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South Korea's democratisation process:
The international factor

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Submission date: 3 June 2005

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (Asian Studies) of the Australian National University

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
CANBERRA 2005
DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work. All sources used have been acknowledged.

Amit Katsav
2005
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Romanisation of Korean

In this paper I will follow the McCune-Reischauer system. That system applied toward Korean names, institutions and publications. The common romanisation of a person, as it appears in newspapers and other publications is used in some cases following the proper romanisation.

Translations

All of the translations from Korean sources made by the author unless indicated otherwise.
Introduction

In his second inaugural address, the American President George W. Bush stated “it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world”. The reason for that policy, according to President Bush, was that “the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world”.¹

The international community can have a dramatic impact on the development of democracy throughout the world. In today’s world, where globalisation is becoming an imminent trend, the sovereignty of a state is not as strong as it used to be. In Ukraine, international pressure in general and American pressure in particular helped bring about the “Orange Revolution”. While some view the American role as a “US-funded, White House-orchestrated conspiracy to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty, weaken Russia’s sphere of influence and expand Washington's imperial reach,”[who said that? The source missing] others see it as helping to “create conditions for free and fair elections.” ² The question of harming the sovereignty of a state can be dismissed in the following manner: “Today those who revere the sovereignty of the state above all else often do so to preserve autocracy, while those who champion the sovereignty of the people are the new progressives. In Ukraine, external actors who

² These efforts were carried out by the US Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy and a few other foundations sponsored by certain US organizations, including Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Solidarity Center, the Eurasia Foundation, Internews and several others to provide small grants and technical assistance to Ukrainian civil society. The European Union, individual European countries and the Soros-funded International Renaissance Foundation did the same.
helped the people be heard were not violating the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people; they were defending it.”

The argument of this thesis is that international factors are crucial in the democratisation process in general and were crucial in the Korean case in particular. It will be demonstrated in the following chapters that, as the socio-economic situation in Korea improved, the importance of the international factors grew. Therefore, although the importance of the economic dimensions and the state of civil society cannot be overlooked, it will be demonstrated that international factors became dominant during the later attempts of the Korean people to rid themselves of military rule. This will be demonstrated in this paper using a chronological approach.

In the theoretical chapter, several international theories that stress the relevance of international factors in the democratisation process are examined. Over views of "The Second Image Reversed" by Peter Gourevitch and Robert Putnam’s "Two-Level" theory are presented. On a more practical level, Jon C. Pevehouse’s theory of "Democracy from the Outside-In?" and the importance of globalisation as presented by Samuel S. Kim’s and Laurence Whitehead’s works which deal with the importance of international factors in the South will be presented. With regard to the other two factors, Seymour Martin Lipset’s argument about the importance of economic development and Nicos Mouzelis’s work on the importance of civil society,

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3 'Meddling' in Ukraine, Democracy is not an American plot, by Michael McFaul, December 21, 2004, Washington Post. Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia, Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela are good examples of this point of view.


amongst others, are presented. The remaining three chapters examine these theories whilst specific periods in the history of Korean democracy are examined.

The first chapter, which deals with the liberation of Korea from Japan and the American military rule which followed (1945-1948), focuses on the building of basic democratic institutions in South Korea (hereafter “Korea”). It was during these three short years that the concept of democracy, as perceived by the Americans, was introduced to Korea. During the First Republic of Sygman Rhee (1948-1960) this idea of democracy became less and less prominent as President Rhee chose to preserve his power and thus moved towards authoritarian rule. As Han Sŏng-ju argued in his book *The Failure of Democracy in South Korea*, the lack of an economic and social base prevented the success of democracy in Korea. I will further argue that international factors, whilst strongly felt, were not the focus of the democratisation process in Korea. The United States and other international players such as the United Nations shifted their focus towards the threat from the north as it became clear that Kim Il Song, North Korea’s leader, intended to unite the entire Korean peninsula under his communist rule. Following the Korean War (1950-1953) it was the goal of the international community to deter Kim from this mission.

By 1979 the situation changed dramatically as Korea’s economic condition during the Third and Fourth Republics (1961-1971 and 1972-1979 respectively) improved. This was mainly the result of President Park Chung Hee’s ruling style as the government became heavily involved in economic planning. Ken Wells’ study of the growing relevance of the *Minjung* power during and after President Park’s assassination demonstrates a maturation of civil society in Korea. Following his murder (26 October 1979) Korea was swept by a wave of euphoria as people anticipated that democracy would replace President Park’s dictatorial *Yushin*
constitution. It was the lack of international support in general and American support in particular that permitted the rise of yet another general to the presidency in Korea. The Kwangju uprisings that took place in August 1980 can be seen as a watershed in the democratic struggle in Korea. The fact that the American army did not prevent General Chun Doo Hwan from using the Korean army to repress this popular rebellion changed the warm relations between the United States and the Korean people, since they had expected the United States to support their efforts toward democracy.

It was during the later years of the presidency of Chun (1981-1987) that international factors became most influential. By 1985 Korea's economy and civil society were fully capable of supporting the democratisation of Korea. The mass demonstrations in the streets of Seoul during the spring of 1987 reflected the widespread demand of the people for democratic change. International pressure on President Chun which prevented him from using military force against these demonstrators and later forced him to yield his position and allow the peaceful transfer of power through open democratic elections. The 1988 Olympics, which were scheduled to take place in Korea, put further pressure on President Chun as the eyes of the world were focused on the internal political process of Korea and forced the government not to create a "second Kwangju".
Chapter One

Theoretical background – The Transition to Democracy

Under what circumstances can a country become democratic? And once democracy has been installed, can we be sure of its survival? The question of the consolidation and maintenance of democracy, together with other relevant topics, are discussed in this chapter. There is no one set of requirements or rules applicable to all nations in the modern era. In order to overcome this problem, I suggest a model of my own. This model combines several variants, namely international, economic and social aspects, and by doing so it attempts to offer a more comprehensive perspective. Figure 1-1 presents the optimal conditions for the democratisation process. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, a different set of conditions (such as figure 1-2 illustrates) can still induce the desired democratisation process.

Figure 1-1: Model for a successful democratisation process

Strong Economic Base

Strong Civil Society \rightarrow \text{Successful Democratisation}

Positive International support
By examining the existing democratic literature, the major trends and theories regarding this subject will be described throughout this chapter. The first part will shed light on the process of democratisation by looking into the concept of democracy and its place in history and by examining the conditions for democratic transition. The second part I examines the international influence exerted towards creating a durable democratic regime. Economic factors are discussed in the third part, and the connection between civil society and democracy is discussed in the fourth. Finally, based on this discussion I present my model.

1. The meaning of democracy and the transition to a long-lasting democratic regime

A. What is democracy?

Before looking at the conditions for transition to a democratic regime, a clear definition of the concept is required. This definition should also include what is not a democratic regime that is an “authoritarian regime.”
It is important to remember that there are a number of possible definitions of this concept. A good summary of the political democratic concept can be found in the work of Kenneth A. Bollen. According to him, there are two dimensions to the concept: popular sovereignty and political liberty. Through the institution of free elections the first dimension can be realized. The second dimension includes the right to free speech, a free press and the right to create an opposition party. Seymour M. Lipset defines democracy as “a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials.” According to Lipset, democracy provides a social mechanism for the resolution of problems among conflicting interest groups. We can add to this the idea of a high level of participation in the selection of a leader and policies. More importantly, the voters should hold real power over the decision-making. When a substantial degree of political competition and freedom exist but the effective power of elected officials is limited, a semi-democratic regime exists. The Syrian and Egyptian cases, where more than 90% of the people voted but the opposition did not gain any real power, are good examples. In these instances, the people do not exert any power over the regime. Although “elections” are held regularly, nobody elects an opposition. An example of a semi-democratic regime may be Iran, especially since President Mohammad Khatami, was elected on May 26, 1997 with 20 million votes, representing 70 percent of the electorate. Following these elections, an era of social and political liberalization took place. Yet real power

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9 Ibid., 578.
remained in the hands of the conservatives, namely the clerics. Real democracy is yet to emerge in Iran.

We may turn to Joseph Schumpeter for a more classic definition of democracy. He claims that "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote."\(^{13}\) We can see that the idea of "popular power" is central to any democratic definition. Huntington further claims that these elections should include "virtually all the adult population" that is eligible to vote.\(^{14}\) If we follow this argument, can we say that the United States was a democracy before the 1960s, or France before the Second World War?\(^{15}\) Huntington continues Lipset's line of thought with regards to the chosen leaders' ability to exercise real power, but he adds a concept of the limitation of that power. Power, he says, should be shared with other social groups.\(^{16}\) In South Korea, for example, the government of President Park Chung Hee, especially after adopting the Yushin constitution in 1972, aspired to absolute power where the opposition existed only in name. During that period, despite President Park's declarations, the semi-democracy that existed during the Third Republic (1961-1971) collapsed.

Since this paper deals with different scenarios where an attempt to consolidate a democratic regime took place, the question of measuring democracy is relevant. However, unlike other concepts, it can prove to be very hard to say that some countries are more or less democratic than other countries. Democracy is not an element of a social system that either does or does not exist, but a rather a complex


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{15}\) In the United States, African American men achieved the right to vote only in 1965 with the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment and in France women gained the right to vote only after the end of the Second World War.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 10.
set of characteristics that may be ranked in many different ways. According to Mick Moore, there is no such thing as "complete democracy". Moore measures the degree of democracy by the extent to which citizens control the political elite. However, even Moore recognizes that this is a far from perfect method. Therefore, he concludes that in order to measure democracy we need to measure the ability of the masses to exercise control over the political elite in relation to the democratic institutions. Moore offers several indicators that can help us measure democracy: the proportion of the population eligible to vote and those actually voting; the number of political parties; the extent of legislative influence over the chief executive; and the freedom enjoyed by the mass media as well as the freedom allowed for the individual and the collective.

B. The preconditions for democracy

The basic assumption of this paper is that basic conditions should exist in order for a country to have a democratic regime. These conditions are, broadly speaking, affluence, economic growth with only moderate inflation, declining inequality, a favourable international climate, and parliamentary institutions. The obvious exception that comes to mind is India, whose economy falls far short of these requirements.

This argument is further supported by Edward Friedman who assumes that democracy indeed has preconditions. He divides these preconditions into two main

18 The political elite concept relates to Dahl's (1971) concept of polyarchy, where the mass of the population exercise control over the political elite.
groups: one in the realm of values, meaning a solid democratic cultural heritage, and the other in the socio-economic realm, meaning a large middle-class socio-economic foundation.\textsuperscript{21} Japan, which had a solid cultural heritage dating back to the end of the Tokugawa period and went through far-reaching economic changes in the years preceding the Second World War, would fit this description. In Korea, where the middle class did not exist until the late 1970s, the democratisation process was not as successful. However, Friedman adds later in the same paper that certain countries do not necessarily need to wait for the maturation of these conditions but rather that democracy can be learned.\textsuperscript{22}

The timing or the level of development is often mentioned in academic literature as some argue that these variants have a crucial effect on the chances of a country becoming a democracy. Bollen and Mouzelis, for example, hypothesize that the late developers have less of a chance of becoming democratic than do early developers. The reasons for this phenomenon are explained by the Dependency Theory in the following manner: "The political power of the elites in the late developing periphery is strengthened by the support they receive from the core, early developers"[SOURCE?]. Whereas countries such as the US or the U.K. are considered "core" states, countries such as India or Vietnam comprise the periphery states. The elites in the periphery have a better chance of maintaining authoritarian rule.\textsuperscript{23} In order to find empiric proof or justification for this hypothesis, Bollen took a sample of 99 countries at different stages of development. Based on this research, he

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 4.
found that the level of development had a greater effect on the democratisation process than the timing.\textsuperscript{24}

If we rule out the timing factor, can we say that some countries are more likely to become democratic because of their social composition? According to Lipset, the answer to that is negative:

An extremely high correlation between aspects of social structure, such as income, education, religion, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other, is not to be anticipated even on theoretical grounds, because to the extent that the political sub-system of the society operates autonomously, a particular political form may persist under conditions normally adverse to the emergence of that form. Or, a political form may develop because of a syndrome of fairly unique historical factors, even though major social characteristics favour another form.\textsuperscript{25}

The following figure illustrates Lipset's conditions and consequences of democratisation:

Figure 1-3: Some of the possible connections between democracy, the initial conditions associated with its emergence, and the consequences of an existent democratic system.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure13.png}
\caption{Some of the possible connections between democracy, the initial conditions associated with its emergence, and the consequences of an existent democratic system.}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item Conditions:
  \begin{itemize}
  \item open class system
  \item economic wealth
  \item equalitarian value system
  \item capitalist economy
  \item literacy
  \item high participation in voluntary organizations
  \end{itemize}

\item Initial Possible Consequence:
  \begin{itemize}
  \item democracy
  \end{itemize}

\item Additional Consequences:
  \begin{itemize}
  \item open class system
  \item equalitarian value system
  \item political apathy
  \item bureaucracy
  \item mass society
  \item literacy
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{24} Bollen, Kenneth A. "Political Democracy and the Timing of Development," 584.


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 105.
C. The Transition to Democracy

When talking about the shift towards a democratic regime, we also need to understand the conditions necessary for a successful transfer of power from the authoritarian government to the newly elected power. The democratic transfer will occur only when the opponents to the regime successfully challenge the status quo. The most important factor in determining the success or failure of this factor is the relative power of the opposition group. Once the power is no longer concentrated within one group, a transition, either peaceful or conflict-ridden, can take place. Because once the opposition holds some power, it perceives a net gain from conflict. From the authoritarian government’s point of view we can discover a willingness to negotiate. The role of mass mobilization as a factor that forces the authoritarian government to change the status quo is crucial. Since the leaders of authoritarian governments try to maintain the status quo in order to maintain their position, the opposition leaders should seek to create another form of authoritarian rule “in which they are part of the winning coalition.”

When dealing with the question of the transfer of power from one group to another, it is necessary to consider the military role in the transition to democracy. For in many cases, (like in South America, South Korea and Pakistan) democracy failed to take root because of deliberate military intervention, a military coup d'état. Until recently, authoritarian or military regimes were the most common form of governance in the developing world. This is the result of, among other reasons, the specific historical conditions of the Cold War era where military regimes were supported by the super-powers. The United States or France, for example, gave economic and military aid to authoritarian regimes due to the purported link between security and

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28 Ibid., 178-9.
development. A military regime is created by a coup d'état when the civilian government is replaced. Following the coup, the military exercises power on an institutional basis, with the military leaders either governing collegially as a junta or circulating the top government positions among top generals.

The transformation from a dictatorship to a democracy usually involves military regimes. Huntington notes, that, with the three exceptions of Argentina, Greece and Panama, military rulers “were better placed to terminate their regimes than were leaders of other regimes”. The military leaders almost always posited two conditions for their withdrawal from power - first, that they should be neither prosecuted nor punished, and second, that the role and authority of the military establishment should be respected. However, it is as easy for military rulers to return to power as it is for them to withdraw from power. Once a military coup occurs, the chances that a second one will take place are rather high because once democracy is installed, radicalism, corruption and disorder can reach unacceptable levels as happened in Argentina, Thailand or South Korea, and the military take control of the running of the state.

For the sake of our discussion, when talking about the transfer of power from one group to another, we need to focus on a transfer with democratic features. There are three key conditions for a liberalizing reform. First, liberalization will be attempted only if the political leaders consider reform desirable, meaning that the reforms become attractive in relation to the status quo. This desirability depends on the known, inferred, or imputed preferences of the reformer and not on objective

30 Samuel P. Huntington, The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, 580.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 584.
33 Ibid., 585.
standards. Secondly, the policy makers must believe that they can identify plausible alternatives that correspond to their preferences. Third, the reform will occur only if the policy makers who control the reform control the political resources to enact and implement the policy change. The following figure can help us better understand the transfer to democracy.

Figure 1-4: Why Do Some Governments Liberalize and Others Do Not?  

35 Ibid., 152.

The above discussion dealt with the general ideas of democracy. We can now turn to a more specific discussion of the conditions for the transformation of power. As we have seen, numerous factors should be taken into account when dealing with the
transition to democracy. It is possible to merge these factors into three main groups: international factors, economic factors and social factors.

2. International factors

Can we claim that the international environment or community has a real effect on the democratisation process? And what about its effect on the maintenance of democracy? The argument of this author is that since we cannot find a theory that covers all of the cases where countries went through a democratic transfer of power, we can say that in some cases, (such as South Korea) international factors were crucial to the final transfer of power from authoritarian rule to a democratic one.

It is true that some scholars like Philippe Schmitter note that, “external actors tended to play an indirect and usually marginal role” and focus on the national forces.36 However, other contemporary scholars37 who give more attention to the international role, are challenging this trend. I will follow this argument throughout this paper. For example, Geoffrey Pridham claims that the international dimension does not get enough attention and that it is definitely important.38

In order to support this hypothesis, we should look into both the theoretical and the empirical dimensions. On the empirical front, we can find many international organizations that include the promotion of democracy as part of their foreign policy goal. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union and even the expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (as it is expected to become a Western Hemispheric Free Trade Association) are several

38 Friedman, Edward. "Introduction".
examples of international organizations that put the promotion of democracy on their agenda.\textsuperscript{39} History can also offer us three distinct examples where the international context of a regime's transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy included a clear international dimension: Post-war ex-fascist Italy, West Germany and Japan.\textsuperscript{40} The "Second Image Reversed" and Putnam's "Two Level Theory", among other theories of international institutions, are some of the theories, which deal with the connection between international factors and the internal processes of a state. However, it is important to note that even the literature that gives some weight to the international factors relies on domestic processes to explain regime behaviours. In this sense, external actors can be seen as intervening or facilitating variables.\textsuperscript{41}

A. Theoretical background

We shall first look at the theoretical background discussed in academic literature. As mentioned earlier, the Second Image Reversed Theory can be useful to our discussion. Broadly speaking this theory claims that international factors influence domestic political outcomes. The most famous scholar in this field is Peter Gourevitch, who argues that, when we try to explain the nature of domestic structures, the international environment may become an explanatory variable.\textsuperscript{42} He summarized his theory as follows:

Two aspects of the international system have powerful effects upon the character of domestic regime: The distribution of power among states, or the international state system;

\textsuperscript{40} Edward Friedman, "Introduction," 2.
\textsuperscript{41} Jon C. Pevehouse, "Democracy from the Outside-In?", 517.
\textsuperscript{42} Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Source of Domestic Politics," 881,882..
and the distribution of economic activity and wealth or the international economy. Put more simply, political development is shaped by war and trade.\textsuperscript{43}

The "Two-Level" theory of Robert Putnam approaches the relationship between the domestic and international fronts from the opposite direction. This theory is more pertinent to our discussion. Putnam notes that many of the processes that take place at the national level have a distinct effect at the international level. At the international level, "national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments". He further claims that both the international and national fronts are interconnected and that even sovereign leaders have to consider the international dimension when making national decisions.\textsuperscript{44} Although Putnam does not refer to the democratic process in this specific article, we can use his argument to support our own argument, meaning that since the decision to become a democracy is a political decision, the Two-Level theory can be applied for our purposes.\textsuperscript{45}

It is important to note that any theory that deals with the relations between domestic and international factors must contain some link to the domestic political process because, while the international forces create constraints and opportunities for democratisation through economic and military-security processes, it is important to see how the actors within the state cope with these outside influences.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 882-883.
\textsuperscript{44} Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," 434.
\textsuperscript{46} Pevehouse, Jon C. "Democracy from the Outside-In?", 518.
B. Empirical Dimensions

Turning to the empirical front, we should look at historical trends relating to the democratisation of specific states over a specific time frame. International factors were the strongest during the years that followed the First and Second World War when the Allies supported a wave of democratisation in Europe.\(^47\) During the Cold War era, the superpowers had a crucial regional influence, e.g. the US in Latin America and some parts of East Asia and the USSR in Eastern Europe.\(^48\) However, as Gerald Segal suggests, "We need to be careful about suggesting that even superpowers play a determining part in affecting the ways in which regimes change their character."\(^49\)

If we look at the following years, (that is, the post-Cold War era), it is possible to claim that the international support for democratisation was very limited and confined to a select sub-set of countries. We can identify three types of limitations that no longer existed: great power rivalries, the resistance to democratisation by stable illiberal regimes and the fear of provoking disorder. These limitations operate most powerfully during the transition phase of democratisation.\(^50\) The conclusion is that "international support for democracy may therefore be at its most effective (and least risky) when it is least likely to make a decisive difference to the outcome."\(^51\)

Nevertheless, the role of the great powers in promoting democracy after the end of the Cold War remained significant. The Clinton administration proclaimed,


\(^{48}\) Geoffrey Pridham, "International Influences and Democratic Transition: Problems of Theory and Practice in Linkage Politics," 2. The reform policy of Gorbachev acted as a stimulator to the change that took place in Eastern Europe during 1989-90 for example.


\(^{51}\) Ibid.
"Enlarging the democratic community abroad is one of the basic pillars of contemporary US foreign policy." While we cannot claim that the US had a systematic approach toward the promotion of democracy, we can observe a mix of different types of decisions pertaining to democracy in both bilateral and multilateral foreign policy. The U.S, as the most powerful nation in international relations, can affect many of the decisions of important international organizations such as the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank. The cases of Bosnia in 1995 and Guatemala in 1993 can be seen as examples, as it was the Americans who contributed the most to NATO, both militarily and economically. The US saw these cases as a clear threat to certain basic civil rights and decided to act. More recently, President Bush's policy of spreading democracy in the Middle East can further support this idea.

When dealing with history, we can recognize several "waves" that included the transition of a number of states to a democratic regime over a short period of time. Paul Drake who studied the so-called "Democratic Tsunami", the period between the years 1974-1990 when more than thirty countries adopted democratic forms of government, argues that international causes "must be given high priority." He explains this argument by criticizing earlier research which tried to explain the democratic transformation by examining direct and intentional policies of foreign governments and agencies. According to him, the results of their research could have been very different if certain questions had been asked such as: "What international factors created an international democratic conjuncture?" and, "In this time period, why did democratic regimes become the norm in many parts of the world?" In


response to these questions, we can identify two types of international factors: global factors which caused disorder and undermined dictatorships and secondly, other international currents that created incentives for dictators to liberalize or even democratise.  

Huntington's *The Third Wave, Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* is another example of research that looked into the same trend. As a cynical response to this work, Robin Luckham and Gordon White edited a book entitled *Democratisation in the South: The Jagged Wave*. In this work, by focusing on the same period that Huntington's "third wave" focused on, they indicate that the democracy that spread throughout the world was as quick to crumble as it was quick to spread. Nevertheless all of the above works do recognize the international dimension and its importance.

C. Globalisation

One of the main reasons for these historical waves is the increasing role of globalisation and its effect on the politics of states. Globalisation helped spread the ideas of liberal democracy throughout the world and made democracy the "near-universal ideal form of political organization and governance." Because of the rapid expansion of sub-national and super-national interconnections that speeds up the process of democracy. Also, the globalisation of capitalism and communications helped erode national barriers.

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54 Ibid., 70-71.
55 I will follow Samuel S. Kim's definition of globalisation as "a series of complex and independent yet interrelated processes of stretching, intensifying, and accelerating worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of human relations and transactions, such that events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world have immediate consequences for individuals, groups, and states in other parts of the world". Samuel S. Kim, "Korea's Democratization in the Global-Local Nexus," In Korea's Globalization, ed. Samuel S. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9
56 Ibid., 6.
The process of democratic consolidation is further supported by global forces, especially multi national corporations (MNC).\(^{58}\) In addition to the MNC the support of other international organizations that bolstered the political and economic capacity of individual states to support and maintain democracy. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for example, helped reinforce the neo-liberal consensus by forcing economic openness and sometimes also demanded political change, as in the case of Zimbabwe.

Another aspect of globalisation is the increasing significance of liberal trends, such as liberalism and human rights. These trends include liberalism and human rights among other things. Edward Friedman creates a connection between the role of Japan as a promoter of human rights in Asia and the idea of promoting democracy.\(^{59}\) Korea was the only Asian country to receive a "good" rating regarding the promotion of democracy abroad. This reflected the former Korean President Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003)'s efforts regarding the spread of democracy in the region.\(^{60}\) Many other private and non-governmental organizations, e.g. Amnesty International, create a clear connection between the promotion of human rights issues and the consolidation of democracy. In addition the great powers promoted the ideas of economic liberalism as part of their foreign policies. We can observe this trend taking effect in South America during the 1980s. From the early 1970s, the internationalisation of the concept of human rights gradually delegitimised many authoritarian regimes.\(^{61}\)


\(^{59}\) Friedman, Edward. "Introduction".


Carter Administration, for example, put human rights issues at the top of its agenda and managed to have some impact on non-democratic regimes.62

When discussing the role of international factors in the transition to democracy, we can observe several features that combine both historical and theoretical factors. Laurence Whitehead grouped these into four main categories: contagion, control, conditionality and consent. By looking at these trends, we can further support our main argument that is that we should pay more attention to international factors in the democratisation process.

In short, Whitehead found considerable evidence of a "snowball" effect, where the success of a democracy has regional repercussions or contagious effects.63 When talking about control, it can be argued that the spread of democracy from one state to another was controlled or decided by an outside power. In other words, about two-thirds of the currently existing democracies owe their origins to deliberate actions or intervention from outside.64 When discussing conditionality, we are referring to international policies and incentives that involve some "minimal requisites or threshold conditions" which define the form of the international support. Many international bodies55 make their support conditional upon the recipient country's demonstration of its actually taking steps towards democracy.66 Finally, we must

62 The relations between President Carter and South Korea's President Park Chung-hee, for example, were severely damaged because of the human rights situation in South Korea, for example.
63 We can compare this to Huntington's theory of democratisation as it appears in his book The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (1991).
64 For example, the boundaries of democratisation after 1945 were set by the presence of US forces. Also, the spread of democracy in the former British colonies was set by London's timetable, that is, to support Britain as a power in decline. During the 1970s and 1980s, although not as strong as the post-war period, Washington, through its aid programs, economic support and military aid, managed to encourage, redirect, or resist democratic trends, especially in Southern Europe and South America.
65 The European Union, for example, made membership conditional upon the democratisation of the prospective state.
66 The difference between control and conditionally is that while control was usually exercised by a single unified source of authority, conditionally includes the process of international consultation and negotiation. Put in other words, control implies unilateralism, conditionally implies multilateralism.
remember that when dealing with sovereign states, outside forces cannot dictate their own policy without achieving consent from the target nation.  

D. The role of International Organizations

It is important to further elaborate the role of conditionality by focusing briefly on the role of the International Organizations (IOs) as promoters of democracy. We can identify several cases where IOs and institutions have influenced domestic politics; multilateral and regional trade is perhaps the most important.  

Pevehouse argues that organizations with a higher democratic density are more likely to be associated with democratic transitions.  

Elsewhere, Pevehouse refers to regional international organizations and argues that they are used by young democratic regimes to consolidate reforms by a multiplicity of mechanisms. By joining the IOs, states can secure financial support that can be used to finance the costly process of building a democracy - building institutions and enhancing the stability of the new regime.

Apart from the international factors, we should keep in mind certain other factors that are crucial to the democratisation process. The following section deals with the importance of the economic and social factors.

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67 Laurence Whitehead, "Concerning International Support for Democracy in the South," 250-267. When referring to the ways in which international processes contribute to the generation of consent, we can distinguish between two aspects: (a) the territorial limits of democratisation and (b) which of the new groups and movements is likely to emerge with real power.

68 Jon C. Pevehouse, "Democracy from the Outside-In?", 517-518.

69 Ibid., 529.

70 Ibid., 611-614.
3. Economic development – a basic condition for democracy?

The vast majority of scholars claim that democracy cannot be conceived of without sufficient economic development. However, it is possible to put forward the opposite argument, namely that countries seek democracy in order to achieve economic prosperity. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many East European countries underwent democratic reform in order to boost their lagging economies. Generally speaking, economic development is one of the basic conditions for establishing a stable democracy. As this section will demonstrate, this assumption is based on several empirical studies that examined a large number of states over a long period of time.

We can claim, with a great degree of confidence, that there is a strong correlation between the states of economic development and democracy. As early as 1959, Lipset claimed in a classic article that “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.” Later on this notion became a sort of “iron law” where it was argued that this assumption was “almost beyond challenge.” In order to support this claim, we should look at some empirical studies that examine a large number of states and analyse the correlation between the state of their economic development and their democracy. Mick Moore investigated this correlation in 72 countries between 1960 and 1988. His dependent variable was the degree of democracy and his independent variable was the proportionate changes in per capita income. He came to the conclusion that “there is a consistent and fairly strong

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72 This idea was presented by Professor Wells during our discussions about this thesis.
statistical connection, on a cross-sectional basis, between levels of national income and the extent of democracy...At any moment, wealthier countries are more democratic." A more comprehensive attempt conducted by Burkhart and Lewis-Beck reached the same conclusion. Still it is important to note that this survey was completed prior to the fall of the Soviet Union and so we have to take into account the fact that its findings were likely to be very different if the survey had run for a few more years.

But what do we mean when talking about economic development? We can argue that a consistent rise in annual GDP is important but of greater importance is how the state distributes wealth to its population. In another comprehensive piece of research, the effects of income distribution on democratic transition were more significant than GDP per capita. Mick Moore claims that there is a clear and consistent cross-sectional relationship between democracy and income levels. We cannot claim that there is a certain income level at which democracies become stronger, but above $6,000 annual per capita "democracies are impregnable and can be expected to live forever." Not only does economic development help create a democratic regime; but it is also possible to claim that it is necessary in order to maintain a democracy in a certain state. We can also claim contrary to certain assertion that dictatorships are not better at generating economic development then democracies -- the exceptions in this instance being South Korea and Taiwan.

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75 Mick Moore, "Is Democracy Rooted in Material Prosperity?," 38.
76 In this research, 131 nations were examined between the years 1972-1989.
77 This research included 75 developing countries for the period from 1962 to 1992.
79 Mick Moore, "Is Democracy Rooted in Material Prosperity?," 47.
81 The same research claims that these countries are the only two dictatorships that started under $1,000 in 1950 and had annual per-capita income exceeding $5,000 by 1990.
There is a strict correlation between economic development and other social aspects that help promote democracy. Education is perhaps the most important of these aspects but the development of a strong and organized middle class is also important, especially with respect to the development of civil society. The role of education as a promoter of cohesion and continuity is clear. When talking about democracy, education has a special role in helping the population acquire a set of political attitudes. For other social aspects, we should turn to the civil society argument.

4. Is there really a connection between Civil Society and Democracy?

The term "civil society" holds various meanings for different scholars where each focuses on an aspect that can contribute to his or her argument. Contemporary literature offers a wide variety, over an extended period, of clashing definitions for this term. It is vital to have a clear definition of this term before going further. In general, civil society refers to a dense network of civil associations or private voluntary associations that can help promote stability by mobilizing citizens on behalf of public causes. Such associations are credited with effective resistance to authoritarian regimes and democratising society from below while pressuring

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83 We can trace reference to this term to as early as the 19th century in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, (Democracy in America, translated by Henry Reeve, London : Saunders and Otley, 1835-1840) who conducted an investigation of American democracy between 1831-2. As for the contemporary (twentieth century) literature, we can refer to Gramsci (Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971) as one of the early scholars who referred to the term, in its social-Marxist context. However, for our discussion it is sufficient to skip the history of the term and to examine its main features.  
84 For example, neighbourhood committees, interest groups or philanthropic enterprises of all sorts. Gordon White (1996) adds to this definition some "uncivil" entities like the Mafia, ethnic or religious fundamentalist organizations and trade unions.
authoritarians to change. 85 Another definition examines the process of modernization 86 and marks the relationships between state and some non-state groups and institutions. When the process of modernization brings about an extensive downward spread of civic and political rights and the lower classes are accommodated in a relatively autonomous manner, we can say that a strong civil society exists, like in pre-industrial England. However, where such rights are not broadly spread, we describe it as a weak civil society. 87

Having defined civil society, we shall now look at the relation between democracy and civil society since a strong relation between the two exists, and the existence of a strong civil society is a necessary condition for the instalment of a stable democratic regime. As Gordon White argues, “The idea of civil society is central to any discussion of democratisation since it raises fundamental questions about the role of social forces in defining, controlling and legitimating state power.” 88 White identifies four ways in which this might come about: (1) change in the balance of power between state and society in favour of the latter, (2) a strong civil society can play a disciplinary role by enforcing standards of public morality, (3) civil society plays a crucial role as an intermediary transmission-belt between the state and individual citizens, and (4) civil society can play a constitutive role by redefining the rules of the political process along democratic lines. 89

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85 This argument refers to the democratic transition that took place in Latin America and Eastern Europe, such as Poland's Solidarity movement. Michael W. Foley, and Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," Journal of Democracy 7, no. 3 (1996), 38.
86 When talking about modernity, Mouzelis refers to "social settings where not only are the public and private spheres clearly differentiated, but there is also a large-scale mobilization of the population and its autonomous or heteronomous inclusion into the national, economic, political, and cultural arenas.
89 Ibid., 185-187.
However, we should not assume that the existence of a strong civil society is the most important variant when examining the creation of democracy. Without the cooperation of the state, little can be achieved. In a somewhat extreme statement, Michael Waltzer argues that “only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society; only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state.” A more cautious approach, expressed by Foley and Edwards, questioned the ability of civilian organizations to have a strong effect over the government without the help of political parties. For this reason, we can reach the conclusion that political parties can be considered the major organizational means of articulating civil society’s interests with the state. The state and civil societies both engage in a similar process of democratising themselves and organisations in the civil society space develop their role as ‘thorns in the side of the state’.

Apart from a strong civil society, certain other social and political aspects must be included. Education, mass mobilization, the legitimacy of the government and the efficiency of the government’s rule should be looked at as well as the more “classic” aspects of civil society. Lipset states that the stability of a democratic system depends amongst other factors upon the effectiveness and legitimacy of the political system. Nationalism can also be seen as being crucial when discussing civil society. Nationality or nationalism provides cohesion to a civil society. The reason

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91 In attempt to answer this question the authors separates between to kinds of civil society. The first one deals with the work of Tocqueville and other early writers and puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and their habits to foster patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity. The second refers to the work of Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik and lays special emphasis on civil society as a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable to energizing resistance to a tyrannical regime.
94 Lipset defines effectiveness as the actual performance of a political system, the extent to which it satisfies the basic functions of government as defined by the expectations of most members of a society.
being that when talking about developing nations the process of modernization leads
to the destruction of localism and a switch of loyalties from the local community to
the nation state.96

Finally, since this thesis deals with the empirical case of South Korea, the idea of
Asian style democracy should be addressed briefly. The notion of “Asian values” as a
barrier to democracy can be found in literature.97 However, I will follow Edward
Friedman’s argument that:

The view that Confucianism generates a peculiar “East Asian dominant-party system” that
“differs significantly from the democratic systems prevalent in the West” is contested by the
author’s data that challenge the widespread belief that East Asia is an anti-democratic anomaly...

Democratisation is not a cultural or regional phenomenon.98

Indeed it is almost impossible to compare the politics of China, Japan and Korea
(both North and South), all countries with a strong Confucian influence. Also, since
there are so many other factors that differ between one country in the region and
another, it is very difficult to find common Asian values. For this reason, our
discussion disregards regional-cultural factors and focuses on factors discussed in the
previous pages.

Conclusion – The Model

In the post-Cold War world, the integration of countries is in constant flux. Every
action of one country has a direct or indirect effect on other countries. A country that
tries to avoid this kind of integration, like North Korea or Cuba, is bound to be
excluded from the benefits of this growing globalisation and usually finds itself left

97 Huntington (1991) can be seen as an example.
98 Edward Friedman, "Introduction," 5-6.
behind. As international organizations gain more and more influence over individual countries, effects on sovereign processes grows. As the world’s sensitivity to issues like welfare and the maintenance of various human rights are given more and more attention by these various international organizations, the subject of spreading democracy as a tool to help improve people’s lives also becomes of greater importance.

Another factor that has become dominant on the world stage following September 11 is the war on terror. Once again, the vast majority of countries in the world see democracy as the only way to spread liberal ideas and fight extremism. Democracy, at least according to the United States and its allies, can and will narrow the growing gap between the wealthy West and the rest of the world. If we combine these various trends, it is obvious that international factors cannot and should not be ignored when dealing with the process of democratisation. Democratisation was and will be a process that can be achieved only by the people of a country, but without the support of the international community that process may prove to be impossible.

At this point, after having surveyed the principles of democratic theories and before we proceed to the specific case study of democratisation in South Korea, we need to present the model that we have chosen to utilize throughout the remaining chapters. This model will include three independent variables international involvement in the democratisation process, the stage of economic development and, finally, the strength of civil society. The dependent variables will be the democratisation process. Each of the independent variables will be measured by three indicators weak and strong. The dependent variable will be measured against two values success or failure.

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99 China provides the best example of a state that realized the benefits of globalisation as it slowly abandoned its isolation from the rest of the world and joined the World Trade Organisation.
Given the scope of this paper, the international factors will be dealt with in greater detail than the other two factors. The following chapters attempt to examine the validity of this model by examining the different stages of modern South Korea’s history (1945-1987).
Chapter Two


Introduction

When attempting to examine the development of democracy in Korea, we should begin with the years that followed the end of the Second World War. During these years, democracy was brought to Korea, only to be sacrificed a few years later to the dictatorial ambitions of Korea's first president Syngman Rhee. After 13 years of growing dictatorial rule, the Korean people rebelled and managed to install democracy. But once again, democracy was not to last long, this time due to a military coup d'état. Throughout these upheavals, what was the international role in helping to bring and maintain democracy in Korea? And was the international factor really able to make a difference when it came to internal politics in Korea? The argument of this author is that the US, as the main outside force, could not only affect the development of democracy in Korea but was largely responsible for its creation in Korea. Also, due to a weak economy and social society, democracy could not be maintained for long.

The first section will review the years of American occupation and the role the US played in creating a democracy in Korea. The second section begins at the end of the First Republic and focuses on the years 1958-1960 as a case study on the impact the US had on Korea, once it had decided to take a stand against President Rhee's anti-democratic ruling style. Finally, the third section examines the very end of President Rhee's rule and the establishment of the Second Republic. It is the hope of this writer that by using official documents published by the United States Government, mainly the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) and by reviewing the Korean newspapers of the relevant periods, a true understanding of the intentions and actions of both the Americans and the Koreans can be obtained. Also, in order to gain a
balanced perspective I have used some literature published in the Korean language alongside English language sources. Since the importance of civil society was minor during this period, the main focus will be on the international factors.


The end of the Second World War brought with it an end to the 36 years of Japanese occupation. Unfortunately the Korean people's desire to regain control over their own land had to wait for three more years, as Japanese rule was replaced by American rule in the south and Soviet rule in the north. During these three years of foreign rule the modern concept of democracy was introduced into Korea. Once again, thanks to the intervention of foreign forces, the Koreans were forced to accept and adopt political and social ideas that were not to be found in Korea previously. Considering the stage of political development following the Japanese occupation, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that democracy was not likely to develop in Korea without any pressure from the outside, at least not as quickly as it advanced under American military rule. Ideas like liberal democracy, a presidential system, the administrative process, a concentration of power in the centre, weak political parties and strong fractional groups can be traced back to the 1945-1948 period. It is the argument of this writer that the present form of Korean democracy began to take shape during the three years of the American occupation. Furthermore, it was the Americans' post-war vision for a free and democratic world that initiated the process of democratising the southern part of the Korean peninsula, a process that continued for decades thereafter.

Another example of the introduction of political ideas can be found at the end of the 19th century when the Japanese tried to modernize Korea.
and came to full realization only at the close of the twentieth century. In fact, without the introduction of democracy to Korea by the U.S, it is most likely that the whole Korean peninsula would have fallen under the rule of communism.

1. Ideology and Practice, the initial phase of the occupation

Before presenting the actual process of building democracy in Korea, we should look at the policies and intentions of the occupying American forces towards Korea. In the initial phase of the occupation, the United States’ policy toward Korea was not very concrete, as can be learned from the Moscow agreement and other statements, but as time went by, a clear policy towards the democratisation of Korea evolved.

According to Bruce Cumings, the Americans had a clear set of goals in regards to Korea. For them a "politically friendly Korea" was much more important then "winning the enthusiastic cooperation of all the Korean people". The Americans occupied the southern part on Korea simply because they wanted to make sure that "no other power would control the situation exclusively". But if we focus on the more positive sides of the American occupation we can find other evidence.

Even before the end of the Second World War, President Roosevelt stated that it would be necessary to educate the Koreans to achieve enlightened self-government. President Harry Truman had a deep devotion to the reflection of American tradition of political liberalism within the post-war colonial areas. He hoped to use the power of the United States in order "to foster the emergence of democracy and economic

101 The following chapters will demonstrate that only with the selection of Kim Dae Chung in 1997 as the President of Korea did true democracy arrive.
development in colonial areas." 105 Ultimately, these beliefs led the Americans to encourage democratisation in South Korea by establishing an effective Korean administration under the military government. 106

Since no single leader was to unite the Korean people under his or her leadership in the South (at least not one of which the US approved), we can describe the situation in Korea immediately after liberation as chaotic. Beside Yŏ's group 107, there were hundreds of newly created political and social groups. In addition, the preparation with respect to civilian activity by the United States Military Government in Korea (USMAGK) was far from complete. When arriving in Korea, Lt. General John Hodge, who headed the 24th Corps, did not receive any clear guidelines from Washington and acted according to the very broad concepts described in the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations. 108 For this reason Hodge requested in September that Washington send him specific instructions as to the future of Korea. In addition, he requested some "high-powered officers who are experienced in governmental affairs and know Orientals." 109

The first indication of the American policy in Korea can be seen in a speech made by General Douglas McArthur on September 8: "As Commander in Chief, United States Army Forces, Pacific...Korea shall become free and independent, the Korean people are assured that the purpose of the occupation is to enforce the instrument of surrender

107 On August 15, the Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence (Tokrip Undong), led by Yŏ un-hyŏng was established with the aim of establishing an independent self-government by the Korean people. This group claimed itself to be the de facto Korean government and did not acknowledge the American Military Government's authority. Since Yŏ was a moderate leftist leader, the occupation authorities regarded his party as a puppet of the Soviet Union and did not recognize him as a legitimate leader. Chan-Pyo Park, "The American Military Government and the Framework for Democracy in South Korea" in. Korea Under the American Military Government, ed. Bonnie B.C. Oh (London: Praeger, 2002), 123-149.
and to protect them in their personal and religious rights." Although we can identify some general ideas regarding the future activities of the American military in Korea within this speech, it can hardly be seen as a concrete set of orders that could be used by Lt. General Hodge.

As an immediate solution to the chaotic situation, the USMAGK decided to use the existing administrative structure of the Japanese colonial government, a step that was not popular among the Koreans. Obviously, this decision was the most logical one since the previous bureaucratic structure built by the Japanese was the only option if the US military was to quickly gain quick control over Korea. The Americans replaced Japanese officials with Koreans who had lived in the United States or with Koreans who could speak English. Also, the new government banned the existence of any other political organization so that the military government was the sole authority.

Soon after the initial chaos was resolved, the Americans turned to the construction of the Korean state. During the first few weeks that followed liberation, most basic governing agencies such as the police, bureaucracy and judiciary were established.

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111 As the American forces arrived in Korea they were greeted by a large number of Koreans who came to welcome the liberators, "US Army, US Army" and "Welcome." At the same time, the Japanese soldiers fired on the welcomers, killing two and wounding ten. A rumour that General Hodge remarked that Koreans considered them the same breed of cats as Jap policeman and "praised and thanked the Japanese commander of the good job and that General Hodge intended to knock together the heads of self-seeking Koreans." This rumour of course did not help the popular image of the American forces among Koreans. Hyung-Kook Kim, The division of Korea and the alliance making process: internationalization of internal conflict and internalization of international struggle, 1945-1948, 145.


113 It should be noted that the main purpose of these initial steps was to block the leftist groups from attempting a revolution as the USMAGK saw these attempts as endangering the stability of South Korea.
These actions were carried out without any specific instructions from Washington but were based on developments within Korea.\textsuperscript{114}

The Moscow Conference (December, 1945) helped to further promote the creation of a democratic regime in the territory that was under American control. That agreement, signed by the four victorious powers\textsuperscript{115} declared that "With a view to the re-establishment of Korea as an independent state [and] the creation of conditions for developing the country on democratic principles... there shall be set up a provisional Korean democratic government..." The third article declares "it shall be the task of the Joint Commission...to work out measures also for helping and assisting the political, economic, and social progress of the Korean people, the development of democratic self-government and the establishment of the national independence of Korea."\textsuperscript{116} As this agreement was signed by four parties, it can be seen only as a general outline for the occupying forces in Korea and not as the policy of the government of the United States specifically. Obviously Moscow did not see things the way Washington did and, ultimately, this agreement never saw its full implementation since free elections never took place in the North.

2. The politics of democratisation – the middle years of the occupation

From the middle of June 1946, Washington began the concrete process of establishing democratic institutions in Korea. Even prior to that date, some steps that helped prepare the ground for future political activities in Korea were made. Lt. General Hodge encouraged the formation of political parties and by October 1945,

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 128. These plans were guided by the "Blacklist Plan" that was design by General McArthur and was intended for Japan. Ibid., 126.

\textsuperscript{115} This agreement was signed by the United States, The Union of the Soviet Socialists Republics, The United Kingdom and China.

there were 54 political parties registered with the headquarters of the military government. Under instruction from Washington to support moderates, the Left-Right Coalition Committee (Chwa-u hapchang wiwonhoe) was established on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of July. On June 29, 1946, Lt. General Hodge suggested legislation for the establishment of the National Assembly. This suggestion was brought before the newly created Committee and on October 9, Hodge declared that the Korean Interim Legislative Assembly would be South Korea's lawmaking body where discussion between the different political groups would be possible. Nevertheless, every decision made by this body was still subject to the review and veto of the USMAGK.

Another important aspect of establishing a democratic regime is the institution of elections. Elections for the National Assembly represented the first experiment of this kind took place in Korea, although in a very limited way. Since it was clear that if universal suffrage were to be given the left would win, the USMAGK restricted the right to vote for the newly elected representatives. Thus, every district "elected" or appointed two representatives by secret ballot. The elections for thirty-eight out of the forty-five seats of the Assembly took place from the 17\textsuperscript{th} to 22\textsuperscript{nd} of October. The elections were boycotted by the left which enabled the right to win most of the seats. Since there was no bi-partisan observation of these elections we cannot conclude that these elections were truly conducted in a free and democratic fashion. On 13 October, the creation of the Interim Legislative Assembly was announced with the majority of its members being part of the Coalition Committee.

118 This committee included Kim Kyu-Sik and Won Se-Hun from the right and Lyu Wun Hyong from the left.
119 This legislative body had 90 members, half elected and half appointed.
121 In many places the "selected" representatives were in fact the same people appointed by the Japanese. In other places, the heads of townships simply appointed themselves.
American intervention in Korea's internal politics could be seen clearly in the support that was given to the rightist groups and in the oppression of the left. As early as 1945 the USMAGK began to intervene on behalf of the rightists in their struggle for victory over the left.\(^\text{122}\) As a popular leader and a potential supporter of the Americans, Yi Sŭngman (Syngman Rhee) was welcomed by the US army and by the spring of 1946 he had gained the full support of the military government.\(^\text{123}\) We can observe three stages in the policy of America towards Korean politics: first, in 1945, the US support of the conservative groups in Korea, secondly, the creation of the Left-Right joint committee in the middle of 1946 and finally, the absolute support of the right-wing which dominated the political scene from October 1947.\(^\text{124}\)

One way for us to explore Korea's response to the new occupation policy in South Korea is to examine media reports. Following liberation, the Americans allowed a relatively free press to exist, which created a rapid growth of newspapers of both rightist and leftist ideologies.\(^\text{125}\)

If we examine the publications, we discover that at least during the first years of the occupation the various reactions to the Americans' activities in Korea ranged from apathy to clear support of the Americans. One of the major Korean newspapers published an editorial entitled "The road of cooperation [with] the United States and the Soviet Union" (Mi-so-hyŏpchoŭi kil), contains a call to let the occupying forces fight amongst themselves and for the Korean people to remain united until they leave Korea. "For the benefit of the construction of Korean democratisation we should


\(^{123}\) Richard C. Allen, Korea's Syngman Rhee: an unauthorized portrait (Rutland, Vt: C. E. Tuttle, 1960), 76-80.

\(^{124}\) Wan-bŏm Lee, "Daehanminkuk-un ottoke sŏngripdoeŏnun" (How was Korea Established) in Hanyuk-Chongch'i ottoke bol kŏninka (Understanding Korean Politics), ed. Hyŏng-sŏb Yun, yong-rae Kim and wan-bŏm Lee (Seoul: Pakyoungsa Publishing Co., 2003), 69.

endorse both the actions of America and the Soviet Union [in Korea]. After all, the Korean (Chosŏn) consciousnesses will not resemble either the Soviet consciousness or the Americans. A rather more positive reaction to the occupation can be found in the Chosŏn Ilbo. "Let us support the American efforts and their intention for the construction of a Korean democracy." The mere fact that various (sometimes very anti-American) opinions could be expressed by the Korean press is a good indication of the success of the US in creating a free society in Korea.

3. The General Elections and Liberation

One of the lessons from the first elections was that the United Nations was put in charge of conducting the first nation-wide elections in Korea. The purpose of putting the UN in charge of the conduct of the elections was to let the UN "observe that the Korean representatives are in fact duly elected by the Korean people and not mere appointees by military authorities in Korea..." The United Nations tried to learn from the mistakes made by the Americans in October 1946 and allowed a much wider suffrage. Furthermore, in an effort to make sure the elections would be truly democratic they were to be held "under the observation of the Commission" (the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea).

Considering the political and social situation in Korea, holding truly democratic elections in 1948 was not an easy mission. Still, the USMAGK tried to help create "a free atmosphere for elections." Moreover, the Americans recognized that "if these

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127 Chosŏn Ilbo, 13 April. The original title of the article is "Mikukin noryŏk chichihacha, minchuchuŭi chosŏn kŏmsalil chilhyang."
129 Ibid., Section II (2), 12
130 One can draw similar conclusions when looking at the situation in Iraq in 2004 before the first democratic elections were held under American sponsorship.
elections are to have lasting value, they must be free and unfettered and must faithfully reflect the will of the people." [his first name?] Jacobs, the American Political Advisor in Korea, regarding the ability of the Korean people to hold free elections stated, "I have the greatest faith in the genuine regard for democratic processes which exists among Koreans today."\(^\text{131}\)

In fact, it was the declared interest of the United States government to hold free elections in Korea and to support the future elected government. The reason for this was that by 1948, the administration realized that in order for Korea to gain its independence, a "united, self-governing Korea" should be established. This government should be "fully representative of the freely expressed will of the Korean people" and the Americans should assist Korea "establish a sound economy and educational system as essential bases of an independent and democratic state."\(^\text{132}\)

We can find some who argue against the American contribution to the development of Korean democracy like Cumings who indicates that a new government, although run by Koreans, "offered little to the Koreans that was better than the previous colonial regime,"\(^\text{133}\) However, without the help and support of the USMAGK, democratic elections meeting the standard stated in the U.N resolution of November could not have been held. Several reasons can support this assumption. First, in order to have free elections, a safe and secure atmosphere must exist prior these elections.\(^\text{134}\)

Considering the number of military troops in Korea and the number of US trained and

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134 Again, we can find similar views expressed prior to the elections in Iraq in 2004.
equipped Korean civil police and army personnel, it was within the capacity of the US to provide this essential requirement. Secondly, during the earlier years of the American occupation, it was under the auspices of the USMAGK that political parties were allowed to be formed (as compared to the situation in the North) and the Korean Interim Government, with its executive, legislative, and judicial branches, functioned as a part of the US Military Government. Finally, the massive economic support given to Korea by the US was essential. As stated by the National Security Report, since South Korea was cut off from its normal sources of supply in the North, the South became totally dependent on the US: "Such is the extent of this dependence that it is estimated that economic collapse would ensue in South Korea within a matter of weeks after the termination of US aid to that area." By providing this economic security, the people of Korea knew that their vote would truly create a government with the capacity to provide a better life for them following their independence.

The 10 May 1948 elections represented American success in introducing one of the most basic democratic institutions to the Korean people. About 80 percent of the eligible voters registered, and 95 percent of these or 7,480,000 actually voted. Furthermore, from the UN point of view, these elections managed to "establish a lawful government" and were "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate." Still, these elections were far from perfect as riots, inspired by the Communists, broke out in February. However, as a consequence of the efforts made by the police, these attempts were confined and only 40 polling places out of over 13,000 were

135 According to the above document, there were 20,000 American troops and about 50,000 US trained and equipped Korean troops in April 1948.
136 Ibid.
139 As the communists were alienated from the government, they tried to prevent the elections from taking place. On February 6 a coordinated program of violence broke out and within a month over 100 persons were killed and more then 8,000 were arrested, Henderson, 155.
attacked. Although the election process was carried out successfully, the Korean people far from fully comprehended the process they were engaged in.

Following liberation, the newly elected Korean government adopted a rather dictatorial style of ruling. Between September 1948 and April 1949, 89,000 people were arrested on various charges of disturbing state tranquillity. Also, President Rhee completely ignored the Assembly's resolution calling for the resignation of the entire cabinet. Still it would be very unreasonable to expect a country without any democratic tradition to fully embrace ideas that were imposed on her from the outside. Considering the economic situation and, perhaps more importantly, the threat from the North, maintaining a democracy in line with the American standards was almost impossible. As Robert T. Oliver argues, unlike Kim Il-Sung who absolutely prohibited political opposition and imprisoned anyone who dared oppose him, President Rhee did allow a large amount of criticism within the press and among politicians to exist. According to Oliver, the fact that this criticism continued throughout the First Republic can be seen as proof, according to Oliver, that essential democracy was maintained.

2. From Apathy to Deep Involvement, 1948-1958

We can summarize the Americans' attitude toward the development of Korean democracy in the years that followed liberation as indifferent. True, the US continued its support for Rhee, a factor that enabled him to maintain his post as the president of

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Korea. But when President Rhee refused to accede to the American demands in the years that followed the end of the Korean War, the American support "was in the process of being phased out." Following the outbreak of the Korean War in June 25, 1950 the Americans needed a strong, anti-communist leader to support their campaign against North Korea. By June 1950, President Rhee's political support base was "in an advanced state of disintegration." It was the outbreak of the Korean War that pushed the Americans to support Rhee in re-building his political base by the reconsolidation of the South Korean political system. The war created a strong military and justified the repression as being carried out along "national security" or "anticommunist" lines.

Following the Korean War, the US played a significant role in the survival and development of Korea. Its economic and military aid to Korea can be seen as an indication of this. During the 20-year period following the end of the Korean War "the US extended to South Korea nearly 8 percent of its world-wide foreign economic and military assistance."

How can we explain the US's dramatic change of heart concerning Korea's democracy? What changed between 1945-48 and the 1950s? To answer this question, we need to look at the Americans' perception of their national security. In the

144 Yong myong Kim, Hankuk hyŏndaeha chongch'isa (A contemporary political history of Korea) (Seoul: Ulyuminwhasa, 1999), 110.
145 The Americans demanded Rhee increase legal taxation, decrease government expenditure, yield to the assembly demands and reduce the arbitrary power of the police.
147 Ibid., 130.
149 Sungjoo Han, "South Korea and the United States: The Alliance Survives," Asian Survey 20 no.11 (1980), 1075-1076. By 1973, Korea was second only to South Vietnam in the total amount of aid that was given by the US.
150 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the origins of the cold war and the US containment policy that evolved toward the end of the 1940s. For a comprehensive analysis of these concepts, see Melvyn P. Leffler, 'The American Conception of National Security and the Beginning of the Cold War, 1945-48', The American Historical Review, 89, No. 2 (1984): 346-381. Also see John L. Gaddis, The United States and the Origins of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).
somewhat naïve perception of the post-war world was changed by the harsh reality of
the Cold War. Up until the late 1940s, the US's main concept of national security
included the creation of a strategic sphere of influence within the western hemisphere
and the projection of American power around the globe. The "loss" of China to
Communism, the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb and the outbreak of the Korean
War made President Truman take several actions that were aimed at responding to the
intensification of the perception of a threat to US national security. Following the
Korean War, the US supreme interest was to prevent the expansion of Communism
and to this end the concept of promoting democracy was abandoned or at least
became secondary.

a. Fight for Democracy – the 1958 National Security Law

By 1958 the US had ended its long practice of ignoring the anti-democratic situation
that was unfolding under President Rhee's rule. Rhee's abuse of power had become
extreme as he tried to prevent any criticism of his government. It is the intention of
this section to show that the US criticism and its various actions did bear some fruit
once the regime of President Rhee collapsed by 1960.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the US was in favour of removing President Rhee
and replacing him with someone who would be more sensitive to American policy.
We can find three reasons for this: (1) The strategic dimension: Korea's role in the
anti-communist struggle in East Asia. One of the most important aspects of this point
is the formation of a Korea-Japan alliance and Rhee, who was anti-Japanese and in
favour of keeping the status quo, was seen as an obstacle by the US (2) The

151 Melvyn P. Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginning of the Cold
War, 1945-48," 380-384. These actions included, among other things, Military assistance to South East
Asia, a decision to build a hydrogen bomb, a commitment to station troops in Europe permanently and
a massive rearmament of the American Military.
international political-economic dimension: the US wanted to use Korea as a showcase for its strategy. For this reason, Korea needed to be democratic, with a successful economy. President Rhee, who became more and more anti-American and failed to create a flourishing economy, had to be replaced.\footnote{When considering this point, we need to bear in mind that the US was not concerned with the anti-democratic activities of President Park Chung-hee, as long as the Korean economy flourished.} (3) Rhee's advanced age and lack of ability to maintain an effective government.\footnote{Byŏng-mun Chi, Yong-ch'ŏl Kim and Sŏng-kwon Ch'ŏn. 
\textit{Hyŏndaeh Hankuk Ch'ong Chi-ui seroun Insik} (A New Perspective on Current Korean Politics) (Seoul: Pakyoungsa, 2001), 164-165.}

We can identify several anti-democratic moves, which took place between 1958 and 1960 that contributed to the growing tension between the administration of President Rhee and the United States. Following the 1958 elections to the National Assembly, the Liberal Party (Chayudang) that supported President Rhee failed to gain a two-thirds majority and took some drastic measures in order to assure its majority in Parliament. Even before 1958, the Liberal Party tried to prevent any challenger of President Rhee gaining power. By 1958 these steps became extreme\footnote{On January 13, Cho Bong-am, the chairman of the Progressive Party (Chinbodang) was arrested by the police on charges of violation of the National Security Act. Following this, four other top officials of the same party were arrested on similar charges (Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affaird (Parsons) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Jones), February 3, 1958. In \textit{FRUS}, Vol. 18, 433.} as opposition members were expelled from the Assembly in order to assure Rhee of a majority. Taking advantage of this false majority, a number of measures preventing the opposition party (the Democratic Party or Minchudang), from posing any real challenge to the ruling party also were taken. One of these measures, the National Security Law, placed harsh restrictions on freedom of the press and another abolished the elected local offices, making the posts appointed instead.\footnote{Joungwon Alexander Kim, \textit{Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972}, 158. Regarding the restrictions put on freedom of speech, the bill declared that "anyone who has benefited the enemy by disturbing the people by reporting or spreading false facts or distorted news" would be penalized. \textit{FRUS}, Vol. 18, 508.} As can be imagined, these moves did not pass without strong opposition from various Korean groups.
A strong reaction from the press to these measures soon followed. The *Hankuk Ilbo*, *Chosŏn Ilbo* and *Yonhap Sinmun* opposed these measures and claimed that the bill's supporters were "core Government and pro-Government organs." The Korean Editors' Association issued a statement on 23 November, 1958 opposing the bill and pledging an all-out fight against these measures. Also, a joint campaign by the editors of four Seoul dailies was declared.\(^{156}\)

We can understand just how strong the reaction to the new bill was by looking at the editorials published after the law was passed in the assembly. The *Chosŏn Ilbo*, for example, in an editorial entitled "The Collapse of Democracy and Our Future" (Minchuchuŭi-ŭi bungkoe-wa uri-ŭi changrae), expressed strong opposition to the new law: "During the 14 years that followed liberation, democracy which could not be seen or heard by any person, has now become nothing but a tragic ruin."\(^{157}\) And the criticism was not restricted to the national newspapers. We can find equally strong reactions from some local newspapers. Not only is the specific law criticised, but the government itself also failed to escape the newspapers' disapproval: "Why did our government add articles which place restrictions on speech to the election law and changed other articles so that they [now] violate freedom of speech? There are many reasons for these moves and they are all very serious but, the way we see it, the most important reason is the inability of the ruling party to govern."\(^{158}\) A strong opposition to the Liberal Party as the ruling party is a common feature of most of these articles. Another conclusion that can be reached from reading the newspapers published at the end of 1958 is that by that time the government could no longer use the anti-communist argument (or excuse) to justify its growing un-democratic practice.

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\(^{156}\) *The Seoul Sinmun, Segye Ilbo, Korean Republic and Kyŏngche Sinmun*. Airgram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, November 26, 1958, in *FRUS*, Vol. 18, 509.

\(^{157}\) *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 1958, December 26, in *Chosŏn Ilbo myŏngsasŏl 500 sŏn*, 651.

\(^{158}\) *Busan Ilbo*, 1958, November 24.
Nevertheless, these articles also offer a fairly good explanation as to why the government put such restrictions on the press in the first place.

Besides the Korean press, the United States also opposed the government’s proposed moves. Since these acts posed a clear threat to the democratic ideas held by the United States, we can detect a clear and strong criticism of Rhee's actions by the American ambassador in Korea, [first name?]Dowling, who referred to the Liberal Party's actions after 1958 as "undemocratic tactics". At a meeting held between the Embassy of the United States in Korea and several Liberal Party members, a clear criticism of the restrictions to freedom of speech was expressed. Dowling emphasized in this conversation the serious international consequences of this act and urged the State Department to express the US concern regarding this act to the Korean Ambassador in the United States, [first name?]Yang. Obviously Rhee did not like these attempts by the United States to prevent him from abusing his power for his own benefit. Rhee "accused the US of interfering in ROK sovereignty and of trying to bring about his removal from power." Ambassador Yang, on his part, justified the National Security Law by claiming that the Koreans "were too active politically" and that the "ROK public is immature and needed curbing." Such statements indicate a complete misunderstanding of the basic democratic ideals by the Korean ruling elite during the 1950s and the growing trend toward dictatorship.

Still, the Americans did not lose their faith in the development of Korean democracy, despite the growing tension between Rhee and the Liberal Party on the one side and the opposition party and the press on the other. In an analysis of the

159 Memorandum From the Ambassador to Korea (Dowling) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), January 23, 1959. in FRUS, Vol. 18, 534.
160 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, December 5, 1958, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 513-514.
161 Memorandum From the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Parsons) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), December 12, 1958, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 515-517.
current political crisis in Korea (January 1959), Dowling noted, "considerable progress has been achieved in the development of democratic institutions and processes." Dowling distinguished Korea as an Asian country that had managed to develop "a remarkable degree of political consciousness." Regarding the role of the United States in helping to solve the political situation, Dowling noted that the Korean people expected the United States to take an active role as "there is no doubt in the minds of the Koreans as to our power to influence the Republic of Korea Government." Such a passive role by the US would have serious consequences in terms of the United States' interest in Korea. Dowling recommend that an active course would benefit the US. This active role should include, among other things, the recruitment of the American press and the encouragement of American Congress members to visit Korea in order to influence Rhee and the hard elements of the Liberal Party. In the words of Dowling, "if we move firmly but discreetly, avoiding polemics against him [Rhee] or the ROK Government, we can eventually persuade him to follow a safer and wiser course than that upon which the Liberal Party seems determined to oppose him."162 This statement also regards the misunderstandings held by the United States in regard to Rhee's power and intentions as if they attributed any misconduct to the Liberal Party and not to President Rhee.

Throughout 1958 and 1959, Dowling, as the representative of the United States in Korea, continued to fight against the introduction of the National Security Law. He strongly believed that the US could make a difference if it were to take a strong stand on this issue. As someone who believed in the power of the free press, Dowling called on the American Press to cover the developing situation in Korea as a way of placing

162 Memorandum From the Ambassador to Korea (Dowling) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), January 23, 1959. in FRUS, Vol, 18, 534-540.
pressure on the Liberal Party parliament members.\textsuperscript{163} Following this, he recommended that the State Department strongly oppose "this attempt to muzzle the press and hamstring the opposition party." He further expressed his concern that if the US failed to act on this issue, "we run the grave risk of serious loss of influence here."\textsuperscript{164} These efforts by Dowling managed to win the attention and finally, the support, of the State Department. President Eisenhower sent a personal letter to President Rhee expressing his "personal concern" over the situation in Korea. Eisenhower criticized the way in which the law (the National Security Law) was passed and urged Rhee not to harm the growth of democracy in Korea.\textsuperscript{165}

Besides diplomatic pressure, the United States used its economic aid as a tool to express its dissatisfaction over the actions taken by Rhee and his party. From 1958, the US's economic assistance was reduced drastically. This economic assistance, which had stood at about 383 million dollars in 1957, was reduced to about 321 million in 1958 and further reduced to about 222 million dollars in 1959. As a result, the Korean economy went into decline - from an 8.7 percent GDP growth in 1957 to 7.0 percent in 1958 and 5.2 percent in 1959. Inflation also returned, and the price index decreased. More importantly, the per capita income dropped slightly and the number of jobs in industry and commerce that had depended on inputs of US aid declined. The Americans also began to support the Democratic Party financially.\textsuperscript{166} On top of this, the American Ambassador "praised the actions and attitudes of the Democratic Party."\textsuperscript{167}

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\textsuperscript{163} Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, December 20, 1958, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 518.
\textsuperscript{164} Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, December 22, 1958, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 519.
\textsuperscript{165} Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea, December 25, 1958, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 522-523.
\textsuperscript{167} Conversation with ROK Vice President Chang Myŏn, FRUS, Vol. 18, 464-467
\end{flushright}
What we can conclude from this short review is that by the end of the 1950s, the US was very sensitive to any attempts made by President Rhee and his party to harm basic democratic values in Korea. As will be shown later, this trend continued well into the following months and years as the US's criticism of President Rhee grew. It is interesting to note that the US actions were a reflection of the popular mood within Korea and, to a lesser extent; the US helped the opposition party by supporting its view. In the end, continuous American pressure combined with a large anti-Rhee student movement led to the downfall of President Rhee.

Turning briefly to the economic situation during the first republic, we can say that a substantial period of growth began after the end of the Korean War. Nevertheless, Korea remained very weak during the 1950s. The reconstruction and recovery from the war along with the re-establishment of basic infrastructure that had been lost due to the division of the country accounted for a large part of the economic growth. As President Rhee resisted pressures to modernize Korea, there was heavy dependence on imports and foreign aid. 168

b. Civil Society During the 1950s

Following liberation from the Americans, Korean civil society since Rhee prevented any social groups from gaining real power and controlled their activities. Rhee continued the USMAGK's policies of supporting the pro-government groups 169 and suppressing the "radicals", "procommunist" and "leftist" groups. The regime mobilized pro-government groups in order to win elections, alter the constitution,

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169 These pro-government groups included anti-communist and ultra rightist organizations, state-corporatist labour and peasant unions.
maintain social order and suppress political opponents. The Korean War, which had bolstered Rhee's anti-communist position, dealt a final blow to the remnants of any progressive groups in Korean civil society. Students' activities were strictly controlled, which helped keep them relatively silent during the 1950s. Since all sections of society, including labourers, peasants and students, were strictly controlled, Korea's civil society from 1948 to 1956 was weak and depoliticised. Another development of civil society in the 1950s, thanks to rapid industrialization and US economic aid, was the emergence of a capitalist class. Thus, although civil society did not play a significant role in supporting democracy during the 1950s, we can observe a slow growth in its power.

Television (KBS and CBS) and the newspapers played one of the most significant roles, in promoting democratic ideas and fighting the government's increasingly anti-democratic governing. When discussing the development of democracy during the 1950s, Kim Kyŏng-il attributed the media with the role of "protector of [the] democratic idea." As an example of this role we may look at one of the editorials published in 1955: "The freedom of publication, one of the basic [democratic] rights, is being trampled on by the constitution...this would not even be considered in a democratic state."

171 Young Rae Kim, "Emerging civil society and the development of interest group politics in Korea," Korea Observer 30 no.2 (1999), 251.
172 Programs like "sasangye", "saebŏk" and "saegye" that were broadcast in 1956 for example.
174 "ŏnlotanab-ui bobun chŏldae isūl su ŏbta ([we] absolutely cannot allow the oppression of [the right of] speech), Chosŏn Ilbo, January 22, 1955.
This situation began to change slightly towards the end of the 1950s as Rhee's support began to decline. This was possible because of the success of the opposition parties in the big cities, a trend that repeated itself in the 1958 National Assembly elections. Following 1958, as a result of Rhee's anti-democratic measures, a growing unrest among the people appeared. Also, on the labour front a new movement opposing the state-corporatist Federation of Korean Trade Unions (Taehan nodong chohap ch'ong yŏnmaeng) was launched. By 1960, around 100,000 students began openly to oppose Rhee's regime and other sections of society, although not as actively as the students, did not heed Rhee's anticommunist propaganda anymore.

3. The second republic

By 1960 the situation in Korea had become highly unstable. The Americans' inclination to replace President Rhee with a new president who would be more attentive to White House needs became more and more dominant. Although America's supreme interest was the maintenance of a free South Korea (from the North) the result was a restoration of democracy to Korea. In order to examine just how significant the US's role was in helping transform the power structure from the increasingly dictatorial rule of President Rhee to the democratic rule of Chang, we shall look at the events that preceded the April 19 uprisings. Following that we will attempt to demonstrate that without strong US support, democracy could not survive for long in Korea.

175 Especially from the 1956 presidential elections. During this election, Rhee's opponent Sin Ik Hŭi posed a formidable threat to Rhee and managed to gather between 100,000 and 200,000 people in Seoul. Despite Sin's sudden death, Rhee gained only 56 percent of the votes compared the 74.6 percent he got in 1952. Also, the opposition party managed to defeat the Liberal Party and to win the vice presidential post.

176 The National Security Law, passed in December 1958, the shutting down of the major newspaper in Korea at the time, the Kyŏnghyang Daily, and the execution of Cho Pong Am, the head of the Progressive Party, provoked a strong civil reaction.

177 Sunhyuk Kim, The politics of democratization in Korea: the role of civil society, 32-34.
1. The March 15 Presidential elections

The end of the first republic began with the 1960 presidential elections and the subsequent eruption of large-scale demonstrations against President Rhee. As a result of the discovery of the body of Kim Cho Yol, a student who had been missing for a number of days, large scale rioting broke out on April 11, 1960 in the southern city of Masan as about 10,000 students gathered and demanded an end to Syngman Rhee's regime. Rhee, responding to a US inquiry into the situation the following day, regarded these demonstrations as "Communist inspired", a clear indication that he had totally lost touch with the true nature of events. From the US point of view, these demonstrations were seen as a threat to the stability of Korea as it feared that the Communists would take advantage of the chaotic situation. For this reason the US tried to help restore stability. Walter P. McConaughy, the American ambassador to Korea from 1959 to 1961, recommended to the Department of State that in order "to strengthen democratic institutions in a manner which will restore Korean public confidence in the Government of Korea" the US should take "more positive actions." One of these "positive actions" was giving the Korean government permission to use military troops in order to cope with the growing unrest. However, the Americans no longer supported the Korean military in the same fashion that they had in the past. Thus, the Korean army declared a neutral stance in domestic politics and did not prevent the people from demonstrating.

178 Telegram from the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 12, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 614.
179 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea, April 12, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 615-6.
180 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 17, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 616-619 and Editorial Note, 619.
181 Soong Hoom Kil, "Development of Korean Politics - A Historical Profile" in Understanding Korean Politics, an Introduction, ed. Soong Hoom Kil and Chung-in Moon (New York: State University Press of New York Press, 2001), 38. The Americans continued their lack of support for the Korean army throughout the following year which may explain why General Park Chong Hee assumed that the US would not intervene when he toppled the Chang government.
By 19 April the demonstrations had spread throughout the country and forced Rhee to recognize the real force behind them. In Seoul the students of the major universities and some high schools numbering somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 pupils held demonstrations all over the city. 182 On the same day, McConaughy asked to meet with President Rhee and some other key ministers. 183 Obviously, Rhee was "somewhat nervous and shocked." Once again Rhee tried to blame the riots on "a small group masterminded by subversives and disorder" and later on condemned vice-President Chang Myŏn and other Democratic Party members "as fomenters and abettors of [the] uprising." McConaughy reminded President Rhee that the US had a strong interest in the maintenance of a secure and stable situation and indicated that the real reason for the uprising was widespread and gross fraud and police coercion in the 15 March elections. 184

Nor did the pressure on President Rhee stop there. On the same day the American President, Eisenhower, called Secretary of State Herter and expressed his concern over the unfolding situation in Korea. President Eisenhower told Secretary Herter that "we have to get tough with Rhee" reminding him of the heavy price the American people had paid for the freedom of South Korea and threatening to pull out the American troops and support from Korea "unless Rhee permits free elections and the people are given the right to vote." The President agreed with Ambassador McConaughy that new elections should take place. 185 Continuing the trend that began

182 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 19, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 616-619 and Editorial Note, 618-619.
183 Defence Minister Kim and Home Minister Hong were also present at this meeting which lasted about 50 minutes.
184 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 19, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 616-619. and Editorial Note, 620-222.
185 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Herter, April 19, 1960. in FRUS, Vol. 18, 623.
in the 1950s, the US put pressure on President Rhee as it perceived a threat to the stability and, to a lesser extent, to the democratic situation in the Korean peninsula.

As the volatile situation continued, the Americans took a more active role in trying to restore order and stability. In Seoul, demonstrators continued clashing with the police and the armed forces and a curfew was enforced. In an effort to bring an end to the situation, the American Ambassador acted as a mediator between the government and the demonstrators as he urged the Korean Defence Minister Kim to go immediately to President Rhee and suggest that he meet with the student delegation and issue a statement relating to the question of holding new elections. On the same day (26 April), the Embassy released its first press statement calling for the restoration of order and expressing American support for the demonstrators' demands of the government. As a result, President Rhee issued a statement saying that new elections would take place and that he would resign if the people wished him to do so.186

Not only did the Americans see an obligation to act in order to help regain stability in Korea but the Korean government also saw the Americans as a credible and popular voice which had a lot of influence on the Korean people as well. At the meeting held on April 26 (the same meeting discussed above), Defence Minister Kim requested Ambassador McConaughy to consider issuing a public statement supporting the actions outlined by the government since he believed that the Korean people would see their government's actions as sincere if the American government supported them.187

186 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 26, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 639-640.
187 Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State, April 26, 1960, in FRUS, Vol. 18, 642-643.
The end of President Rhee's rule can be attributed to several factors but we cannot disregard the role of the US Chong Yong-Yuk concludes that the Americans played a significant role in the fall of President Rhee since they supported the opposition and applied strong pressure on Rhee, restrained the army and supported the April revolution.189

2. The Establishment of the Second Republic

Following the resignation of Rhee, the First Korean Republic ended and the way for free, democratic elections was opened. Ironically, it was Chang Myŏn, a protégée of Rhee, who took Rhee's place. When comparing the two individuals' backgrounds, we find similarities (for example, both received their education in the United States) but for the most part Rhee had a superior family background, played a significant role in the independence movement and had greater skills as a political leader. Maybe this can help us understand why Rhee managed to survive for 13 years as President while Chang's term as Prime Minister lasted for less than a year.

When looking at the literature published in the months following the establishment of the Second Republic, we find a lot of optimism. "Five months after the successful student insurrection the Second Republic was thriving." Given the circumstances of

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188 Namely, the growing unrest of the people in regards to the growing un-democratic ruling style of President Rhee, the worsening economic situation and the numerous demonstrations held across the country.
190 Rhee received degrees in political science at George Washington, Harvard and Princeton and Chang got his PhD in education at New York's Manhattan College.
the democratic revolution that took place in Korea, it is hard to imagine that on May 1961, the elected government would be toppled by the army.

Since we are not concerned here with the description of events that led to the fall of the Second Republic, but rather the international factors that supported democracy in Korea, a closer examination of the relations between the Chang government and the US relations follows. As early as 1956, when Chang was elected Vice President, we find that President Rhee made accusations against him having American support. It is true that the US openly opposed Rhee even before 1948 and that it would have preferred to see him replaced by "the soft-spoken, American educated, former Korean ambassador to Washington Chang Myŏn." Indeed, Chang realized the influence of the US as he observed the collapse of the Rhee government following the withdrawal of US funds. For this reason, the new government was very anxious to secure American backing by supporting its interests and following its advice. Although Chang did try to follow the American demands, the Americans, for their part, reduced economic aid to an all-time post-Korean War low level of $180 million. The US also failed to provide support for a "New Deal" type of public works program that was meant to create millions of jobs. This failure to revive the economy, plus the freer political atmosphere that encouraged contention between radicals and conservatives and the limitations that the new constitution put on Chang led to the collapse of the Second Republic. Perhaps one of the most

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193 It should be noted that following the resignation of Rhee as the President of Korea, a transitional government was put in place. This government passed a constitution amendment that adopted the parliamentary system on June 15, 1960. Soong Hoom Kil, "Development of Korean Politics - A Historical Profile", 38.


195 Ibid., 212-213. An example of this can be seen in the devalue of the Korean hwan from $1: hw 650 to $1: hw 1000 in January and $1: hw 1300 in February 1961. This step came as a reply American pressure put on Rhee but had a disastrous effect since the cost of imports on which the Korean economy depended doubled and prices rose 15 percent during the two months in 1961.

196 Sungjoo Han, "South Korea and the United States: The Alliance Survives," Asian Survey 20 no.11 (1980), 209-211. The Americans did supply the money but only after the coup d'état took place.
important issues that contributed to the fall of Chang's government was his inability to reform the government and get rid of the corruption that existed well before the rise of the Second Republic and thus failed to fulfill the expectations of the students who had helped him become Prime Minister.\(^{197}\)

Just as the US can be credited for helping end President Rhee's rule, it can also be credited for the quick fall of the Chang government. Support for this view can be found in Korean sources. "Chang Myŏn cannot be held solely responsible for the failure of his government. Since the Americans did not believe that Chang's democratic government would be able to regulate the revolution and control the army, their lack of support [towards Chang's government] can be seen from the beginning." Since the US's main concern was the struggle with communism and democracy was relegated to a secondary position, Washington was not ready to risk a weak Korea. This can help us understand why it did not react strongly to the army's coup d'état.\(^{198}\)


Conclusion

When trying to describe the relationship between the US and Korean democracy we can identify several trends. Strong support was replaced by apathy following liberation as a result of the American strategy. Yet by the end of the 1950s the Americans had begun to apply growing pressure on President Rhee, not so much from fear of losing democracy in Korea but from fear of losing South Korea to the North. It is not the argument of this author that the US played the main role in the replacement of President Rhee's growing anti-democratic regime by Chang Myōng's democratic government. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the significant role the US played in this process. As Korea's closest ally, no leader in Korea could afford to disregard the views expressed by the US. Although Chang was aware of this fact, he did not meet the most important expectation held by the US – creating a strong and stable state that would not cave in to the pressures from the North. Once Chang could not guaranty the US backing for his government, his days were numbered.

This chapter presented three case studies that can be tested against our model. The first was the occupation years (1945-1948); the second was the period from 1958-1960, and finally, 1960 to-1961. Although steady growth occurred in the Korean economy during this time, the First Republic was characterized by a weak economy. The same can be said of Korea's civil society since the Korean state was too young to create a strong civil society. As for international involvement, strong American involvement during the occupation period managed to help install democratic institutions in Korea. As we move into the 1950s, the US shifted its main focus towards security interests, allowing President Rhee to suppress the development of democracy in Korea and install a regime which was increasingly dictatorial. By the end of the 1950s, increasing US involvement in the democratic process in Korea
helped remove President Rhee and, later on, realize democratic elections. Although not discussed in the paper, it is important to note that once the US did not favour Chang as the leader of Korea, we can observe a quick collapse of his regime. This trend continued well into the 1960s and 1970s as the US was again willing to tolerate President Park's dictatorship as long as he managed to keep the communist threat at bay. The next attempt at regime change was to take place following the assassination of President Park, and we shall discuss it in the following chapter.
Chapter Three – 1979-1980, the Hope of Democracy

Introduction

"Kim Chaekyu, the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, shoots and kills President Pak Chŏnghŭi (Park Chung-hee), his chief bodyguard Ch’a Chich’ŏl and five members of his escort convoy", read the headline of the 27 October morning newspaper. An intense struggle then ensued between the forces who demanded a profound change and those who supported the status quo. In the end, the struggle was won by the army and democracy was, once again, put on hold. What will help us understand the reasons a democracy failed to come about following the assassination of President Park? It is the argument of this author that by 1980 Korea was in fact ready to begin a transition to democracy, at least from a social and economic point of view. This time it was the international factor that was lacking as global events prevented Korea's biggest ally, the U.S, from actively opposing Chŏn Tuhwan's (Chun Doo Hwan) ambitions to assume control in Korea.

The first section of this chapter examines the political, social and economic situation in the period that followed the 26 October 1979 assassination. Special attention is given to the American role during that period. By doing so, it will be shown that Korea was in fact ready for democracy and that the US was not fully supportive of the democratic transition. The second section examines the events that took place in 18 May 1980 at Kwangju and focuses on the international involvement, with a closer examination of the American role. Finally, the aftermath with respect to Korean-American relations is discussed.

Chosŏn Ilbo, 1979, October 27. Two days later, on October 29, Park's assassin was executed.
1. The Murder and its Aftermath - Hope for Democracy

Towards the end of 1979 the political climate of South Korea changed, as a period of growing unrest and large-scale demonstrations and unrest amongst the population began to spread throughout the country. That, combined with steadily decreasing support for Park's rule led to the assassination of President Park by the very same person whose job it was to protect him, the head of the Korean CIA. Although a military coup was soon to follow, we can detect a clear movement toward democracy, one that continued in the following decades. As Moon Byŏngch'u notes, the assassination of President Park and subsequent collapse of the Yushin system paved the way for the creation of democracy in Korea, as strong expectations of democracy and a demand to end dictatorship in Korea were voiced by various social and political groups. These hopes were given full expression during the events that were to take place only a few months later in the southern city of Kwangch'ŏ (Kwangju).

The Minjung became a prominent factor following the end of President Park's rule. Throughout Korean history, the Minjung held a prominent role as they have "deeply affected intellectual, literary, and political culture". In fact, it was their struggle which enabled the democratic struggle and sacrifices which dominated the following

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200 By December 1978, Park's party, the New People's party (Shinmin'ndang) won only 33 percent of the popular vote. Byŏngch'u Moon, Kukka, Chongch'isahoe, Shiminsahoe. Hankuk Minchuchū'ui ihaengkwa kongkohwa (State, Political society, Civil society, The performance of Korea's Democracy and its firmness) (Seoul: Yangchi, 1999), 132.

201 The assassination came after an intense argument regarding the way the government should treat the riots in the southern cities of Pusan and Masan between Park and his chief bodyguard, Cha Chichŏl on the one side and the KCIA chief, Kim Chaekyu, on the other. While the KCIA chief argued that they should act in a restrained way, President Park wanted to dispatch elite combat troops in order to put down the demonstrations (Saxer, 2002:41).


203 Byongch'u Moon, Kukka, Chongch'isahoe, Shiminsahoe. Hankuk Minchuchuui ihaengkwa kongkohwa, 132-133.

years and enabled the 29 June Declaration.\textsuperscript{205} As one of the Minjung’s main roles was “the struggle against oppression”, their contribution to the democratic struggle cannot be overlooked. Since the Minjung’s actions, as argued by Kenneth Wells, cannot be separated from the global movements as they “impinge on domestic life”\textsuperscript{206}, the 1980 Kwangju uprisings and the events that followed cannot be separated from the international context as well. That will be demonstrated in the following pages.

Despite the positive developments, the army, considered the growing unrest as a threat to the security of Korea, much as it did in May 1961, since it believed that the North\textsuperscript{207} would take advantage of the situation. On 12 December a military putsch was carried out by Major General Chun Doo Hwa who was then the Commander of the Defense Security Command.\textsuperscript{208} As Yang Sung Chul indicates, the troops under Chun during his putsch “were technically under joint American-South Korean command.”\textsuperscript{209} This point has particularly important relevance for our discussion as it can be interpreted as American consent for the military putsch, especially if we consider the fact that the same troops were also used later during the Kwangju Uprisings.\textsuperscript{210} In the short term, at least officially, President Cho’e remained President


\textsuperscript{207} The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

\textsuperscript{208} In this putsch sixteen military generals were arrested, including General Chóng Sunghwa, the martial law commander and the army chief of staff. Sung Chul Yang, The North and South Korean Political System, A Comparative Analysis (Elizabeth NJ: Hollym, 1999), 430.

\textsuperscript{209} Sung Chul Yang, The North and South Korean Political System, A Comparative Analysis, 430.

\textsuperscript{210} Although I use the term “Kwangju Uprisings” in order to describe the events that took place at Kwangju on 18 May 1980, it is possible to find many other titles for these events. Among them are “the Kwangju Massacre”(Kwangchohaksal), “The Kwangju Struggle” (Kwangchu hangchong) and “The Democratic Struggle at Kwangju” (Kwangjuminchunghangchaengyonggu).
until 16 June 1980 when he resigned. Following his retirement from the army, General Chun became president on 22 August.\textsuperscript{211}

\textbf{a. The Political Situation In Korea}

Towards the end of 1979, we can detect a move toward a more liberal style of rule as, in response to the opposition’s demands, the government released more than 1000 political prisoners and relaxed the rules against dissent. However, instead of pacifying the opposition, it became even more radicalized as demonstrations against Park’s regime spread throughout Korea. This struggle was not confined to the streets but was also very intense in the parliament. In a speech on 10 September the opposition leader Kim Yŏngsam (Kim Young Sam) announced his plans to start a movement that would “overthrow the Park regime.”\textsuperscript{212}

Following the assassination of President Park, Prime Minister Ch’oe kyuha (Choi Kyu Hah) became the acting president but did not declare his intentions with respect to establishing reforms during his term, which encouraged the opposition leaders to take the lead in the struggle for democracy. Kim Daechung (Kim Dae Jung), another opposition leader, in a speech on 8 December called for the restoration of basic human rights, freedom of the press, and an end to martial law. “Before the end of the year [1979] the government had to begin a clear process of amending the constitution and holding elections that would bring about the establishment of a democratic government.”\textsuperscript{213} With respect to the ongoing debate about the cancellation of the \textit{Yushin} system that was still in operation, Mr. Kim said, “A continuing struggle

\textsuperscript{211} The National Conference of Unification elected Chun with a vast majority of 2,524 votes out of 2,525. Following his election, Chun dismantled the old regime’s \textit{Yushin} system and a new constitution was drafted and approved by national referendum on 22 October, 1980, Ibid, 432.

\textsuperscript{212} James Fowler, “The United States and South Korean democratization.” \textit{Political Science Quarterly}, 114 No 2 (1999),266.

\textsuperscript{213} Taken from a speech given by Kim Dae Jung, December 8, 1979, titled: “It is the time for the cancellation of the emergency act number 9”, in Samsong Kim, \textit{Soului Bom, Minchusonon} (Seoul’s Spring, Democratic speeches) (Koyang: Hankukhaksul Chongbo, 1987), 45-50.
between the [supporters of the] Yushin system and their opponents, between dictatorship and democracy is taking place in Korea nowadays. To the supporters [of the Yushin system] I have a warning and some advice – Mr. Park is dead! It is important to note that a strong personal struggle between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yung Sam contributed to the weakening of the main opposition party, the New People's Party (NPP-Shinmindang), and its struggle against the ruling party.

These events were accompanied by a series of demonstrations in the spring of 1980 that took place all over Korea. Most significant of those was the “Seoul Spring” (Soul bom), where a series of demonstrations held mainly by students who called for immediate democratic reforms took place in Seoul. About 150,000 students and citizens protested on 15 May against the new military government. In order to give the government a chance to respond to their demands, the demonstrators refrained from further street demonstrations. The government, sensing its danger to itself, extended the martial law that was in effect in Seoul to the rest of Korea. Although Choi remained South Korea’s president, General Chun became the de facto leader. As part of the new martial law, university campuses across the country were closed and many political leaders, including Kim Dae-jung, were placed under arrest. Kim’s arrest ignited a strong reaction from the Kwangju residents, since he was from the southern Honam region.

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214 Taken from a speech given by Kim Dae Jung, March 26, 1980 at the YWCA, entitled: “Together with the people’s spirit”. Ibid., 152.
215 This personal struggle continued over the following years preventing the opposition party from taking control in the 1987 free elections. Byongchu Moon, Hankuk Minchuchuuirouei Iheangkwa Kongkohwa, 1979-1994 (Democratic transition and consolidation in Korea). PhD. Thesis, Political Science Department (Seoul: Konkuk University, 1996), 81-82.
b. The Social Situation

Alongside the political struggle by the opposition party, we can detect a revival of Korean civil society, as the restrictions that were present during Park’s regime were lifted. Following the collapse of the Yushin system and the establishment of the Fifth Republic, the social structure remained quite restrictive since the previous government of Park, in the name of anti-communism and economic development, had effectively managed to suppress any demands for reforms made by the people. This can be seen in the inability of the masses to effectively mobilize themselves and gain their objective. During the 18 years of dictatorial rule many restrictions existed that denied basic democratic rights and restricted the activities of social groups like labour unions. Strong state intervention, while able to achieve rapid economic development, also managed to harm the development of civil society.

When examining the prospects of Korea for a successful transition to a democratic regime, we must consider the level of social development. One major change that had occurred by the end of President Park’s rule was the existence of a strong, solid middle class. This was the result of Korea’s rapid economic development throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, this factor was missing. Another factor that prevented Prime Minister Chang Myōn from holding his position for long was his...

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218 Although Park’s rule was not democratic, it is possible to see it as a “semi-democratic” regime as free elections were held at least until 1972 when the constitution was changed. Following the installation of the Yushin Constitution Park’s regime became increasingly dictatorial. Any attempts to oppose the government were blocked, the press was heavily censored and scores of political activists were arrested on various allegations and in accordance with Emergency Regulation No. 9 which was proclaimed on 13 May 1975. For specific cases of human rights violations see the Amnesty International Report 1986, South Korea. Violations of Human Rights. (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1986). For further discussion on the political situation in Korea during the 1970s see Edward J. Baker and Jerome Alan Cohen, ‘US Foreign Policy and Human Rights in South Korea.’ In ed. Shaw, William, Human Rights in Korea, Historical and Policy Perspective. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 176-195.
inability to secure the masses’ support, as the students were the only group who supported his goals.\textsuperscript{221} By 1979 not only did students and opposition leaders take part in the struggle but so did the masses, a point which came to full realization in the struggle at Kwangju where massive mobilization against the government took place. This can help us further understand the scale and strength of civil society at this time as finally, after so many years of strict restrictions, an opportunity to express their demands was given to various social groups.

The years 1979-1980 can be seen as a turning point in the history of Korean society and its struggle for democracy. General Chun and his group (known as the new military authorities or Shinkunbu) could not be offered legitimacy or even be accepted by the people due to the popular opposition to dictatorship and struggle for democracy. The students struggle, accompanied by the labour unions’ struggle for reforms, weakened the new government.\textsuperscript{222} The “overwhelming dominant position” of civil society during the early stages of the Fifth Republic was one of the factors that caused the crisis of stability and power management experienced by the new government.\textsuperscript{223}

c. The Economic Situation

Since a democratic transition is hardly possible without real economic development we shall now turn to a brief examination of the economic situation in Korea during the years 1979-1980. Even though a serious economic crisis began to unfold,

\textsuperscript{221} The students supported Prime Minister Chang’s selection mainly due to their opposition of President Lee Sygman. This support was soon to be replaced with a growing sense of disappointment at the new government’s performances as Prime Minister Chang was not able to deliver the democratic reforms he promised prior to his election.

\textsuperscript{222} Byongchu Moon, \textit{Kukka, Chongch’isahoe, Shiminsahoe. Hankuk Minchuchuui ihaengkwa kongkohwa}, 142-145.

\textsuperscript{223} Byongchu Moon, Hankuk Minchuchuuiroui iheangkwa Kongkohwa, 1979-1994, 94.
following the death of President Park,224 in a broader sense the basic economic indicators showed us just how much the Korean economy had expanded since the last attempt of the masses to establish democracy, in April 1960. When examining the per capita income, we can see just how profound the change was: from US$ 371225 in 1960 to US$ 2,720 in 1980226, from 73.9 won in 1965 to 199.7 won in 1980227 and the average consumption grew from 67.9 won in 1965 to 159.8 won in 1980.228

Finally, the per capita GNP in Korea can offer us further evidence of the impressive development Korea managed to achieve under President Park: from US$ 100 in 1963 to US$ 1,647 in 1979.229 One factor that can help us understand just why the crisis was so sharp was that the Korean people had become accustomed to a high growth rate under the Park regime. In 1980, for the first time since the Korean War, there was economic decline as the GNP rates dropped down to a negative 2.7 percent.230

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above figures: The first conclusion is that by 1980 the economic factor could no longer justify the social-political repression that it had during the Park regime and secondly, that General Chun's assumption of power could not be justified in economic terms because the economic crisis was short lived.

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224 By 1979, the government predictions for export were not met (the total amount of exports was 15 billion dollars) which brought about a sharp devaluation of the Won by 20 percent (from 484 Won to the Dollar to 580 Won) in January 12, 1980. The total amount of imports rose to 7 billion Won. On top of this the international oil price was steadily increasing which brought a rise of 59.43 percent in oil commodities. Sangyong Chŏng, Hongkyu Cho, et al. Kwangjuminchunghangchaeng dak'yumentőri 1980 (The Kwangju people's struggle, documentary 1980) (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1990), 104.

225 The figures refer to the US Dollar value in 2000.

226 These figures are taken from the Korean Development Institute, Half Century of the Korean Economy – Collection of Policy Date, 1995 and Korea National Statistical Office, Major Statistics of Korean Economy, 2002.

227 In units of 1000 won, 1999 prices.


229 The Bank of Korea. Ibid, 106.

since it was caused mainly by the deep political uncertainty and the oil crisis that followed the crisis in Iran in 1979.

d. Prospects For Democracy

Given the social, economic and political situation, a kind of euphoria about future political developments in the short period that followed the assassination of President Park began to emerge. A sense that now the road to democracy was finally open and that the new government would take serious steps in order to reform the political system can be found both in Korean in foreign publications. The US and other allies of Korea also expressed their optimism with respect to the future of Korea. “It is possible for us to accomplish a new political democratic era in Korea if we continue to march in the same direction. The commitment of President Choi to political freedom and democracy gives the people of Korea new hope.” 231 It is interesting to note that this was written only a day before the coup led by General Chun took place which shows us just how unexpected the coup was. This coup was the first sign of what was yet to come since five months later the chance for a peaceful transition to a democratic regime was all but shattered.

The reasons for the failure of democracy in Korea on this occasion can also be found in the international context, especially the role of the US Although by 1979 Korea’s dependency on the US was much weaker given the impressive economic development that had taken place during the ruling years of President Park, the US was still able to influence the decision-making process in Korea. 232 Given this, we

232 A good example of this is the American success in deterring President Park from developing nuclear weapons during the 1970s.
shall now turn to examine the American role in the events that preceded the Kwangju uprising.

e. The American Involvement – from the Assassination of President Park to 17 May

The main argument of this chapter is that the US bears some responsibility for the failure of democracy in Korea in 1980. Still, it is important to make clear at this stage that the author does not attribute the failure of democracy solely to the US. A lack of action, rather than actual actions taken by President Jimmy Carter's administration, is crucial to our understanding of the above argument. Throughout the 1970s, and especially following the establishment of the Yushin system, the American administration consistently criticized President Park's growing anti-democratic ruling style. This, combined with the long history of American support for democracy in Korea that began in 1945, created certain expectations of the US. Therefore, the US, for reasons that will be explained later on, was seen as a country that did not follow its moral obligations.

Before getting into actual descriptions of US involvement, it is important to note that literature relating to the period of 1979-1980 can generally be divided into two separate categories: one supporting the official American stand (that is that the US did not intervene in and had no prior knowledge of the events that led to the Kwangju uprisings) and the other arguing that the US not only knew what happened during and before the uprisings in Kwangju, but that it also played a significant role in influencing and manipulating these events in order to achieve its own goals. Also, it is very important to distinguish between publications, which were published before

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233 We can put James Fowler, Kim hyun K. and Moon Ihwan in this category.
234 Tim Shorrock, Sungchul Yang and, to a large extent, the Korean press belongs to this category.
1996 and those after this date. We find many scholars (especially those published in Korean) blaming the US for its part in what occurred during and prior to Kwangju as part of the anti-American trend that was to follow the uprisings.

After reading a variety of publications from both sides, and as a neutral foreign observer (meaning neither Korean nor American), this writer places himself on the side that claims that the US could have, although it was not obliged to, changed the course of events by taking a firm stand against the Korean military. It is not the argument of this author that the US approved the military coup on December 12 or that it approved the Korean army's actions during the mass uprising at Kwangju. I conclude that political considerations and some world events forced the American administration to abandon its open policy of promoting democracy when it saw a threat to its national security and its own interests.

The official American version is that the US was not involved in any way in the events that led to the Kwangju uprisings. "The United States had no prior knowledge of the assassination of President Park Chung Hee on 26 October 1979... The United States had no advance warning of the December 12 incident in which a group

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235 The Department of State was forced to release the documents dealing with the events that occurred during and before 18 May 1980, following a request made by Tim Shorrock in the name of the Freedom of Information Act. These documents can be found in the Kwangju Documents Collections (Government Documents and Information Center, Mudd Library, Yale University). Since these papers cannot be found anywhere outside the US (at least when this paper was written), I will follow the papers of Tim Shorrock, "Debacle in Kwangju", The Nation, Vol. 263, no.19 (1996), 19-22, and the transcript of his article: The US Role In Korea, 1979-1980, published on February 27, 1996 in The Journal of Commerce, and James Fowler, "The United States and South Korean democratization", who made extensive use of these official documents.


237 The subject of anti-Americanism is dealt with in the following section.

238 A different point of view can be found among some Korean, meaning, that the US was actually deeply involved in the assassination. This accusation is based on the fact that the US had close relations with Kim Cheakyu, as the American Ambassador held numerous meetings with him and the fact that the US expressed its disagreement in regards to President Park's actions, especially in regards to the Human Rights issue. (MBC, 2004, 4 April In: http://www.mbc.com/broad/tv/culture/cantell/1405173_1590.html). Since no real evidence which can support this theory is to be found, it is difficult to support these allegations.
of ROK army officers led by Major General Chun Doo Hwan seized control of the military.” The only concern the United States had in response to these events was the possible threat by North Korea as it was “alarmed that the North might see it as an opportunity to attack the South.” President Carter wrote a personal letter to President Choi on January 4, 1980, expressing his concern about the events that took place within the army and warning that similar occurrences in the future “would have serious consequences for our close cooperation.”

With regards to the possible political change that could follow the assassination of President Park, “The United States repeatedly urged the Korean civilian and military authorities to resume the democratization process.” In fact the US policy towards Korea following the December 12 incident was summed up as an “attempt to preserve momentum toward a broadly based democratic government under civilian leadership.”

Some of the 1996 declassified documents further support the argument that the US acted in order to support the development of democracy after the assassination of President Park. The US decided to reduce its criticism of Korea and reached a secret agreement with the new government of Choi, one that set a schedule for reforms. Throughout the short term of the Choi administration, the Americans did not publish any form of criticism as they believed that private diplomatic pressure would be more efficient. As argued above, the Americans chose to take a passive role with respect to

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240 Ibid., p.6.
241 Ibid.
243 Although it was clear to both sides that this schedule could not be met as Choi lacked the power that was needed in order to conduct such wide-ranging reforms to the political system.
the new administration. Given this attitude, it is possible to claim that General Chun did not consider the Americans as a possible threat to his future political ambitions.

From the above description we could conclude that the Carter administration took a supportive stance in the question of democratic transition. In fact it is also possible to come to a different conclusion, one that shows that considerations of security and stability took precedence. This perspective, represented by the non-official point of view, while attempting to show the US in a negative light, can also help us understand the reasons for the passive American role.

Following the assassination of President Park, the Carter administration set up a top-secret policy-making group in order to closely follow the events unfolding in Korea. Given the events that took place in Iran and the Soviet Union, the conclusion that “the United States must avoid another Iran in Korea” was reached. According to Tim Shorrock, and in contrast to the White Paper, supporting democracy in Korea was not the Americans’ top priority when dealing with post-Park Korea, but rather making sure that stability in Korea would be maintained. The various social groups that once relied on American support for their struggle against Park’s regime could no longer expect support.

In a Cherokee cable dated December 1979, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, Richard C. Holbrooke asked Ambassador Gleysteen to send a direct message to Korean Christians saying that they should not expect long-term support for their struggles (meaning their struggle for democracy). The United States,

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244 This group’s discussions were limited to President Carter and his Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Richard C. Holbrooke and top intelligence officials at the National Security Council. In South Korea, distribution was limited to US Ambassador William J. Gleysteen. The codename given to the cables was NODIS/Cherokee (Tim Shorrock, 1996, in http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/kwangju3.htm). This web page contains the English version of Shorrock’s three-part series published in Sisa Journal in Korea in 1996.
Holbrooke said, should send a direct message to the dissidents saying "In this delicate time in Korean internal politics, the United States believes that demonstrations in the streets are a throw-back to an earlier era and threaten to provoke retrogressive actions on the part of the Korean government." This move came after Mr. Holbrooke obtained the full support of Congress in regard to US policy toward Korea, meaning to maintain stability in Korea as a key ally of the US. As we shall see later, this policy continued well into 1980. Regardless of the accuracy of either the official or the unofficial versions, it is hardly possible to claim that the Carter administration was able to predict the massive burst of violence that surfaced in Kwangju in the middle of 1980. The following section focuses on these events and examines the international role and response to these events.

2. Kwangju and World Involvement

On 18 May 1980 a massive clash between the people of the southern city of Kwangju and the Korean military under the command of General Chun Doo Whan took place. After the clashes ended, General Chun became the President of Korea on 22 August and the prospects of installing a democratic regime dissolved. It is not the intention of this paper to describe the events that took place during the uprisings. Rather, as this event marked the turning point in the struggle for democratic transition, we should look into the role played by the international community as our main argument is that international factors were of particular significance during the 1979-1980 struggle for democracy. Continuing its policy which had been set by the end of

\[245\] Tim Shorrock, "Debacle in Kwangju".

1979, the Carter Administration chose to take an observer role rather than trying to influence events, a decision that proved to be critical to future Korean-American relations.

a. Japanese, Chinese and American Involvement

On viewing the international scene, we can find three countries that could have had a significant effect on the political situation in Korea during the above years: China, Japan and the United States. Among these countries the US played the greatest role as the other two countries did not affect events in a significant way.

The Chinese maintained mainly economic relations with the ROK prior to and during the 1980s and tried to avoid political moves that would jeopardize its relations with North Korea. To this ends, Chinese policy makers tried to maintain a balance between both Koreas.\(^{247}\) As Chung Jao-ho argues, the Chinese approach toward Seoul during the 1980s has been characterized by "separating politics from business."\(^ {248}\) For this reason, the Chinese had no significant influence over the events that took place during May 1980. When examining the Japanese role, we find a similar attitude.

Japanese involvement in Kwangju events was mainly in the aftermath. The failure of the democratization process that took place after the assassination of President Park and the rise of another military junta led by General Chun Doo-hwan stirred Japanese public opinion. The Japanese government was concerned at the instability that could follow the Kwangju events and paid special attention to the trial of opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung.\(^ {249}\) We can conclude that the Japanese avoided intervening in the

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\(^{248}\) Chung, 1990, in ibid, 1146-1147.

\(^{249}\) The Japanese were concerned that the Koreans would not respect the 1973 "Political settlement" that followed Kim's kidnapping from Tokyo. In this agreement the Koreans assured Japan that Kim would not be charged in Korea over his political activity in Japan or elsewhere. The Korean government decision to impose a death sentence on Kim one month following the uprisings, amidst allegations that he planned and provoked the demonstrations, placed the newly Japanese Government, led by Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko, in a political dilemma. A warning was sent to Korea by the
uprisings and were more concerned about the actions of the new leadership that seized power following the events. Given its geographic location and its close relations with the US, Japan, much like South Korea, also paid close attention to the possible risk from North Korea. Still, considering the extreme sensitivity of Koreans to any use of military power by Japan, no military intervention was even considered. 250

That leaves the United States. As Korea’s most important ally, both economically and strategically, the US, unlike Japan and China, had a great influence over the political events that led to the Kwangju uprising and later to the establishment of Chun’s government. Just how significant was American involvement and did it take an active role in the events? It depends on whom you ask and, no less importantly, when you ask these questions.

b. A closer look at American actions during the Kwangju uprisings

In order to get a clearer picture of the US role during the Kwangju uprisings, we shall now turn to a closer examination of the American actions. Chong Chaeho, who wrote his PhD dissertation on the Democratic Movement in Korea, 251 divides the uprising into three stages; (1) from 18 May until the morning of the 19th, (2) from the

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250 For further discussion on the Japanese role in the democratization process in Asia, see Edward Friedman (ed.) *The Politics of Democratization, Generalizing East Asian Experiences* (Boulder: Westview, 1994).

afternoon of the 19th until the afternoon of the 21st and, (3) from the evening of the 21st until the 27th. His account is based on reports in the Korean media.\textsuperscript{252}

In the first stage of the uprisings, the US’s main priority was the return of Korean soldiers to their post in the DMZ since it was concerned about a possible attack by the North. According to the Korean media, General Wickham gave General Chun his consent to mobilize troops during the 17 May coup d’etat in order to restore order. From this report we can see that the US’s main concern was North Korea since it was afraid the North would take advantage of the situation.\textsuperscript{253} Regarding the decision made by General Wickham, as we shall see later, this version was proven to be correct despite repeated denials by American officials of any involvement in the events that took place during the early months of 1980.

By the second stage, the US had dispatched its Air Force in order to prevent any attack from the North. The Koreans saw this move as a clear sign of a US decision not to get involved in the uprisings.\textsuperscript{254} In other words, they believed the US had chosen to deal first with the security threat posed by North Korea even though there was no indication that it was about to dispatch troops to the South. Here we can detect the first signs of criticism of US actions as it chose to take steps in order to prevent a theoretical threat whilst not doing anything to stop the Korean army’s real actions in Kwangju.

Finally, by the third stage, the US “expressed its concern” regarding the events that took place in Kwangju and asked Korean officials to demonstrate “self control” and to open a dialogue with the people of Kwangju. By this stage the US realized that it had

\textsuperscript{252} Chŏng is making use of the publications of the Chosŏn Ilbo and Donga Ilbo, as published in the days that followed the uprisings (May 20\textsuperscript{th} till 22\textsuperscript{nd}).
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 74.
misjudged the North’s intentions and was wrong to dispatch its Air Force at such an early stage. 255

We can summarize the American role during the uprising as that of passive observer. No steps were taken to prevent the sending of troops to Kwangju since, they believed, "The first priority is the restoration of order in Kwangju by the Korean authorities with the minimum use of force necessary." 256

c. The Criticism Of the US Role in the Kwangju Uprisings.

The greatest "accusation" we can find regarding the US role in the events that took place in Kwangju refers to the fact that an extensive deployment of troops, theoretically under American command, occurred in order to quell the uprisings in Kwangju. We shall deal with the official response of the Americans to these accusations in the following section. Here, we simply wish to describe the way the US acted during the uprisings. This task proves quite difficult as different descriptions can be found when looking at different sources. Once again, it is important to distinguish between pro-American and anti-American scholars.

According to some Korean scholars, the American decision not to send any troops or at least to prevent General Chun from sending the 20th division represented an American betrayal of the Korean people. As Cho Chungkwan puts it:

The United States, as the representative of world capitalism and protector of foreign capital, was portrayed as the sponsor of the military dictatorship. Alleged US complicity in the Kwangju bloodshed was seen as proof. 257

255 Ibid., 78.
256 This policy was reached after a discussion at the White House on May 22 in a National Security Council meeting. See Don Oberdorfer, The two Koreas, A contemporary History (Reading Mass: Basic Books, 1997), 129.
A more typical Korean reaction to the American role during the Kwangju Uprising and one that reflects the deep anti-American trend that followed 1980 can be found in Lee Samsŏng's work:

With respect to the American role in the Kwangju slaughter (Kwangchohaksal)...its full knowledge of the events that took place is more important than its anti-democratic, anti-Nationalist and anti-Korean characteristics.

We can conclude that from the Korean point of view, the US chose to deal first with the theoretical threat imposed by North Korea and ignored the actual evolving situation in Kwangju, despite of its awareness of the worrying situation. When looking at the Americans' description of the events, we get a completely different picture.

Donald N. Clark, who gives a balanced account of the issue, points to the fact that all of the Korean troops were under the joint command of the Combined Forces Command (CFC), meaning under the command of the American Commander in Chief (CINC). This implies that before deploying any units, in theory American CINC consent was required. But in practice, the Korean generals could move these units by simply notifying the American General. That, to a large extent, is the reason for the sharp division between the scholars' attribution of responsibility to the U.S. If we utilize this explanation, we can describe the events that took place during 1980 in the following manner: General Chun removed the 20th Division, notified General Wickham that he was removing it from the CFC OPCON, and moved it to Kwangju.

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258 Lee refers to the support the US gave to General Chun after the murder of President Park.
260 As Clark indicates, following the Korean War the operational control (OPCON) of all American and ROK forces in war time was in the hands of the American Commander in Chief (the CINC). The CFC which was created in 1978, changed the original agreement so that the American CINC had operational control in peacetime as well over all units deployed to defend against North Korean attack. See Donald N. Clark, "Bitter Friendship: Understanding Anti-Americanism in South Korea," in Korea Briefing, 1991, ed. Donald N. Clark (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 156.
in order to crush the uprisings. This scenario provides us with an explanation of what happened but by no means does it tell us just how deep the involvement of the US in the events was. The official American version is that there was no prior notification to the CFC OPCON and so the Americans could not have done anything to prevent the Kwangju uprisings. But the Koreans' claim of American involvement since the Americans were in fact informed of the deployment of troops in advance and thus could have prevented it.

d. The Official American Reply to the Korean Accusations

On 19 June, 1989, as a result of growing criticism from the Korean side in regards to the role the US played during the events that took place from October 1979 until May 1980, the United States embassy in Seoul published a paper entitled “United States Government statement on the events in Kwangju, Republic of Korea, in May 1980.” This paper was later to be known as the “white paper” and it provides us with the official US government stance with respect to its involvement in the events that took place beginning with the assassination of President Park until the May Uprisings.

In regards to the events that took place in Kwangju, as far as the American government was concerned the US was not involved in nor had any prior knowledge of the events that were about to take place in Kwangju.

The United States did not initially know the full extent of the violence in Kwangju. When it became aware of the seriousness of the situation, the United States repeatedly urged restraint by ROK military forces and issued a public statement on May 22 expressing concern over the civil strife in Kwangju and calling for dialogue between the opposing sides.

261 Donald N. Clark, "Bitter Friendship: Understanding Anti-Americanism in South Korea," 156.
We can find further support for the above stance from some other officials such as Congressman Stephen J. Solarz who stated that "[The] American authorities had no prior knowledge that these units [the two battalions of the special warfare command initially involved in the atrocities at Kwangju] were being sent to Kwangju and were not even aware of their presence there."\textsuperscript{264}

As we claimed earlier in this chapter, the US's responsibility with respect to the Kwangju uprisings is mainly a moral and supportive one rather than a legal one. The third article of the Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the ROK\textsuperscript{265} supports the official American claims concerning its actions. According to this article, prior to taking any action, the army must get the permission of the United States Congress and therefore, "in the legal aspect the US was not responsible for the coup or the Kwangju Incident."\textsuperscript{266}

The above paragraphs leave no room for doubt since they make it clear that not only was the US not involved in the events in Kwangju, but its actions are fully legal and backed up by the treaty signed between the US and Korea. The problem is that the above description is not completely accurate, as we can see from some of the official documents that were declassified seven years after the publication of the white paper.

e. The Unofficial Version – What Really Happened in Kwangju?

Unlike the official publications, we now know that the US actually did know about the events that were about to take place: "According to the newly declassified

\textsuperscript{264} An Enduring Partnership Address by Congressman Stephen J. Solarz, Extension of Remarks–November 01, 1989, in Http://thomas.loc.gov/
\textsuperscript{265} This articles reads: "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes". Christopher D. Yoon, The Kwangju Democratization Movement, US Role During the 1979-1980 Period: Its Impacts and Ramifications, 50.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 50-51.
documents...on May 9, 1980, the [Carter] Administration gave prior approval to Chun to use military force to crack down on student and labour unrest”, claims Shorrock.267 “The US officials knew as far back as February 1980 that Chun was mobilizing Special Warfare Command Troops, trained to fight behind the enemy lines in a war against North Korea, in his repression of dissent in Kwangju.”268

From these cables we can conclude that the US was informed in advance about General Chun’s intentions and did nothing to stop him. Although the US was not obliged to stop General Chun, it could have tried to do so but, given the Carter Administration’s decision to restore stability in Korea, it chose not to.

The publications of Tim Shorrock created a furore in Korea. We can find numerous references to the publication in the Korean press published in English:

The US government approved plans by former South Korean president Chun Doo-hwan to use military units against pro-democracy demonstrators in Kwangju in May 1980, the Journal of Commerce reported Tuesday, quoting newly declassified US government documents.269

In the Korean language press, the reaction was much stronger. The conservative Dong-A Ilbo published an article on the same day, which made a comparison between the white paper published in 1989 and the newly declassified documents published in 1996, and demonstrated the unreliability of the official publication that the US government had prepared in reaction to the Korean accusations.270 The Kwangju uprisings had a significant effect both on official Korean-American relations and on the way Koreans viewed the Americans.

267 In a cable sent from Glysteen to Washington on May 7, the American ambassador notes: “In none of our discussions will we in any way suggest that the [US government] opposes [Republic of Korea Government] contingency plans to maintain law and order, if absolutely necessary, by reinforcing the police with the army.” Tim Shorrock, Debacle in Kwangju, 20.

268 On May 8, the US Defence Intelligence Agency reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the 7th Special Forces Brigade (the one that was actually responsible for the worst brutalities in Kwangju) “was probably targeted against unrest” in Kwangju. Ibid., 19-20.

269 The Korea Times 29 February 1996.

270 Dong-A Ilbo, 29 February 1996.
f. The Reasons For The American Actions

The above description of the American actions during the events that led up to and took place in Kwangju can provide us with only half the picture, the other half being to understand why the US chose to abandon its long-time commitment to democratic development in favour of other considerations. To this end this section briefly discusses other world events that took place prior to and during the Kwangju uprisings and examines their impact on the decision-making process in the White House.

Firstly, it is important to examine the Carter administration’s policy towards Korea prior to the events that followed the murder of President Park in order to understand the extent of criticism. Considering the emergence of détente and liberal internationalism during the 1970s, President Carter managed to be elected on the basis of promoting human rights issues around the world. Carter’s policy was a response to the declining power of the US - a process that began in the early 1970s. The American people looked for a moral president after their experience with the scandals of President Nixon and the Vietnam War. The fact that Korea was a close ally of the US had a great impact on her choosing, along side with the Philippines and Indonesia, to become a prominent human rights defending country. That is why unlike his predecessors at the White House, President Jimmy Carter tried to strike a balance between promoting human rights issues and security issues when dealing

272 Examples of the decline in US power can be found in the situation in Vietnam, the growth of Soviet power, the weakness of the US dollar and the rise of the OPEC countries' power.
with Korea. However, in practice the administration gave matters of 'national interest' a lot more weight at the expense of human rights issues. This was especially true during the 1979-1980 years when a series of events forced the administration to shift its attention towards security issues.

By 1979, the re-emergence of the Cold War (the war in Afghanistan) and the crisis in Iran pushed aside any prior consideration the Carter administration had regarding Korea. The main objective was to maintain order and return stability to Korea. Behind this was the understanding that they could do anything in order to prevent the fall of yet another one of the US's allies to the Communists. This also included giving support, although not actively, to General Chun's plans since they were aimed at restoring order in Korea.

When observing American foreign policy, especially during the cold war era, one can detect a clear and distinguishing set of priorities. First and foremost were national security considerations. Economic interests follow close behind and last on the list were human rights and the promotion of democracy. Whether President Carter was sincere in his intentions of promoting human rights or whether he used these issues in order to gain political capital is irrelevant as the United States, one of the two superpowers, could not afford a sudden change in its priorities. Like many other events in history, timing was crucial. Perhaps if the assassination of President Park had taken place a year before it did, things would have been different. But given the way things did occur, it is important for us to remember the big picture and not focus only on the narrow Korean perspective. The following section attempts to look beyond the years 1979-1980 and examine some of the consequences.

3. Repercussions of the US Actions

Following the Kwangju uprisings, we can detect two significant trends – on the one hand there was strong disparagement of the new administration of President Chun by the Carter administration and on the other the rise of anti-Americanism. The first trend was soon replaced by one of strong endorsement as President Carter was replaced by President Reagan, but the second trend refused to disappear.

a. From a “Cool and Aloof” policy to “Close Ally”

President Carter, who hoped for a democratic transition in Korea following the murder of President Park, was highly criticised for the actions taken by General Chun.

As described by Don Oberdorfer, the United States adopted a “cool and aloof” public stance towards Chun as it tried to steer the country towards a democratic elections. Still, since President Chun, “feels that he can more or less do as he pleases, irrespective of US warnings” the Carter Administration had little hope of changing the political situation in Korea. Following his election to the presidency on August 27, 277 President Carter in a private message to President Chun urged “early elections under a new constitution and greater personal freedom to enhance stability”. Thus we can summarize the Carter-Chun relations as extremely cold. Cabinet meetings no longer took place and the annual US–Korea security conference was postponed. 278 However this stance was soon to be reversed.

The new Republican administration of Reagan that replaced the Democratic administration of President Carter expressed its support for the new Korean President from the beginning. President Reagan, who was elected on the exact opposite

277 President Chun was not elected by the people but by gaining two thirds of the votes of the National Conference for Unification, as stated in the yushin constitution.
278 Don Oberdorfer, The two Koreas, A contemporary History, 130-133.
platform to the 1977 election campaign of Carter, appreciated the strong, anti-communist ruling style of Chun. President Chun was the first foreign president to visit the White House and met with President Reagan, in exchange for the release of Kim Dae Jung, who was blamed for stirring up and planning the uprisings in Kwangju. Almost no pressure was applied for meaningful democratic reforms by the new administration, at least not until June 1987 when some large-scale demonstrations erupted in South Korea.\textsuperscript{279} Another indication of the warm relations between the two new administrations is the total reversal of President Carter's plans to withdraw US troops from Korea.\textsuperscript{280} Following their meeting, the US reaffirmed their policy that "the security of the Republic of Korea is pivotal to the security of the United States."\textsuperscript{281}

It is important to note that the nations of the world did not impose any sanctions on the new regime in South Korea. Because the western countries, such as the United States and Japan, had a strategic and economic interest in Korea, they were reluctant to impose sanctions on the Korean military junta.\textsuperscript{282}

\textsuperscript{279} In fact, we can detect a growing pressure on the Chun government to take some steps in the direction of liberalization as early as 1985, following the fall of Marcos in the Philippines. This issue will be further discussed in the next chapter. Selig S. Harrison, \textit{Political Alignment in the Two Koreas: The Impact of the American Presence}, 123.

\textsuperscript{280} This decision was made on February 1981, in Chun's first visit to the White House.


b. The Rise of Anti-Americanism

The second repercussion of the Kwangju uprisings and the US involvement in those events was the rise of anti-Americanism (Banmi), a phenomenon that still preoccupies the Korean press and public opinion. The previous chapter can help us understand the roots of this strong reaction by the Koreans immediately after May 1980.

As this "trend" has many features, let us first define the term. To this end the definition of Donald N. Clark, who explored the issue, can be useful to us:

The anti-Americanism at issue here is systematic hostility toward Americans and their institutions in Korea, criticism that goes beyond understanding to attack the motives and ideas of Americans, and attacks by Koreans on other "pro-American" Koreans in a manner reminiscent of attacks on former Japanese collaborators after the Second World War.283

According to Clark, the background to this trend can be found in South Korea’s long history of submission to stronger powers (China, Japan and eventually the U.S). Selig S. Harrison further elaborates this point and indicates a "frustrated nationalism" factor. This trend, according to Harrison, can be seen in many other countries where American forces are stationed, as this generates constant friction. In Korea’s case, the continuing division of the country gives rise to an underlying nationalism – and the US is held responsible for that division, at least among the young generation and this should be taken into account.284

One of the reasons for the growing anti-Americanism was the opposition’s accusation of the US’s involvement in the Kwangju uprisings. The main reason for the anti-Americanism was probably the Korean people’s disappointment with the Americans’ actions before May 1980 since it was accepted as naïve to assume that democracy would evolve in Korea after the murder of President Park without the Korean people.

283 Donald N. Clark, Bitter Friendship: Understanding Anti-Americanism in South Korea, 149.
first taking any independent steps. Some expressions of this trend are the burning
down of the US Cultural Centre in Pusan in March 1982 and the seizing of the US
Information Service in Seoul in May 1985. A survey carried out by the Institution
for Peace Studies at Korea University in 1994 offers some further insight into
Harrison’s theory, since 28 percent replied that they “believe that the US was the most
responsible for the national division” and 49 percent “believe that the US meddles
most in Korea’s domestic political affairs.”

The Americans, for their part, although worried about this trend, believing that this
was not a phenomenon that represented the entire, or even a majority of, the Korean
population. As Congressman Frank J. Guarini commented, “I think the problem (anti-
Americanism) is not too serious because the majority of Koreans value the traditional
friendship between Korea and the United States.” But anti-Americanism was not
the only result of the Kwangju uprisings.

c. Reliance on the US - the Disillusionment

Besides the rise of anti-Americanism and perhaps as a result of it, we can identify
another important aspect in the long-term relations between the various groups within
Korea who struggled to establish democracy and the US When referring to the US
before 1980, the US is described as “the protector of democracy” and the relations
with the US described as “an eternal blood alliance.” However, “after the Kwangju

286 Chungkwan Cho, *The Kwangju Uprising as a Vehicle of Democratization: A Comparative
Perspective*, 77.
287 Christopher D. Yoon, *The Kwangju Democratization Movement, US Role During the 1979-1980
Period: Its Impacts and Ramifications*, 59-60.
288 Frank J. Guarini, *United States Security Relations With South Korea (Extension of Remarks – June
289 Minchuchuölui suhoch’a.
290 Yongwonhan hyölmeng.
uprisings the true essence of the US was exposed." This was because the US preferred to give "tactical support" to Chun and his group since this served the US's aims.

Samsŏng Lee, a Korean scholar who examines the relations between Korean democracy and the US, indicates that many Koreans credit the U.S with a great deal of influence over Korean politics in general and Korean democracy in particular. The Americans, according to Lee, use this power in order to justify their military presence in Korea. Finally, he indicates that there is a misconception that a democracy in Korea cannot exist without American support. While not blaming the Americans for fomenting the violence that broke out in Kwangju, Lee blames the US for abandoning the Korean struggle for democracy in favour of stability in the region. In other words, the anticipation of an active American intervention in the events, one that did not materialize, was seen as some kind of a "betrayal" by the Americans.

d. The New Administration’s Stand with Regard to Promoting Democracy in Korea

Even though the people of Korea lost the battle in Kwangju and later were forced to endure seven more years of dictatorship, their struggle was not in vain since President Chun was obliged to step down and hold free elections after the end of his term. The new government from the beginning proclaimed itself to be a "transitory" regime on the way towards full democracy. The new constitution, for the first time in Korea's modern history, stipulated a single term for the president. On top of that, unlike the
old *Yushin* constitution where the victory of the president was guaranteed, much more freedom and competition was allowed so that the advantage of the ruling party became limited.\(^{294}\) From the end of 1983, Chun’s administration began implementing a steady stream of liberal, although well controlled, policies that contributed to the re-emergence of Korean civil society and the Minjung.\(^{295}\)

In the years that followed the Kwangju uprisings a constant march toward democracy, conducted by a variety of groups, was taking place. President Chun, unlike President Park, was not able to legitimize his dictatorship by using the economic development argument simply because the people of Korea enjoyed a much better economic environment in the 1980s in comparison to the 1960s and 1970s. Yielding to the growing pressure of the opposition, by November 1984 the regime lifted the ban on the political activities of some eighty-four politicians who were previously banned from political activities. Some of these politicians formed the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) in January 1985 \(^{296}\) and managed to gain considerable support in the elections.\(^{297}\) Thus, in the following years, backed by civic groups and a stronger position in the National Assembly, the opposition party managed to lead the struggle for democracy.\(^{298}\) The following chapter further discusses the transitional period and focuses on the various steps taken by the international community, the Korean opposition and the Korean people.


\(^{296}\) Although the official leader of this new party was Lee Minwu, the real people who ran the party were Kim Dae Jung and Kim Yong Sam. The reason is that by this stage, these two were still banned from political activities.

\(^{297}\) In the elections to the National Assembly, in February 1985, where 84.6 percent voted, the NKDP gained more than 29 percent of the votes in comparison to 35 percent gained by the ruling party, Cart J. Saxer, *From Transition to Power Alternation, Democracy in South Korea 1987-1999*, 45.

\(^{298}\) Ibid., 44-45.
Conclusion

This chapter examined the unsuccessful attempt of the Korean people at a peaceful transition toward a democratic political system. The murder of President Park presented a unique opportunity since his growing dictatorship could have been replaced by a less restrictive regime. Unfortunately, the military had different plans and the opportunity was missed. It was during this time the Minjung began to take a central role in shaping the political developments of Korea. Without their sacrifice the democratic transition that began in 1987 could not have happened. Although by 1980 the Korean economy and the development of a civil society was in fact at an intermediate stage, one that could have supported a democratic transition, the international factors were missing or weak at best. In fact, it was the international factor that prevented democracy from taking place. An unfortunate chain of events took place in other places in the world and forced the Carter administration to abandon its commitment to a democratic transfer in Korea and to stress its support for stability, as it feared it might “lose” Korea to the Communist North.

Being dependent on a foreign country has its advantages and disadvantages. Up until the 1970s, Korea relied on the US for its military and economic support. Alongside this there was an unwritten guarantee of moral support from the American side to nurture a democracy in Korea. By 1980, Korea was no longer a third world country that depended on the US for its existence. Due to President Park’s successful economic plan, Korea became economically independent and its army was capable of coping with the Northern threat. But in the political sphere, South Korea still needed the support of the United States and, once this did not materialise, a strong anti-American trend began to spread throughout Korea.
Chapter Four – The Success of Democratisation

Introduction

The new administration of ex-general Chun Doo hwan signalled the failure to establish democracy following the murder of President Park. This time however, due to the lack of legitimacy, the new administration’s demise was obvious from the very early of the Fifth Republic (1981-1988). And indeed, by 1988 Korea successfully held free elections, the first in decades. Preceding these elections, the June 29 declaration, made by the then government candidate and presidential nominee Roh Tae-woo, symbolized more than anything President Chun’s demise of power. This declaration however came only after large-scale demonstrations and intense pressure from the outside. On top of that, the Olympics that were scheduled to take place in Seoul in the summer of 1988, helped restrain President Chun’s actions and prevented him from using military force against the anti-government demonstrators, like he had in 1980.

During the Fifth Republic Korea’s economy expanded, the quality of life improved and society matured. All of these factors contributed to the growth of the middle class. In addition, the international climate had changed since the US no longer supported military dictatorships as it did in the previous decades. The looming end of the Cold War was another factor that contributed to the demise of President Chung as dictatorships all over the world began to collapse.

This chapter explores a critical period in the transition to democracy. Although December 1987 represents a watershed, the Fifth Republic’s fall began well before that. The first section of this chapter examines the state of civil society as well as the changing economic situation during the years 1980-1987. A short review of the major events of that period follows. The third section focuses on the international aspect and
its contribution to the democratisation process. Finally, a short reflection on the contribution of democracy to Korea is included.

1. The socio-economic situation in the Fifth Republic

Throughout this paper three factors have been identified as crucial to a successful democratic transition: the stage of economic development, the maturity of the civil society and the international factors. This section briefly examines the first two factors since the international factors are dealt with in the following sections. In comparison to the previous attempts to install democracy (e.g. in 1948, 1960), and 1979, by the end of the 1980s the Korean economy and its civil society were in much better shape. President Chŏn Tuwan (Chun Doo Whan) was very successful in pulling Korea out of its economic crisis of 1979-1980 and reviving the Korean economy. On the civil side, we can detect a significant growth of various organizations that acted separately to the government, a great improvement when compared to the Pak Chŏnghŭi (Park Chong Hee) era.

Although the Chun regime, much like the previous authoritarian regimes, managed to create an almost omnipotent state which ruled over society, a civil society was able to develop, even if at a very slow pace, and helped promote democracy. Seong Kyoung-Ryung attributes the collapse of the Chun regime “to the tremendous popular resistance organized by diverse civil society groups such as student activists, labour activists, and more importantly, moderate political reformists with middle-class backgrounds.” However, in comparison to the period that followed the June 29

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declaration, Korea’s civil society was still weak. Nonetheless, from 1984, we can identify a steady increase in the number of civil organizations.

By the mid 1980s the composition of Korean society changed in a way that allowed a solid future civil society to develop. Broadly speaking, we can identify three politically important classes which formed the basis of this civil society; the capitalist class which became dominant thanks to the current and previous regimes’ support of the chaebol, an urban working class and a complex middle class composed of members of the liberal professions, and intellectuals and white-collar workers. By the early 1980s the capitalists remained heavily dependent on state patronage but, given their size and importance, the state was unable to ignore their demands and needs. Thanks to the rapid increase in the number of industrial workers, organized workers often clashed with the state in attempts to improve their working conditions and salaries. 300

From the above groups we can isolate the middle class as the most important sector, which helped eventually to bring an end to the dictatorship of President Chun. In a paradoxical way, the impressive economic growth that helped President Chun win a certain legitimacy during the early stages of his tenure also helped with the eventual demand by the masses to gain more political freedom and bring an end to his regime. The middle class, who by the second half of the 1980s was free of economic worries, “no longer tolerated the trade-off between economic development and political freedom.” 301 In fact, it was the middle class together with the students who provided


the "final push" to the sagging democratic movement. Similar positive developments can be attributed to the economic sector.

Recovering from the 1979-1980 economic crises, during the Fifth Republic (1981-1987) Korea enjoyed a steady and strong economic growth. President Chun, after assuming power, tried to institute macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment. Among other measures, this policy included a tight fiscal and monetary policy by trimming government budgets, cutting subsidies, freezing wages, and restraining credit allocations. As a result of this policy, the average economic growth rate stood at 9.5 percent, while inflation was held at 6.1 percent annually. Furthermore, the average annual current account surplus ($2.8 billion) was twice the average deficit under former president Park. By 1987, economic growth stood at 12.3 percent, one of the highest rates in Korean history.

During the Fifth Republic the country sought to develop capital-intensive heavy and chemical industries. Steel, shipbuilding and transportation equipment became the first priority. This was possible mainly thanks to the development of a close relationship between the large diversified business conglomerate (chaebol) and the government, a relationship which was most noticeable in the allocation of state credit. One indicator of the enormous importance of the conglomerates in Korea is the fact that the top ten chaebol accounted for 70 percent of GNP in the mid 1980s.

During the 1980s, due to various internal and external pressures, Korea was forced to liberalize its economy. The interventionist policy that dominated the Korean

economy from the mid 1960s began to change. This trend was supported by the chaebol who wanted to gain greater control over capital and investment while maintaining their access to cheap credit. Due to the drying up of credit for industrial expansion and a steep rise in real interest rates, reforms were necessary. The result was a shift from foreign to domestic finance. Still, this change was slow and the state was still heavily involved in the economy.³⁰⁵

Since this paper follows the school of thought that rejects the static, procedural notion of democratic politics³⁰⁶ and views democracy as an evolving procedure, the claim that by June 1987 democracy had suddenly been declared in Korea is not one that this writer supports. Instead, we can identify a slow and steady movement towards democracy, one that began well before 1987. From 1984, we can identify a gradual transition from a repressive regime (1980-1983) towards a more relaxed one and by late 1985 the so-called “decompression phase” (yuhwa kukmyŏn) began.

2. Historical Review

a. From Authoritarian Rule to Democracy

In order for us to understand the importance of the 29 June declaration, we need to go back and examine the Fifth Republic and its attitude towards democracy in Korea. When dealing with the democratic-authoritarian trends during this period, we can identify three distinct periods: 1980-83, “a period of political terror, a dark age of

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.
³⁰⁶ This attitude has been employed by Huntington (1989,1991). Here, we follow Doh Chol Shin’s theory as it appears in his book, Mass politics and culture in democratizing Korea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
democracy in Korea", the “decompression” period of 1983-1985, and, finally, the 1985-1987 period of “appeasement.”

Following the May 1980 Kwangju uprisings, the new military authority managed to repress all elements who opposed its authoritarian rule by arresting large numbers of political and social activists and by applying strong censorship to the press. Television was nationalized and the press also no longer remained free since all newspapers except one government-approved newspaper in each province were not allowed to run. However, the harsh ruling style of President Chun did not succeed in completely abolishing the resistance to the new government. On one front, however, the government did succeed: the opposition parties no longer posed any threat as they were “tamed by the military” and lacked genuine popular support. Without a political opposition, the students took up the lead in organizing the anti-government activities. However, in contrast to the previous years, this time the opposition demanded a total restructuring of the socio-political order, one that would lead to a radical type of democracy.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Chun regime lacked legitimacy from the beginning due largely to the way Chun managed to seize control over the country. By 1984 the government, reassured by its impressive economic success, felt the need to stabilize its rule by gaining support and legitimation from the people. This aim could be achieved, so the ruling elites thought, during the 1985 National Assembly elections

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307 Sang-Yong Choi, “Democratization and Peace in Korea.” In, Democracy in Korea, Its Ideals and Realities, ed Sang-Yong Choi (Seoul: The Korean Political Science Association, 1997), 5-7. A similar classification scheme and typology is applied by Hyung Baeg Im,
308 Hyungwon Kang, From the Streets to the Olympics: Korea, Democracy and the 24th Olympiad (Seoul: Art, Space, 1989). On top of that, the nation’s two wire services were consolidated into one, Yonhap News Agency, and placed under government control. The international wire services (such as Associated Press and Reuters) were also under the surveillance of the government’s censorship.
309 For example, in March 1982, the United States Information Agency building was set on fire by university students opposing President Chun. Also, on September of the same year, a Coalition of Youth for Democratization was organized in an attempt to revitalize the opposition forces. Sang-Yong Choi, "Democratization and Peace in Korea.", 6.
310 Ibid.
where a strong base of support could have strengthened the government's rule. Thus, the "decompression" phase began after 1983 and many of the political restraints were lifted. But the government's plan did not quite work as planned and the result was growing disorder and activities that were aimed mainly at the government. Students and labour organizations demanded more freedom and a replacement of the current regime with a democratic one. Besides the "traditional" radical elements, other social movements cutting across classes and occupations, such as peasants, college professors, and journalists joined the struggle against the government. 311

The February 1985 general elections can be regarded as the beginning of the transition to democracy. In these elections the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) lost its two-thirds majority and won only 35.3 percent of the votes. The new party of Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP), won 28 percent of the votes and became the largest opposition party. One of the major reasons for this success was the NKDP's desire for a direct popular election of the president. 312

Since the government's plan to encourage division between the moderate and radical forces failed, we can observe a renewal of its oppressive policies by mid-1985. President Chun's response to the opposition was one of partial appeasement alongside his continued attempts to divide the opposition. This policy, however, failed as the opposition groups, despite their heterogeneous political orientation, managed to maintain a broad coalition against the government.

The opposition’s main demand was for constitutional reform as a first step towards a regime change. In early 1986, following the 1985 elections, the opposition, now with greater force behind it, initiated a debate on the constitutional amendments. While the ruling party, the DJP, proposed a parliamentary system, the opposition party, the NKDK, aware of the government’s ability to manipulate this type of election, demanded a presidential system.\(^{313}\)

By 1987 the situation began to get out of hand as large-scale demonstrations began to take place around the country. Although the students were the driving force behind these demonstrations, this time the participants included a large proportion of the Korean population, namely the middle class who had become a dominant force during the 1980s. The direct cause for this outbreak of demonstrations was the revelation of the death of a Seoul National University student, Park Chong Chol, as a result of torture whilst under police investigation. In addition President Chun, in a dramatic announcement made on April 13, 1987, postponed the constitutional debate and the presidential elections until his term expired in February 1988. The opposition, which was split between those who were willing to accept President Chun’s proposal for a parliamentary form of government in return for certain democratic reforms and those who rejected it, strengthened the position of the hardliners who saw the government as weak and vulnerable.\(^{314}\)

By 1985, as a result of the changing structure of the power balance in Korea, political change was bound to occur. Utilizing Siddharth Swaminathan’s model of

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\(^{314}\) Sung-Joo Han, "South Korea in 1987: The Politics of Democratization," *Asian Survey* 28 no.1 (1988): 52-53. By early April, the opposition party split as the two Kims could not agree on the issue of leadership. Kim Young Sam created the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), taking with him 66 out of the 90 lawmakers. Lee Min Woo, the head of the former NKDP, merged his party with the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Ibid.
shifting toward democracy,\textsuperscript{315} we can explain the political process that began in 1985 and ended with the 29 June declaration as a situation where power was no longer concentrated within one group, i.e. the government, and therefore a transitional phase was inevitable. The government was willing to negotiate with the opposition since it recognized that the status quo could not be maintained for much longer.

b. The June 29th Declaration

By the beginning of June, 1987, the situation in Korea had become extremely volatile as large-scale demonstrations filled the streets of Seoul. The deadlock over the new constitution continued as the Chun government resisted caving in to the opposition demands. Roh Tae Woo, President Chun's candidate for the looming elections, in an unprecedented move decided to put an end to the unstable situation and virtually adopted the opposition demands. Whether he coordinated this move with President Chun is still somewhat unclear,\textsuperscript{316} but what is clear is that following his declaration he managed to gain the support of many Koreans and to bring an end to the demonstrations that threatened to harm the approaching Olympic Games. As Choi Sang-Yong puts it, "Korean society embarked upon its journey toward democracy with the June 29th Declaration in 1987."\textsuperscript{317}

So what made Roh accept the opposition demands and come out with such a dramatic declaration? It is difficult to find a single answer to this question. While some see it as a victory of the popular forces over the government, others see it as a


\textsuperscript{316} According to Roh's declaration, the content of the declaration was to be presented to the President after the speech but according to the monthly magazine, \textit{Wolgan Chosen} it was President Chun who authorized the content of the declaration. "June 29 Declaration, Work of Chun Doo hwan," Wolgan Chosen, June 1989 in Manwoo Lee, \textit{The Odyssey of Korean Democracy, Korean Politics, 1987-1990} (New York: Praeger, 1990), 40.

\textsuperscript{317} Sang-Yong Choi, "Democratization and Peace in Korea", 10.
government initiative aimed at “launching a low-cost regime-dominated democratisation process,” meaning engaging in a liberalisation process with minimum cost or threat to the government. A more balanced answer may be that by the end of June, a coequality of power between the regime and its opposition created a catastrophic deadlock, one that had to be broken by either of the two sides. The democratic coalition could not force the regime to surrender its power, since the government, although weakened and divided, still controlled the army. When we look at the situation from this perspective, the June 29th declaration can be seen as a political pact in which the authoritarian power-holders were guaranteed their incumbent status in exchange for their concession to restore democratic competition.

On examining the declaration we find a clear intention by Roh to change the political system and to institute a change for democracy. First, Roh accepted the opposition demand to amend the constitution and to adopt a direct presidential election system, because “the people are the masters of the country and the people’s will must come before everything else.” In order to make sure that the elections would be fair, Roh declared that a revision of the Presidential Election Law was needed so that freedom of candidacy and fair competition were guaranteed. Another major step in the direction of democracy is the amnesty given to Kim Dae-jung and other political dissidents.

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318 Ibid.
319 Hyun Baeg Im, "South Korean Democratic Consolidation in Comparative Perspective," 25.
320 Roh stressed the fact that for him, the parliamentary cabinet system is more suitable to Korea but, "if the majority of the people do not want it, even the best-conceived system will alienate the public, and the government which is born under it will not be able to dream and suffer together with the people." Grand National Harmony and Progress Towards a Great Nation; Special Declaration on June 29, 1987. in Korea under Roh Tae Woo: Democratisation, Northern Policy, and Inter-Korean Relations, edited by James Cotton (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 317-318.
Other issues addressed in the declaration included the strengthening of basic human rights and the protection of human rights by the government, the abolition of the Basic Press Law so that freedom of the press would be restored, greater freedom was given to the private sectors in general and to the institutions of higher education in particular, allowing political parties to exist and finally, the declaration that "bold social reforms must be carried out to build a clean and honest society." In order to demonstrate just how serious he was about the above program, Mr. Roh declared that if these ideas failed to be accepted, he would resign from all of his public duties.321

Following the above declaration, it was clear that the opposition demands had been met and that free, democratic elections for the presidency would be held. The first step in that direction was drafting a new, democratic constitution. An eight member panel, consisting of four senior lawmakers from each of the two major parties, managed to draft this constitution by September. The new constitution declared, amongst other things, a single five-year term for the president and removed the president’s authority to dissolve the National Assembly. In addition to this, and in the spirit of the June 29 declaration, the new constitution significantly bolstered guarantees of basic civil rights and liberties. Generally speaking, the new constitution significantly reduced the president’s power and by doing so, it helped prevent any future attempts by the president to abuse his or her power.322 The constitution was approved by the National Assembly on October 12, 1987 by a margin of 254-4, reflecting the broad support of both the government and the opposition.323 Thus, with

321 Ibid., 318-321. The above declaration has a surprising similarity to the plan of Lee Min woo, then the head of the NKDP, as presented in December 1986, as indicated by Manwoo Lee in his book, The Odyssey of Korean Democracy, Korean Politics, 1987-1990, 23-24.
322 Ibid., 41-42.
323 Bret L. Billet, "South Korea at a Crossroads: An Evolving Democracy or Authoritarianism Revisited." Asian Survey 30, no. 3 (1990), 302.
the new constitution finally drafted, the opportunity to hold truly free and democratic elections was realized in the 1987 presidential elections.

3. The International Factors

Similar to the previous attempts to install democracy in Korea, the 1987 attempt was not free of international involvement. This time, unlike in the past, we can identify the international factor as a positive, i.e. as a factor which propelled the Korean government towards democratisation. The importance of the international factor during Korea's transfer to democracy can be better understood if we follow Robert Putnam's "two-level" theory. According to that theory:

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by the central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.324

President Chun, who was under tremendous pressure from the opposition and the masses to change the constitution and give up his power, was also aware of the growing international pressure and consequences of his actions, mainly in relation to hosting the Olympic Games. Therefore, when President Chun finally yielded to the opposition's demands, it was clear that the international factor played a major role.

Unlike the previous cases where an attempt to install democracy had taken place (in 1948, 1960 and 1979-1980), in 1987 the Americans were not the only party involved.

This time, thanks to the 1988 Olympics and the rapidly changing world environment, the entire international community was involved. Still, we should not forget that the international factor was not the most important factor in pushing the Chun regime to declare a peaceful transformation of power to a popularly elected government. If anything, we can detect a decline in the international ability to have an effect on the internal political process in Korea in comparison to the previous decades. Nevertheless, this factor cannot be overlooked. The following section tries to examine the international factor and its various elements.

a. The Changing International Environment

By the late 1980s, the international community was no longer an obstacle to democracy but rather a factor which helped promote it. Unlike the previous decades when the United States, in the name of protecting its national security or other activities, usually intervened against democracy and in favour of military dictatorship, by the second half of the 1980s the United States and the international community in general began to oppose dictatorship and support the development of democratic institutions around the world.

From the economic point of view, the international environment played a significant, although secondary role in the transitional phase to democracy by imposing certain constraints on the internal political process. As Peter Gourevitch

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325 This was true mainly in Latin America of which the case of Guatemala in 1964 is a good example.
326 Robert Alan Dahl, *On democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 148. For Dahl, the international factor is seen as a negative factor for the development of democracy. According to him, "Democratic institutions are less likely to develop in a country subject to intervention by another country hostile to democratic government in that country." Ibid., 147. Using this argument we can say that democracy (or democratic institutions) is likely to develop in a country subject to intervention by a foreign country in favor of democracy.
once put it, "political development is shaped by war and trade." This time it was trade, amongst other factors, which forced Korea to change. Simply stated, Korea was forced to liberalise, both politically and economically, if it wanted to integrate itself into a globalised world.

This economic liberalisation was largely the result of a growing interdependence in the economic sphere between Korea and other major countries such as the United States, Japan and Western Europe. By the second half of the 1980s, Korea became a major trading partner of some of the world's biggest economies, including China, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The transition to democracy was reinforced by Korea's transition from "state-led developmental capitalism" towards "market-led welfare capitalism." By 1987, the realignment in big power relationships contributed to the reduction in tension and ideological conflict between the major powers. This helped Korea take a more relaxed view of security and concentrate on political and economic issues.

b. The American Contribution and the Seoul Olympics

Im Hyung Baeg, who examined the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule in Korea, stresses the importance of "external factors in the calculus of strategic choice of both authoritarian power holders and democratic opponents." According to him, it was the change in the American policy towards Korea, one that began after

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328 For example, by 1987 Korea became the seventh largest trading partner of the United States and the third largest trading partner of Japan. Also, Korea held trading surpluses of $10 billion in 1987 with the United States. By 1988 Korea's trade volume with China reached over $3 billion dollars, surpassing China's bilateral trade with the Soviet Union. Ahn, Byung-joon. "Korea's International Environment" 164-166.
329 Ibid., 164.
1985 that helped with this democratic transition. Unlike in 1979-1980 when the US did not interfere with the military coup carried out by the then Major General Chun, by 1985 the US policy towards military dictatorship had changed. More than anything, the factor that caused this change was the fall of the dictatorship of Marcos in the Philippines.\(^{331}\)

The United States no longer supported rightist military dictatorships, it publicly opposed the use of armed force when dealing with violent opposition movements, and it promoted the civilisation and liberalisation of authoritarian regimes in the third world. It was this policy that enabled the democratic advocates to carry out mass demonstrations without fearing a strong military reaction from the government. As Im observed, without the ability to use military power, the government became a "paper tiger."\(^{332}\)

Another explanation for the sudden change in American attitude towards the Chun government is that the US was afraid that the political crisis might create a threat to the stability of Korea.\(^{333}\) As in 1980, security considerations and the possible threat from the North (although much smaller this time) held great sway in the American decision-making process.

When examining the overall contribution of the United States to the development of Korea’s democracy, David Steinberg, in dealing with the subject of anti-Americanism, stresses the contribution of the US to the promotion of human rights and democracy in Korea. He stresses the fact that part of the anti-American trend can be seen by many

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\(^{331}\) The US put pressure on Marcos to leave the Philippines both officially – through the threat to cut off military aid during the time of the Enrile/Ramos rebellion--and unofficially – through media attention, Congressional visitors and electoral observers. Larry Diamond, "Introduction: Persistence, Erosion, Breakdown, and Renewal" in *Democracy in Developing Countries, Asia* ed. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (London: Adamantine Press Limited, 1988), 41.

\(^{332}\) Ibid., 92.

Korean writers who downplay the important role of the United States in preventing President Chun from using the military against the anti-government demonstrators. While the Americans take pride in their role in Korea prior to and during the transition to democracy in 1987, we can detect a very negative perception of the US on the Korean side. An explanation for this can be seen in the Korean perception of the United States, one that views the US as favouring military and economic goals and being more supportive of dictatorships than democracies. Elsewhere, Steinberg stresses the crucial role of the US in the 1987 demonstrations and describes it as "probably the most successful US intervention in support of greater freedom and human rights in the bilateral relationship since 1948."

The Reagan administration had a particular interest in the process and outcome of the Korean elections and was especially against any military intervention before or after the elections as that would have embarrassed the US and damaged the Reagan administration's policy towards Korea. Generally speaking, Washington played a "quiet, but decisive role" in promoting democratic reform. Speaking more specifically, we can identify three main events where the US interfered with internal Korean politics: President Chun's reluctance to hold democratic elections after the end of his seven year term, his intention to use military force in response to the growing unrest during the 1987 June uprisings, and the US attempts to help the

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334 In a survey conducted among college students, 41.9 percent believed that the United States had a negative effect on human rights in Korea, while 60.2 percent supported the claim that the US had a negative effect on the democratisation process in Korea. Steinberg, David. "Introduction, Anti-American Sentiment in the Korean Context." In Korean Attitudes toward the United States, Changing Dynamics, edited by David Steinberg (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), xvii.

335 Ibid.


338 Bret L. Billet, "South Korea at a Crossroads: An Evolving Democracy or Authoritarianism Revisited.", 301-302.
opposition camp. In the first instance, President Reagan sent a letter to President Chun "calling him to honour his promises for a peaceful transition to democracy." This letter was followed by a call made by Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur on February 6, for "a new political framework" and an assurance that a peaceful transfer of power would take place. Clearly this statement was directed towards President Chun. Following this statement, Sigur emphasized that President Chun had in fact promised the US government that he would retire quietly and peacefully when his term ended.339

The Reagan administration adopted a similar attitude towards the Chun government during and prior to the June demonstrations. Once again, the US made it clear that it supported the move towards democracy. This message was delivered by the Assistant Secretary of State on his visit to Seoul on 23-25 June. Sigur "spoke strongly against any military involvement in suppressing the demonstrations."340

The US's more direct involvement in Korean politics and its attempt to help the opposition leaders can be seen in several instances. The New York Times published an editorial calling for the NKDP to "take a chance" with Lee Min-woo's formula, who was opposition leader at the time.341 But even before this, the US was involved in Korean politics. In February, James R. Lilley, the American ambassador to Korea, in an unprecedented move, met with opposition leaders Lee Min-woo and Kim Young Sa, in order to try and solve the feud among rival parties in Korea. That meeting was followed by Secretary of State George Shultz's visit to Seoul on March 6, where he managed to obtain President Chun's pledge to step down at the end of his single term.

340 Ibid., 60.
seven-year term. On March 13, at a dinner meeting between the American Ambassador and Lee Min-woo, Ambassador Lilley “showed keen interest in Lee’s formula for democratisation.” In conclusion, we can say that the US played a significant part in the 1987 events. Aware of its power and prestige in Korea, especially among the politicians, the US took an active role in helping end President Chun’s dictatorship. The anti-Americanism which had been evolving since 1980 and which erupted largely because of the US’s failure to actively support the student struggle for democracy, can be seen as a further factor that pushed Washington to learn from its past mistakes. Nevertheless, as was demonstrated above, the US was not successful in regaining the massive popular support it enjoyed prior to 1980.

In addition to American pressure, we can also identify another external factor that was crucial in helping Korea with its transition to democracy. For the first time, Korea was given the chance to host the most important sporting event in the world - the Olympics. For Koreans, this was a great chance to show the world just how much Korea had evolved since the 1950s and the Korean War and it also provided a great opportunity to expand its diplomatic and economic ties with the nations of the world. On the other hand, hosting an event of this magnitude also meant that the eyes of the world were fixed on Korea, as “scrutiny of the host country has become a fixture of the modern Olympic tradition, like the torch relay or the Olympic song.” This, to a large extent, forced the government to curb its actions, especially towards the democracy agitators, and in the end, to accept their demands. Put another way, “The Olympics fostered democracy in Korea. It is that simple.”

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342 Ibid.
343 Hyungwon Kang, From the Streets to the Olympics: Korea, Democracy and the 24th Olympiad, 18.
344 Ibid.
c. Democratic Features of the Sixth Republic

Utilizing Bollen's definition of democracy we can identify some of the major steps in the process of creating democracy in Korea while issues such as popular sovereignty and political liberty received a major boost under the Rho government. By 1987, after decades of rigged elections or no direct elections at all, truly free elections took place. Roh's efforts towards liberalizing the press and the fact that the opposition party was allowed to operate support this statement. Following 1987, the Schumpeter democratic system (i.e. a system where "political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote") was realized.345

An analysis of the voting patterns between the 1987 and 1992 elections shows that the most important factor influencing the voters' decision was regionalism. In fact, according to some scholars, the regional factor was the dominant factor during the 1987 and 1992 presidential elections.346 Sun-Kwang Bae who explored the voting patterns in the period of democratic transition (from 1985 to 1992) found the regional factor to be crucial. According to Bae, there are two main explanations for this phenomenon: the 'personalism' of the candidates and the difference in the political orientations of voters between regions.347 For example, in the 1987 election, three viable candidates fared best in their respective regions: Roh Tae-woo in Kyongbuk, Kim Young-sam in Kyongnam and Kim Dea-jung in Cholla.348 Similar patterns can also be observed during the 1992 Presidential elections.

348 Kim Jong-pil, the fourth candidate, also got the majority of votes from his home region of Ch'ungch'ong.
Unlike the previous military regimes of Chun and Park, the new administration was much more sincere about taking numerous liberalization measures. For the first time for decades, the government tolerated a political opposition. The press enjoyed much more freedom as new legal measures were established to ensure independence and self-regulation of the mass media. For the first time since 1961, autonomy was accorded to local politics when in the early 1990s two elections were held to form local councils. Finally, various social sectors were given autonomy. These sectors included, among others, the education system, the deregulation of overseas travel and the activities of the universities.

In addition to this, we can identify some other democratic measures that were taken by President Roh during his five-year term. In March 1989, the government passed Laws of Assembly and Demonstration, a new Constitution Court was created in order to protect the democratic constitution and various human rights, and the judicial system gained more independence and was less subject to political influence. Nevertheless, by the end of the Roh presidency many non-democratic features still dominated the political scene.

First, due to the still existing National Security Law, party pluralism was not realized. In addition, the organization of the political parties was far from democratic since the head of a party chose the participants in that party. Secondly, human rights still posed a major problem as political violence and deliberate torture still existed. Political dissidents still suffered from discrimination. Thirdly, freedom of association was still denied to schoolteachers and other unions. And finally, as mentioned above,

349 As Su-Hoon Lee observed, there was no reason for the government to repress political opponents simply because the opposition was split and posed no threat (at least in the early stages). Su Hoon Lee, "Transitional Politics of Korea, 1987-1992: Activation of Civil Society", 357.

350 These measures led to an "explosion of mass media" as 1,492 periodicals were newly registered between June 29, 1987 and April 30, 1989. Ibid.

351 Ibid.

352 Doh C. Sin, Mass Politics and Culture in Democratising Korea, 6
the voting pattern was highly influenced by regionalism and the buying and selling of votes that harmed to some extent the citizen’s right to vote.\(^{353}\)

The years 1987-1992 symbolize the transition from the struggle to establish democracy in Korea to the consolidation of democracy in Korea. This stage was far from complete by the end of Roh’s presidency and the inauguration of the first civilian government of Kim Young Sam. In fact, since the transfer of power between the government and the opposition party did not occur until 1997 when Kim Dae Jung was elected president, we can claim that the consolidation phase continued well into the 1990s. As Hyug Baeg Im claims, we cannot consolidate democracy by simply institutionalising electoral competition, as occurred in 1987. Rather, we need to “stabilise, institutionalise, routinize, internalise, habituate, and legitimise democratic procedures and norms in political, social, economic, cultural, and legal arenas at both the elite and mass levels.”\(^{354}\) On the positive side, if we follow Lipset’s axiom “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy”,\(^{355}\) Korea’s chances of maintaining democracy were very good, given its rapid economic development.


So far, this paper has dealt almost exclusively with the conditions that enabled (or prevented) Korea from ridding itself of authoritarian rule. However, since we are dealing with such a broad subject as democracy, I believe that at this point, before concluding, a short general discussion about Korean democracy is appropriate. Hopefully, this discussion can help the reader better understand the broader


\(^{354}\) Hyun Baeg Im, "South Korean Democratic Consolidation in Comparative Perspective", 23.

consequences of the 29 June declaration and the subsequent free elections that took place at the end of 1987. Furthermore, if we understand what democracy meant to the people of Korea, perhaps we will better understand its importance in general.

First of all, it is important for us to make a clear distinction between democracy as a concept and democracy (or democratisation) as a process. As Robert Dahl observed, there is a gap between the idea of democracy and its actuality, and that gap will always exist.\textsuperscript{356} Young Whan Kihl further noted that

Democracy and democratisation must be kept separate both conceptually and theoretically. Whereas democracy is an ideational system ... democratisation is the process of attaining the ideal and advancing the cause of democracy.\textsuperscript{357}

In the first chapter, we elaborated on the ideal type of democracy and its various requirements. However, as we advanced through our historical review of Korean democracy, a clear gap between these theories and the reality became clear. I will argue that democracy as an idea was crucial in giving the Korean people (and for that matter any other nation which struggles with the difficulties of dictatorship) a goal, a course of action, even though it was clear that this idea will never be realized in its entirety, not in Korea nor in any other place in the world. The Korean people’s struggle, as I see it, was not for democracy per se. Rather, their struggle was for a better life, a struggle to wrench themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty and join the other, more developed, nations. But alongside material prosperity, political freedom was pursued, for what good is it to have a prosperous economy if the distribution of its riches remains among a minority elite?

Democracy, more than any other political system, holds the solution to these twin aspirations, i.e., political development combined with a constant rise in people’s

\textsuperscript{356} Robert A. Dahl, On Democracy.
\textsuperscript{357} Young W. Kihl, Transforming Korean Politics : Democracy, Reform, and Culture (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 20.
standard of living. If history can teach us anything, it is that democracy indeed engendered prosperity and political freedom. Although the concept of democracy was well known in Korea prior to the American occupation, it was during that time that democratic institutions were first built in Korea. As their liberators and as one of the world's two super-powers, the US was seen as a role model by many Korean generations who believed that there is much to be learned from the US. From the other side, the US tried from the onset to export democracy with its various merits to Korea.

It is possible to argue that in the particular case of Korean democracy, at least in the first decades that followed its liberation from the Japanese, democracy was an obstacle rather a factor that helped promote economic prosperity. In fact, this argument was made time and again by Korea's military rulers, Park Chung hee and Chun Doo hwan. And the simple fact is that the Korean economy indeed prospered under central planning and political oppression. In the period that followed the Korean War, Korea did not need democracy. What it needed was to pull itself out of its extreme state of poverty. People care less about their right to vote when they cannot be sure whether they will have enough food for their families or will be able to find a job. From this point of view we can say that President Park Chung hee was the right person to stand at the head of Korea during the 1960s and 1970s.

But this argument was no longer valid by the time President Park decided to appoint himself as a president for life, when he adopted the Yushin constitution in October 1972. By that time, although Korea was far from being considered a developed nation, at least from the economic point of view the survival of Korea was no longer a major threat, at least from the economic point of view. By 1980, rapid economic development allowed the Korean people to deal with other issues other than economic development; their political rights increasingly became the main issue. Democracy,
beyond its promise to further develop the economy, also carried further benefits such as preventing the government from using cruel and vicious systems of rule and the guarantee of basic civil rights.\textsuperscript{358}

Survival was no longer an issue for the generation that was born after the Korean War. For this generation the most important goal was to improve their lives and to strengthen Korea as a country. Maybe this will help us better understand the large-scale demonstrations that took place in Korea regularly during the Fourth and the Fifth Republics (1972-1979 and 1981-1988 respectively). President Park, for his part, truly failed to understand the people’s demand for broader political freedom. After all he had delivered on his promise of economic growth, and he assumed that political freedom could be sacrificed for that cause.

Democracy, as an idea, became a national obsession following the Kwangju uprising. As argued before, by 1980 Korea was in fact ready for a democratic transition, at least from the economic and social perspectives, but the military did not concur with this sentiment. The harshness of the Chun administration can only support our initial claim about the connection between democracy and personal living standards. And indeed, by 1987, the people voiced a clear demand – down with dictatorship!

When democracy was finally won, the people of Korea were better off than they were prior to the presidential elections of December 1987. People were not hunted because of their different political views (although complete political freedom was still a way off), the media once again regained its freedom and people were free to travel abroad. More importantly, the constant threat of martial law was lifted. These, and other measures, improved the people’s quality of life and allowed Korea to

\textsuperscript{358} Robert A. Dahl, On Democracy, 46-59. Dahl indicates further advantages of democracy over non-democratic regimes such as the assurance of a broader range of personal freedoms, the protection of people’s fundamental interests and the promise to foster human development.
further prosper and develop. From an economic point of view, since Korea began its transition towards democracy the economic growth rates were not as impressive as during the previous dictatorial regimes. That was especially true during the 1997-1998 IMF economic crisis. But that was mostly due to the fact that under democratic rule workers had to be given better working conditions and unions gained more power. To facilitate the workers demands the Korean economy become less attractive to foreign investors. But we also have to remember that after that first shock Korea’s economy became much better equipped for successful competition with other nations in the globalizing world. An indication for that can be seen in the fact that the South Korean economy ranks as Asia’s third largest economy.359

One of the first consequences of the liberalization process that began in the end of the Chun government was the demand for better working conditions. This trend continued well into the Sixth Republic as various unions succeeded in improving the workers’ basic working conditions.

When visiting Korea I was privileged to hold an interesting conversation with a Korean engineer in his late fifties working for one of Korea’s largest companies. I told him about the paper I was writing and we discussed democracy in Korea. When I asked him whether he thought that Korea was better off since establishing democracy he immediately replied with a definite “no.” According to him, Korea’s situation was much better under President Park whose main concern was the economy. I have to admit that at first I was a bit confused by this reply, given the long struggle of the Korean people for democracy. But later I learned that his view was common among the “older” generation but vary rare among the younger generation (people in their twenties, thirties and early forties).

Today democracy is secure in Korea. The reason is that people understand that their life has improved tremendously during the four successive democratic administrations of the Sixth Republic. Today Korea is a member of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations. Korea is now a country that provides loans to developing countries rather than receiving loans as it once did during its not too distant past. And it is leading the world in research and development in a number of fields. “As Sony wobbles, Samsung rises” reads the headline of the New York Times, indicating the fact the Samsung’s profits have overtaken Sony’s. Following the Korean War very few people would ever have imagined that Korea, once a colony of Japan, would ever successfully compete with its former master’s leading companies.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the steady growth of democracy in Korea. Democracy means a free market economy, freedom from tight government control and, no less important, a guarantee of basic civil rights. As we have tried to demonstrate, the long process of democratisation that began in 1945 and ended in 1987 (and which was then replaced by the consolidation of democracy) was heavily influenced by the international community in general and the American administration in particular.

The future of Korea lies in its ability to further develop its democracy and to advance towards the democratic ideal. Despite a natural pessimism with respect to the future of democracy in Korea, this author has no doubt that democracy will prosper, and contribute to the general prosperity of the people of Korea in general.

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Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the successful democratic transformation of Korea that took place in 1987. As Korea's economy was in advanced stages of development and the civil society, mainly the middle class, also became a major factor during the 1980s, the international factor became highly relevant for the democratic transition. It was the international support for the democratisation of Korea that helped in taking full advantage of the two previous factors. Large-scale demonstrations helped force President Chun to fulfil his promise to resign after seven years in office. It was shown that although the Korean people were the main force behind the democratisation process, since many of them sacrificed their lives or livelihood during their vigorous struggle for democracy, international factors played a significant role as well.

By preventing President Chun from using military force against the demonstrators, the US facilitated an open and free exchange of ideas that had not been possible following the assassination of President Park Chung Hee in October 1979. By the mid 1980s, the Reagan administration was no longer supportive of military dictatorships and began supporting the spread of democracy. The 1988 Seoul Olympics also played a major role by forcing the government to yield to opposition demands since the alternative was widespread disorder, which could have jeopardised the games being held in Seoul. Korea's growing integration in the world economy and its growing importance as a trade partner to some of the world's biggest economies also contributed to the democratisation process. Finally, the imminent end of the Cold War and the rapidly changing world system created the conditions for a democratic transition.

Since this paper does not examine the consolidation of democracy, it will be sufficient to say that the international environment continued to support democracy in
Korea well beyond 1987. During the 1990s Korea became a significant economic power and this enabled her to become a member of some of the world's major economic organizations, such as the OECD and the WTO. It also became a member of the United Nations as well as a member of various local and global organizations. Being a democracy facilitated the entry of Korea into many of these organizations and being a member of these organizations further supported the growth of democracy in Korea. As to the Korean people's benefits from democracy, one need only look at the state of the economy and civil society almost two decades after 1987 in order to justify the claim that democracy indeed supports prosperity.
Conclusion

This paper dealt with the necessary conditions for a successful democratic transition. Three variants were examined: the international factors, the economic factors and the civil society factors. Of these three, the main focus was given to the international factors, since the author considers their importance and relevance to the present day crucial. The other two factors were given a short theoretical and empirical review as well. By examining the specific case of South Korea, we have attempted to establish a correlation between these three factors and the success or failure of the democratisation process.

Three main periods of South Korean history were examined: first, from the end of the Second World War (1945) until the Second Republic (1960-1961); second, the period that followed the assassination of President Park Chung hee (26 October 1979) and ended with the establishment of the Fifth Republic (1981); and, third, the transition to democracy which began in the second half of the 1980s and ended with the holding of the December 1987 elections. In each period the three variants were examined against the democratisation process and an attempt was made to explain their outcomes.

Using the model we constructed, we can conclude that the international support for democracy, at least in the South Korean case, was crucial to the democratic transition. However, it was also shown that without a strong economy and maturing civil society, democracy could not survive for long - as the case of the Second Republic (1960-1961) demonstrated. Up until 1979, a weak economy and weak civil society prevented the establishment of democracy since the military rulers of Korea used the economic situation to justify their political repression. During this period the international community could not have created democracy in Korea since, due to the efforts of
President Rhee, there was no civil fabric that could have supported such a democracy. Although the American involvement helped bring an end to the Rhee government, the subsequent democratic government of Prime Minister Chang could not sustain itself for long, mainly due to its weakness and its inability to stimulate the economy.

By 1980, thanks to the successful efforts of President Park, the economy was no longer a factor that could have prevented the transition to democracy. The civil society also went through a significant change and helped in mobilising a large portion of the Korean population to demand democracy. It was the international factor that was missing in this period. A side-product of this lack of international support in general and American support in particular was the rise of anti-Americanism. Although there are various aspects to this trend, one is the strong reliance on American aid, both economic and political, a factor that further supports our main hypothesis in regards to the importance of the international role.

Although the international factor played a secondary role during the 1987 election in which the democratisation process was successful, it has been shown that it still played a major role. It was the maturing civil society that helped mobilise a large portion of the middle class, which had became a dominant force in Korean society by that time, backed by a strong economy that helped end President Chun’s rule. We must remember that this transition towards a democratic political system, although peaceful on the surface (as was demonstrated during the 1987 elections) had been accompanied by the sacrifice of many Koreans during the previous years. Here we can see another example of the suffering of the Minjung, as Wells put it, one that dominated their long history.362

362 Kenneth M. Wells, “The Cultural Construction of Korean History”, 13. Other examples for the minjung suffering are the Japanese empire from 1905 to 1945 and the superpower division of Korea.
To following diagrams illustrates our main findings:

**The First and Second Republics of Korea:**

- Weak Economy
- Weak Civil-Society
- Most Weak International Support for Democratisation

**1979-1980:**

- Growing Economy
- Growing Civil-Society
- Lack of International Support for Democratisation

**1985-1987:**

- Strong Economy
- Growing Civil Society
- Successful Democratisation
- Strong International Support for Democratisation

The international community can have a dramatic impact on the development of democracy throughout the world. In today’s world, where globalisation is becoming a widespread trend, the sovereignty of a state is not as strong as it used to be.  

The latest American involvement in the Middle East further supports the growing importance of the international community in the democratisation process. Iraq's latest free elections, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the municipal elections held in Saudi Arabia and the growing demands for free elections in Egypt are only a

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363 These efforts were carried out by the US Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy and a few other foundations sponsored certain US organizations, including Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Solidarity Center, the Eurasia Foundation, Internews and several others to provide small grants and technical assistance to Ukrainian civil society. The European Union, individual European countries and the Soros-funded International Renaissance Foundation did the same.
few examples of this ‘Arab Spring’. True, it is possible to claim that these events have
nothing to do with the international community, but that would be simply ignoring the
facts. As Jeff Jacoby from the Boston Globe noted, more and more of President
Bush’s critics begin to realize that something is actually happening in the Middle East
and that the US administration’s ambition to spread democracy may not be so far-
fetching as they used to think.364

It remains to be seen whether President Bush’s vision of spreading democracy
throughout the Middle East will actually materialize. But it has been made clear that
the international community plays a crucial role in the future of promoting democracy.
Many international organizations, like the European Union, demand democratic
reforms as basic pre-conditions which can further help in spreading democracy.

This specific case study of South Korea has shown that alongside a growing
economy, the people’s demand for greater political freedom could not be dismissed
by the government. The same trend occurred and continues to occur in various parts
of the former Soviet block to this day. Perhaps more than in the past the international
community can take a leading role in helping various civic groups that demand
democracy and learn from the Korean case.

Finally, the international factor also plays a significant role in the consolidation of
democracy. Although this paper has not dealt with this issue, we can note that the
process of creating a strong, stable democracy is no less complicated than the
democratisation process itself. The international factor, as seen through President Roh
Tae-woo’s Northern Politics or President Kim Young-sam’s Segyehwa (globalisation)

364 ‘The Arab spring’ by Jeff Jacoby, The Boston Globe, March 10, 2005; examples of this change are
Claus Christian Malzahn in the German newsmagazine Der Spiegel: “Could George W. be right?”; Guy
Sorman in France’s Le Figaro: "And if Bush was right?" And NPR’s Daniel Schorr in The Christian
Science Monitor: “The Iraq effect? Bush may have had it right,” and London’s Independent, in a Page 1
headline on Monday: “Was Bush right after all?”
reform can support the claim of the importance of the international aspects both to the Korean political leadership and to the consolidation of democracy in Korea. The future of Korea as a leading economic power depends on its ability to further develop its democracy, a process in which the world community will play an important role.
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