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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

12 December 1986

South Korean Politics [Redacted]

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Summary

President Chun Doo Hwan seems to believe that his party is well positioned to push its proposed revision of the Constitution through the National Assembly, solidly establishing a parliamentary system and the ruling party's political predominance in 1988. The prevention last month of a massive opposition rally--intended to show a "public" mandate for direct presidential elections--was a major setback for Chun's opponents. Other opposition actions, including a boycott of the National Assembly, have aided government efforts to paint the opposition as obstructionist. In our view, Chun intends to put the ruling party's constitutional revision bill to a national referendum early next year, before the peak period for student protests.

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted], Office of East Asian Analysis. Information as of 12 December was used in its preparation. Comments and questions may be directed to the Chief, Korea Branch, Northeast Asia Division, OEA, [Redacted]

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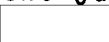
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The Constitutional Revision Issue

The dialogue on constitutional reform, which began last spring when President Chun Doo Hwan agreed to hand the question to the National Assembly, has been stalled since mid-August. Hardliners in both the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) and the opposition New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) have been inflexible, preventing the constitutional revision committee from meeting to hammer out a compromise:

- The DJP favors a parliamentary form of government with a figurehead president and most power vested in a strong prime minister elected by the National Assembly.
- The NKDP wants a directly elected president and a strong legislature. The NKDP also has called for a more independent judiciary and greater protection for human rights. 

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The Government's Strategy

The government's success in blocking the NKDP rally in November appears to have encouraged Chun to accelerate his timetable. 

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 the ruling party is publicly urging the the NKDP to resume talks. 

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Nonetheless, we believe Chun inclines toward a hard line and is prepared to arrest NKDP assemblymen if they attempt to block the bill when it is introduced. 

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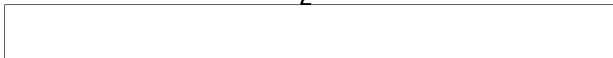
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 Although Chun apparently agreed to delay the bill's submission, we believe he is determined to settle the issue by spring. Failure to hold a national referendum by March to approve a revised Constitution would provide the opposition an opportunity to swell its ranks in the streets with activist students, who will return to Seoul's campuses in early spring. 

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The Opposition Retrenches

The opposition has been unable to regain the initiative. Its effort to block National Assembly passage of the 1987 budget bill failed, and it has postponed additional rallies until next year--probably because of concern that the holidays and government preventive measures would cause low turnouts. But



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rallies could resume in the weeks ahead. [Redacted]

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Risks for Both Sides

Neither side is likely to budge on basic demands or abandon hardline tactics. But we also expect interludes of conciliatory posturing as both sides try to appear more reasonable and credible to the public. As a case in point, the ruling DJP's offer to hold off on submitting its proposal in the Assembly until next year was matched by the NKDP's announcement that it would be willing to return to parliamentary talks on constitutional revision. [Redacted]

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Militant tactics by the opposition also carry the risk of further crackdowns by the government. For example, continued confrontation could prompt Chun to declare limited martial law--a move that could deal the NKDP completely out of the succession process. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] The opposition's hard line also could cost public support, the NKDP's strongest asset in attempts to pressure the government. Many South Koreans already view opposition politicians as more interested in their personal ambitions than in hammering out a compromise with the government. [Redacted]

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Tough tactics pose other problems for Chun. A continued heavy hand in the Assembly and against rallies might alienate conservatives of minor opposition parties, whose support the ruling party would need in an Assembly vote on constitutional revision. If Chun cannot muster votes to pass a constitutional reform bill, he might take more extreme actions. These actions would entail greater risks for his administration. A growing number of political observers believe that Chun will disband the Assembly and call new elections if his efforts to revise the Constitution fail. This would guarantee a sharp response from Chun's opponents and could result in broader public backing for opposition rallies, including the support of most of Seoul's large student population. [Redacted]

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Moving Toward Succession

We believe Chun is pushing a parliamentary system of government in order to position himself advantageously when his term ends in 1988. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] We expect political unrest, marked by student demonstrations, anti-US themes, and violence by radicals to continue in 1987. [Redacted]

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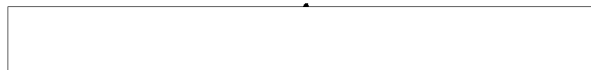
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Over the next year, Chun and the ruling party, as well as the opposition, will be planning strategy with an eye toward Washington. If the United States is perceived as acquiescing in a succession that most Koreans believe blatantly unfair, anti-Americanism could spread to the general populace. Many Koreans already believe US support underpins the present government, and perceived US acceptance of Chun's agenda is likely to aggravate popular resentment toward the United States. 

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SUBJECT: South Korean Politics [redacted]

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