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15 DEC 1979



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

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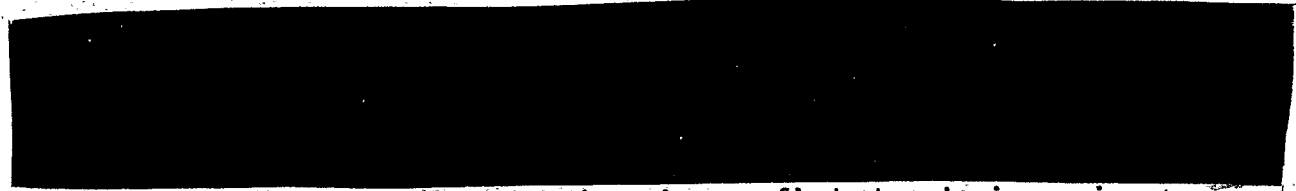
INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
SUBJECT: Developments in Korea (U)

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MA - 12/15  
see note  
HB

You asked for my views on recent developments in Korea. Generally I agree with Jack Vessey. We should wait until more of the dust settles to draw firm conclusions. We know that Chon Tu-wan is calling the shots for the moment. We know that the Army controls the real instruments of power through the new Cabinet selections--the military forces (Defense), the police (Home Affairs), and the surveillance of corruption (General Administration). But the available intelligence reveals relatively little about the extent of Chon's network of cronies, the sources of cohesion among them, the political ideology they share, and the links they have with prominent politicians and technocrats.



Nonetheless, I suspect that Chon is going to find that it is easier to draw the military directly into the political succession struggle than to limit or control the scope and consequences of its involvement. As both Bill Gleysteen and John Wickham have pointed out, the precedents--the disruption of the orderly movement toward a wider political process, the open invitation to "clan politics" and the settling of old scores within the military, the readiness to defy constitutional methods, and the apparent indifference of the Young Turks to American reactions--are ominous portents for the future.

Both Bill and John have already made strong representations to President Choi, General Lew, and the new Army Chief of Staff, General Lee. Gleysteen, moreover, met with MG Chun yesterday, and emphasized our concerns about the dangers of disunity within the military and its impact on possible North Korean reactions, progress toward constitutional liberalization, and economic and political stability. Bill went out of his way to warn that the ROK depends on good relations with our military and our businessmen, and both are disturbed by what has happened.

Chon accepted Bill's comments and acknowledged that he is also concerned about the ramifications of recent events. His explanation of the events

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of December 12/13 is self-serving, but not entirely implausible, i.e., pursuit of the investigation escalated when Gen. Chong refused to cooperate. Chon insisted that his actions were neither a coup nor a revolution, and he mentioned that he has no personal ambitions, supports President Choi's liberalization program, and expects the unity of the military to be reestablished within a month. Nevertheless, Chon recognizes that Chong's supporters may seek vengeance, and as the fair-haired boy of the 11th Class at the Korean Military Academy (the "Pete Dawkins of the ROK Army"), Chon knows that his meteoric rise has stimulated envy and resentment even among his peers. In short, he realizes he is very exposed.

The most worrisome aspect of all this, of course, is precisely the danger of further struggle within the Army. Chon probably would like to enlist our help in containing counteractions. While we can easily stress the importance of unity in the military, we will probably be faced with extremely tricky choices in the next few weeks.

It would be useful for you to reinforce the themes Bill developed with Chon, and there is a natural occasion for it. With the appointment of a new Defense minister, it is appropriate for you to send a brief congratulatory note to "Tiger" Chu, Ro's replacement. Given the circumstances, there is no reason for you to dispatch such a message immediately. By waiting several days we can get a better fix on the nature of the new military leadership, and fine-tune your message accordingly. The basic signal, of course, must be that recent actions set a dangerous precedent within the ROK military, run great risks in light of the North Korean threat, and raise questions about future ROK progress toward political liberalization. Inevitably such developments are of concern to us because they affect our ability to honor commitments to ROK security.

*agreed*

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Michael H. Armacost  
Deputy Assistant Secretary

*12/15*

DECLASSIFIED BY DSD, DOS  
DATE 12 OCT 2016  
FOIA CASE # 04-F-2690

*Please prepare at the right time, including also a passage noting my complete confidence in Wickham.*

*HFB*



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