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May 21, 1980

Cable from the US Embassy in Seoul to the US Secretary of State, 'The Kwangju Crisis'

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Summary:

Ambassador Gleysteen writes that the "massive insurrection in Kwangju is still out of control."

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WHSR COMMENT:

ZB AAR DEN VP
EOB:GR*GG,KIM

0245

MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS:

NO MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS

MESSAGE:

IMMEDIATE
DE RUEHUL #6463 1421003
O 212056Z MAY 80
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6463

~~SECRET~~ SEOUL 06463
EXDIS
E.O. 12065: RDS-3 5/21/00 (GLEYSTEEN, W.H.) OR-M
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, KS
SUBJECT: THE KWANGJU CRISIS

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. THE MASSIVE INSURRECTION IN KWNGJU IS STILL OUT OF CONTROL AND POSES AN ALARMING SITUATION FOR THE ROK MILITARY WHO HAVE NOT FACED A SIMILAR INTERNAL THREAT FOR AT LEAST TWO DECADES. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE IS OBVIOUSLY THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE POLITICAL CRACKDOWN HIT KIM DAE JUNG (M-RI KIM TAE-CHUNG) AND OTHER NATIVES OF CHOLLA, BUT BY NOW ALMOST ALL ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION SEEM TO BE ENGAGED IN A VIOLENT, PROVINCIAL FREE FOR ALL REFLECTING DEEP-SEATED HISTORICAL, PROVINCIAL ANTAGONISMS. AT LEAST 150,000 PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED, THERE HAS BEEN GREAT DESTRUCTION, AND OUR MOST RECENT INFORMATION IS THAT THE RIOTERS HAVE BROKEN INTO ARMORIES AND SEIZED WEAPONS, LIVE AMMUNITION, AND DEMOLITIONS. THE KOREAN ARMY PLANS TO PULL ITS MILITARY FORCES OUT OF THE CITY TONIGHT, MAINTAINING ROADBLOCKS AND CONCENTRATING DEFENSE ON TWO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND A PRISON CONTAINING 2,000 LEFTISTS. THE AUTHORITIES ARE TRYING TO GET A CEASEFIRE SO THAT THEY CAN TALK TO THE RIOTERS ABOUT THEIR DEMANDS FOR AN APOLOGY, RELEASE OF PRISONERS, AND REMOVAL OF MARTIAL LAW FORCES. WHILE ALL THESE MOVES SEEM INTELLIGENT, THEY HAVE NOT WORKED SO FAR AND THE DECEMBER 12 GENERALS OBVIOUSLY FEEL THREATENED BY THE WHOLE AFFAIR.

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

3. GENERAL NICKHAM HAS AGREED TO A HIGH INTERNAL ALERT STATUS AGAINST INFILTRATION, AND HE HAS INFORMALLY TAKEN SOME MEASURES ASSOCIATED WITH DEFCON 3. HE HAS ALSO URGED THAT DEFENSE CONSIDER WHAT FORCE AUGMENTATIONS MIGHT BE POSSIBLE IF WE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR NORTH KOREAN EXPLOITATION. HE HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY FORMAL ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT BE PROVOCATIVE AND LEAD TO AN ESCALATION WITH NORTH KOREA.

4. WE HAVE DISCUSSED, IN ADDITION, WHAT WE MIGHT DO. ONE MAN WHO COULD HELP IF HE WERE WILLING WOULD BE KIM DAE JUNG, BUT HE IS IN JAIL AND PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE WILLING TO BE HELPFUL UNLESS HE COULD EXTRACT FAR-REACHING CONCESSIONS. NO OTHER HEROES ARE LIKELY TO STEP FORWARD. IF THE RIOTING GETS EVEN MORE SERIOUS, I SUGGEST THE DEPARTMENT CONSIDER REITERATION OF THE MAY 18 STATEMENT FOCUSING IT ON A CALL FOR ALL CONCERNED TO CALM THE SITUATION, ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE WITH EACH OTHER, AND AVOID A FISSURE WHICH COULD GREATLY INCREASE EXTERNAL THREATS. THE STATEMENT COULD CONCLUDE BY TAKING NOTE OF PYONGYANG'S PROTESTATIONS OF INNOCENCE AND STATE THAT WE INTEND TO HOLD THEM TO THEIR DECLARATION. AS OF NOW, I AM AGAINST ANY LOCAL AMERICAN STATEMENT BECAUSE IT COULD BACKFIRE WITH CHARGES THAT WE WERE IN COLLUSION WITH THE GOVERNMENT. A STATEMENT IN WASHINGTON WHICH BALANCED THE CALL FOR MODERATION TO BOTH SIDES WOULD POSE LESS DIFFICULTY. UNFORTUNATELY, NO AMERICAN STATEMENT IN A SITUATION OF CENSORSHIP AND RIOTING IS GOING TO BE HEARD BY MANY PEOPLE. GLEYSTEEN

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