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ACTION EAP-00

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AIT-02 PA-01 ED-04 OMB-01 INRE-00 USIE-00 SP-02
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9472
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL SHANGHAI IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL SHENYANG IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL CHENGDU POUCH)

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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, CH
SUBJECT: STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS UPDATE

REF: (A) SHANGHAI 8147 (B) BEIJING 32085 (C) HK FBIS 230309Z DEC 86

1. (C) SUMMARY. A SMALL STUDENT DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED IN BEIJING THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 23. PEOPLE'S DAILY PUBLISHED AN EDITORIAL DECEMBER 23 EXPRESSING SYMPATHY WITH STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS BUT ALSO MAKING IT CLEAR THAT THE LIMITS OF OFFICIAL TOLERATION WERE BEING APPROACHED. PD DECEMBER 24 RAN A FRONT PAGE Q AND A WITH THE SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL PRESS SPOKESMAN WHICH TOOK A SIMILAR LINE.

IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE AMBASSADOR DECEMBER 23, EXPRESSED THEIR VIEWS OF THE STUDENT CONFIDENTIAL

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SITUATION. WANG TOOK A RELATIVELY UPBEAT VIEW, WHILE THE TWO LIUS WERE MORE PESSIMISTIC. THE DEMONSTRATIONS RAISE QUESTIONS, AS THE PD EDITORIAL NOTED, ABOUT POLITICAL STABILITY, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE AUTHORITIES WILL CRACK DOWN HARD IF POLITICAL STABILITY IS THREATENED, PARTICULARLY IF STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE OR, WORSE, COMBINE WITH LABOR UNREST. IF THE DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE TO PHASE DOWN NATIONALLY AS WELL AS IN SHANGHAI, THEY MAY DO SOME, BUT NOT IRREPARABLE,
DAMAGE TO REFORM, PARTICULARLY POLITICAL REFORM; IF DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE THEN MANY REFORM POLICIES DEMONSTRATIONS GROW SIGNIFICANTLY, BECOME VIOLENT, OR COMBINE WITH LABOR, THEN MANY REFORM POLICIES COULD BE CALLED INTO QUESTION AND A MAJOR SETBACK OCCUR. TO DATE, HOWEVER, THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF AVOIDING THE USE OF FORCE AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, ON AVOIDING ALIENATING THE YOUNG PEOPLE ON WHOM CHINA'S FUTURE DEPENDS HAS RESULTED IN REMARKABLY SOPHISTICATED HANDLING OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH MAY SERVE TO MINIMIZE DAMAGE. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ALTHOUGH THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE TO PHASE DOWN, THERE IS STILL SOME UNCERTAINTY AS TO THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THINGS WILL MOVE. STUDENTS AT BEIJING UNIVERSITIES WERE REPORTEDLY ACTIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 23. ABOUT 1,000 STUDENTS LEFT QINGHUA UNIVERSITY AT ABOUT 2100 MOVING TOWARD OTHER UNIVERSITIES IN THE AREA. THE CROWD EVENTUALLY GREW TO ABOUT 3,000 PEOPLE. POLICE DID NOT INTERFERE AND THE DEMONSTRATION DISPERSED AFTER A WHILE. A FOREIGN JOURNALIST PRESENT AT THE DEMONSTRATION WAS STRUCK BY THE LACK OF SERIOUSNESS OF THESE DEMONSTRATORS, ALTHOUGH ONE DEMONSTRATOR CALLED LOUDLY FOR "MULTI-PARTY CONFIDENTIAL DEMOCRACY." ACCORDING TO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WHO OBSERVED THE DEMONSTRATION, THE STUDENTS DID NOT LEAVE THE UNIVERSITY AREA AND DID NOT REACH TIANANMEN SQUARE.


4. (C) A REBUTTAL OF THE PD DECEMBER 23 APPEARED ALMOST
IMMEDIATELY ON A BULLETIN BOARD AT BEIJING UNIVERSITY. THE FIVE-PAGE "SMALL CHARACTER" POSTER WAS IN LETTER FORMAT. NOTING THAT THE EDITORIAL WAS THE FIRST MEDIA REACTION TO THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN SHANGHAI, THE WRITER REFUTED POINTS IN THE EDITORIAL, ASKING RhetORICALLY JUST WHAT "DEMOCRATIC CHANNELS" WERE AVAILABLE. THE WRITER SAID THAT IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE EDITORIAL THAT THERE WAS NO DEMOCRACY. THE WRITER MADE AN UNCLEAR
OF LAST YEAR, AND CLAIMED THAT 80 PERCENT OF CHINESE
ARE "NUMB." HE SUGGESTED THAT STUDENTS SHOULD GO TO WORK
AMONG VILLAGERS TO GAIN AN IDEA OF THE CONDITIONS THERE.
ABOUT TWENTY STUDENTS CROWDED CLOSELY AROUND THE POSTER
AT ANY GIVEN TIME, THOUGH WITH A CONSTANT TURNOVER.
THERE WAS LITTLE COMMENT AS THEY READ, AND THOSE AT THE
FRONT WERE UNWILLING TO READ ALOUD FOR THOSE IN BACK.

5. (C) THE DECEMBER 24 PEOPLE'S DAILY RAN A Q AND A ON
ITS FRONT PAGE FILED BY XINHUA SHANGHAI QUOTING THE PRESS
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SPOKESMAN OF THE SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT. THE
INTERVIEW PROVIDED A GOOD DEAL OF DESCRIPTIVE MATTER
ABOUT THE SHANGHAI DEMONSTRATIONS AND TOOK THE LINE THAT
ALTHOUGH IT WAS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE
CONCERNED ABOUT REFORM, THE METHOD THAT THEY HAD ADOPTED,
DEMONSTRATIONS, WAS INCORRECT. "A PORTION OF THE
STUDENTS," THE SPOKESMAN SAID, "HAVE INSUFFICIENT UNDER-
STANDING OF THE ACTUAL CONDITIONS OF CHINESE REFORM,
AND HAVE A RELATIVELY UNCLEAR UNDERSTANDING ABOUT HOW
DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED."

6. (C) THE AUTHORITIES IN BEIJING CONTINUED TO PULL OUT
ALL THE STOPS TO KEEP STUDENTS IN BEIJING ON CAMPUS. A
LARGE MEETING FOR STUDENT ACTIVISTS WAS HELD AT THE
GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE DECEMBER 23 WHERE STUDENTS WERE
BROUGHT TOGETHER WITH VETERANS OF THE FIGHTING ON THE
VIETNAM BORDER. CITY LEADERS ALSO SPOKE TO THE STUDENTS.
BEIJING RADIO STATIONS CARRIED LENGTHY ACCOUNTS OF THIS
MEETING WITH REPEATED REFERENCES TO THE NEED FOR "STA-
BILITY AND UNITY." THE BEIJING DAILY DECEMBER 24
CARRIED AN INTERVIEW WITH 84-YEAR-OLD ZHOU PEIFU, FORMER
PRESIDENT OF BEIJING UNIVERSITY AND VICE CHAIRMAN OF
THE "SEPTEMBER 3" SOCIETY (ONE OF CHINA'S DEMOCRATIC
PARTIES), WHO SAID THAT HE COMPLETELY AGREED WITH THE
PD EDITORIAL OF DECEMBER 23. HE SAID THAT STUDENTS DID
NOT REALIZE THAT THEY WERE LIVING IN A GOLDEN ERA,
AND THAT THEY
SHOULD TREASURE STABILITY AND UNITY, AND WORK FOR THE
MODERNIZATION OF CHINA.

7. (C) AT A DECEMBER 23 LUNCHEON HOSTED BY
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1.5(B), 1.5(D)
NOT ALL A BAD THING, THAT YOUNG STUDENTS NEEDED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF OUTLET FOR THEIR CREATIVITY, OF COURSE, HE ADDED, SERIOUS DISORDER COULD NOT BE CONDONED. BUT THE SPIRIT OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS WAS CONSTRUCTIVE. WANG RECALLED IN THIS CONNECTION DEMONSTRATIONS HE HAD SEEN IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1980 ON AN IV GRANT. THERE THE DEMONSTRATIONS HAD BEEN CONDUCTED IN AN ORDERLY MANNER WITH RULES OF CONDUCT OBSERVED BY BOTH SIDES.

EARLY IN THE CONVERSATION THAT INITIAL STUDENT DEMANDS RELATED TO "SMALL THINGS" SUCH AS TUITION INCREASES, ASKED LATER ON IF STUDENTS WOULD BE GETTING MORE FREEDOM, HE SAID THAT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEIR DEMANDS WOULD BE ACHIEVED REMAINED TO BE SEEN. HE ALSO IMPLIED THAT THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP WAS FULLY FOCUSING ON THE DEMONSTRATIONS, AND SAID THAT THEY HAD MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION, INCLUDING BOTH PARTY AND GOVERNMENT CHANNELS.

AUTHOR, WERE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE STUDENT.

DEMONSTRATIONS IN A DINNER DISCUSSION WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND MRS. LORD ON DECEMBER 23. THEY WERE SYMPATHETIC WITH STUDENT ASPIRATIONS FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY, BUT BELIEVED THE PROTESTS WOULD PROBABLY SET BACK THEIR CAUSE. OPPONENTS OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE LEADERSHIP WOULD USE THE PROTESTS TO UNDERLINE THE DANGERS OF DEMOCRACY, THEY BELIEVE. THE STUDENTS WERE UNDERSTANDABLY NAIVE BECAUSE OF THEIR INEXPERIENCE AND DIDN'T REALIZE THE NEED TO PROCEED WITH CAUTION. THE AMBASSADOR PRESSED ON THEIR UNQUALIFIED
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PESSIMISM. HE ASKED WHETHER THERE MIGHT STILL BE SOME
BENEFICIAL IMPACT IF THE DEMONSTRATIONS REMAINED PEACE-
FUL AND AMICABLE RESOLUTIONS WERE REACHED. IN THAT CASE,
THE PROSPECTS MIGHT BE BRIGHTER, BUT THEY REMAINED SKEPTICAL. THE PROCESS TOWARD FREER EXPRESSION
AND PARTICIPATION, WHICH THEY SUPPORT, IS CLEARLY GOING
to BE A LONG AND TRICKY ONE IN THEIR VIEW. WHEN THE
AMBASSADOR ASKED HOW ELSE THE STUDENTS COULD CONVEY
THEIR VIEWS TO THE AUTHORITIES DEBATING POLITICAL
REFORMS, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THEY COULD THINK
OF NO OTHER METHOD.

9. (U) POLITICAL STABILITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CRITICAL
CONSIDERATION IN CHINA. THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THE
AUTHORITIES WILL CRACK DOWN, AND CRACK DOWN HARD, IF
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STABILITY SEEMS TO BE BEING CALLED INTO QUESTION. THE
XINHUA DISPATCH OF DECEMBER 21 MADE THIS CLEAR IMPPLICITLY
AND THE PEOPLE'S DAILY EDITORIAL OF DECEMBER 23 WAS EVEN
MORE EXPICIT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE AUTHORITIES HAVE
CONSISTENTLY TAKEN THE LINE THAT DEMONSTRATIONS ARE
LEGAL, AND THAT STUDENTS (OR ANYONE ELSE) HAVE A RIGHT
TO EXPRESS DIFFERING VIEWS. THE CRITICAL ISSUE FOR THE
AUTHORITIES IS CERTAINLY ALIENATION--THAT IS, HOW TO
AVOID ALIENATING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE, AS PD SAID,
"CHINA's HOPE". BEIJING MAYOR CHEN XITONG EXPRESSED
SIMILAR SENTIMENTS WHEN HE SAID AT A DECEMBER 22 COCKTAIL
PARTY FOR FOREIGN JOURNALISTS THAT "STUDENTS ARE NOT OUR
ENEMY BUT OUR DESCENDANTS." BEYOND THAT THERE IS THE
STILL MORE IMPORTANT QUESTION OF MOVING FROM AVOIDANCE OF ALIENATION TO ACHIEVEMENT OF THE COOPERATION AND SUPPORT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CHINA'S MODERNIZATION AND IN THE MODERNIZATION OF THE PARTY.

10. (U) THERE MAY BE AN ADDITIONAL COMPLICATION. WE HAVE HEARD FROM JOURNALISTS, AND AN ARTICLE HAS APPEARED IN THE SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (REF C) WHICH REFERS TO A STRIKE OVER LOW WAGES WHICH OCCURRED AT THE LOYANG, HENAN TRACTOR FACTORY LAST WEEK INVOLVING AS MANY AS 20,000 WORKERS. THE WORKERS HAVE APPARENTLY RETURNED TO WORK, AND WE HAVE SEEN NO REFERENCE TO ECONOMIC OR LABOR-RELATED ISSUES IN ACCOUNTS OF BANNERS AND POSTERS CARRIED BY DEMONSTRATING STUDENTS.

11. (C) COMMENT. WE BELIEVE WITH SHANGHAI THAT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE HAS BEEN REACHED. IF THE SHANGHAI DEMONSTRATIONS RESUME AND GROW, IF LARGE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS OCCUR ELSEWHERE, PARTICULARLY BEIJING, OR IF, WORST OF ALL, STUDENT AND LABOR UNREST COMBINE, THEN THE ENTIRE AFFAIR COULD BECOME A NET LIABILITY FOR REFORM WITH SERIOUSLY NEGATIVE POLICY CONSEQUENCES. A SEVERE CRACKDOWN WOULD BE INEVITABLE. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DEMONSTRATIONS PHASE DOWN AND OUT WITH THE SHANGHAI DEMONSTRATIONS AS THE PEAK, IT MAY BE POSSIBLE FOR THE REFORM LEADERSHIP TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE DONE TO REFORM, ESPECIALLY POLITICAL REFORM. IN ANY EVENT, THE QUESTION OF THE HANDLING OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS POSES ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGES THE REFORM LEADERSHIP HAS YET FACED. END COMMENT.
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THE BEIJING CENTRAL COLLEGE OF NATIONALITIES, WERE APPARENTLY MOSTLY UIGHURS, WHO OF COURSE COME FROM XINJIANG. THEY CARRIED ABOUT TEN BANNERS. AFTER CIRCLING TIANMEN SQUARE THE STUDENTS PROCEEDED TO ZHONGNANHAI, THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP COMPOUND, FOLLOWING WHICH THE DEMONSTRATION APPARENTLY BROKE UP. LOCAL WIRE SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES WERE ABLE TO GET THE BEIJING MUNICIPALITY TO CONFIRM THAT "SOMETHING OF THIS SORT" HAD OCCURRED, BUT NO FURTHER DETAILS; THE CENTRAL COLLEGE OF NATIONALITIES HUNG UP WHEN CALLED.

4. ACCORDING TO AN AFP DISPATCH (REF A), A SMALL NUMBER OF STUDENTS STAGED A SIMILAR PROTEST IN TIANJIN ON DECEMBER 8 AT TIANJIN UNIVERSITY.

5. COMMENT. STUDENT FERMENT CLEARLY CONTINUES. WE DO FIND A BIT ASTONISHING A DEMONSTRATION IN CHINA (A) ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING; AND (B) BY A MINORITY NATIONALITY GROUP. ANOTHER INTERESTING FEATURE OF THESE DEMONSTRATIONS IS THAT THEY INVOLVE SCHOOLS OTHER THAN THE "MAJORS" LIKE BEIDA. END COMMENT.

LORD.

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*** Current Handling Restrictions ***  n/a
*** Current Classification ***  UNCLASSIFIED