

# Democratization in Korea

## The United States Role, 1980 and 1987

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"Transition" is surely the most hackneyed concept among commentators on Korea over the last decade. In this post-modern world of increasingly rapid change, it is fair to say that the Republic of Korea (ROK) is in a constant state of transition from one thing to something else. The two broad areas that most frequently appear in discussions of Korea's transition are economic and political development. In the first case, analysts trace the transition of the ROK from a backward, largely agrarian economy to an industrial and now even post-industrial powerhouse that competes at a high level in the world marketplace. In the latter case, scholars examine the transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic one. Until the economic slide of last fall and the subsequent election to and assumption of the presidency by former opposition leader Kim Dae Jung, most observers would have conceded that the political transition is at an earlier and more precarious stage than the economic. Kim's smooth rise to the ROK's highest office demonstrated powerfully that the way Koreans in the south conduct themselves politically has changed fundamentally over the last generation.

This paper compares two incidents in Korea's recent past that represent flash points on different sides of the political transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The first case involves the process by which Chun Doo Hwan seized power between October 1979 and August 1980; the second encompasses the series of events leading up to Roh Tae Woo's dramatic announcement of June 29, 1987, that the next president would be chosen in a popular election rather than by a small electoral body carefully selected at the top. My approach is to examine the role of the United States in both incidents with the idea of drawing some tentative conclusions about why Korea's transition toward democracy experienced a setback in 1980 but a giant leap forward seven years later.

### I

I begin with two narratives: the first, of the basic events within

Korea in the two cases under consideration; the second, of American actions in the two cases. These will prepare us for a comparative analysis that hopefully will serve to illuminate the reasons for the very different outcomes of 1980 and 1987.

The assassination of President Park Chung Hee on October 26, 1979, provides a reasonable starting point for narrating the train of events leading to the suppression of attempts at democratization during 1980. Executed by the director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), Kim Jae Kyu, the assassination took place in the midst of considerable political and economic turmoil. Impressive gains had occurred during most of Park's eighteen-year reign, but a global recession produced by sharply increasing oil prices had produced an economic slowdown during 1978. The result was initially a slowing rate of increase and then an actual decline in the exports that had fueled South Korea's economic miracle. By mid-1979 unemployment was on the rise as were political opposition and civil unrest. The opposition actually had garnered more votes than the ruling party in National Assembly elections of December 1978 and had been denied control of the legislature only because of a system of proportional representation. At the end of the following May, the strong-willed Kim Young Sam ousted moderate Lee Chul Seung as leader of the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP), ushering in a period of aggressive challenge to Park's rule. The president responded initially by loosening the enforcement of laws restricting dissent and releasing more than 1,000 political prisoners. In August, however, as criticism of the government grew, the regime took countermeasures, most notoriously with a forceful breakup of a protest by women workers of the Y. H. Trading Company over their employer's failure to pay back wages. When the NDP used the incident to attack Park's legitimacy, authorities attempted to oust Kim as its leader, only to provoke Kim to even bolder action. In early October the ruling party in the National Assembly voted to expel him from that body, leading to the mass resignation of opposition lawmakers. Within days, demonstrations broke out in Pusan, Kim's hometown. On the seventeenth, police killed five demonstrators and arrested five hundred. Although students led the protests, they received support in the general populace and soon spread to nearby Masan. The unrest produced dissent within Park's entourage and, when the president sided with hardliners, the reform-minded KCIA director killed him along with his security chief, Cha Chi Choi.

The assassin immediately attempted to persuade the army chief of staff, General Chung Seung Hwa, to carry out a coup d'etat. Instead,

Chung arrested Kim, adhering to the Yushin constitution of 1972, which provided in the event of Park's demise for the temporary accession to the presidency of the prime minister. The cabinet quickly endorsed this approach, naming Choi Kyu Ha the acting president. On December 6 an electoral college named him interim president.

To that point, Choi had not tipped his hand on his political orientation, but on December 7 he appeared to move toward the reformers. He lifted Emergency Measure 9 (EM-9), which outlawed virtually all criticism of the government, and released 69 violators, including the prominent opposition leader Kim Dae Jung.

Only five days later, however, an event occurred that would prove of far greater consequence to South Korea's political development than Choi's modest actions. A group of young officers under the leadership of Major General Chun Doo Hwan, the commander of the Defense Security Command, seized control of the army, arresting Chung and fifteen other generals and purging the military of reform elements. The public justification for the move was suspicion of General Chung's involvement in Park's assassination. A more likely explanation was that Chung and his allies intended to soon relocate the ambitious Chun to a remote command far from the reins of power in Seoul. More generally, Chun was the leader of officers of the eleventh class (1955) of the Korea Military Academy, the first group to graduate after a full four-year program modeled after that of West Point. This group, and officers from later graduating classes, had been frustrated in reaching the top ranks of the military by Class 8, led by Chung. Without drastic action, Chun and his followers faced eventual retirement without ever achieving what they considered to be their right by training and outlook. Revealingly, two days after the putsch Chun removed most of the Class 8 group from leadership positions, replacing them with officers from Class 11 or above.'

The significance of the military putsch was not immediately apparent. Some fighting had occurred between rival military units in Seoul on the night of the twelfth and the movement from the 38th parallel to the capital of elements of the Ninth Division under Chun's friend Roh Tae Woo, little seemed to change on the surface. On the fourteenth, Choi appointed a new cabinet and officials at the Ministry of Defense insisted publicly that the incident was strictly military in nature. By the end of the year, Choi had released or reduced the sentences of over 1,700 political prisoners. At the end of February 1980, he loosened restrictions on the press and restored civil and political rights to nearly 700 violators of EM-9, including Kim Dae

Jung. Earlier in the month, Lee Hahn Been, the deputy prime minister for economic affairs, declared in a speech in San Francisco that "the important point is not that the [December 12] incident occurred but that its occurrence did not affect the political and economic progress of Korea."<sup>2</sup> Still, all of South Korea except Cheju Island remained under the martial law that had been declared in the aftermath of Park's assassination. When on April 14 Chun, in defiance of the constitution, took over as acting director of the KCIA, government insiders and outsiders alike began to fear the worst.

Chun's move came amidst growing civil unrest. The apparent liberalization that had occurred since December emboldened a long-repressed labor movement. When economic conditions continued to slide during the new year, labor disputes, mostly over unpaid wages but also over pay raises to keep pace with rampant inflation, grew rapidly. After a particularly nasty uprising of coal miners at Sabuk, the government granted a 20 percent wage increase. If anything, this concession simply encouraged labor militancy. After a new school year began in March, student activists joined laborers in overt dissent. Demands spread for campus reforms, an end to martial law, and early democratization. Demonstrations became especially widespread after April 19, the twentieth anniversary of the student revolt that toppled the regime of Syngman Rhee. Increasingly prominent in the agitation was the demand for Chun's removal from his offices.

In May events moved rapidly toward a climax. Early in the month, students in cities throughout the ROK began to move demonstrations beyond their campuses into downtown areas. This brought clashes with the Martial Law Command, which in turn provoked students to demand an end to martial law by May 15. Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and the Catholic church soon joined in this demand. On the fifteenth, mass rallies took place in some sixty cities. Over 50,000 students gathered at Seoul Station in the nation's capital and began marching toward the center of the city. Riot police confronted them along the way, backed up by army troops. In a confrontation lasting two and a half hours, students attacked the police with stones and other hard objects and even commandeered six city buses, which they drove or rolled into police lines. One young policeman, a former student, was killed and three were injured. Over two hundred students were hurt and four hundred more were detained. Police succeeded in containing the demonstration without the direct involvement of troops.

Conservative and opposition political leaders now feared that

matters were getting out of control, that further such incidents would provide the military with an excuse for an open seizure of power. On the sixteenth, Kim Jong Pil, the leader of the government party in the National Assembly, proposed an end to martial law. Prime Minister Shin Hyon Hwak announced that the government would make concessions to student demands. President Choi, who was on a trip to the Middle East, would rush home to work with the legislature, scheduled to meet in four days, in ending martial law and devising a concrete plan and timetable for democratization. Opposition leaders joined in calling on students to halt demonstrations. In response, Seoul students, who had confronted considerable public antipathy once they moved their activities off campus, suspended further protests until the government had had a chance to act. In Kwangju, always a hotbed of dissent, a combination of students and townspeople held an orderly torchlight procession and then postponed further measures. On the next morning U.S. Ambassador William Gleysteen reported home that moderate students seemed to have been sobered by recent events but it was "impossible to say if [the government] will take advantage of the small window that may now be open."

Later that same day Chun slammed the window shut, declaring nationwide martial law; banning all political activity, including any meeting of the National Assembly; closing the universities; forbidding criticism of past or present political leaders; and arresting hundreds of students and politicians, among them Kim Jong Pil, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Dae Jung. When on the eighteenth five hundred students in Kwangju demonstrated against Chun and martial law, army special forces units, untrained in crowd control, surrounded them and then indiscriminately beat and bayoneted them with their rifles, killing several dozen. The so-called "Black Berets" continued their brutal actions against students and citizens over the next twenty-four hours, only to spark a massive popular uprising, which on the twentieth drove the troops out of the city. It was not until late on the twenty-seventh that units from the army's Twentieth Division combined with the special forces to retake control of the city for the government. Estimates of civilian deaths during the incident range from 230 to over 2,000.

The government provided two primary justifications for the crackdown. First was the assertion that if unrest continued the North Koreans, either through direct attack or internal subversion, would take over. Rumors spread that North Korean military units were mobilizing along the 38th parallel, that gunfire was exchanged between DPRK and

ROK forces in the demilitarized zone, and that infiltration from the north was on the rise. Second was the claim that turmoil in the south made reversal of the economic slide impossible, that the proper course was self-discipline and self-denial rather than caving in to labor and student demands.'

Although Chun exercised the real political power in South Korea, he did not immediately assume the presidency. Choi stayed in that post until resigning in mid-August. Chun did not take the position until September 1, after being "elected" unanimously by the National Conference on Unification, a body established by Park Chung Hee and used now in hopes of conferring legitimacy on a man who lacked substantial public support. Following the example of Park after his coup d'etat in 1961, Chun also sought legitimacy by launching a "purification" campaign, with the putative goal of cleansing ROK politics and society of corrupt elements. In reality it largely purged from positions in government, the press, and the educational community people who could not be trusted to follow Chun's lead. Finally, in his inaugural address he stated as a major objective the establishment of a tradition for the peaceful transfer of power "by reforming the political culture in Korea so that democracy would take root."<sup>5</sup> Chun proceeded to have a new constitution drafted that provided for a powerful president to serve for one seven-year term. In October it passed in a national referendum with 91.6 percent of the votes cast. With the holding in March 1981 of a general election for a new National Assembly, the Fifth Republic was fully in place.

Chun never became a popular leader, despite the steadying of the economy during 1981 and the eventual emergence of a "second takeoff." Dissent was never far below the surface, but improving economic conditions, Seoul's securing of the 1988 Olympic Games, and the promise of a new regime in the same year joined with Chun's heavy hand to discourage serious disruptions, at least until 1986. In February 1985 the opposition did remarkably well in National Assembly elections. A perennial weakness of the opposition in Korean politics has been its factionalism, but in early 1986 it united momentarily in the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) around the issue of constitutional reform. The key demand was for the election of the next president through a nationwide popular vote rather than through an electoral college or the legislature, which could easily be controlled by the government Democratic Justice Party (DJP). Although reformers in the DJP eventually agreed to a dialogue on the matter with the NKDP, as the year progressed public demonstrations

became more widespread and radicals appeared to be increasing their influence.

Events began to move toward a showdown on April 13, 1987, when President Chun announced a postponement of constitutional debate and revision until after the Olympics, a clear signal that he remained determined that his successor - if, indeed, there was to be one the following year - *not* be chosen by a popular vote. Predictably, student demonstrations proliferated, but in May university faculties also commenced issuing public manifestos calling for democratization.

In early June the scope of confrontation escalated. On the second, Chun announced that Roh Tae Woo was his choice as the ruling party's candidate for president. The DJP's nominating convention was to occur eight days later at the Seoul Hilton, but that was also the date set for a mass national rally of students in favor of constitutional reform. On the day before, the government arrested several hundred student leaders and over 2,000 demonstrators.

Even this action did not quell the protests. Tens of thousands of Koreans demonstrated on city streets throughout the nation, and despite 3,800 arrests on the tenth, protests continued in subsequent days. The honking of car horns in Seoul and the appearance of thousands of well-dressed men and women visibly beyond student age amongst the demonstrators revealed the existence of broad support for reform among the middle class.

Still, on the fourteenth, the government announced that it could not rule out martial law. On the following day, to be sure, it settled peacefully a confrontation between police and students at the Myongdong Cathedral in downtown Seoul, but five days after that Prime Minister Lee Han Key made a nationally broadcast speech insisting that strong action would be taken to end the unrest.

Rumors soon began circulating that DJP leaders, including Roh, were advising Chun to compromise. In a meeting with Kim Young Sam on the twenty-fourth, Chun expressed a willingness to resume debate on constitutional revision, although he refused to retreat from his April 13 statement regarding the timing of revision itself. A day later Kim Dae Jung was freed from house arrest. Finally, on June 29 Roh made his dramatic address calling for the direct election of the next president and the expansion of political rights.

Subsequently, a compromise emerged from the National Assembly on constitutional amendments that essentially endorsed Roh's proposals. The amendments were confirmed by popular referendum, and at the end of the year Roh emerged victorious in a

hotly contested election for president over Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. Roh was inaugurated on February 25, 1988. Although cries of electoral fraud abounded in the camps of the defeated candidates, Roh entered the Blue House with a legitimacy that his friend and benefactor before him had never enjoyed. Five years later, he turned over the reins of power to Kim Young Sam after the former opposition leader had joined the ruling party and then defeated Kim Dae Jung in a national election.

## II

Our narrative of the U.S. role in the pivotal events in Korea of 1980 and 1987 begins with the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who entered the White House in 1977 determined to put his personal stamp on American foreign policy. An important if not central part of his agenda related to Korea, as during his campaign the previous year he had advocated the withdrawal of U.S. troops - not air forces - from the peninsula and criticized the Park regime for human rights violations. On the eve of the November election, the story broke of widespread efforts by Korean agent Park Tong Sun to bribe members of the U.S. Congress and other federal government officials in order to influence American policy toward the ROK. The revelations produced a flurry of investigations within the federal government during 1977 and 1978 and helped to prevent Carter from securing the necessary authority from Congress to balance troop withdrawals with a program to modernize ROK military forces. Even elements of the human rights lobby in Congress, who were anything but friendly toward the Park government, argued that troop withdrawal would undermine U.S. leverage in encouraging liberalization. And legislators concerned about American strategic interests in Asia following the Vietnam debacle expressed reservations about troop withdrawals in the face of doubts among allies there, especially Japan, about the willingness of the United States to fulfill its commitments. Carter received his authority at the end of 1978, but almost simultaneously word leaked out of a new intelligence study indicating that North Korea's strength far exceeded previous estimates. By the end of June 1979, when the president visited Korea for a summit, the pressure on him to at least postpone withdrawal was intense from both the legislative and executive branches.'

Carter wanted to avoid talks on the issue with his ROK counterpart. Despite prior warnings on the matter, Park courted disaster in their first meeting by presenting the case, at length, against



withdrawal. Only intense lobbying by his advisers induced Carter to agree to postpone withdrawal until 1981 in return for promises from Park of an increase in ROK military expenditures and the release from jail of a substantial number of dissidents. Although Park kept his promises, the release of prisoners did not usher in a general policy of liberalization. The United States did express concern, both in public and in private, over his increasing crackdown on dissent between August and his demise in late October, even at one point calling Ambassador Gleysteen home briefly. Indeed, Kim Jae Kyu's awareness of growing American discontent with Park may have emboldened him to take the president's life.<sup>7</sup>

The United States responded cautiously to Park's death. Conditions in the ROK had become calm, and Gleysteen warned that, if his government pressed "too hard, too crassly, and too soon for structural change [it]could easily provoke a very unhealthy anti-American reaction." Although outside the military there was a consensus in favor of political liberalization, there was no agreement as to its timing or extent. Aside from advising Acting President Choi to abolish EM-9, the ambassador suggested avoiding precise recommendations. A proposal that Kim Dae Jung be released, for example, "could very well start dangerous counter-currents among the military." The prevailing view in the State Department was consistent with this outlook. It recognized that the new situation provided "an opportunity" but also represented a "great danger," especially of exploitation by North Korea. American influence "should be utilized quietly" to nudge governing elites toward democracy.<sup>8</sup>

Gleysteen and his subordinates did considerable "nudging" during the ensuing months, lobbying generally in private with governing and dissident groups alike in an attempt to keep the ROK on a steady course toward liberalization. However, when a mob stormed the U.S. embassy in Teheran and took its occupants hostage in early November, Washington policymakers became increasingly concerned that the chaos and revolution that had engulfed Iran during the previous year would also develop in Korea. Still, despite ongoing efforts to discourage Christian dissidents from directly challenging martial law, American officials in Washington and Seoul continued to believe that a steady if gradual move toward liberalization was the best way for the ROK to maintain stability in the face of the ongoing threat from North Korea.<sup>9</sup>

It was with great concern, then, that American observers reacted to the military putsch of December 12. The concern rested on

both its possible implications for continued liberalization and its impact on unity within the ROK armed forces and the Combined Forces Command (CFC) created the previous year. The CFC was designed to give Korean units greater autonomy, but on the night of the twelfth Chun and his allies violated the new arrangement, removing key units from the CFC without giving advance notice to the American commander, General John Wickham. Gleysteen and Wickham immediately launched a private campaign to warn Korean military leaders of the "grave consequences" that would follow if they undermined "the civilian government's program to bring orderly political liberalization." Over Wickham's objections, Gleysteen even conveyed this message to Chun directly in a tense meeting on the fourteenth. The State Department issued a public statement along the same lines, but also reiterated the continuing U.S. commitment to defend the ROK against outside attack. Despite Gleysteen's initial pessimism, President Choi's appointment on the fourteenth of a "neutral" cabinet without overt interference from the military proved heartening." To keep up the pressure, President Carter sent a personal note to Choi on January 4, 1980, the contents of which the embassy disseminated throughout the ROK government. Carter emphasized his concern about the events of December 12 and warned that such occurrences in the future "would have serious consequences for our close cooperation.""

Gleysteen summarized the perspective from the U.S. embassy in a cable home on January 29, 1980.

Our key positions at this point are to urge the government to move ahead with political liberalization, the military to remain unified and refrain from crude intervention in politics, and the opposition to be patient. But our activist role is not an easy one and eventually we will be "damned if we do and damned if we don't" by various elements of society seeking our support. The costs of miscalculation are high. If we don't do enough, dangerous events could occur; if we try to do too much, we may provoke strong, chauvinist reactions.... Although they usually mute their opinion, most Koreans sense a reduction in the real power of the U.S. and are increasingly concerned over what they perceive as our unwillingness to face up to the Soviet challenge, and they are also somewhat skeptical of our ability to handle Beijing. They suspect we may be too preoccupied elsewhere to respond resolutely to difficulties on the peninsula. [On the other hand, among political activists] few realize that our influence is limited in large part by the fact that we could not pull our powerful security and economic levers

without risk of destroying the ROK's stability.<sup>12</sup>

Despite ongoing American nudging and occasional liberalizing acts by the government, the overall trend in the ensuing weeks left much to be desired. Martial law continued, Choi failed to present a timetable for democratization, and dissidents and the political opposition grew increasingly impatient. Lacking a substantial political base and by temperament and experience a bureaucrat rather than a leader, Choi was anything but aggressive in moving forward. Chun Doo Hwan's takeover of the KCIA on April 14 only reinforced concerns about Choi's strength. To show its disapproval of Chun's move, the United States indefinitely postponed the annual Security Consultative Meeting between the defense secretaries of the two governments, but the State Department possessed evidence that official pressures were being undermined by informal contacts between retired and active American military men at the middle level and Korean military leaders. Of special concern here was General Richard Stilwell, a former United States and United Nations commander in Korea.<sup>13</sup>

A meeting between Gleysteen and Chun on May 9 illustrates the limits to which the Americans were willing to go in pressuring the ROK government in the emerging crisis. The ambassador had met with the general infrequently since the December 12 incident as a signal of displeasure over his action, but now Gleysteen felt it desirable to see Chun to better gauge his intentions. The meeting was scheduled days in advance, so the ambassador consulted with the State Department on what he intended to say. On the eve of the meeting, the ROK military advised their U.S. counterparts of the movement of two brigades of special forces to the Seoul area for possible use in response to student demonstrations. Gleysteen made it clear to the State Department, and the State Department agreed, that he would not express opposition to "ROKG contingency plans to maintain law and order, if absolutely necessary by reinforcing the police with the army." He surmised, "If I were to suggest any complaint on this score, we would lose all our friends within the civilian and military leadership." The ambassador thought the meeting "went quite well," that, although Chun "probably found my attitude sympathetic [on] the student security situation," he also was "very aware of the danger of over reaction and use of military force."<sup>14</sup>

Deputy U.S. Military Attache James Young met with Roh Tae Woo, then commander of the ROKA Capital Security Command, on the same day, however, and emerged less hopeful than Gleysteen. Four days later, Wickham met with Chun and left with a similar feeling.

While these views were communicated to the ambassador, he and his political advisers remained cautiously optimistic that Chun would exercise restraint in employing his military forces against demonstrators.<sup>15</sup>

That optimism lasted into the evening of May 17, when the embassy learned that riot police had broken up a meeting of students at Ewha Women's University and arrested student leaders. At around ten o'clock Gleysteen finally was informed that "extraordinary martial law" would be imposed nationwide just after midnight. This came following the ambassador's report home earlier in the day that the "lack of significant public support" for recent demonstrations had "put a damper on the more moderate student leaders," thus creating an opening through which the government could institute reforms. Late in the afternoon he met with an aide to President Choi at the Blue House, using "very, very strong language to stress the danger [to U.S.-Korean relations] of letting Korean military leaders determine how the government was going to cope with political decisions at this stage." Gleysteen recorded after the meeting that "some sensible thinking is taking place at the Blue House, although we will have to wait and see whether the President has the toughness to go as far as he probably should."<sup>16</sup> Whether through lack of toughness or conviction, it soon became apparent that Choi had followed the military in its determination to tighten the martial law already in effect.

Gleysteen responded to the situation with a combination of disappointment, frustration, and anger. He spoke firmly and at length to ROK leaders in the days that followed, always counseling restraint in the use of force. The State Department in Washington reinforced his efforts, although as usual since the Park assassination it spoke more forcefully in private than in public. In the now tightly controlled South Korean press, official U.S. comments were often distorted or went unreported. As the Kwangju tragedy evolved, the American government consistently urged restraint in using the army, but the Korean media conveyed the impression that the United States was actually encouraging such action.

That said, the United States always conceded that force was justified if absolutely necessary to keep order. Indeed, the ambassador made it clear over and over again that, as in the past, his government would work with any ROK regime, conservative or liberal, so long as it could maintain stability. When after the initial bloodbath in Kwangju and the retreat from the city of the special forces, ROK authorities consulted the Americans on the possible deployment of units from the

Twentieth Division in regaining control, Gleysteen and Wickham approved, hoping that the use of troops trained in riot control would achieve the purpose with minimal casualties. Despite continuing efforts to seek peaceful methods of resolving the crisis, the Americans declined to mediate when appeals along those lines came out of Kwangju in the final hours before ROK troops marched in early on the twenty-seventh. Clearly, for the short term, the United States prioritized order over political liberalization.<sup>17</sup> The "damned if we do and damned if we don't" mentality reinforced this prioritization in softening the American voice for change.

With order restored in Kwangju and relative quiet prevailing throughout the country, the United States adopted a cool position toward the ROK government. Washington postponed an economic mission to Korea and requested the Asian Development Bank to hold up decisions on two loans to the ROK. When Chun took the presidency late in the summer, President Carter refused to send him congratulations and privately urged him "to take the earliest possible action to ensure the stability of the government through the development of popularly-supported political institutions and greater freedom for your citizens."<sup>18</sup>

Overshadowing the quiet if ineffectual pressure on Chun was a story of early August in the *Los Angeles Times* that quoted a "highly placed military official," soon identified as General Wickham, as questioning the readiness of Koreans for democracy and suggesting that they were "lemming-like" in lining up behind Chun as the next president. He also indicated that the United States was likely to support him, as its priorities placed "national security and internal stability ... before political liberalization."<sup>19</sup>

The Reagan administration, which took office in January 1981, was much more open on this last point than its predecessor. President Ronald Reagan embraced the Chun regime immediately, welcoming its leader as the first foreign head of state to visit his White House and postponing indefinitely consideration of U.S. troop withdrawals. However much that embrace was rooted in strategic concerns, the visit itself represented part of a bargain in which Chun agreed to spare the life of Kim Dae Jung, who was under a death sentence for alleged subversive activities during the previous spring. Despite the abandonment by Reagan of Carter's aggressive public stance on human rights, the new president came to understand that for reasons of domestic politics as well as foreign policy he could not simply ignore the issue. On Korea his administration worked quietly for the release

of political prisoners, probably with some success, and more publicly to encourage Chun to keep his promise to step down after one term in the presidency.

The warm relationship between the two governments-fostered most visibly by several summits in Seoul and Washington and the appointment of the conservative academic Richard L. Walker as U.S. ambassador to the ROK-helped to foster anti-Americanism at levels never before encountered in South Korea. An increasing number of adults possessed no memory of U.S. efforts during the Korean War-of the "alliance forged in blood"-or of the American role in easing Syngman Rhee from power in 1960. The Chun campaign to associate U.S. policy with his actions of May 1980 and the Reagan administration's refusal to do anything publicly to counter that campaign combined with Reagan's clear endorsement of the military regime to lead many Koreans, in particular young adults, to regard the United States as part of the problem rather than the solution.

Washington was well aware of this sentiment, and with temperatures rising in South Korea during the fall of 1986 it began to take precautionary measures. It replaced Walker with James Lilley, a career CIA officer. Earlier, when the task was to establish a solid working relationship with Chun, Walker had performed an important function, but now he was an increasing liability given his close ties to the Chun regime and his disinclination to reach out to opposition groups. In addition, fearful that in another crisis the United States would be unable to communicate its official views to the public, USIS in Seoul began publishing and distributing on college campuses, to libraries, and to press and social organizations a Korean-language journal entitled "Current Events and Views."<sup>22</sup>

Despite American fears, accurate reports of statements by U.S. officials on Korea did filter out through the press in Seoul during early 1987. On February 6 Gaston Sigur, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, delivered a speech on Korea in New York in which he backed "a new political framework" for the ROK characterized by civilian control. Simultaneously, Ambassador Lilley commenced a series of meetings with opposition leaders. These events were reported widely in South Korea, as was Secretary of State George Shultz's brief stop in Seoul on March 6. The message came through clearly that, although the United States did not intend to interfere in Korea's domestic politics, it favored political liberalization and that an increasingly vocal American Congress supported that view. It was just as clear, however, that the Chun government was attempting to

cultivate resentment of outside interference.<sup>21</sup>

This pattern continued in April after President Chun announced an end to discussions on constitutional reform. Newspapers in Seoul reported expressions of disappointment in the American press. When the daily *Seoul Sinmun* stated that the U.S. government had reacted favorably to Chun's announcement, the American embassy immediately corrected the report and the paper printed the correction. The Seoul press also covered Congressman Stephen Solarz's visit to Korea in the middle of the month and his statements then and after his return home in favor of early democratization. At the end of the month the liberal *Tonga Ilbo* reported a statement by President Reagan in an exclusive interview with a Japanese newspaper that "Korea needs a more open, broad-based government." Days later it quoted Lilley as stating in a speech to the Korean Bar Association that "the United States supports ... dialogue between the political parties, a willingness to compromise and sacrificing narrow interest, and free and fair elections leading toward a broadened democratic political process." As the spring progressed, newspapers gave increasing attention to the movement in the Democrat-controlled U.S. Congress to institute trade restrictions on South Korea.<sup>22</sup>

Yet even though the United States succeeded in transmitting to the Korean public more high-level statements favoring liberalization than it had seven years earlier, it still engaged in a delicate balancing act. American diplomats consistently urged "dialogue and compromise" between the ROK government and opposition leaders and discouraged violent demonstrations. They gained reinforcement from extensive and considerably bolder comments from American journalists and members of Congress, substantial numbers of whom devoted close attention to the escalating crisis. As conditions heated to a boil in mid-June, U.S. officials became extremely cautious in their public statements. Word did leak out that on the thirteenth Lilley had advised ROK Foreign Minister Choi Kwang Soo not to allow riot police to storm the Myongdong Cathedral to break up a student sit-in and that President Reagan was preparing a personal letter to President Chun.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, comments out of the Pentagon and State Department indicated that the United States regarded events in South Korea as an internal matter for South Koreans to resolve. Clearly the administration wanted to avoid any statement that would encourage demonstrators or opposition leaders to believe that, in a pinch, the United States would bail them out.<sup>24</sup> On the seventeenth, Secretary of State Shultz, who was in Singapore attending a meeting of ASEAN

foreign ministers, stated that he wanted President Chun to resume negotiations with the opposition on constitutional reform, but "would not press hard for him to do so." He denied that the current situation in the ROK was analogous to that in the Philippines early the previous year when the United States had intervened to help bring about the resignation of President Ferdinand Marcos and the flowering of democracy.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the White House and the State Department had indeed drafted a letter from Reagan to Chun "couched in sympathetic, gentle, and inoffensive language," as journalist Don Oberdorfer has recently characterized it, but unmistakably calling "for political rather than military solutions."<sup>26</sup> Lilley received the letter, which he was instructed to deliver personally to Chun, on the evening of June 17, but the ROK president delayed in meeting the ambassador until the afternoon of June 19. Unknown to Lilley at the time, in the morning Chun had ordered a crackdown early the next day, which was to include the deployment of army forces to college campuses and cities nationwide and the arrest of student demonstrators. But Lilley, who days earlier had been referred to in the *New York Times* as short on diplomatic experience, took the offensive.<sup>27</sup> Having checked beforehand with General William J- Livesay, the commander of U.S. forces, to ensure his support, Lilley was more explicit than Reagan's letter in informing Chun that the United States opposed use of the army in dealing with the crisis and warning him of the potential consequences to the United States-ROK relationship if the army did intervene. According to a recent account, an hour after the president and the U.S. ambassador met, Chun suspended the order for mobilization.<sup>28</sup>

The crisis did not end here, nor did American pressure. On the twentieth the United States announced that Assistant Secretary of State Sigur, now in Australia with Secretary Shultz, would make a quick trip to Seoul. He arrived on the twenty-third, a day before Chun's meeting with Kim Young Sam, and stayed for three days. Sigur met with top ROK officials, including the president, emphasizing the need to avoid military intervention in the political process. In the end Chun acceded, although it was not until July 1 that he openly endorsed Roh's concessions of the twenty-ninth.

### III

Why was the transition toward democracy advanced in 1987 but not seven years earlier? Why did the United States take a stronger



stance in 1987 than in 1980? What difference, if any, did the United States make in the two cases? I should note at the outset of this analysis that identifying causes in history is inherently imprecise, that this is particularly so in the cases involved due to the unavailability of most of the pertinent documents, especially on the Korean side. In the most recent of the two cases, we lack even the partial declassification of U.S. State Department documentation. We do possess oral testimony from some of the actors, Korean and American alike, that is reported by Don Oberdorfer in his recent book, and I have tested some of this material in my own private conversations with former officials. The comparative approach also assists here in contending with the limited documentation available by accentuating divergent conditions in the two cases that suggest reasons for the differing outcomes.

I divide my presentation into three levels of analysis: the situation in Korea, external conditions, and the climate in the United States. The three levels intermingle, of course, but their separation assists in the establishment of hierarchies of causation.

I begin with the Korean setting simply because it is the most important. Since Korea was opened substantially to the world in the late nineteenth century, change has often occurred there in large part due to external influences. I will argue below that the United States played an important role in South Korea's democratization during the 1980s and that conditions outside the peninsula were frequently significant in shaping its position. Yet the move toward democracy in 1987 was not imposed from without any more than was the move in the opposite direction in 1980. In the end, Chun Doo Hwan made real choices, and they were based primarily on internal conditions. Those conditions provided the starting point for American policy as well.

Let us compare conditions in South Korea in 1980 and 1987. In both cases college students rose up in protest against government policies; in both cases they took their protests to the centers of major cities. Labor unrest was more overt in 1980, but in 1987 discontent among workers clearly seethed just below the surface in the face of strong repressive action by the Chun regime. The biggest difference in popular attitudes between May 1980 and June 1987 rested in the urban middle class. In the first period Gleysteen characterized these people as "grumpy but by no means in a rebellious mood."<sup>23</sup> When radical students took their protests off campus in 1980, the middle class gave them little support. Over the last year it had from time to time shown discontent with the government, but it did not provide major support for students until there was general outrage over the brutal actions of

the ROK special forces in Kwangju. In June 1987, in contrast, the middle class in Seoul and elsewhere, now far more prosperous and economically secure than in 1980, openly demonstrated its support for students. The student rebels themselves were better organized to resist penetration by government agents and to prevent riot police from containing or breaking up demonstrations. Thus the scope of repression necessary to maintain order in 1987 was far greater than in 1980.

Attitudes in the army were far less certain in the later than in the earlier year. Chun was not a man to shy away from spilling blood, even that of his own people. After seizing control of the army in 1979, he had purged the senior leadership and, in doing so, broken the logjam for promotion from the middle ranks. This action ensured the army's loyalty to him in May 1980. During the next seven years, however, gratitude toward Chun diminished as younger officers made their way upward. Furthermore, the rank-and-file of the conscript army had become much better educated and thus less likely to remain uniformly obedient if called upon to brutally suppress a broad popular uprising.<sup>30</sup>

Evidence remains sketchy on the army in 1987, but one retrospective account is consistent with press rumors at the time regarding Roh Tae Woo's position and with what we know of the personalities of Roh and Chun. In the midst of the crisis, the story goes, Chung Ho Yong, a retired general and former and future cabinet member in Chun's government, received direct word of widespread concern among "younger generals and colonels who were alarmed by the extensive preparations that had been made to use force against the demonstrations."<sup>31</sup> Chung reported this to Roh, emphasizing the damage military intervention would do both to society and to his own political prospects. Roh quickly advised Chun against use of the army. In short Chun possessed an army of less certain reliability but with a more challenging task than in 1980.

Another part of the equation, and a clear difference between 1980 and 1987, was Chun's likely fate in the context of political liberalization. In 1980 neither he nor a close friend held the prospect of winning a national election. Chun stood little chance of controlling either the liberalization process or his personal fortunes in that process. Having recently led a military putsch, he was highly vulnerable in a system lacking a tradition of easing leaders gently from power. South Korea lacked such a tradition in 1987 as well, but now Chun was a wealthy man who possessed some hope of choosing a successor. The hope was far from a certainty if he permitted a popular election, but it was bolstered by one fact and one likely development. The fact was

that, in continuing to control the government through the election, he could influence the process and thus the outcome. The likely development was a split in the opposition between Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, who were bitter rivals with a long record of failing to cooperate if it meant sacrificing personal ambitions. In a three-way race, a Roh campaign liberally financed by the *chaebols* that had prospered so mightily during Chun's reign and favored by the government stood an excellent chance of emerging victorious. The restoration to Kim Dae Jung of full political and civil rights for the first time since the early 1970s, though couched as a concession to liberalization, was also a weapon in the impending struggle for Chun's succession.

This analysis suggests that the American role in South Korea's democratization was at best secondary. Internal conditions alone provided powerful inducements for Chun to toe a hard line in one case and make concessions in the other. Yet when we consider the apparent fact that Chun gave preliminary orders to employ the army on June 19, 1987, and that Roh did not announce concessions until ten days later—not to mention that Chun waited still two more days to announce *his* approval—it becomes obvious that the outcome was a close call, that a slight shift of conditions one way or another could have made a huge difference. It is in this context that we turn to a comparison of the external forces at work in 1980 and 1987.

In both cases the position of the United States was far and away the most serious concern in the ROK, whether it be among policy elites or the general public. The United States was the protector of South Korea's security and one of its two leading trading partners. The state of United States-ROK relations stood in marked contrast in 1980 and 1987, however. In the former year they were in their most difficult period since the founding of the ROK in 1948. Although Carter had agreed to postpone further consideration of troop withdrawals until 1981, technically that issue still hung in the balance. In the context of America's recent debacle in Vietnam and apparent U.S. helplessness in the face of a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the seizure of American hostages in Iran (the abortive rescue mission occurred in late April), South Korean confidence in the strength of the United States was at a low ebb. The recent Koreagate scandal and acrimony over the human rights issue cast further doubt on the solidity of the United States-Korea relationship.

This situation greatly diminished Washington's influence with Chun. South Korean politics were highly masculine in nature, both

literally and figuratively, and in style Chun rested on the extreme end of the masculinity scale. He was combative, willful, and dishonest to boot, inclined to strike back and deceive rather than compromise under pressure. Stern anti-communism was a matter of faith to him and the flexibility of Carter toward communist regimes early in his administration-his abortive exploration of establishing relations with Vietnam and Cuba, for example, and his embrace of China, which involved terminating a military commitment to Taiwan-had not impressed Chun favorably. Then Carter's decisive shift toward a traditional cold war position in the face of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 led Chun to believe that the president was unlikely to hold him accountable on the issue of liberalization. That public sentiment in the United States had shifted distinctly rightward as Carter geared up his campaign for reelection surely did not pass unnoticed either, especially given the reassurances Chun most likely received privately from such former U.S. military leaders in Korea as Generals Stilwell and John Singlaub. Finally, America's top representative in Seoul, Ambassador Gleysteen, in some ways epitomized a United States that had retreated from its initially flexible position in the cold war. Capable and experienced, he had used pointed language with Chun and other Korean leaders in the past, so much so that they sometimes referred to him disparagingly as "Governor-General." Chun certainly had no illusions of the ambassador's fondness for him. Yet Gleysteen went into the critical meeting with Chun on May 9 anxious to avoid provoking him, impatient with students and opposition leaders over their provocative behavior, and determined to emphasize the goal of political stability. To Chun the message most likely conveyed was that the only point in dispute was the best method of achieving that goal, and on this point he had every reason not to defer to the Americans. With South Korea in turmoil and his own position severely threatened, Chun was not about to be deterred from exerting his power by the United States of Carter and Gleysteen.

The United States of Ronald Reagan and James Lilley was very different. After years of self-doubt, Americans had been called upon by the conservative Republican president to "stand tall." Unabashedly anti-Soviet, Reagan had chastised the "evil empire" and escalated the arms race to an all-time high, believing that the U.S. economy could compete the Soviet bloc into oblivion. By June 1987 the Soviet Union, now led by Mikhail Gorbachev, was in the midst of large-scale reform, both domestically and in its foreign policy. The new Soviet leader first met Reagan in November 1985, and the two leaders got on well. By

June 1987 they had made substantial progress in arms control talks, even verging on agreement to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear forces from Europe. With cold war tensions diminishing, the U.S. relationship with China solid, and the ROK enjoying its "second [economic] takeoff while its northern competitor stagnated, the U.S. State Department in February 1987 granted its representatives abroad permission to talk to their DPRK counterparts. Under Carter such a move would have been considered a sign of weakness and disloyalty to the ROK alliance, but given Reagan's strong support for Chun, manifested in several summits between the two leaders, and his quiet approach to human rights, it came across more as a sign of self-confidence and strength. Adding to Reagan's credibility in applying pressure in 1987 was the example of the critical role the United States had played the previous February in easing President Ferdinand Marcos out of office in the Philippines in the face of a massive display of "people power." The Philippines did not face the threat of outside attack as did South Korea, of course, but by accentuating the external dangers that difference could just as easily make the United States less rather than more tolerant of a regime resisting massive internal pressures for reform.

The domestic circumstances of the Reagan administration added credibility to its pressure for reform in Korea. Whereas in 1980 Carter had faced major pressure from the right, Reagan's concern was from the opposite side. The Democrats had recaptured control of the Senate in 1986 and now dominated both houses of Congress. They were anything but gentle in addressing aspects of Reagan's foreign policy, which despite the promising direction of Soviet-American relations, received embarrassing scrutiny as a result of congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra affair. Reagan also had pressure from Capitol Hill on foreign trade policy. With the ROK running a hefty surplus in its trade balance with the United States, Reagan faced a potentially winning coalition of protectionists and human rights advocates in favor of imposing strong restrictions on imports from the peninsula. Both Congress and the press paid considerably more attention to the South Korean crisis in 1987 than they had in 1980 and instead of "Avoid another Iran" the message was now "Why not another Philippines?" Reporting of such sentiment was widespread in the ROK press.

This context left the top U.S. representative in Seoul ideally positioned to transmit to Chun Washington's appeal for restraint. Ambassador Lilley was a tall, robust man with an air of enormous self-

assurance. Unlike Gleysteen, he served a president who was highly popular with the American military. There is no evidence that active or retired officers with contacts in the ROK did anything but support him in the crisis. Indeed, this time it was American officials who received word from ROK army officers of their discontent with Chun.<sup>32</sup> We still lack internal documents from the period, but it is hard to imagine Lilley on the eve of his meeting with Chun on June 19 wiring home as Gleysteen had seven years before that the United States "would lose all our friends within the civilian and military leadership" if it quibbled over use of the army in an emergency. The message now, it appears, was simple and direct: the United States did not support army involvement in maintaining internal order, and if such involvement occurred it could easily put the Korean-American security relationship in jeopardy. Lilley's message of the nineteenth was undoubtedly repeated several days later by an important visitor from Washington, Gaston Sigur.

Chun faced one more external pressure that involved the United States. This was the fear that a crackdown and major bloodshed would seriously compromise Seoul's hosting of the Olympic Games the following year. One possibility was that a crackdown would spark a move by the Soviets and their allies to boycott the event, but a far more likely and frightening development would have been its relocation by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to an entirely different location. During June both the American and the South Korean press carried stories of this possibility, which clearly was receiving consideration by the IOC. Los Angeles, the host in 1984, was the obvious alternative. Nothing so symbolized the ROK's coming of age as a world player as did Seoul's winning of the 1988 Olympics over Nagoya, Japan. Nothing could so compromise the accomplishments of Chun as a ruler as the loss of the Games due to his unwillingness to accommodate the wishes of his people. As much as Chun craved power and held democratic principles in contempt, this prospect surely gave him pause.

We are left with the question of why the American course differed in 1980 and 1987. It bears reiterating at the start that the differences were not ones of black and white but rather of shades of gray; that in both 1980 and 1987 the United States tried to encourage liberalization but without undermining ROK security or sparking a sharp nationalistic reaction. In the later year, however, the Americans at the critical moment weighted their message more forcefully on the side of change and took greater pains throughout to ensure that that

message got out to the Korean public. The question is why.

As with the analysis of Chun's contrasting decisions of May 1980 and June 1987, conditions within South Korea provide the appropriate starting point. Certainly the expressions of support for the students by the middle class in 1987 gave the Americans a sense that Chun faced a mass uprising, which he had not seven years earlier. There was no question in 1980 that the army could halt the overt unrest if it chose to do so. The surprise, to the Americans at least, was that elements of the army so overreacted in carrying out their task that they set off a major, if local, uprising. Once it had occurred, however, American officials, while urging their Korean counterparts to employ as little force as possible in bringing it to an end, had no doubt that, lest it spread, it must be suppressed within a finite period.<sup>33</sup> In 1987, in contrast, there was a sense by June 10 that the suppression of dissent would require protracted and bloody military operations made all the more problematic by hints of disunity within the army. To American observers, then, the dictates of security vis-a-vis North Korea were weighted far more on the side of accommodating rather than suppressing dissent.

The analysis so far speaks more to U.S. actions in May 1980 and June 1987 than to the weeks and months leading up to those periods of intense crisis. The unavailability of internal documents from the fall of 1986 to June 1987 renders us incapable of determining whether or not American observers anticipated the sentiments of the South Korean middle class in advance of its appearance in the streets in June. What we can say, though, is that the United States expected trouble during 1987 well beforehand and made some effort to prepare for it. From October 1979 to May 1980, on the other hand, the Americans reacted ad hoc to a series of surprises-Park's assassination, Chun's military putsch, Chun's takeover of the KCIA, and finally the imposition of "extreme martial law." An essential part of the sense of anticipation in 1987 was the memory of what had happened before and the knowledge of its impact-of Chun's deceit, both of American officials as to his intentions and of the Korean people as to the U.S. role, and of the negative influence on public sentiments toward the United States in South Korea. By 1987 the Americans had had years to observe the impact of the events of 1980 and to prepare for the difficulties that were bound to arise when Chun confronted the end of his term as president.

A major source of the difference in the U.S. courses in 1980 and 1987, then, rests in the simple fact that the first preceded the

second, and by a span of time sufficient to generate reflection and adjustment without clouding memories. The Americans knew in 1987 from hard experience that Chun could not be trusted to keep his promises, that if he cracked down on dissent he would attempt to convey to the public that the United States supported him, and that, unless the United States possessed the means of communicating directly with the Korean people, they were likely to believe Chun. The Americans made effective use of historical analogy to help avert a disruption in United States-Korea relations of potentially far greater magnitude than had occurred in 1980.

Yet it would be inappropriate to end by complimenting the United States for what it did right. Ultimately the credit for democratization in South Korea in 1987 rests with the South Korean middle class, the salarymen and women of Seoul and other cities who took to the streets in June to show their support for change. Perhaps they also had learned a lesson from 1980-and perhaps that lesson is the same as the one inscribed on the Korean War Memorial in Washington, DC: "Freedom is not free."



## Notes

1. See James N. Young, "Factors Hindering Korean Development: The 12/12 Incident and Its Aftermath," unpublished paper delivered at the Conference on Change and Continuity in Korean Culture, May 1998, University of South Carolina (copy in author's possession). In 1979 and 1980, Young was U.S. deputy military attache in Seoul.
2. As quoted in Mark L. Clifford, *Troubled Tiger: Businessmen, Bureaucrats, and Generals in South Korea* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 156.
3. Gleysteen to Muskie, May 17, 1980, in collection of State Department documents on U.S.-Korea relations during 1979 and 1980, declassified in 1993 (hereafter referred to as SD). Copy in author's possession
4. This conclusion is based on my reading of U.S. Embassy, ROK, International Communication Agency, "Press Translations," from May 20 to the end of the month, and the *New York Times*, May 15, 16, 18, and 19, 1980.
5. As quoted in Young Whan Kihl, *Politics and Policies in Divided Korea: Regimes in Contest* (London: Westview Press, 1984), p. 81.
6. Robert G. Rich, Jr., "U.S. Ground Force Withdrawal from Korea: A Case Study in National Security Decision Making," prepared for the U.S. Department of State, Executive Seminar in National and International Affairs, Twenty-fourth Session, 1981-



82, copy in author's possession.

7. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997), pp. 105-15; William H. Gleysteen, Jr., "Korea: A Special Target of American Concern," in David D. Newsom, ed., *The Diplomacy of Human Rights* (Washington: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 90-93.

8. Gleysteen to the Secretary of State, October 28 and November 1, 1979, and the Secretary of State to the American Embassy, Seoul, November 1, 1979, SD.

9. Secretary of State (from Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke) to Ambassador Gleysteen, December 4, 1979, and Gleysteen to Holbrooke, December 7, 1979, SD.

10. Gleysteen to the Secretary of State, December 13, 14, and 15, 1979, and the Secretary of State to Gleysteen, December 13 and 15, 1979, SD. In an interview in Washington, DC, on November 4, 1997, Gleysteen informed me of Wickham's strong objection to his meeting with Chun. Wickham did not meet with Chun until February 14, 1980.

11. U. S. Embassy, Seoul, USIS Press Office, "Events in Kwangju, Republic of Korea, in May 1980," June 19, 1989, copy in author's possession.

12. Gleysteen to the Secretary of State, January 29, 1980, SD.

13. Secretary of State to Gleysteen, May 3, 1980, SD.

14. Gleysteen to the Secretary of State, May 6, 8, and 9, 1980, and Secretary of State to Gleysteen, May 8, 1980, SD.

15. Young, "Factors Hindering Korean Development," pp. 10-11.

16. The quotes are from two messages sent by Gleysteen to the Secretary of State on May 17, 1980, in SD.

17. The conclusions in this paragraph are based on U.S. cable traffic between Washington and Seoul from May 18 to 27, 1980, in SD, and U.S. Embassy, Seoul, "Events in Kwangju." For sharp attacks on U.S. policy during the crisis, see Tim Shorrok, "US Knew of South Korean Crackdown: Ex-Leaders Go on Trial in Seoul," *Journal of Commerce*, February 27, 1996, and "The U.S. Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980," <http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/kwangju3.htm>. For a balanced, well-informed account of U.S. policy in the crisis and its aftermath, see Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas*, pp. 124-38.

18. Secretary of State to AmerEm, Seoul, August 29, 1980, SD.

19. *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1980.

20. On the journal, see the translation of an article in the *Tonga Ilbo* of March 5, 1980, in U.S. Embassy, Seoul, "Press Translations," March 6, 1980. For background on the journal, I am thankful to Bill Maurer and Don Washington, both USIS officials at the time, who discussed its role with me on November 6, 1995, in Seoul.

21. See U.S. Embassy, Seoul, "Press Translations," for the period February 9 to March 10, 1980.

22. See *ibid.*, April 15 through May 31, 1987.

23. See *ibid.*, June 16-19, 1987.
24. See the *New York Times*, June 16, 1987, pp. 1, 16; and June 17, 1987, p. 14
25. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1987, p. 10.
26. Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas*, p. 168.
27. *New York Times*, June 16, 1987, p. 7.
28. Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas*, pp. 169-70.
29. Gleysteen to the Secretary of State, May 8, 1980, SD.
30. Clifford, *Troubled Tiger*, p. 269.
31. Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas*, p. 171.
32. This information was provided me in a telephone interview on November 3, 1997, with a State Department official assigned to the Korea issue in 1987 who wishes to remain anonymous.
33. Author's interview with Gleysteen, November 4, 1997.

South Koreaâ€™United States relations (Korean: í•œë¸, ê´ê³,,; Hanja: éŸ“ç³/4Ž é—œã¸,,; RR: Hanmi gwangye; MR: Hanmi kwan'gye) refers to international relations between the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the United States of America. Relations have been extensive since 1950, when the United States helped establish the modern state of South Korea, also known as the Republic of Korea, and fought on its UN-sponsored side in the Korean War (1950â€™1953). During the subsequent four decades, South Korea experienced tremendous economic, political and military growth, and significantly reduced U.S. dependency. Americaâ€™s pivotal role in creating a separate South Korean state assured that the United States would also have a determinative influence over the countryâ€™s politics, at least during its early years. Yet Americaâ€™s overall role in shaping South Korean politics has also been a very complicated one. While the United States has, on the one hand, often supported dictatorial regimes in Seoul, it has also sought in other ways to contribute to the countryâ€™s democratization.Â This was a somewhat rare combination in Korea during the years after World War II and made him too potentially valuable to ignore. Thus, as Rhee gained political ascendancy in southern Korea, the United States did little to interfere because it saw no viable alternative. of democratization that began in the mid-1980s temporarily disrupted its historical commitment to maintaining strong bilateral ties with Washington by increasing the influence of â€œprogressiveâ€ elites and special interest groups in its political environment.[vi] However, the ROK-US alliance has survived and even flourished due to the decisive influence that Seoulâ€™s central decision-makers have retained in the process.Â First, I briefly examine previous studies on South Koreaâ€™s post-democratization policy behavior toward the United States. The massive South Korean nonviolent campaign against the tradition of authoritarian regimes happened only seven years after the notorious Kwangju Massacre of 1980â€™governmental mass violence that was intended to shut down completely the movements for social justice. From 1980 to 1983 the government tried to â€œcleanseâ€ the society of activists, purging or arresting thousands of public officials, politicians, professors, teachers, pastors, journalists, and students. Activists not arrested went quiet or continued their activities in low profile or secretive ways.Â â€œCivil society and democratization in South Korea.â€ Chapter 4 in Charles K. Armstrong, *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*. second edition, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).