

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

4 January 1984

South Korea: Weighing Early Elections [redacted]

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*We believe President Chun Doo Hwan is seriously considering advancing by as much as a year the parliamentary elections now scheduled for March 1985. Chun may calculate that such a move would strengthen his grip on the political process and improve his ability to orchestrate succession arrangements in 1988--when he has promised to step down as president. In our view, Chun runs the risk of feeding persistent and widespread suspicions he plans to stay in office beyond 1988, provoking new protests by dissidents and students, and alienating those South Koreans who support his government.* [redacted]

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Recent events in South Korea [redacted] indicate that President Chun may be preparing to advance the date of the 12th National Assembly elections from March 1985 to sometime in 1984.

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- The controlled press has run low-key stories on the legal provisions for early elections and possible reasons for accelerating the timetable.
- A "secret" purge list of ruling party assemblymen is circulating, which many South Korean political observers view as kicking off party preparations for early elections.

*This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Northeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Northeast Asia Division [redacted]*

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[redacted]

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[REDACTED]

In public statements, the Chun government continues to play down the possibility of early elections. Prime Minister Chin Ie Chong, for instance, stated to the press on 15 December that there was no reason for early elections "under present circumstances." [REDACTED]

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#### Chun's Motive and Options

In our view, the chief reason President Chun may move elections ahead would be to avoid being a "lame duck" during the last year of his presidency. If elections are not advanced, the next National Assembly term will run from March 1985 until March 1989, a year after Chun's term ends in February 1988. [REDACTED]

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- Chun could use his discretionary authority under the national election law to advance elections up to six months, in this case, to October 1984. Chun could do this again in 1988, moving elections ahead from October to March.
- Alternately, Chun could invoke Article 57 of the Constitution to dissolve the National Assembly at anytime

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[redacted]

within the last three years of its term and hold new elections within 30 to 60 days. Under this provision, Chun could advance the 1985 National Assembly election to early this year and the following election would automatically occur four years later in early 1988. The Constitution, however, requires Chun to give specific national security grounds for this action. [redacted]

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### Costs

Both strategies carry some political risk for Chun, but the second is considerably greater. Invoking Article 57 without clear national security grounds, we believe, would be taken by many South Koreans as a sign of Chun's low regard for the Constitution, invite comparisons to the Park regime, and feed suspicions that Chun intends to remain in office past 1988-- which he cannot do under the present Constitution. Students and dissidents are certain to assume the worst and protest, and if Chun calls for new elections within the next few months, liberal Protestant and Catholic leaders might even ask the Vatican to cancel the Pope's visit in May. Perhaps more significant, a poorly managed election scenario runs the risk of alienating South Koreans who do support the present administration. [redacted]

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Early elections would also require Chun to speed up efforts to revitalize his own Democratic Justice Party. The recent purge list amounts to almost half of the DJP's 151 assemblymen. These individuals will be dropped "to make room for better people," according to the DJP Secretary General's candid explanation to US officials. Chun reportedly is displeased with the party's inability to cultivate genuine popularity and has been reviewing ways to strengthen the local party apparatus before the next election. [redacted]

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We believe Chun is aware of the risks. The recent Christmas amnesty may in part be intended to allay concerns about Chun's commitment to constitutional government and soften criticism if he does advance the elections. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: South Korea: Weighing Early Elections [Redacted]

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