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27 OCT 1979

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SUBJECT: Korean Situation and Future US Policy--INFORMATION MEMORANDUM(U)

Background.

On 25 October 1979 Republic of Korea (ROK) President Pak Chung Hui convened a meeting of senior ROK security and cabinet officials concerned with internal domestic security. KCIA Director Kim Chae Kyu, Presidential Security Force Director Cha Chi Chol, Blue House Senior Secretary Kim Kye Won, and several cabinet ministers were in attendance. During the meeting President Pak severely criticized the officials present for failure to keep him informed on the current domestic situation. He accused the ROK security services of being inaccurate in their assessments of the domestic situation. He felt the primary problem was a lack of communication between the Blue House and the population. The President directed the situation be corrected and that a Complaint Bureau be established.

When Director Kim of the KCIA returned to his office after the meeting with Pak, he was very depressed. His depression had been growing over three months as civil unrest had increased.

On the evening of 26 October 1979 at about 6 p.m., President Pak, KCIA Director Kim, Security Force Chief Cha, and Presidential Secretary Kim met at a house run by the KCIA for dinner.

- During the dinner KCIA Director Kim and Presidential Security Chief Cha got into an argument over security matters. Reportedly President Pak tried to stop the argument. Reports indicate the Director of the KCIA drew a pistol and shot at Cha. President Pak and Cha were both hit. The President's Secretary Kim Kye Won placed the wounded President in his car and rushed him to a hospital. He died enroute.

- General Lew, Deputy Commander, Combined Forces Command, has indicated to the US Embassy that it was the Chief of Presidential Security Cha, not KCIA Director Kim, who shot the President.

- The Ambassador believes this impassioned argument theory has considerable plausibility based on the temperament of the KCIA and Security Chief.

The South Korean government has taken the following actions:

- The Prime Minister Choi Kyu-ha has been named acting President.
- Martial law has been declared but Cheju island has been exempted. This exception allows civilian control of the government to continue.
- Army Chief of Staff General Chong, Sung Hwa has been named martial law administrator.

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- All military leaders have pledged their support of President Choi. Opposition leaders have expressed their regrets and are playing a wait and see game.

North Korea has announced Park's death, but no outward signs of attack preparations or unusual military activity have been noted.

The Korean populace remains calm; curfew has been extended from 2200 to 0400; business is functioning normally; the people are somber and quiet.

The Future.

Evidence provided so far does not support reports of a military coup, but neither does it rule out the possibility.

We do not know and may never know exactly what happened. If the above "fit of rage" explanation is correct, it does not rule out Army Chief of Staff Chong or some other determined individual attempting to turn the situation to his advantage.

- Acting President Choi is a professorial type whose limitations are widely recognized. Indeed, he is already reported to have commented upon the heavy responsibility which has suddenly been thrust upon him.

- General Chong is a man of energy, honesty, drive, and determination. He reportedly has wide support among ROK colonels and below for his reformist initiatives, but many general officers apparently resent those same efforts.

- KCIA seems to be rapidly disappearing at the none too tender hands of its archrival, the Defense Security Command. The latter is in charge of the ongoing investigation and is arresting KCIA members wholesale.

Under the constitution the 3,000 member National Committee for Unification, which functions something like an electoral college, should meet within 90 days to elect a new president. The effectiveness of this procedure is problematic.

US Policy.

A few reports record Korean comments that perhaps this is the time to move toward a more democratic system, and certainly from our perspective this would be the best possible result. However, nothing in Korea's long and turbulent history has prepared them to accept compromise as a political modus vivendi, and the continued severe North Korean threat also militates against a functioning western style democracy. Nevertheless, Korea and Koreans have displayed a remarkable adaptivity, especially over the last 18 years under President Park. Through sensitive and judicious advice we may be able to affect the flow of Korean events at the margins toward a more open system. Our best course of action will be at best initially to


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remain cautious, wait and see who emerges as potential leaders, and be clear but discrete in exerting our influence. In the long run we want a strong, responsible, independent ally in Korea, one that will be a model not only of western economic development, but also of the democratic political system. Such a development would benefit both the west as a whole and the Korean people as individuals. In the short run we want to avoid even the appearance of manipulating a puppet. Fortunately, these goals are compatible.

In sum, our current posture should be threefold:

- Stand staunchly by our ally to discourage North Korean rashness. This has already begun in our strong and prompt press statement and in the demarches to Beijing and Moscow.
- Cautious observation of emerging political currents in Korea. Praising President Park's accomplishments as appropriate but also discretely inserting an occasional reference to his personal integrity (which was unquestioned) and to democracy or the open system toward which he was steering his country (which may in fact be debatable but will be to our purpose to assume).
- Private communication to the new leadership as they are identified of our hopes for a settlement of recent political tensions and the institutionalization of the give and take and open communications of a truly democratic society. We should stress the long-term strength, the resiliency of democracy compared to the brittleness of autocratic regimes.
- We would not expect any significant change in Korean defense policy.


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