINISTER SOURCE OF ALL EVIL. HE HAPPENS TO BE ONE OF A NUMBER OF KOREANS WHOSE PERSONAL DECISIONS COULD PROVE FATEFUL FOR THEIR COUNTRY. FOR THE SHORT RUN, HE IS STRONGLY CONSTRAINED FROM OPENLY VIOLATING HIS ASSURANCES ABOUT NOT INTERVENING IN POLITICS, AND SO FAR HE HAS WORKED TO CONTROL RATHER THAN STIMULATE THE KIND OF UNREST THAT MIGHT JUSTIFY EXTENSION OF HIS POWER. YET EVEN IF HE CONTINUES TO BIDE HIS TIME, HE WILL WIELD POWER THAT MAKES ALMOST EVERYONE UNCOMFORTABLE. IN STRUCTURING THE NEXT ELECTION, HE MIGHT PLAY A VERY CRUDE ROLE BUT HE MIGHT CONTENT HIMSELF WITH PLAYING THE ROLE OF A BACKSTAGE MENTOR IF HE COULD FIND A COMBINATION OF POLITICIANS BOTH WILLING TO FRONT FOR HIM AND ABLE TO WIN AN ELECTION. MARKING TIME WILL NOT BE WITHOUT PROBLEMS FOR CHUN BECAUSE HIS OPPONENTS MAY SEEK TO EMBARRASS OR DESTROY HIM, ESPECIALLY IF HE MISPLAYS HIS CARDS. HE IS ALREADY WIDELY FEARED AND WITHIN THE ARMY EVEN HIS COLLABORATORS OF DECEMBER 12 MIGHT FEEL BETRAYED IF HE WERE TO REACH OUT FOR OVERT POLITICAL POWER. CLEARLY HE IS GOING TO CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF OUR MAIN PROBLEMS.

(C) THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER:

THE PRIME MINISTER HAS TOLD ME QUITE CANDIDLY THAT HE AND THE PRESIDENT BELIEVE THAT MUCH CONFUSION WILL DEVELOP LATER THIS YEAR WHEN THE NDP AND DRP WILL DISCOVER THAT NONE OF THE KIMS IS A SHOO-IN FOR THE ROK'S NEXT PRESIDENT. THUS THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY IS TO GOVERN AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE AND TO ALLOW A POLITICAL STALEMATE TO DEVELOP

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ELECTION VICTORY ARE POOR BUT HE OBVIOUSLY HOPES THAT WITH TIME HE WILL HAVE A FIGHTING CHANCE TO WIN. HE WILL WORK ASSIDUOUSLY TO ENCOURAGE FRACTURES IN THE OPPOSITION AND TRY TO REPAIR THE DRP'S IMAGE THROUGH POLICIES DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO FARMERS AND THE URBAN POOR. ABOVE ALL HE WILL EXPLOIT HIS ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE AND HIS RELATIVELY GREATER ACCEPTABILITY TO THE MILITARY THAN EITHER OF THE NOP KIMS. NEVERTHELESS, KIM JONG PIL WILL BE A LONG SHOT UNLESS THE ESTABLISHMENT RALLIES AROUND HIM, WHICH THEY HAVE NOT SO FAR. HE HAS THE LIABILITIES OF PAST CORRUPTION, CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH YUSHIN, AND POWERFUL ENEMIES WITHIN THE DRP. MANY MILITARY OFFICERS SEE HIM SIMPLY AS PREFERABLE TO THE NOP KIMS AND NOTHING MORE.

E. NOP KIM YONG SAM AND KIM TAE CHUNG:

THE NOP'S RATHER UNQUESTIONED ADVANTAGE IS THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY WIN DECISIVELY IF A POPULARITY CONTEST WERE CONDUCTED IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, AND ITS GREAT LIABILITY IS THE UNDISGUISED DISTRUST OF THE MILITARY LEADERS (THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY THE TROOPS). ALTHOUGH NEITHER KIM YONG SAM NOR KIM TAE CHUNG HAS LET WUHY OVERRIDE HIS AMBITION, NOP LEADERS KNOW VERY WELL THAT A PARTY SPLIT WOULD KEEP POWER OUT OF THEIR GRASP. TO A LESSER EXTENT THERE ARE GLIMMERINGS OF AWARENESS THAT OVER TIME THE NOP MAY BE FORCED TO DEMONSTRATE MORE CONVINCINGLY THAN IN THE PAST THAT IT IS CAPABLE OF INTELLIGENT POLICIES AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION, NOT JUST OPPOSITION FIREWORKS.

THE STRATEGIES OF THE TWO KIMS REFLECT THESE CONSIDERATIONS. THEY ARE PLAYING RATHER ROUGHLY WITH EACH OTHER

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BUT ARE AT LEAST TRYING NOT TO SPLIT THE PARTY WHILE THEY BOTH BLAME ALL ILLS ON THE CHOI GOVERNMENT AND ARGUE THAT KIM JONG PIL CAN NEVER ESCAPE HIS YUSHIN ASSOCIATION, NEITHER KIM HAS YET DARED TO PURSUE THE CORRUPTION ISSUE WHICH REACHES WITHIN THEIR OWN RANKS, AND, IN A STRIKING BREAK FROM THE PAST, BOTH HAVE COMMENDABLY REFRAINED FROM INFLAMING PUBLIC PASSIONS OR SNIPIING AT SENSITIVE ISSUES SUCH AS POLICY TOWARD THE NORTH/SOUTH KOREAN DIALOGUE. THE IMAGEMAKERS OF BOTH KIMS ARE WORKING ON THE PROBLEM OF "POLICY-MINDEDNESS" AND KIM YONG SAM HAS AT LEAST TRIED TO IMPROVE HIS MILITARY TIES. HIS EFFORTS SO FAR HAVE NOT MADE MUCH OF A DENT. KIM TAE CHUNG HAS TAKEN THE PROUD STAND THAT HE IS READY TO CONSULT WITH THE MILITARY IF THEY TAKE THE INITIATIVE, PRESUMABLY AN INDICATION THAT HE EITHER FAILS TO UNDERSTAND HIS PROBLEM OR IS TOYING WITH A DANGEROUS KIND OF CONTEST. THE NUP WILL PROBABLY AVOID A "OVERHEATED" APPROACH FOR A FEW MORE MONTHS TO BUILD UP THE IMAGE OF SOBRIETY, TO AVOID BEING CHARGED WITH ENDANGERING THE PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUING CIVILIAN RULE, AND TO SORT OUT THE LEADERSHIP CONTEST WITHIN THE PARTY. AT SOME POINT, HOWEVER, IT WILL ALMOST SURELY TAKE OFF THE GLOVES EVEN AT THE RISK OF A CRACKDOWN BY THE AUTHORITIES.

13. UNLESS THE STUDENTS OR OTHERS GET OUT OF HAND, KOREA IS LIKELY TO REMAIN FAIRLY STABLE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS BECAUSE: THE SOLDIERS KNOW THE PEOPLE WOULD NOT ACCEPT A MILITARY TAKEOVER; GENERAL CHUN HAS PAINTED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER IN TERMS OF EXTENDING HIS FORMAL POWER; THE POLITICIANS KNOW THAT THEIR GRADUALLY EXPAND-

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