

US Knew of South Korea Crackdown

Ex-Leaders
Go on Trial
In Seoul

By TIM SHORROCK

Special to The Journal of Commerce

WASHINGTON — Two former South Korean presidents charged with treason, mutiny and corruption entered a Seoul courtroom this week to begin what could be the most important political trial in modern Asian history.

Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo stand accused of staging a rolling coup in 1979 and 1980, sending troops into the southwestern city of Kwangju in May 1980 to quell pro-democracy demonstrations in an action that resulted in the massacre of some 240 people and accepting millions of dollars in bribes from Korean corporations in the decade they held power.

At stake, in addition to the fate of the generals, is the solidity of the U.S. relationship with South Korea, which has been a keystone of U.S. foreign and economic policy for four decades. That's because a major issue in the trial will be the role of the United States in approving the use of elite Korean military units to put down the Kwangju upris-



UPI/Corbis-Bettmann Photo
A South Korean paratrooper beats an anti-government demonstrator in May 1980. Some 50,000 demonstrators, using sticks and rocks, battled troops during a nine-day revolt.

ing. The United States maintains 37,000 troops in South Korea and, under a joint command structure, has operational control of more than 80% of the Korean forces.

Mr. Chun, who has been charged with murder for giving troops the order to open fire in Kwangju, has said that his actions in 1979 and 1980 were explicitly approved by Washington, a claim that the Carter administration adamantly denied. A 1989 White Paper produced by the Bush administration supported those denials.

But new documentation obtained by The Journal of Commerce indicates that the United States knew far more about Mr. Chun's plans than has ever been

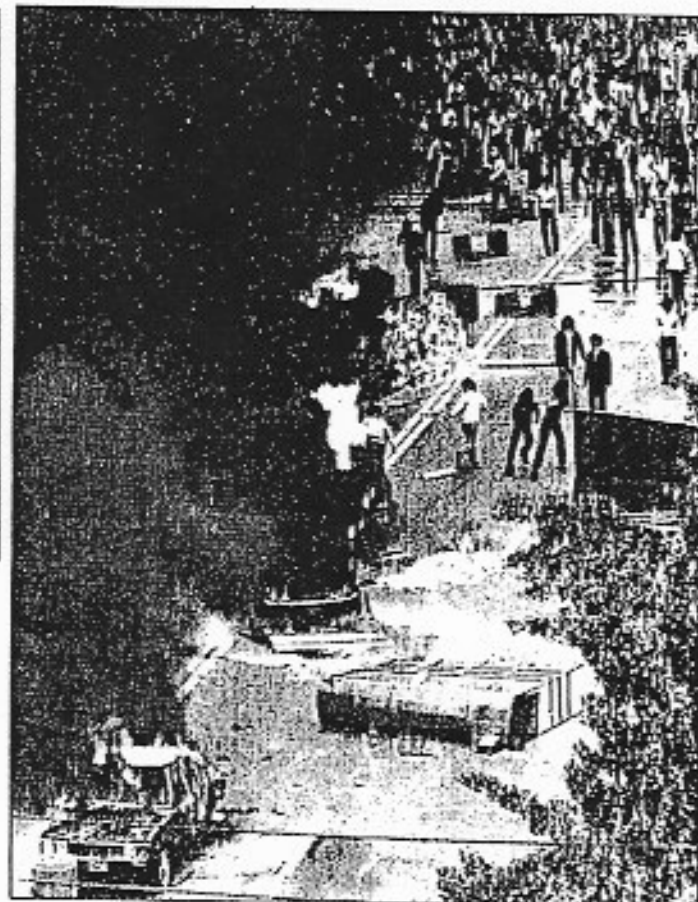
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According to the newly declassified U.S. government documents:

• Senior officials in the Carter administration, fearing that chaos in South Korea could unravel a vital military ally and possibly tempt North Korea to intervene, approved Mr. Chun's plans to use military units against the huge student demonstrations that rocked Korean cities in the spring of 1980.

• Two of the key decision-makers
SEE TRIAL, PAGE 4A

President Carter's experience with South Korea could help President Clinton in dealing with China. Story, Page 7A.



UPI/Corbis-Bettmann Photo
Automobiles burn after angry demonstrators set a fire during an anti-government demonstration in May 1980.



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advice. The message to the Christian dissidents, he said, "was too tricky an armchair suggestion from Washington, something we just couldn't do."

But after the Dec. 15 action, he added, the U.S. government made clear to Mr. Chun "we won't argue about who did what to whom."

In the months before Mr. Chun's May 17 coup, Mr. Gleysteen said he continued to press Korean dissidents to avoid confrontation. While warning the generals to be tolerant, he explained, "we tried to get the message across to the moderates that they should keep down their inflammatory actions."

Daily Demonstrations Held

But by early May, tens of thousands of students were holding daily demonstrations in Seoul and other cities demanding that Mr. Chun step down and calling on the National Assembly to set a timetable for democratic rule.

It was in this context, with both sides refusing to yield, Mr. Gleysteen said in a recent interview, that the U.S. began discussing military contingency plans with Mr. Chun. "Chun was saying he was going to behave," Mr. Gleysteen said. "But he had to have contingencies if things got out of control. The U.S. understood at the time that no government would allow law and order to break down. But we added that how this was done was critically important."

Mr. Gleysteen said he signed off on the contingency plans because he feared "total chaos" in South Korea. "Seoul was close to being overrun" by the demonstrations, he said.

Mr. Gregg, who was monitoring Korean intelligence reports for the National Security Council, said the Carter administration approved the contingency plans because of the way the Korean Army had handled previous demonstrations in Seoul. "I remember the general feeling" in the White House, he recalled, "there was real apprehension when the riots broke out in Seoul. Chun was a very tough man. So there was a sight of relief when the demonstrations in Seoul were moderately handled."

Concerned About Signals

In addition, "we were concerned about sending the wrong signals to North Korea," said Mr. Gregg. "That was the prism through which we

always saw the events of this government." Because of the concern, the Department of Defense sent two early warning aircraft to Korea and diverted an aircraft carrier from the Philippines to the Japan Sea.

Both Mr. Gregg and Mr. Gleysteen say now that they do not recall seeing the May 8 Defense Intelligence Agency document stating that Special Forces were "probably targeted" against arrest at Kwangju universities.

Mr. Gleysteen said U.S. officials in Korea usually knew where Korean Special Forces were even though they are not under direct U.S. command. But even if some U.S. officials knew Special Forces were going to Kwangju, he argued, it was "absolutely unknown to the United States, either through military or civilian channels," that they would open fire or use bayonets on peaceful demonstrators.

"We had no preview of Kwangju, of what amounted to very cruel brutality," he said. "It was very much out of line with Korean military behavior in our experience."

On a Slippery Slope

Mr. Chun's declaration of full martial law and an end to all political activity on May 17 sent Korea down a slippery slope. In a swift chain of events, he closed down the National Assembly, sent troops to occupy the nation's universities and began arresting scores of politicians and dissidents. Among those detained were Kim Dae Jung, South Korea's best-known dissident and a native of Kwangju, and Kim Young Sam, who is now president of South Korea.

Those decisions deeply angered Mr. Gleysteen, who informed the Korean government the United States was "staggered" by the crackdown.

But in Kwangju, where political dissent has a long historical tradition, students continued to hold large demonstrations on May 18 and May 19. They were surrounded by Army and Special Forces troops, who began shooting indiscriminately and using bayonets and clubs on students. By all accounts, the worst brutalities were committed by the Special Forces.

In response, citizens seized guns from local armories and drove the military out of Kwangju. For nearly seven days, as the Korean Army surrounded the rebellious city and its outlying towns, a citizens group tried to negotiate with the Chun group.

"Massive Insurrection"

On May 22, Mr. Gleysteen reported, "a massive insurrection in Kwangju is still out of control and poses an alarming situation for the ROK military." He estimated that "at least 150,000 people are involved."

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tion criticized Mr. Chun's crackdown and urged moderation.

Behind the scenes, however, U.S. officials were growing increasingly concerned.

On May 22, Mr. Gleysteen told the Korean foreign minister that the U.S. military would help facilitate Korean "army efforts to restore order in Kwangju and other trouble elsewhere." He added that "we had not and did not intend to publicize our actions because we feared we would be charged with colluding with the martial law authorities and risk fanning anti-American sentiment in the Kwangju area."

That afternoon in Washington, Secretary of State Edmund Muskie convened a high-level meeting at the White House to discuss Korea. Among the participants were Mr. Christopher, Mr. Holbrooke, Mr. Gregg, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Gen. David Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

Restoration of Order a Priority

The secret minutes of that meeting were declassified under the Freedom of Information request.

After a full discussion, "there was general agreement that the first priority is the restoration of order in Kwangju by the Korean authorities with the minimum use of force necessary without laying the seeds for wide disorders later," the minutes state.

"Once order is restored, it was agreed we must press the Korean government, and the military in particular, to allow a greater degree of political freedom to evolve," the White House decided.

The U.S. position was summed up by Mr. Brzezinski as "in the short-term support, in the longer-term pressure for political evolution."

In addition, Mr. Muskie asked the Department of Defense, which had already declared a state of alert toward North Korea, to "take additional planning steps to prepare for 'worst case scenarios' which could develop."

Back in Seoul, Mr. Gleysteen and Gen. Wickham agreed that the U.S. government should allow the Korean 20th Division to retake the city. "We did not want the special forces used further," Mr. Gleysteen said in his interview.

20th Army Division Rushes In

In the early morning hours of May 27, the Korean Army sent its 20th Army Division to retake Kwangju after receiving permission from Gen. Wickham. The troops recaptured the city after a brief firefight. About 10 civilian demonstrators were killed in the final assault.

News of the U.S. decision to re-

lease the troops was broadcast throughout South Korea on the orders of Mr. Chun. That angered the Carter administration, which had asked Mr. Chun to release an accompanying statement criticizing his political crackdown.

In a cable to Washington, Mr. Gleysteen expressed his disdain at a "deliberate effort on the part of the Chun Doo Hwan group who are determined to manipulate American public opinion."

"Too many Koreans and local Americans believe that the U.S. condoned and even abetted the government's harsh behavior in Kwangju," he said. "This misunderstanding grew from the core fact that we acquiesced in the movement of forces to Kwangju to control the situation."

The misunderstandings intensified in early June, when the Carter administration approved a visit to Seoul by John Moore, president of the U.S. Export-Import Bank, which considering \$500 million in loan guarantees to South Korea to finance the export of U.S. nuclear power technology. A group of U.S. lawmakers sharply criticized the visit as a stamp of approval for Mr. Chun.

"Multiplier Effect"

In response, Mr. Holbrooke testified that canceling Mr. Moore's visit or cutting Ex-Im bank loans to Seoul would have had an "almost certain multiplier effect... on private lending institutions in New York and elsewhere" and hurt the Korean economy.

For many Koreans, the final blow came in 1981, when President Reagan invited Mr. Chun to the White House and honored him as the first foreign head of state to visit Washington after Mr. Reagan's inauguration. According to recent visitors to the Kwangju cemetery where people killed during the uprising are buried, a figure resembling President Reagan hangs in effigy.

Mr. Gleysteen and some of his former colleagues at the State Department argue it was Mr. Reagan's invitation, and not their actions, that made Kwangju a burning issue in the 1980s.

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"Kwangju was an unspeakable tragedy that nobody expected to happen," he said. The State Department, he added, continues to believe the United States "has no moral responsibility for what happened in Kwangju."

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Startling Political Compromise

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ers at the time were Warren Christopher, President Clinton's secretary of state, and Richard C. Holbrooke, who retired last week as the Clinton administration's chief negotiator in Bosnia to join the New York investment banking firm of CS First Boston. Mr. Christopher was deputy secretary of state in 1980 and Mr. Holbrooke, who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in Bosnia, was assistant secretary of state of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

U.S. officials in Seoul and Washington knew Mr. Chun's contingency plans included the deployment of Korean Special Warfare Command troops, trained to fight behind the lines in a war against North Korea. The "Black Beret" Special Forces, who were not under U.S. command, were modeled after the U.S. Green Berets and had a history of brutality dating back to their participation alongside American troops in the Vietnam War.

On May 22, 1980, in the midst of the Kwangju Uprising, the Carter administration approved further use of force to retake the city and agreed to provide short-term support to Mr. Chun if he agreed to long-term political change. At a White House meeting on that date, plans were also discussed for direct U.S. military intervention if the situation got out of hand.

The documents show that the U.S. assurances to Mr. Chun were approved by Mr. Christopher and delivered May 9 by William J. Gleysteen, who was then U.S. ambassador to Seoul. "In none of our discussions will we in any way suggest that the USG (U.S. government) opposes ROKG (Republic of Korea government) contingency plans to maintain law and order, if absolutely necessary, by reinforcing the police with the army," Mr. Gleysteen cabled the State Department on May 7, 1980, as he prepared for a critical meeting on May 9 with Mr. Chun.

Mr. Christopher cabled back the next day: "We agree that we should not oppose ROKG contingency plans to maintain law and order." He added that Mr. Gleysteen should remind the Korean leaders "of the danger of escalation if law enforcement responsibilities are not carried out with care and restraint."

The documents directly contradict parts of the white paper that was prepared by the Bush administration after it refused to allow Mr. Gleysteen and Gen. John Wickham, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, to testify before a South Korean congressional panel investigating Kwangju.

US Officials Alarmed

In that report, the State Department said, "U.S. officials were alarmed by reports of (Korean) plans to use military units to back up the police in dealing with student demonstrations" in 1980 and did not have "prior knowledge of the movement of the Special Warfare Command units to Kwangju."

In a statement given to The Journal of Commerce last week, the State Department acknowledged an apparent discrepancy between the White Paper and some of the newly declassified cables, but added that "we stand behind the integrity of that report and of our actions."

In an interview, a State Department official added: "Its basic conclusions are unassailable and unimpeachable. When all the dust settles, Koreans killed Koreans, and the Americans didn't know what was going on and certainly didn't approve it." He said he was speaking for the entire department, including Mr. Christopher and Mr. Holbrooke, who did not wish to be interviewed.

Donald J. Gregg, who was the CIA station chief in Seoul from 1972 to 1975 and confronted the issue of Kwangju when he was U.S. ambassador in Seoul during the Bush administration, was equally confident. "I don't think we have anything to fear" from the trials, he said in a recent interview. "There are no smoking guns."

That, of course, remains to be seen. In any event, the newly released documents are sure to be explosive in South Korea. Mr. Chun remains a hated figure for imposing eight years of military rule after the country had experienced 18 years of dictatorship under Park Chung Hee. Mr. Park, a former general who seized power in 1961, was assassinated on Oct. 26, 1979, by the head of Korean CIA.

Documents Show 'Pattern'

Bruce Cumings, a professor of international history and politics at Northwestern University and a leading expert on Korea, says the documents "show a pattern where the United States wasn't going to do anything serious to Chun Doo Hwan no matter what he did, including mowing down a lot of people in Kwangju. Security prevailed over human rights."

The new documents are part of a collection of 2,000 declassified State Department and Defense Intelligence Agency cables obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. They provide a detailed look at the decisions made at the highest levels

of the U.S. government about the crisis that gripped South Korea in 1979 and 1980.

Among the cables are about 110 pages of high-level discussions about Korea that began shortly after the Park assassination. That event added another element of turbulence in an administration dealing with the Iranian hostage crisis and rising tensions with the Soviet Union, which invaded Afghanistan in December 1979.

Weak Interim President

Mr. Park was succeeded by a weak interim president, Choi Kyu Ha. But on Dec. 15, 1979, Mr. Chun, with help from Mr. Roh, led a coup inside the Korean military. He declared martial law on May 17, 1980, and replaced Mr. Choi as president four months later.

The most highly classified cables, code named Cherokee, were distributed only to President Carter's top diplomatic and intelligence advisers. Mr. Gleysteen, who is now retired, recalled recently that Mr. Carter himself was deeply involved in the Korea decisions. At the White House, he said, "you just pushed the Korea button and the door opened."

"There should be no misunderstanding of the fact that Ambassador Gleysteen and General Wickham (are) expressing coordinated USG policy and concerns under centralized direction from Washington," Mr. Christopher and Mr. Holbrooke wrote in a secret cable in April 1980. "There is a unified policy and direction, and we are in constant mutual communication."

According to the cables, Mr. Gleysteen met with Mr. Chun and a top aide to Mr. Chun on May 1. In their discussions of the student demonstrations, Mr. Chun "probably found my attitude sympathetic," Mr. Gleysteen reported in his follow-up cables. "We would not obstruct development of (Korean) military contingency plans."

Special Forces Being Sent

Just before his meeting with Mr. Chun, Mr. Gleysteen reported that two brigades of Korean Special Forces were being sent to Seoul and the nearby Kimpo Airport to cope with the upcoming student demonstrations. "Clearly ROK military is taking seriously students' statements that they will rally off-campus on May 15 if martial law is not lifted before that date," he said.

A separate cable from the Defense Intelligence Agency to the Pentagon on May 8, 1980, reported that the 7th Brigade of the Korean Special Forces, which was later blamed for the worst brutality in Kwangju, was "probably targeted against unrest" at universities in

Kwangju.

The cable also noted that Special Forces were trained to use CS gas, a virulent form of tear gas banned in many countries, and had been willing to "break heads" in previous encounters with Korean students.

Pat Derian, a veteran of the civil rights struggles in the south in the 1960s who was Mr. Carter's assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs, expressed shock when recently shown the documents, which she had not seen during her tenure at the State Department. "This was a green light as far as I can see," she said of the U.S. assurances to Mr. Chun.

Ms. Derian, who frequently locked horns with Mr. Holbrooke over human rights issues, said "national security hysteria" frequently determined the course of U.S. policy in the latter part of the Carter administration.

"There was an unemotional, almost supine approach to these dictators," Ms. Derian said. "This wasn't some moralistic choice. It was what they wanted to do."

Holbrooke Angry at Dissidents

Friction between the Carter administration's human rights rhetoric and its military and security concerns began to emerge as soon as protests against martial law broke out following the Park assassination.

After meeting with a group of senators in December 1979, the documents show, Mr. Holbrooke told Mr. Gleysteen that attitudes in Washington "are dominated by the Iranian crisis." "Needless to say, nobody wants 'another Iran' — by which they mean American action which would in any way appear to unravel a situation and lead to chaos or instability in a key ally," he said.

To keep the lid on in Korea, Mr. Holbrooke proposed "a delicate operation" to "make clear to the generals that you are in fact trying to be helpful to them provided they in turn carry out their commitments to liberalization." He instructed Mr. Gleysteen to tell what he referred to as "a relative handful of Christian extremist dissidents," that they should not count on U.S. support forever.

Mr. Holbrooke and other U.S. officials were deeply disturbed by the Dec. 12 coup, when Mr. Chun and Mr. Roh violated the U.S.-Korean command structure by sending armored units to the Korean Army headquarters, where they arrested the martial law commanders and replaced them with officers loyal to Mr. Chun.

Timetable Demanded

Within days, Mr. Holbrooke instructed the ambassador to extract

a timetable from Mr. Chun even if it was vague and noncommittal. "You could even point out, if you were a very cynical person, that setting a date now does not necessarily mean that this date will be kept," he said.

The next day, the Korean ambassador to Washington reassured Mr. Holbrooke that the political process would continue. Mr. Holbrooke then reported back to Mr. Gleysteen, saying he had told the ambassador "that the USG would not publicly contest the ROKG version of events, but he would not wish to see further changes of command 'Korea style.'"

Shown these cables in an interview, Mr. Gleysteen was asked if he had followed up on Mr. Holbrooke's