In October 1979, the conditions were ripe for a transition to democracy in South Korea, also known as the Republic of Korea (ROK). After two decades of stunning economic growth, the plunge toward recession had begun. Labor unions launched a wave of strikes and demonstrations. Korean students also filled the streets in protest. Churches also lent their support to the movement. Finally, the workers, students and clergymen were joined by the parliamentary opposition, which had prestige but not power. Although the United States customarily favored stability in South Korea, the Carter administration resented the Park dictatorship, both because of its human rights violations and its apparent efforts to bribe American legislators. Under pressure, the Park dictatorship found itself beset by internal divisions, with hard-liners calling for the use of force and soft-liners advocating a measure of compromise with the protesters. This division culminated in the assassination of Park by his own intelligence chief. The reins of power then passed to a provisional government that committed itself to democratic elections and the protection of civil liberties. Yet just six months later, Gen. Chun Doo Hwan, a protégé of Park, violently consolidated his control of the government, ushering in another seven years of dictatorship.

In June of 1987, Chun Doo Hwan found himself in a situation that would have been familiar to Park. Students, workers, church leaders and opposition leaders united once again to oppose the regime. Yet this time, the economy kept growing and the regime remained united. Chun also had an excellent relationship with President Reagan, who hosted Chun at the White House as recently as 1985. Nonetheless, Chun surrendered to the protesters’ demand for free and fair elections and for the restoration of civil liberties. South Korea today is a full-fledged democracy. The puzzle that remains is why South Korea became a democracy specifically in 1987, even though the prospects for a transition were so much more favorable in 1979. Chun clearly had the power to deploy the armed forces in defense of the regime, yet he chose not to do so.

Why not? Three factors account best for the failed transition of 1979-1980 and the success of 1987. First, the personal situation and interests of both Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, his second-in-command, had changed significantly over the years. In 1979-1980, both men were ambitious young generals whose mentor and patron, Park Chung Hee, had just been assassinated. They had no qualms then about shooting their way into power. By 1987, Chun and Roh were political veterans who had presided over a return to the spectacular growth rates of the Park era. They were also determined to cement their legacy both by presiding over the first peaceful transfer of power in the history of the ROK and by hosting the 1988 Summer Olympics. Roh also recognized that he could prevail in a free and fair election, because of a divided opposition. Although reluctant at first, Chun and Roh accepted that compromise best served their interests.

A second factor that accounts for the different outcomes in 1979-1980 and 1987 is the increased unity of the protest movement. The four main constituents of the movement –
students, labor unions, churches and the parliamentary opposition – were the same during both transitions. In both instances, these constituents sought to establish umbrella organizations, or chaeya, that would effectively coordinate the strategy and resources of the movement. In 1987, however, the chaeya achieved a much greater degree of efficiency and solidarity because they learned from the mistakes of the failed transition in 1979-1980.

The third factor that explains the difference between South Korea’s two transitions is the contrast between how the Carter administration and the Reagan administration approached both US-ROK diplomacy and the challenge of democracy promotion. Although strongly committed to human rights, the Carter administration hesitated to challenge the legitimacy of authoritarian governments, preferring to focus on preventing specific actions, such as torture and unjust imprisonment. Thus, while the Carter administration welcomed the democratic opening of 1979, it remained passive when Chun wrested power back from the civilians. Initially, the Reagan administration rejected democracy promotion, preferring to focus on the solidarity of anti-Communist governments, both authoritarian and democratic. Yet over time, the administration reversed its course. Thus, at a critical moment in 1987, President Reagan sent a personal letter to Chun Doo Hwan, insisting that Chun find a peaceful solution to the prevailing crisis. Ironically, Reagan’s word carried considerable weight precisely because Reagan had embraced Chun without hesitation during the early and uncertain days of his regime.

The Two Transitions

Park Chung Hee ruled South Korea for eighteen years. As a young general, he led a coup d’etat that overthrew a recently elected government in 1961. His coup represented a bid for personal power, not an ideological statement. After more than two years in power, Park suddenly called for elections. In spite of the considerable benefits of incumbency, Park prevailed over his opponent by the razor-thin margin of 1.4 percent. Economic growth rapidly accelerated in the mid-1960s, enabling Park to win re-election by a much safer margin in 1967, although the gap narrowed again when Park sought a third term in 1971. In 1972, Park declared martial law. He dissolved the National Assembly, banned political parties and closed the universities. Park then promulgated a new “revitalizing reform” (Yusin) constitution, which lent its name to the final, or Yusin, period of his tenure.

After more than a decade and a half of continuous and rapid growth, as Table 1 shows, a brief interval of economic turbulence brought on the demise of the Park dictatorship. When the price of oil spiraled out of control in 1979, it drove prices higher throughout the South Korean economy, damaging the welfare of millions of wage-earners who were ill equipped to deal with inflation. In the second half of 1979, the economy entered a deep recession. Workers rapidly mobilized against the regime.
Table 1: GDP Growth and Inflation Rates, 1966-80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Real GDP Growth</th>
<th>Inflation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Efforts to suppress the protests only provoked further mobilization, which led to a fatal split among Park’s closest advisers. They disagreed about whether to respond to the pro-democracy movement with intensified force or with an offer of compromise. The main advocate of compromise was Kim Chae Kyu, head of the Korean CIA. On the evening of October 26, 1979, Kim had dinner with President Park. The discussion at dinner led Kim to believe that Park had come down decisively in favor of a hardline approach. In desperation, Kim paid a brief visit to his nearby office, returning with a .38 Smith & Wesson hidden in his pocket. Back in the dining room, Kim shot both Park and his chief bodyguard at point-blank range. When his gun jammed, Kim borrowed another .38 from one of his men to finish off the victims.2

Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha quickly assumed the role of acting president and formed a transitional government. On November 10, Choi announced that the constitution would be amended “to promote democracy” and that new elections would be held. In addition, Choi revoked many of the “emergency decrees” issued by Park and restored the civil rights of Park’s rivals, such as former president Yun Po Sun and opposition leader Kim Dae Jung.
The transition suffered its first setback on December 12, when Maj. Gen. Chun Doo Hwan and Maj. Gen. Roh Tae Woo, in concert with other members of their secret military society, the Hanahoe, launched a rapid and violent operation to arrest the Army’s pro-democracy chief of staff, thus consolidating their control of the military. Chun and Roh gradually reduced Prime Minister Choi and the other civilians to a set of figureheads. On April 14, 1980, Chun illegally appointed himself head of the Korean CIA, provoking a violent wave of student demonstrations. The protests culminated on May 15, when 70-100 thousand students demonstrated in the heart of Seoul. Chun responded by declaring martial law, suspending all political activity, arresting opposition leaders and closing the universities. This brought an end to the protests, except in Kwangju, where an uprising took control of the city from government forces. On May 27, a brutal assault by 20,000 military personnel retook the city. Chun’s control was now complete. In the months after the Kwangju uprising, Chun imposed a new constitution on the ROK and elevated himself to president.

According to the new constitution, the president would serve a single, non-renewable term of seven years in office. In light of Chun’s continual assertions that he would step down from office on schedule, South Koreans began to think of the end of Chun’s term as a potential moment of transition. Chun also implemented a very measured agenda of liberalization once the economy recovered. As part of the agenda, Chun pardoned or rehabilitated hundreds of political prisoners, lifted the ban on political activity by more than 200 opposition figures, and allowed more than one thousand students expelled for political reasons to return to their universities. Chun ultimately sought to construct a convincing democratic façade that would enhance his legitimacy without reducing his power. In February 1985, the regime held legislative elections designed to produce a docile majority in the National Assembly. The balloting process was fair, although the regime’s unusual process for distributing seats enabled its loyalists to win a majority in spite of receiving only 35 percent of the vote, as opposed to 29 percent for the main opposition party, led by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam. In the court of public opinion, the election represented a massive victory for the opposition, because the playing field tilted so heavily toward the government. Turnout at the polls was 84.6 percent, the highest in thirty years. Thus, the electorate interpreted the results as an authentic expression of the will of the people.

Chun clearly understood that his electoral gambit was a failure. Knowing the opposition would demand free and fair elections for president in 1987, Chun sought to evade deliberations about the succession process. If the 1980 constitution remained in force, Chun would be able to install Roh as his successor. In February 1986, the opposition marked the anniversary of the legislative elections by launching a campaign to revise the constitution. After extensive protests and rioting, Chun compromised by allowing the formation of a special committee in the National Assembly to propose a set of constitutional revisions. The committee’s negotiations dragged on until April 1987, when Chun suspended the process. The streets remained calm.

Chun attempted to cement his victory on June 10 by announcing the nomination of Roh Tae Woo to become the next president. This time, the opposition exploded. Violent protests erupted across South Korea on the day of Chun’s announcement. Led by students, the crowds attacked the police with fists, blunt objects and gasoline bombs.
The police responded with nightsticks and tear gas, clouds of which rolled through the streets of South Korea. The two Kims called for non-violent protests against the regime, of which there were many, yet it was student violence that pushed the regime to the brink. In spite of their fury, the protests and riots resulted in few fatalities on either side. Yet the police were rapidly becoming exhausted, whereas the students’ numbers and energy seemed inexhaustible. Chun still had the option of mobilizing the armed forces, yet this approach carried with it the risk of extreme violence, perhaps bloodier than the Kwangju Uprising of 1980. Nine days into the riots, Chun issued an order for military mobilization but rescinded it later that day. As the riots surged into their third week, Chun accepted that he would have to surrender to the protesters’ principal demands: direct presidential elections and the restoration of civil liberties.

On June 29, 1987, Roh Tae Woo announced the reforms the protesters had demanded. This marked the moment of transition, when the regime accepted that a new system of government would be put in place in South Korea. Yet from Chun and Roh’s perspective, their government had lost the battle in order to win the war. It was public knowledge that both Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung considered themselves to be the democratic opposition’s natural candidate for president. As Chun and Roh correctly calculated, the Kims would split the opposition vote, allowing Roh to prevail with a small plurality. In the months leading up to the presidential vote in December, the opposition sought to reconcile its two candidates and produce a unified ticket, but to no avail. In the meantime, the constitution was revised to replace the electoral college with a single round of voting for president. Had the opposition insisted on a two-round election, in which the top two finishers in the first round had to compete in a run-off, one of the Kims would presumably have prevailed. But the opposition showed no interest, allowing Roh to prevail with 35.6 percent of the vote, just several points more than each of the two Kims. Initially, both Kims responded to their defeat by alleging a corruption of the vote, yet the charges were soon withdrawn.

In 1992, Kim Young Sam won the next presidential election by forging an alliance with Roh. In spite of his alliance with Roh, Kim moved aggressively to implement democratic reforms. In 1996, a South Korean court convicted both Chun and Roh of treason and mutiny, sentencing Chun to death and Roh to many years in prison. In 1997, Kim Dae Jung prevailed in the ROK’s third free presidential election. His inauguration resolved the last concerns that the transition might be reversed. As president-elect, Kim pardoned both Chun and Roh.

*The Chaeya*

In both 1979 and 1987, South Korea’s authoritarian regimes had to face down broad and deep coalitions committed to a democratic opening. The 1987 coalition was much more tightly organized, however. In 1979, the diverse array of groups opposed to the regime struggled to establish umbrella organizations, or chaeya, that could coordinate the coalition’s efforts. In 1987, the effort to establish chaeya organizations was far more effective. A second critical difference between the two coalitions was the challenge they faced. Initially, both coalitions sought to overthrow dictatorship led by former generals. After the fall of the ancien regime, the respective challenges faced by the two coalitions
diverged. In 1987, the struggle basically ended with Chun and Roh’s capitulation to the opposition’s demands. In 1979, the opposition still had to contend with a bloody-minded army determined to restore its control by any means necessary. This challenge was more than the chaeya could bear, at least in the short-term.

The first chaeya began to emerge in the early 1970s, after Park Chung Hee imposed the Yusin Constitution. In November 1974, the National Congress for the Restoration of Democracy was founded. It was followed in 1978 and 1979 by the National Coalition for Democracy and the National Coalition for Democracy and Reunification. The organizations participating in these chaeya associations included “religious groups (for example, the Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice), intellectual groups such as the Council of Dismissed Professors, human rights organizations like the Korean Council for the Human Rights Movement, and writers’ groups (the Council of Writers for Practicing Freedom, for instance).” The leadership of the chaeya in the 1970s included “former politicians, religious leaders, scholars, and other professionals and were widely respected for their morality, integrity, experience and caliber.”

The chaeya enjoyed a cooperative relationship with the parliamentary opposition led by Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. However, “the cooperation and alignment between civil society and political society was not through institutionalized channels such as joint organizations. It was aligned instead through individual connections and commitments. Furthermore the main cooperation occurred between religious leaders and opposition party politicians.” In contrast, student groups and labor unions had few close links with the parliamentarians. This notable absence represented a significant organizational flaw, since the students and the unions were so critical to the mass mobilization that threatened the dictatorship.

In spite of its initial defeat by Chun, civil society began to reawaken when the regime began to relax various restrictions on political activity in 1983. In March 1985, two smaller chaeya combined to form the People’s Movement Coalition for Democracy and Reunification (PMCDR). The unity of the opposition also benefited strongly from the decision of student groups, such as the Youth Coalition for Democracy Movement (YCDM), to explicitly support the parliamentary opposition in advance of the 1985 legislative elections. This was the first time since the early 1960s that students identified themselves with a political party.

In late 1985, the PMCDR and the democratic opposition in the National Assembly launched a campaign to collect ten million signatures in support of revising the constitution. Together, they formed the National Coalition for Democracy Movement (NCDM). This tight alliance allowed the pro-democracy coalition to prevail when the government sought to disrupt the campaign with a barrage of raids and arrests. Such tactics were met with massive rallies that forced the government back onto the defensive. However, the PMCDR broke with the NCDM when the two Kims agreed to negotiate with the regime on the subject of the constitution. After Chun suspended those negotiations, a new umbrella organization emerged, known as the National Movement Headquarters for a Democratic Constitution (NMHDC). In the critical period between June 10 and June 29, 1987, the NMHDC organized several massive demonstrations, including the June 26 Peace Parade that mobilized one million protesters across South
Three days later, Roh Tae Woo announced that the government would surrender to the opposition’s demands.

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**The United States and Democracy in South Korea**

Regime change in South Korea has always reflected the influence of American diplomacy alongside the imperatives of South Korean domestic politics. Since the founding of the ROK, South Korean actors have initiated every transition from one regime to another. South Korean actors have also exerted the greatest influence on the course and outcome of those transitions. Yet American decisions, expressed in terms of both actions and acts of omission, have made certain outcomes far more or far less probable than they would have been otherwise.

The United States’ influence on South Korean politics was greatest in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The arrival of Allied forces in 1945 brought an end to 35 years of Japanese colonialism on the Korean peninsula. Whereas American forces occupied the peninsula south of the 38th parallel, Soviet forces held the territory north of that line. As in Germany, the onset of the Cold War resulted in the emergence of two separate republics, each one diplomatically aligned with its respective occupying power. On May 10, 1948, Koreans on the southern half of the peninsula cast their votes in a US-supervised election. Before the election, on April 5, the US commander in Korea, Lt. Gen. John R. Hodge issued a “Proclamation on the Rights of the Korean People” very similar both to the American Bill of Rights and the chapter on rights and duties of the US-drafted Japanese Constitution. Hodge’s proclamation declared, among other things, that all Koreans “are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection under the law, and no privileges of sex, birth, occupation or creed are recognized.” Hodge’s proclamation influenced the constitution adopted by the newly elected National Assembly on July 12. However, the Koreans responsible for drafting the constitution were already inclined in a democratic direction as a result of the Allied victory in World War II and the imperative of distinguishing South Korea from its communist counterpart to the north. On August 15, 1948, the ROK was officially founded by President Syngman Rhee, winner of an election within the Assembly. Rhee was a veteran nationalist who had spent many years in the United States but rarely gotten along well with American policymakers.13

From the founding of the ROK through the mid-1970s, the US government displayed an uneven interest in South Korean democracy. Always concerned with stability, the US tended to favor democratization when it advanced the cause of stability. After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Rhee’s government became progressively less democratic. Preoccupied with the threat from the North, the US government made little effort to restrain Rhee authoritarian tendencies in the 1950s. Yet when the ROK government rigged the 1960 elections and protesters poured into the streets, the US helped ease Rhee out of office, paving the way for a democratic transition. When Park Chung Hee launched his *coup d’etat* in 1961, the US did not contest the outcome, but did pressure Park to hold elections, which he did in 1963. Park’s declaration of martial law in 1972 coincided with a period of US retrenchment in Asia, during which it withdrew
from Vietnam and reached out to China. As a practitioner of realpolitik, President Nixon was not inclined to confront Park about internal matters.

The contrasting outcomes of the South Korean transitions in 1979-1980 and 1987 are attributable in part to the very different approaches to those events taken by the Carter administration and the Reagan administration, respectively. While the Carter administration welcomed the democratic opening of 1979 and lent its support to the interim government, the administration shied away from an active effort to ensure the transition’s success. The turbulence of the US-ROK relationship in 1977 and 1978 was one reason. In addition, the crisis in US-Iranian relations made the administration extremely averse to any course of action that risked further instability.

The Reagan administration approached the US-ROK relationship from a very different perspective. Initially, the Reagan administration rejected democracy promotion in principle, preferring to focus on the solidarity of anti-Communist governments, both authoritarian and democratic. As a result, Reagan developed a relationship of trust and confidence with Chun Doo Hwan. Yet over time, the administration came to favor democratic transitions even at the expense of strongly anti-Communist dictatorships. Thus, at a critical moment in 1987, President Reagan sent a personal letter to Chun Doo Hwan, insisting that Chun find a peaceful solution to the prevailing crisis. Ironically, Reagan’s word carried considerable weight precisely because Reagan had embraced Chun without hesitation during the early and uncertain days of his regime.

The mutual antagonism of Jimmy Carter and Park Chung Hee resulted in a low point in US-ROK relations. As a candidate for president, Carter spoke in favor of a phased withdrawal of US forces from Korea, planned in consultation with both the ROK and Japan. Yet during his first months in the White House, Carter surprised the ROK by announcing a schedule for the withdrawal of all US combat forces within 4-5 years. The humiliation for Park was considerable, even though Carter ultimately abandoned his plans in response to congressional opposition. Carter also antagonized the Park regime by describing its human rights violations as “repugnant.” In addition, the US-ROK relationship suffered as a result of congressional investigations into the influence-buying operations of South Korean businessman Park Tong Son. After the Department of Justice indicted Park on thirty-six counts of bribery and similar offenses, Carter requested his extradition. Park Chung Hee refused. President Park also denied that he had any knowledge of Park Tong Son’s activities, although that denial lacked credibility. The legal ramifications of the scandal were minimal, yet once again both presidents felt insulted by the other.14

After Park’s assassination, the United States sought to present itself as unobtrusive, but supportive of reform. Two days after the killing, William Gleysteen, the US ambassador in Seoul, sent a cable to Washington elaborating his preferred approach. He wrote:

“I urge that we resist the temptation to suggest architectural designs to the Koreans in favor of: (A) providing reassurance against the threat from the North, (B) urging the observance of ‘constitutional processes’ and (C) gently working through all channels toward political liberalization. We should avoid critical public comment or punishing actions unless and until the new regime has blotted its copybook.”15
The challenge facing the United States was how to favor liberalization both gently and effectively when the partisans of authoritarianism imposed no such restraints on themselves. Chun and Roh’s violent takeover of the ROK military on December 12, 1979 represented the first test of the United States’ good intentions. Gen. John Wickham, the US commander in Korea, was furious because Chun and Roh had brazenly ignored their obligation to inform the national headquarters before effecting the movement of troops. Yet the only price Chun had to pay for his actions was to sit through a lecture from Amb. Gleysteen and Gen. Wickham two days after the takeover. According to the cable Gleysteen sent back to Washington, the ambassador told Chun “bluntly and directly” that his actions had threatened the ROK’s progress toward freedom and stability. Gleysteen then informed the State Department that “Chon [sic] understood our message clearly.”

Gen. Wickham was less confident. He reported back to the Pentagon that “Chun impressed me as a ruthlessly ambitious, scheming and forceful man who believes he is destined to wear the purple [presidential sash]…He is on the make, has a taste for power, and knows how to use it.” Nonetheless, Wickham argued for a “hands-off-response” because he neither believed that it was Washington’s place to interfere in Korean domestic politics nor that Washington could do so effectively. In January and February 1980, Wickham and Gleysteen gave some consideration to supporting a counter-coup within the military by anti-Chun generals, but ultimately decided against it. By March, Gleysteen had even begun to defend Chun, reporting back that the United States “should resist oversimplifying Korean politics by making Chun Doo Hwan the sinister source of all evil.”

Even after Chun imposed martial law in May, the United States hesitated to question his authority. Meeting on May 22, 1980, in the midst of the violence in Kwangju, the National Security Council decided that the American approach to the ROK government should entail “in the short term support, in the longer term pressure for political evolution.” A memo for the national security adviser prepared the day before the meeting laid out the justification for this approach in greater detail. It listed the United States’ objectives in South Korea as:

1. Maintain security on the Korean peninsula and strategic stability in Northeast Asia. (Do not contribute to “another Iran” – a big Congressional concern.)
2. Express a carefully calibrated degree of disapproval, public and private, towards recent events in Korea. (But not in a way which could contribute to instability by suggesting we are encouraging opposition to the Government.)

Despite its initial confidence that the defense of human rights could enhance American security, the Carter administration had now succumbed to the fear that the defense of human rights would damage American security. Ironically, the Carter administration found itself in a position where defending human rights might “contribute to instability” precisely because it had done so little to strengthen democracy and deter a military coup in the months after Park’s assassination.

In its final months in office, the Carter administration co-operated with incoming Reagan administration officials to save the life of Kim Dae Jung, who had been sentenced to death for his dissidence against Chun’s new regime. This surprising instance of co-
operation effectively illustrates how little difference remained between the Carter and Reagan approaches, even though Carter embraced human rights in principle whereas Reagan prioritized anti-Communism. In August 1980, Carter wrote a private and impassioned letter to Chun asking him to spare Kim’s life. This effort to save an individual without challenging the system responsible for his repression had become characteristic of Carter’s human rights initiatives. Also characteristically, the Reagan administration sought to save Kim’s life because of outside pressure, not because of an actual concern for Kim. Richard Allen, the incoming National Security Adviser, recognized that Kim’s death would provoke outrage at home and abroad. In the midst of such outrage, it would become impossible for the United States to help Chun consolidate his four-month-old regime, strengthen the US-ROK security relationship and prevent North Korea from taking advantage of tensions in the West. Thus, Allen negotiated a reprieve for Kim in exchange for an invitation for Chun to visit the White House. According to Richard Armitage, who served as a member of Reagan’s transition team in the months before his inauguration, “It was an easy deal.” Both sides were willing to compromise in order to promote their shared interest in a stronger US-ROK relationship. On January 21, 1981, the day after Reagan’s inauguration, the administration announced that Chun would soon be arriving for a visit. Less than two weeks later, Chun became the first head of state to visit Reagan at the White House.

In June 1982, Reagan reversed his public stand against democracy promotion. In a speech before the British Parliament, Reagan described the spread of democracy across the globe as essential to the free world’s ultimate victory over Communism. Reagan also observed that democracy rested on a broad foundation of rights and liberties, not just on fair elections. The practical implication of Reagan’s new stance was the founding, in 1983, of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Even so, few journalists or scholars – let alone Democrats – attributed much credibility to Reagan’s claim that the United States would oppose not just dictatorships of the left but also of the right. Archival evidence suggests, however, that Reagan, as usual, meant exactly what he said in public, but did not have a clear sense of how to implement the sweeping commitment he had made.

In the months before Reagan’s visit to South Korea in November 1983, there was little discussion of how his new commitment to democracy promotion would affect his close relationship with Chun Doo Hwan. In the weeks just prior to Reagan’s departure, the White House focused its energy on arms control issues that threatened to divide the United States from Western Europe. This brief interval was a memorable one for Robert McFarlane, who had just been promoted to national security adviser. Richard Armitage, then serving as the Pentagon executive responsible for military relations with the Asia-Pacific region, recalls that political reform in South Korea was not a major concern at the time. Speaking before the National Assembly in Seoul, Reagan withheld direct criticism of the regime but firmly insisted that democracy was the goal toward which South Korea must strive in spite of the ever-present threat from the North. The American president declared:

The development of democratic political institutions is the surest means to build the national consensus that is the foundation of true security… We welcome President Chun’s farsighted plans for a constitutional transfer of power in 1988…
Now, this will not be a simple process because of the ever-present threat from the North. But I wish to assure you once again of America’s unwavering support and the high regard of democratic peoples everywhere as you take the bold and necessary steps toward political development.\textsuperscript{28}

The State Department’s internal summaries of Reagan’s discussions with Chun show that Reagan expressed his clear support for liberalization. In a preparatory memo for the meeting, Robert McFarlane informed Reagan that “your second meeting with President Chun should focus on political liberalization and economic issues. Although Chun will not welcome a discussion of the Korean domestic political situation, he will expect you to refer to it and to express support for further liberalization.”\textsuperscript{29} McFarlane recalls that Reagan’s polite and friendly manner softened the prodemocracy message given to Chun. According to McFarlane, “President Reagan’s tendency was … to never lecture an ally.” Reagan’s emphasis remained on the brutality and unpredictability of North Korea and its Soviet patrons. Moreover, Reagan “wanted this to be a visit without rancor in any way, or seeming to hector the government.”\textsuperscript{30}

Surprisingly, Chun did not resist a discussion of political reform. Instead, the South Korean president told Reagan that the ROK’s turbulent postwar history had led “the people [to] believe that a change of presidents is only possible through violence. This is a very dangerous way of thinking … My term is scheduled to end in 1988 and it will.”\textsuperscript{31} Of course, Chun did not specify how his successor would be chosen, nor is there any indication that Reagan pressed for a clarification.

The tension between Reagan’s friendship with Chun and his commitment to democracy promotion did not flare up again until just before South Korea’s legislative elections in February 1985. Days before the election, Kim Dae Jung returned to South Korea from his exile in the United States. Kim arrived with an entourage of prestigious American observers, including scholars, retired diplomats, and Democratic members of Congress. The observers’ purpose was to prevent Kim from sharing the fate of Filipino opposition leader Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, who was murdered on the tarmac of the Manila airport after his return from exile in the United States. Although Kim arrived safely, ROK security officers beat and threw to the ground a number of the American observers.\textsuperscript{32} Reagan told journalists that the melee had resulted from “bad judgment on both sides” and that the incident “tended to hide the fact that Korea, South Korea, has made great strides toward democracy… Their democracy is working.”\textsuperscript{33} Yet as the \textit{Washington Post} pointed out, the assault on Kim’s entourage took place just one day after Reagan had declared in his State of the Union address that “Freedom is not the sole prerogative of a chosen few; it is the universal right of all God’s children…our mission is to nourish and defend freedom and democracy, and to communicate these ideals everywhere we can.” If so, then the assault on Kim’s entourage was an assault on the principles that Reagan had so passionately sworn to defend. And so, the \textit{Post} asked, “What is [Reagan] going to do about it?”\textsuperscript{34} Just four days later, after the opposition’s stunning performance in the legislative elections, the \textit{Post} offered Reagan an apology. Its editors asked:

Did some of us perhaps give too much importance to the well-publicized drama of Kim Dae Jung’s return? The image of him as a banned and abused politician seems not to square with the reality of the leeway offered his party in the campaign and with its success at the polls… It remains, however, that President
Chun, partly in response to American “quiet diplomacy,” has been opening up the system somewhat: releasing prisoners, readmitting banned people to academic and political life.\footnote{35}

It is unknown whether Reagan understood that legislative elections were about to take place when he said of the South Koreans that “Their democracy is working.” Nonetheless, the elections validated Reagan’s confidence that change was underway. In April, Chun visited the White House for a second time, where Reagan praised “the steps his government has taken to further promote freedom and democracy.”\footnote{36} This time, there were no negative editorials and Chun’s visit did not even make the front page of either the Post or the Times.

Reagan demonstrated no apparent interest in the protracted negotiations over the presidential succession process that consumed South Korea politics in late 1986 and early 1987. Mid-ranking officials in the administration monitored the negotiations carefully, however. Gaston Sigur, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, actively sought to extract concessions from Chun’s regime. On February 6, 1987, during a public address in New York devoted entirely to the situation in South Korea, Sigur declared that the time had come for the military’s permanent withdrawal from the nation’s politics. According to Sigur, the security of the ROK in the midst of constant threats from the North demanded a popular government no less than it did a strong army.\footnote{37} Somewhat recklessly, Sigur delivered his address without prior approval from any of his superiors. At first, Secretary of State George Shultz was outraged by Sigur’s insubordination. Yet just a few weeks later, when Shultz visited Seoul to meet with Chun, Shultz said of Sigur’s speech that “every sentence, every word, every comma is the policy of our government.”\footnote{38} In public, Shultz was less animated but no less firm. At a press conference following his discussions with Chun, Shultz announced that “The United States, as a friend and ally, supports the aspirations of all Koreans for continuing political development, respect for basic human rights and free and fair elections.”\footnote{39}

In the spring of 1987, Washington paid little attention to the situation in South Korea, in part because the capital was consumed with the scandal known as Iran-contra. In Seoul, however, US Ambassador James Lilley sought to lay the foundation for gradual reform without compromising the ROK’s stability. In November 1986, Lilley had replaced Amb. Richard “Dixie” Walker, Reagan’s first ambassador to Seoul. Walker was a staunch advocate of close relations between the US and ROK governments. Walker also had a habit of making flippant remarks that antagonized his critics. According to Don Oberdorfer, the Washington Post’s correspondent for Northeast Asia at the time, “Dixie, he was not the easiest person for a correspondent to deal with… He had his own agenda, so to speak… He was a decent guy, he was a kind of avuncular figure… I never had the sense he was telling me what he was really thinking.”\footnote{40} Amb. Lilley recalls that Walker was unpopular with the professional diplomats at the US embassy in Seoul and that even State Department officials in Washington “took hard hits” at Walker. In addition, Walker bore the resentment of prominent scholars of East Asian affairs in the United States, who were fierce critics of the Chun dictatorship. Upon his arrival in Seoul, Amb. Lilley was scarcely more popular than his predecessor. Most of Walker’s critics objected to Lilley’s appointment as ambassador, in the expectation that his diplomacy would resemble Walker’s.\footnote{41}
During the process of his confirmation as ambassador, Lilley came to the conclusion that “Voices from the legislative corridors of Washington as well as from the halls of the State Department were pushing, loudly and crudely, for the primacy of democracy in the South Korean equation.” Lilley resented those who insisted that the pursuit of security and reform were mutually exclusive. Among those he singled out was Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), who asked Lilley at his confirmation hearings, “What do you place first: security or democracy?” Lilley’s approach to the US-ROK relationship stood in contrast to the approach of both his subordinates at the embassy and his superior in Washington, Gaston Sigur. Whereas Sigur made a point of visiting Kim Dae Jung on all of his trips to Korea, Lilley resisted the pressure to meet with Kim during his first months as US ambassador in Seoul. Lilley recalls that many of his colleagues wanted him to follow the example set by Amb. Harry Barnes, a forceful advocate of democracy and human rights during his tenure in a number of South American capitals in the 1980s.

In the final weeks before the explosion of protests and riots that brought down the dictatorship, Sigur and Lilley continued to serve as the two faces of American diplomacy in South Korea. Although not apparently by design, Sigur and Lilley performed a sort of “good cop, bad cop” routine, in which the Assistant Secretary demanded concessions from the regime, while the Ambassador assured Chun and Roh of America’s friendship. During his several visits to Seoul in this period, Sigur continued to make a point of meeting with Kim Dae Jung, who remained under house arrest at the time. On one occasion, the government sought to intimidate Sigur by having the security detail guarding Kim’s house rock Sigur’s car so hard that it almost flipped over. Lilley describes this as “a scare tactic of the crudest form.” Yet rather than granting Sigur’s requests to join the Assistant Secretary for his meetings with Kim Dae Jung, Lilley held back. He later wrote:

“I kept more quiet about my work, reassuring leaders that they had US support and then making sure they understood our hope that democratic change would come in the form of open elections, greater freedom of the press, and genuine opposition parties. I couldn’t be effective as the US ambassador if alienated from my Korean counterparts.”

Among Lilley’s most controversial decisions in this period was to attend the electoral convention of Chun and Roh’s Democratic Justice Party (DJP) in early June 1987. The US embassy’s own political counselor told Lilley that his attendance amounted to complicity in a democratic charade. Sixty other ambassadors boycotted the convention. Yet Roh Tae Woo personally expressed his gratitude to Lilley for his attendance, observing that there had been considerable pressure for Lilley to join the boycott.

In keeping with Chun’s wishes, the convention nominated Roh to succeed Chun as president. When announced in public on June 10, 1987, Roh’s nomination sparked the wave of protests and riots that ultimately brought about a democratic transition. On the evening of June 10, student protesters occupied the Myungdong Cathedral in downtown Seoul. The government considered evicting the students by force. Lilley, however, counseled against such a reckless move. Meeting with the ROK foreign minister on June 13, Lilley said flat out, “Don’t go into the cathedral with troops. It will reverberate all over the world.” The government stood down and resolved the situation peacefully by relying on priests to serve as intermediaries with the students.
The explosion in South Korea caught Washington off-guard. Neither the president nor the secretary of state nor any other high-ranking official made a public statement about the events in South Korea. Although some within the administration suggested sending a presidential emissary to Seoul, others felt that confronting Chun in a public manner might provoke a backlash. Eventually, a consensus emerged around a proposal to send a private letter from Reagan to Chun counseling restraint.\textsuperscript{48} The precise origins of this approach are difficult to identify. During Reagan’s second term, the White House, State Department and Pentagon coordinated their policies toward East Asia by means of a weekly meeting on Monday afternoons known as the “EA [East Asia] informal”. The principal participants in these meetings were Gaston Sigur from the State Department, Richard Armitage from the Pentagon and James Kelly from the NSC staff at the White House. A critical influence on this group’s thinking with regard to Korea was its successful and bloodless effort to facilitate a democratic transition in the Philippines in 1986.\textsuperscript{49}

The group had several reasons to believe that a letter from Reagan to Chun, rather than a more confrontational approach, might be sufficient to prevent bloodshed and promote reform in Seoul. First of all, “The South Korean military … had a big hangover from Kwangju.” Although Chun was hardly repentant, many officers were ashamed of the military for killing hundreds of the civilians they were supposed to protect. Chun himself was constrained by the upcoming Olympics and the potential for the games to be cancelled in the event of major violence. The members of the EA informal also believed that Roh Tae Woo was “far more flexible” than Chun Doo Hwan. In several discussions with Roh, members of the group had suggested that Roh would be able to prevail in free and fair elections as a consequence of the opposition’s inability to unite behind a single candidate, either Kim Dae Jung or Kim Young Sam.\textsuperscript{50} The EA informal’s perception of Roh as more flexible than Chun was shared by others. Lilley recalls that “Roh was a different kind of man.”\textsuperscript{51} In addition, Roh cultivated a close relationship with Don Oberdorfer, the correspondent for the Washington Post, in spite of the paper’s constant condemnations of the dictatorship. Oberdorfer recalls that Roh’s “eagerness” to talk was “extraordinary.”\textsuperscript{52}

Reagan’s letter to Chun was moderate in tone but delivered in a forceful manner. Composed by the president’s advisers, “the missive was couched in sympathetic, gentle, and inoffensive language, which Reagan preferred when dealing with allies.”\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, the contents of the letter were vague and referred to the crisis at hand indirectly at best. For example, the letter observed that “Dialogue, compromise, and negotiation are effective ways to solve problems and maintain national unity.”\textsuperscript{53} Delivering the letter in a time of crisis presented a challenge. The South Korean ambassador to Washington, Kim Kyung Won, advised Amb. Lilley to present the letter to Chun in person, rather than dispatching it through the corridors of the Foreign Ministry. The letter from Washington arrived in Seoul on the night of Wednesday, June 17. On Thursday, the Foreign Ministry informed the US Embassy via phone that Chun would not receive Lilley. The US political counselor, the third-ranking official at the Embassy, then demanded a meeting with a Ministry representative, only to be given the same reply as before. Only after the political counselor lost his temper and began to yell at one of his South Korean
counterparts did the Foreign Minister himself place a phone call to Lilley. Chun would agree to meet with the American ambassador on Friday, June 19.\textsuperscript{54}

Lilley was invited to meet Chun at the Presidential Palace at 2pm on Friday. At 10am, Chun had met with his defense minister, intelligence chief, and uniformed chiefs of staff. Chun ordered the deployment of battle-ready troops across the country by 4am the next morning. Plans were made to arrest opposition leaders. Before visiting Chun at the Palace, Lilley conferred with the commander of US forces in Korea, Gen. William J. Livesey. The ambassador informed the general of his intention to advise Chun against the use of force. Livesey said nothing. In an unusual departure from his conservative style, Lilley chose to interpret the general’s silence as consent for a forceful demarche to President Chun. Lilley was determined to reinforce “Reagan’s amicable letter with firm and unambiguous statements about the US position regarding the declaration of martial law.”\textsuperscript{55} Lilley ventured to Chun that the imposition of martial law would risk undermining the US-ROK alliance and result in another massacre as disastrous as the one at Kwangju. Lilley told Chun, “This is the American position. The [U.S. military] command is with me. I speak for all of the United States.”\textsuperscript{56}

In addition to the administration, Congress sought to send its own message to Chun and his supporters. Resolutions calling for free and fair elections in South Korea passed both houses without a single dissenting vote. Remarkably, both Republicans and Democrats embraced the Wilsonian proposition that promoting democracy enhanced US national security rather than sowing chaos. Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), observed that “If the South Korean people are able to freely choose their own government, they will not hesitate to defend it.”\textsuperscript{57} Some Democrats went further and sought to deploy economic sanctions against the Chun regime. On June 18, the day before Lilley presented Reagan’s letter to Chun, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) introduced the “Democracy in South Korea Act,” which would have imposed sanctions on the ROK because “there is no justification for American trade assistance that subsidizes dictatorship in South Korea.” Sen. Kerry, a co-sponsor of the act, added that “Quiet diplomacy and the familiar refrain of nonintervention in Korea’s internal affairs” are simply not adequate responses to the present crisis … I am cosponsoring and avidly support the proposed sanctions against South Korea.”\textsuperscript{58} The call for sanctions never gathered much support, however. Then, after Roh announced on June 29 that there would be direct presidential elections, the question of sanctions became irrelevant.

Just two or three hours after Lilley met with Chun, Foreign Minister Choi Kwang Soo informed the ambassador by phone that Chun had decided not to declare martial law.\textsuperscript{59} To what degree might one say that American diplomacy promoted the democratic cause in South Korea? More specifically, to what degree might American diplomacy have influenced Chun’s decision not to use the military to crush the pro-democracy movement in 1987 as he had in 1980? Was it a coincidence that Chun made his decision just hours after Lilley delivered Reagan’s letter, or can a direct, causal relationship be established? Lilley himself cautions against believing that American diplomacy was dispositive. He writes that “it was likely the South Koreans themselves,” both generals and diplomats, who “may have influenced President Chun the most.” As Armitage observed, the military itself would not countenance another Kwangju.\textsuperscript{60} Oberdorfer suggests that the younger colonels and generals in the ROK military made known to Chun and Roh their
adamant opposition to the use of lethal force against the protesters. Among authors who have scrutinized the South Korean transition, the most widely cited explanation for Chun’s restraint is that if the violence escalated, the International Olympic Committee might have called off the 1988 Summer Games or awarded them to another host. For Chun, the games symbolized the success of his effort to transform South Korea into a truly modern republic. Although Chun had taken power in the midst of deep recession, he presided over a return to double-digit growth. Chun also took power at an unprecedented low point in US-ROK relations and proceeded to restore an alliance that many South Koreans considered essential to their security. Resorting to the brutal methods of 1980 would have jeopardized that achievement. Finally, given that Roh had strong prospects of winning a free and fair election, Chun could be confident that neither the economic nor the diplomatic pillar of his agenda would crumble as a result of a democratic transition. Ultimately, there is no way to separate and quantify the significance of these critical influences on Chun’s thinking. One can only speculate whether Chun might still have kept the army in its barracks if there were no Summer Games scheduled for 1988, if the United States signaled that violence was acceptable, or if Roh were not a viable candidate in a free and fair election.

**International Influences on Democratic Transitions**

Democracy assistance programs – from training journalists and union organizers to funding exchange programs for teachers and students – are the standard prescription for promoting democratic change. Although, in rare instances, democratic change has followed a foreign invasion, few responsible voices condone violence in the name of democratization. Often, both scholars and practitioners assume that slow-moving assistance programs and unwanted invasions are the only methods for promoting democratic transitions from abroad. Yet the case of South Korea clearly demonstrates that there is a third path – diplomacy – that observers have persistently overlooked in spite of its potential to catalyze democratic transitions.

The words of American envoys, in both public and private, made a significant contribution to the democratic transition in South Korea. In the 1980s, there were no democracy assistance programs to speak of. The United States garrisoned ample forces in South Korea, yet the threat of force against the ROK, let alone its actual use, were unthinkable in light of the common threat that the US and the ROK faced from North Korea. Diplomacy was the only path open to American officials interested in democratic change, but it was an effective one.

One of the drawbacks of promoting democracy via diplomacy is that it is an intensely political and uncertain process. Foreign service officers and civil servants can implement democracy assistance programs once they have been approved by host and donor governments. In contrast, effective diplomacy requires senior officials – up to and including the head of state – to make affirmative decisions in favor of exerting pressure on behalf of democratization. Sometimes, senior officials are simply unwilling to exert such pressure, because they consider other objectives to be more important than democratization. At other times, they may be willing to pay lip service to democratic ideals, but little more. Even when a government begins moving toward a strategy of
promoting democratization via diplomacy, factionalism within the cabinet or executive branch may hinder its implementation. In the case of South Korea, it was a fortunate coincidence that American strategic interests and domestic politics aligned to favor support for democratization in the mid- to late 1980s, when just a few years earlier, exerting such pressure was simply out of the question.

Under what conditions can diplomacy affect the course of a democratic transition? Friendly and trustful relations between the intervening power and the state in transition are extremely important. Chun Doo Hwan and his advisors took the words of American officials very seriously because they believed that the Reagan administration was deeply committed to the security of South Korea. Ironically, Reagan’s initial disinterest in any sort of political reform in South Korea played an essential role in fostering this belief.

There was also a considerable imbalance of power between the United States and South Korea, with the latter depending on the former for its security. Yet if the United States had sought to pressure Chun in the early and uncertain days of his regime, he may have responded as intransigently as Park Chung Hee did to American criticism of his record on human rights. Sometimes, no amount of diplomatic pressure will make a difference if internal conditions militate against a transition.

As illustrated by South Korea, the potential for diplomacy to promote democratic change is greatest when the authority and legitimacy of a regime begin to falter. When democratic activists begin to challenge an authoritarian regime, its dependence on allied governments, especially the most powerful ones, is heightened. The allied government can begin to exert pressure in a way that might have provoked a backlash at another time. The tactics available to the allied government are many. Visiting officials may publicly call for change, either directly or through the news media, as Gaston Sigur and George Shultz did in Seoul. Ambassadors may counsel against specific actions, such as James Lilley’s warning not to use force against the protesters inside of Myungdong Cathedral. Legislatures may issue condemnations, or call for free and fair elections, as Congress did in the midst of the June riots. Yet sometimes, a quiet letter, such as Reagan’s missive to Chun, may carry the most weight. The tactics available are manifold. Their effectiveness depends intimately and ultimately on the situation.62

In the context of the Cold War, the willingness of the United States to pressure its authoritarian allies related closely to the risk that destabilizing the incumbent dictatorship would facilitate its replacement with a Marxist or pro-Soviet regime. Today, the willingness of the United States to exert pressure relates closely to the risk that destabilizing the incumbent dictatorship will facilitate its replacement with a hostile Islamic regime. The fundamental dilemma is the same. How can democratic governments promote democratic transitions abroad without compromising their own security? Even though scholars have not paid much attention to the role of diplomacy in encouraging transitions, American diplomats have begun to rediscover the subject. In a 2006 address at Georgetown University, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice coined the phrase “transformational diplomacy” to describe her efforts to implement the Bush administration’s ambitious but controversial democracy promotion agenda.63 The implications of Rice’s efforts remain unclear, especially now that there is a Democratic president in the White House. Yet diplomacy has comprised an essential component of democracy promotion efforts in the past and can be expected to do so in the future. It is
advisable for scholars to explore the history of such efforts in order to assess what impact they may have in the years ahead.
Endnotes

1 The literal meaning of “chaeya” is “out in the field” or “in the opposition.”
2 The most detailed account of these events in English can be found in Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 109-111.
4 There has been persistent disagreement about the number of civilian fatalities in Kwangju. Whereas government figures put the number at under 200, human rights organizations long insisted that the real death toll was as high as 2,000. Recent research suggests that the actual toll may have been approximately 300. See Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 377-78; Linda Lewis, *Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 69-71.
10 Ibid., 73.
11 Ibid., 85.
12 Ibid., 91-92.
16 Cable – Seoul to Washington, December 15, 1979, Doc. CK3100116064 in the DDRS.
18 Cable – Seoul to Washington, March 17, 1980, Doc. CK3100128699 in the DDRS.
20 Memo – Gregg to Brzezinski, May 21, 1980, Doc. CK3100466142 in the DDRS.
21 South Korean movement activists almost unanimously point out that the US government’s support for Chun after Kwangju – in addition to the widespread speculation in South Korea that the US might have endorsed or condoned the massacre – was the main reason for the consequential alignment of democracy movement and anti-Americanism. After Kwangju, democracy movement in South Korea took an unambiguously anti-American tone. Authors’
interviews with Ki Pyo Chang, Hee Yeon Cho, Se Ung Hahm, Dong Choon Kim, and Choong Il Oh.

22 Letter – Carter to Chun, August 1980, Doc. CK3100117778 in the DDRS. See also Zbigniew Brzezinski’s memo to Carter from September 1980 (Doc. CK3100499249 in the DDRS).

23 Authors’ interview with Richard Armitage, April 29, 2008, Arlington, VA.

24 In public, the Reagan administration denied that it had offered the ROK any incentive to spare Kim’s life. This was not wholly untrue, since Reagan and his advisers had always intended to welcome to Washington the most prominent of the right-wing dictators from which Carter had kept his distance. Thus, in a sense, Allen negotiated a concession from the South Koreans in exchange for an invitation that would have been extended in any event.

25 A. David Adesnik, “Reagan’s ‘Democratic Crusade’: Presidential Rhetoric and the Remaking of American Foreign Policy” (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 2005), passim. Although little noticed either at the time or thereafter, Reagan’s conversion to the democratic cause came in response to the unexpected success of free elections in El Salvador, a small country that had an outsized influence on Reagan’s thinking about global politics (See Adesnik, “Crusade,” 164-214).

26 Authors’ interview with Robert McFarlane, April 28, 2008, Arlington, VA. McFarlane’s predecessor was William “Judge” Clark. McFarlane had served as Clark’s deputy.

27 Authors’ interview with Armitage, April 29, 2008. Armitage’s title was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.


29 Memo – McFarlane to Reagan, November 5, 1983, Doc. CK3100497051 in the DDRS.

30 Authors’ interview with Robert McFarlane, April 28, 2008, Arlington, VA.

31 Memo – Wolfowitz to Shultz, November 19, 1983, National Security Archive – South Korea Collection (hereafter NSA/Korea). In contrast to the Archive’s extensive online and microform holdings, the NSA/Korea collection is available only to on-site visitors.

32 Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun, 381. Cumings, a historian at the University of Chicago, was one of the members of Kim’s entourage. Initial reports claimed that the officers had beaten Kim as well, but Kim later said that this was not so.


37 American Foreign Policy – Current Documents (Washington, DC: Department of State), February 6, 1987, Doc. 366. Sigur ensured greater exposure for his address by delivering it on the day before a memorial service for Park Chong Chol, a student who had died in police custody.

38 Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas, 166.


40 Authors’ interview with Oberdorfer, April 28, 2008, Washington, DC.

41 Authors’ interview with James Lilley, April 28, 2008, Washington, DC. Amb. Walker passed away in 2003. He himself was a scholar of East Asian affairs who received his doctorate from Yale in 1950 and continued to teach at the university until 1957. Lilley recalled that the East Asia faculty at Yale were the most vocal critics of Walker in the 1980s.
42 James Lilley (with Jeffrey Lilley), *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 265-266.
43 Authors’ interview with James Lilley, April 28, 2008, Washington, DC.
45 Ibid.
46 Se Ung Hahm, a prominent Catholic priest who led the pro-democracy movement in the 1980s who currently serves as president of the Korea Democracy Foundation, recollects that he was told that Catholic countries in Europe and Latin America would consider boycotting the Olympic Games if the Korean government used force to evict the student protestors from the Myungdong Cathedral. Authors’ interview with Hahm, April 22, 2008, Seoul.
47 Lilley, *China Hands*, 274.
49 Authors’ interview with Armitage, April 29, 2008. The successful transition in the Philippines also served as a great inspiration to democracy activists and opposition leaders in South Korea. Authors’ interviews with Se Ung Hahm, April 22, 2008 and Dong Choon Kim, April 23, 2008, Seoul.
50 Authors’ interview with Armitage, April 29, 2008.
51 Authors’ interview with Lilley, April 28, 2008.
52 Authors’ interview with Don Oberdorfer, April 29, 2008.
53 Quoted in Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 168.
54 Lilley, *China Hands*, 276.
55 Ibid., 277-278.
56 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 170.
58 *Congressional Record*, June 18, 1987, 16652, 16662.
59 Authors’ interview with Lilley, April 28, 2008.
60 Lilley, *China Hands*, 278; Authors interview with Armitage, April 29, 2008.
61 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 164; Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 332-333.