



Director of  
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# The Radicalization of Dissent in South Korea

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Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

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THE RADICALIZATION OF  
DISSENT IN SOUTH KOREA



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Information available as of 27 August 1987 was used in the preparation of this Memorandum, approved for publication by the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council on that date.

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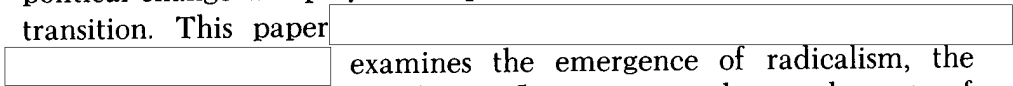
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### SCOPE NOTE

The surprisingly rapid growth of radical dissent in South Korea has increased concern that proponents of revolutionary ideology and violent political change will play a disruptive role in the forthcoming political transition. This paper



examines the emergence of radicalism, the potential for its growth, and its influence on moderate elements of Korean society. The paper also evaluates the ability of radicals to tap and exploit nationalistic and anti-US sentiments, which could lead to conditions that seriously affect US interests on the peninsula.



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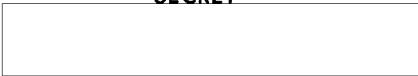
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### KEY JUDGMENTS

We fully expect radical students to foment violent protests again in September, when the school year begins, but it is difficult to predict the level and scale. Much will depend on the degree of flexibility and dexterity the government displays. If Seoul tries to backpedal on reforms, or if negotiations on constitutional and electoral reform sour—especially if the government is chiefly blamed—we can envision large numbers of mainstream students and others joining the radicals in the streets. 


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Although the appeal of some radical themes suggests the movement is no longer confined to an insignificant fringe element of students or dissidents, we see only a limited possibility that radical protest actions will escalate to insurrection. At this time, we see little public support for radical demands for a “mass democracy” constitution, a socialist restructuring of the economy, and withdrawal of US troops from Korea. These issues do not have the appeal of the anti-Chun campaign the radicals conducted during the spring and early summer. 

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For the organized political opposition, the prospect of capitalizing on new demonstrations to push demands for reform would be tempting. Nonetheless, Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and other politicians almost certainly would think long and hard before either actively allying with student radicals or openly encouraging their actions. Both Kims almost certainly recognize that the government could use evidence of such direct ties to avowedly leftist radicals as grounds for prosecuting the opposition party’s leaders. We also assume the two Kims recognize that the radicals would prove difficult, if not impossible, to control. 


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The number of students categorized by the South Korean Government (ROK) as “hardcore radicals” has increased steadily. 

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Moreover, many of South Korea’s 1 million university and college students—nearly half of them in the Seoul region—along with the recent graduates and high school upperclassmen, are influenced by counterculture values and perspectives. Indeed, we suspect that through churches, contact with students, and other channels, most of the urban population is regularly exposed to news and ideas from dissident circles. 

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We believe South Korean officials have exaggerated the cohesiveness of the radical network and the degree to which a centralized leadership exists. Student radicals have had limited success in linking their organizations to workers' groups, which generally distrust campus dissidents. Although the street protests in June probably had a demonstration effect on the subsequent wave of labor unrest, striking workers have focused on the right to unionize, and on wage and benefit issues, not broader political themes. 


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Also, only a few, generally tenuous links exist between radical groups and North Korean agents. Radicals regularly have adopted North Korean themes and arguments, however, and may be unwittingly influenced and supported by North Korean and perhaps even Soviet front organizations. 


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The support radicals receive from the South Korean public, in our view, stems from the Chun government's perceived lack of legitimacy. Brought to power by a military coup and sustained by a stacked election, and tarnished by recurring scandals, the government has not enjoyed backing from the vast majority of respected South Korean intellectual, social, or religious leaders, including those who are politically conservative. 


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Chun's successor is virtually certain to face a radical challenge from the beginning of his term—either as an attack on the legitimacy of a ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) victory or as agitation for drastic reforms by an opposition winner. Even a more liberal leader might well have to consider shelving reform in favor of the time-tested controls of his predecessors. 

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Despite the prospect that radical dissent and related anti-Americanism will continue to grow, the United States does not appear likely to become the immediate target for a campaign of terrorist attacks. Only a small minority approve of such tactics, and we do not believe committed and well-organized groups that can carry out a terrorist course of action now exist or are preparing to emerge. 

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Over the longer term, the consequences of radical dissent could become increasingly significant for US interests. Themes raised by radicals—US economic “imperialism,” racism, the use of South Korea as a “nuclear platform,” and others—will remain part of South Korea's intellectual mainstream well into the 1990s. Moreover, the radicals could complicate the management of US-ROK relations by stirring up public sentiment on nationalistic issues such as: the creation of a nuclear free zone on the Korean peninsula, and the presence and role of the US military contingent in Korea—for example, the large US military contingent in Seoul and US dominance of the combined command structure. 

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## DISCUSSION

1. Despite intensified police crackdowns and harsh sentences for radical leaders in South Korea over the past few years, South Korean authorities have been unable to break the back of radical dissent. In fact, government actions have increased sympathy for groups advocating extreme and sometimes violent forms of political expression. Even before the latest and largest demonstrations in June 1987, security service officials were pessimistic about prospects for controlling radical violence. Their concern has grown since then, particularly with the release of all but the hardest core dissident leaders, the restoration of political rights to opposition leader Kim Dae Jung, the uncertainties raised by constitutional reform talks, and the possibility of a freewheeling presidential campaign. [redacted]

2. When the spring 1987 semester began, the radical students began changing their tactics. Dissident leaders recognized the need to attract to their cause more moderate students, who had been alienated by their earlier deliberate use of violent protests. As a result, activists focused on campus issues and broader political concerns. [redacted]

3. We believe that the demonstrations in June and early July point out the growing ability of radical activists to draw others into violent protest when they have a popular issue. [redacted]

[redacted] many apparently mainstream students joined in, and that the demonstrators enjoyed widespread, active popular backing:

— [redacted] when the ruling party held its presidential nominating convention on 10 June, demonstrations on campus, and in Seoul and other cities, drew over 50,000 participants, with perhaps half this number actively skirmishing with riot police.

— Public sympathy—and growing anger over the government's use of tear gas to disperse crowds—fueled the daily demonstrations over

the next two weeks. Estimates on participation varied widely, but the crowds totaled several hundred thousand nationwide on the peak days, amounting to possibly the most extensive protests since the founding of the republic in 1948.

— Moreover, despite the ruling camp's acceptance of the opposition's reform demands on 29 June, student and dissident leaders were still able to draw an estimated 500,000 or more participants in Seoul alone on 9 July, when demonstrations commemorated the death of an injured student protester. [redacted]

4. Notwithstanding the government's promises of reform and its relaxation of deeply hated campus controls, we fully expect radical students to foment violent protests again in September when the school year begins again. It is difficult, however, to predict the level and scale of the protest activity that will ensue. If the mood on the campuses is volatile when students return, activists would have little difficulty in organizing further violent protest actions. Indeed, the appeal and following of political radicalism in South Korea suggest the movement is no longer the province of an insignificant fringe element of students or dissidents. [redacted]

## Out of the Shadows

5. Over the past several years, the impact of revolutionary political thought—specifically the overthrow of the current system in favor of a democracy of the masses—and the growing number of its proponents have emerged as a major concern among South Korean officials, academics, and political observers. No single event in the last several years better dramatized the upswing in radicalism and extremist behavior than the violent demonstrations that disrupted an opposition party political rally in the industrial port city of Incheon in May 1986. [redacted]

6. [redacted] claimed that 3,000 radicals were involved, portraying the incident as an effort by students and local labor activists to link up in order to trigger a popular uprising and make blue-collar Incheon a "liberation district." It seems clear that government-controlled TV coverage exaggerated the number

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of protesters and the intensity of the violence [redacted]  
[redacted] Even so,  
the episode shocked most South Koreans, focusing  
public attention on the extremist dissidents. [redacted]

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7. The Inchon riots also jolted opposition party members who saw it first hand. They were especially taken aback by the radicals' verbal attacks on their leaders, such as Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, as political accommodationists. Even journalists sympathetic to the government's critics publicly cautioned the opposition party against trying to use radical violence to its political advantage. Statements by the two Kims after the incident distanced them from political extremism, albeit without explicitly condemning the radicals or disavowing their basic demands for political reform. [redacted]

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#### Radicalism: Some Yardsticks

8. Developments since Inchon have highlighted several aggressive and worrisome elements in the politics of dissent. Many South Koreans see an increasingly radical ideological cant in antigovernment rhetoric, as well as the wider use of violence as an instrument of protest, some of which is directed at the United States. The trends admittedly are difficult to quantify, but, we too, believe there is reason to worry about the movement's statements, as well as its actions. [redacted]

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9. *Rhetoric.* Over the past two years, the most extreme dissident groups in South Korea have become increasingly explicit about their revolutionary beliefs. Since President Chun Doo Hwan took power in 1980, radical solutions to South Korea's political "underdevelopment" have become staples in dissident slogans and publications. Translations of neo-Marxist analysis as well as the previously banned writings of South Korean dissenters became more accessible in 1983-84, when Seoul experimented with a liberal policy toward campus political activity and looser controls on publication. The government has tightened up since then, but many radical works, along with tracts on revolutionary strategy and tactics, remain in circulation. [redacted]

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10. [redacted] Korean observers have reported an increasingly virulent and sophisticated content in protest leaflets. Despite new ideological twists in the radicals' slogans—P'yongyang's call for a "national liberation people's democratic revolution," for example, was widely mimicked by the most

radical groups this spring—much of the radicals' thinking continues to draw on three basic concepts: "democracy," "the nation," and "the masses" (see inset). Over the years, nationalists, intellectuals, and political dissidents have modified these themes to fit Korea's history as a nation caught between the Japanese and Chinese empires before World War II, and dominated and divided since then by the conflict between the superpowers. [redacted]

11. *Numbers.* Any effort to identify and count the "radical" fringe is highly subjective at best. Security service estimates of the number of students categorized as "hardcore radicals" have steadily increased. During 1982-84, South Korean security personnel told US officials that the number of radicals ranged from 3,000 to 5,000—roughly one-half of 1 percent of the student population. Recently, [redacted] upped the "radical" share of South Korean university students to 5 percent—roughly 50,000 activists out of a student population of 1 million. [redacted] said the figure included 0.3 percent—about 3,000—who were dedicated Communists. He estimated that dissident leaders could mobilize another 40 percent of the student body under the right circumstances. Professors in Seoul, for their part, told [redacted] that ideological radicals account for perhaps 10 percent of their students, but that a large student majority generally sympathize with the radicals' motivations. [redacted]

12. *Incidents and Arrests.* According to published government statistics, 1,697 student demonstrations and protest actions occurred during January-October 1986, compared with 1,014 during all of 1985, and 826 in 1984. The number of violent protests in particular rose rapidly over the level experienced during the period of looser campus controls in 1983-84. As a result, persons detained and formally arrested in connection with student unrest increased from only 35 in 1984, to 594 in 1985, and 4,610 in 1986, according to official figures. The number of students rounded up by police but later released with an admonition or dealt with in summary proceedings also rose steadily. [redacted]

13. Indictments for antistate acts under the tough National Security Law (NSL)—another measure of radical activity—rather than other less severe statutes also increased dramatically after the Inchon riots. Official statistics indicate 666 people were formally arrested for National Security Law offenses in 1986, up from some 270 arrests in 1985, and only a handful

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## South Korean Radicalism—Grafted to Traditional Roots

Most radical writings are a pastiche of weakly connected ideas, but three core themes surface repeatedly:

- *Minju*: democracy—specifically the replacement of military-spawned government with a popular (and populist) civilian government.
- *Minjok*: the “national race”—the ideal of a unified Korean nation, restored to its historical territory and a position of influence and respect in the world.
- *Minjung*: the masses—the notion of a shared spirit, will and destiny of the oppressed masses, and their emancipation from exploitation by a ruling elite [redacted]

These themes have deep roots in modern Korean intellectual history and are used to legitimize radical thought as part of a respected nationalistic tradition. Radicals also borrow freely from liberation theology and new Marxism in weaving these themes into an ideological whole. [redacted]

The call for “democracy”—*minju*—echoes a tradition of post-World War II student protests against authoritarian government, including the 1960 student revolution that brought down President Syngman Rhee, the seasonal campus turmoil during Park Chung Hee’s tenure, and large-scale student demonstrations against President Chun’s rise to power in 1980. In radical writings, *minju* also carries overtones of a socialistic egalitarianism [redacted]

The concept of “nation”—*minjok*—evokes the emotion associated with Korea’s traditional subordination to China, its subjugation under Japanese colonial rule, and

its later division as a result of the US-Soviet rivalry. The twin notions of reunification and national restoration have permeated literary, philosophical, and cultural thought in the 20th century, as well as in the constitutions and official ideologies of each postwar Korean government. Official textbooks on national history devote chapters to the Korean people’s traditional development and constant struggle for independence against stronger, predatory neighbors. The 20th century itself is handled briefly, focusing on the anti-Japanese liberation struggle, colonial exploitation, Korea’s division, Communist atrocities during the Korean war, and the South’s up-by-the-bootstraps development since the mid-1960s. [redacted]

“The masses”—*minjung*—reflects both Marxist-Leninist notions and owes a particular debt to Korean *minjung* theology. A highly nationalistic view, *minjung* theology has evolved over the past two decades. A form of liberation theology, it has been indigenized by dissident Korean Christian clergy, theologians, and philosophers. In many cases, these figures have been blacklisted from regular seminary and university positions since the mid-1970s because of their antigovernment activities. The theology draws an allegorical parallel between the trials of the ancient Hebrews and the suffering of the downtrodden Korean masses under a series of domestic and foreign oppressors. For *minjung* theologians, the Koreans are a chosen people, marked for both extreme suffering and, with emancipation, extreme exaltation. *Minjung* theology sees suffering as the instrument of liberation that unifies the masses, producing struggle, emancipation, and justice. [redacted]

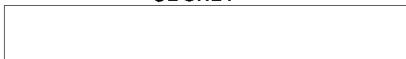
in 1984. We judge that arrests for NSL violations continued at or above this pace through May 1987. [redacted]

14. **Radical Ideology.** Even sympathetic observers have characterized radical thinking as more sloganeering than reasoned political philosophy. The radical political agenda covers a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from guarantees for civil and labor rights, social welfare programs, freedom of expression, university autonomy, military noninvolvement in government, and free democratic elections; to removal of nuclear weapons, withdrawal of US troops, economic self-sufficiency, the revolutionary creation of an interim government followed by a peoples’ constitutional convention and unconditional reunification with North Korea. Most radicals also use a hodgepodge of neo-Marxian arguments against the present political and economic arrangements, as well as of the whole

range of US–South Korean ties, but few appear willing or able to articulate well reasoned arguments in support of their own positions:

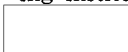
- In part, this probably reflects the strongly emotional and “ethical” grounding that typifies political dissent in the Korean cultural context generally, and most intensely among student dissenters.
- The ideological fuzziness also serves, by design or subconsciously, to insulate radicals from clear-cut identification as Communists—still anathema to most South Koreans. Indeed, while most radicals staunchly deny being pro-Communist, the seemingly disjointed collection of themes espoused by more extreme groups amounts to a revolutionary political agenda without a Leninist ideological framework. [redacted]

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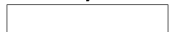
15. *New Radical Groups.* The occupation of the USIS library in Seoul in May 1985 by the "Sammint'u," the Struggle Committee for the Three People's Principles, marked the debut of several new, self-proclaimed and better organized radical student "action" groups. A wave of attacks on government and US-identified facilities followed, and in November 1985 nearly 200 radical students vandalized the training institute of the ruling Democratic Justice Party.



16. Although police ferreted out senior Sammint'u leaders and their older mentors, the claims of South Korean security officials that they had neutralized the core of this radical movement proved ill-founded. Younger radical leaders, chiefly former student activists and expelled students in their early twenties, quickly filled the gap. Offshoots of the Seoul Sammint'u and new groups using similar names surfaced on campuses in late 1985. By early 1986, several new groups with even more radical rhetoric and intentions emerged, taking leading roles in the Inchon incident:

- The "Minmint'u," the Anti-Imperialist, Antifascist National Democratic Struggle Committee, advocates a united front with other dissident groups. It seeks to establish provisional revolutionary governments and to convene a people's constituent assembly to rewrite the Constitution as a steppingstone to socialist revolution and national reunification.
- The more radical "Chamint'u," the Anti-US Self-Reliance, Antifascist Democratization Struggle Committee, gives highest priority to the expulsion of the United States from South Korea. It seeks a peninsula-wide social revolution led by the exploited classes, setting the stage for Korean unification. Unlike the Minmint'u, however, it supports direct elections as a first step.

17. The government crackdown on the Chamint'u and the Minmint'u after Inchon caused these loose networks to fragment, metastasize and frequently reemerge with new leaders and new names but much of the same core agenda. Numerous small groups still identify themselves as Minmint'u or Chamint'u, while the Anti-Imperialist League, Constituent Assembly group, and the National Liberation People's Democratic Revolution that have emerged since last fall closely echo Minmint'u or Chamint'u core themes.

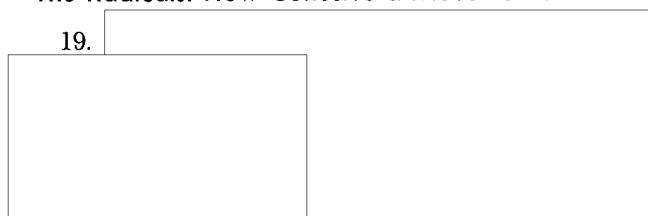



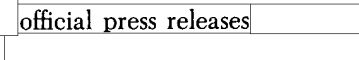
18. So far, universities in Seoul, including South Korea's three most prestigious institutions—Seoul Na-

tional University, Korea University, and Yonsei University—have been hothouses of radicalism. There are 70-odd underground student circles in the capital according to recent press reports, and similar groups have sprung up in other cities.

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The Radicals: How Cohesive a Movement?

19. 

 official press releases 

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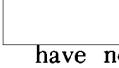

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 are notably thin on evidence. For example, we have not found information  on shared funding or extensive intergroup planning meetings. We believe such ties would be more evident if the radical opposition were a nationwide, tightly knit network.

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20. Independent action appears to be the rule:

- The seizure of the American Consulate in Pusan by Chamint'u and Minmint'u members from Seoul in 1986 was not coordinated with sister groups in Pusan.
- The Chamint'u students from Pusan National University who attacked the Consulate in December 1986 apparently did not inform their counterparts in Seoul—even though their attack took two weeks to plan.

Radical groups in Seoul, however, appear to cooperate better than most outside the capital—sharing information and coordinating demonstrations on major protest days. Seoul groups also took the lead in organizing a pan-national student leadership meeting in Taejon on 19 June, which drew some 6,000 mostly radical students from 83 universities. The daylong gathering to plan a fall strategy appears to have produced little more than an amorphous agreement to form a national coordinating organization, and an affirmation of the goals of establishing an interim revolutionary government and convening a people's constitutional convention.

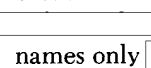
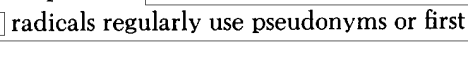
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21. Fear of police infiltration and informants almost certainly explains some of the inhibitions against broad-based cooperation.

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 radicals regularly use pseudonyms or first names only 

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[Redacted] university professors say that competition for recruits, one-upmanship in organizing demonstrations, personal rivalries, and ideological and tactical disputes also keep ties weak. [Redacted]

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22. Even in the broader spectrum of dissident organizations, beyond hardcore student activists, cooperation is limited. Such groups as: the proscribed Federation for Mass Movement for Democratic Unification, the Catholic Farmers Association and the Catholic Young Workers, and the Human Rights Committee of the Korean National Council of Churches or the Catholic Priests for Peace and Justice have sometimes worked in loose alliance. But such combinations as the Council for the Promotion of Democracy (CPD)—a dissident coalition closely tied to the main opposition party—and the National Coalition for a Democratic Constitution—a somewhat broader umbrella organization—have served chiefly as nodes for communication and liaison rather than as cohesive groups. Even under the freer political climate since June, these organizations have not emerged as a unifying institutional voice with a focused program for societal reform. As in most other nongovernmental organizations in South Korea, institutional sinews appear too weak to control competing interpersonal ties and parochial factional interests. [Redacted]

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“political motivations” of this group, although the government has also urged employers to find white-collar jobs for “disguised” students, suggesting that often the students’ motivations may have been chiefly economic. [Redacted]

25. [Redacted] claim that many of the small radical groups rolled up after the Konkuk University episode were giving high priority to politicizing workers (see inset). Given the apparent success of the police in disrupting such groups, their direct influence is hard to gauge. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] suggests that student activists have been more committed to building such ties than have dissident labor leaders, who generally appear ambivalent about a linkup with student radicals:

- Activist workers at times seem to welcome student support and publicity for such demands as free unions, collective bargaining, improved working conditions, and workers’ rights.
  - In other instances, protesting workers have viewed student involvement as a liability, entailing an ideological taint and increased risk of violence.
  - On balance, we believe workers and labor activists are leery of campus dissidents. [Redacted]
- [Redacted] labor activists in 1986 were becoming disillusioned with student radicals, who saw basic worker concerns as tactical issues, rather than ends in themselves. [Redacted]

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23. **Linkages to Labor Activists.** The possibility of close cooperation among student radicals, other dissidents, and worker activists has concerned President Chun, as it did his predecessor, Park Chung Hee. Indeed, the spread of unrest to young unemployed workers raised the Pusan-Masan riots in 1979 to the crisis stage, triggering policy arguments over strategy that led to Park’s assassination by his security chief. Accordingly, ensuring that students and labor are divided—as well as separated from Christian dissidents and the leading political opposition party—has been a cornerstone of Seoul’s strategy to check dissent. [Redacted]

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24. Seoul has been especially tough against dissident efforts to bridge this gap. For example, many incidents of alleged brutality or torture by police interrogators reported by [Redacted] human rights groups have involved dissidents accused of trying to organize a united front. The government also has tried hard to weed former student activists out of the blue-collar work force. Last year police officials claimed some 600 so-called disguised workers had misrepresented their educational background to get factory jobs; of these, 162 were formally arrested for trying to organize and influence workers. [Redacted] have stressed the

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26. Although factory workers participated in the June demonstrations, they did not walk off the job or otherwise act in concert to support the protests. [Redacted]

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Moreover, we believe that many young workers may envy the student radicals’ educational opportunities and even despise students for wasting these advantages through feckless protest activities. [Redacted]

27. Indeed, while the widespread labor unrest this summer clearly was sparked in part by the June demonstrations—and by signs that the government was prepared to capitulate on longstanding labor rights issues to avert economic and political chaos—workers have focused almost exclusively on wage and benefit issues, along with the right to unionize. Even the

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Social, Psychological, and Economic Factors

Bridging Class Lines.

Evidence suggests participation in radical antigovernment activities cuts across all social classes. Of those arrested in the 1986 Konkuk University incident—one of the few cases in which information on the social background of student activists is available—53 percent were judged by investigators to be from middle-class backgrounds, while 40 percent were from lower income families and 7 percent from upper income households, according to press reports.

Some [redacted] claim impoverished families produce most hardcore dissident leaders, but there is little evidence that as a group working-class South Koreans have radical sympathies:

[redacted]

- Police have even arrested sons and daughters of senior military officers, bureaucrats, and ruling party officials for protest activities.
- Other protesters have been offspring of lower level government employees, including teachers, local officials, and security personnel.

[redacted]

Demographic Factors

High birth rates during 1955-70 created a bulge in the number of adolescents and young adults, the 15 to 29 age group, who are now passing through the universities and into the labor force. Massive cityward migration has magnified the impact of the group in urban areas during the past two decades:

- In Seoul, 31 percent of the population is age 15 to 29—with Pusan and other major cities showing a similar pattern.
- Migration for work and school has exposed the majority of South Korean youths to city life and lights, implanting tastes and expectations that provincial areas cannot satisfy.

The urban-centered youth bulge generates extra pressure on the economy to provide employment opportunities. Until the demographic surge dissipates in the 1990s—falling birth and migration rates should take their toll—economic policymakers need to accommodate a 4- to 5-percent annual increase in the demand for nonagricultural employment.

[redacted]

Politically, the problem of absorbing growing numbers of university graduates is particularly sensitive:

- President Chun's decision to nearly double university enrollments early in his term—raising attendance rates to 28 percent, among the world's highest—has made it difficult for many new graduates to find employment that meets their expectations.
- According to government figures, the 156,000 graduates in February 1987 represented a 32-percent increase over 1985; last October, government statistics indicated that perhaps half of the 1986 male college graduates were still unemployed several months after commencement—excluding those who had entered the Army or graduate school.

South Korea's current economic surge will help the labor-absorption problem, but it still may not wipe out the backlog as well as accommodate the forthcoming large graduating classes.

Education Policy

South Korean educators almost unanimously agree that Seoul's educational policies have exacerbated student alienation. Educational reforms introduced early in President Chun's terms, including a ban on private tutoring and the expansion of freshman enrollments—with mandatory offsetting expulsions of poor academic performers—had the effect of eliminating a major source of financial support for poor students and creating an unpopular and ultimately unenforceable regime of academic sanctions. The dismissal of dissident leaders for academic failure and their induction into the Army—where some dissidents reportedly died from corporal punishment—further discredited the government's campus policies. Indeed, professors say that the government's efforts to force the universities to police and punish student activists have seriously undermined faculty-student relations. [redacted] lackluster and uninterested students, for their part, often prefer expulsion "with honor" for antigovernment activities to dismissal for academic failure.

Psychological Pressures

In explaining recent political suicides—five students and four workers have set themselves on fire or jumped to their deaths during antigovernment protests over the past 18 months—South Korean observers credit the effects of frustrated ambitions, or peer and family pressure, more than ideology. In two student suicide cases where background information has been reported, professors who knew the students paint a picture of social maladjustment or deep anxiety over failure to meet family expectations leading the individual to seek recognition and respect through martyrdom. A professor familiar with both cases [redacted] that radical leaders deliberately instigate such actions by playing on students' psychological weaknesses.

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opposition Reunification Democratic Party's proposal for constitutional provisions on worker participation in management and an equal sharing of profits has not caught on with workers. [ ]

28. *North Korean Connections Are Tenuous.* Despite intense investigations, South Korean security services appear to have uncovered only a few, generally tenuous links between radical groups and North Korean agents. Although many groups draw on North Korea for ideas and rhetoric, P'yongyang, in our judgment, appears to have done poorly in winning the affections of South Korean radicals. Only a few radicals—most often individuals, not groups—have specifically praised the North Korean system, leadership, or ideology. The Voice of National Salvation (VNS), North Korea's clandestine radio, which masquerades as an indigenous South Korean revolutionary broadcast, has generally criticized the radicals' infighting and parochialism, urging them to build a united front among "all democratic forces"—including opposition politicians such as Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, workers, and human rights activists. [ ]

29. There is fragmentary evidence that domestic radicals may be unwittingly influenced and supported by North Korean and perhaps even Soviet front organizations:

— Several spy rings exposed by Seoul over the past few years have included former students recruited by North Korean agents while studying in Japan or the United States, or students from Japan—mainly ethnic Koreans—who have enrolled in universities in South Korea. North Korean recruits have attempted to build ties to local dissidents, and radicals reportedly have received radical literature via such channels. However, the security services have yet to find a "smoking gun" that directly ties the purported spies to the activities of radical groups.

— [ ] bragged last year that the Christian Conference of Asia, a Soviet front, had successfully exploited the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) movement in South Korea—an outgrowth of an international evangelical and workers' rights movement begun in the 1960s by the United Methodist Church. [ ]

#### Roots in the Mainstream

30. The largely indigenous origin of radical dissent in South Korea has contributed, in our judgment, to the popular tolerance accorded the movement (see inset). [ ]

#### South Korean Radicalism: Generic or Sui Generis?

South Korea's modern radicals reflect the factional and confrontational style characteristic of Korea's traditional political culture. The roots of such behavior lie in the patrimonial structure of Korean society, reinforced by its Confucian heritage. Like the establishment they challenge, radicals see their legitimacy residing in intellectual and moral superiority. Even within the radical leadership there is little genuine power sharing or tolerance of criticism. [ ]

Today's radicals, however, also advocate a fundamental restructuring of the sociopolitical system, rather than the purification of an established order. We see this perspective as a significant change from the past. In turn, the ruling elites' fear of radical dissent has helped keep the political system frozen in authoritarian patterns. With authority highly centralized, the growth of autonomous nongovernment institutions has been stunted, leaving South Korean political culture few institutions that can effectively mediate between conflicting social and economic claims. The absence of independent brokering mechanisms is a recurring dilemma in Korea's modern development. In the past, pressures for change have mounted without the benefit of safety valves. As a result, when change has come, it has frequently been disruptive. It remains to be seen whether the government's delivery of recently promised reforms will be sufficient to ameliorate current pressure for change. [ ]

after the Sammint'u seizure of the USIS library in Seoul in May 1985 (but before the Inchon riots) found that less than 30 percent of the adult respondents viewed the Sammint'u as clearly leftist.<sup>1</sup> The statistics accord with others that suggest most South Koreans regard the present crop of campus activists as part of a student protest tradition, a perception once evident in Japan as well as in other Asian cultures. [ ]

31. Public tolerance and sympathy for the students—clearly evident during the June demonstrations—have helped radical groups expand their scope of operations, despite the government's effort to contain them:

— Dissident tracts and leaflets are regularly read, discussed, and shared by nonactivist students. Over the past several years, students on many

<sup>1</sup> The extensive poll was one of a series by the progovernment *Kyunghyang Sinmun*—apparently with government support, judging from information from other sources. A bootleg copy of the research report—which we believe to be genuine—was published last fall in an antigovernment expatriate paper. [ ]

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campuses have elected avowed radicals to lead their associations.

- Religious and social organizations have housed and funded youth groups, such as the Young Catholic Workers and the Ecumenical Youth Council, that have large activist contingents. [redacted]

[redacted] charge that many evening schools for factory workers using church facilities combine academic tutoring with political indoctrination.

- Church-affiliated organizations apparently hire dissident students and workers blacklisted by the government. In addition, shopkeepers have helped protesters eluding police escape into back alleys. [redacted]

32. Beyond the accepted tradition of student protest, the “understanding” many South Koreans express toward even radical dissent, in our view, reflects the Chun government’s perceived lack of legitimacy. Brought to power by a military coup, sustained by a stacked election, and tarnished by recurring scandals, the government has not enjoyed backing from the vast majority of South Korean intellectual, social, or religious leaders, even including those who are politically conservative. Only in the wake of ruling party chairman Roh Tae Woo’s promised political reforms on 29 June [redacted] South Koreans [redacted] genuinely expect the government to follow up on promises of liberalization. [redacted]

33. The intense and unremitting dislike for President Chun has fostered a political atmosphere in which radical notions can flourish. In particular, antipathy toward military interference in politics has become so strong that many military leaders believe the Army’s image as an institution has been badly blemished. Antiestablishment sentiments in general have also increased, resulting in profound public cynicism toward government motives and accomplishments in virtually any sphere—including the 1988 Seoul Olympics and South Korea’s enormous economic growth during Chun’s tenure. Because of the widespread perception that the United States bears responsibility for Chun’s rise to power and his regime’s political abuses, anti-US sentiment has intensified and spread in all strata of Korean society. [redacted]

34. Moreover, many in the general public accept the radicals’ message that South Korea is moving toward another undemocratic political transition forcibly imposed by an unpopular political elite intent on preserving its own power and perks. At the same time, the man-in-the-street shares with the dissidents a

deep-seated feeling that fate and external pressures have repeatedly kept Korea from achieving its historical and cultural destiny. We believe most South Koreans are ambivalent about their own national history, and accordingly are susceptible to emotional appeals focusing on the realization of a new, proud, Korean national identity—a driving sentiment with parallels to the American “pioneer spirit.” [redacted]

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35. *The Dissident Counterculture.* For disgruntled students and young workers of the “Kwangju generation” (see inset) who have rejected the government’s view of the world, dissident writers present a sharp alternative to the simplistic picture of South Korea found in official high school textbooks. Like President Park, Chun has punished and muzzled many of his most articulate critics:

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- Roh Tae Woo’s democratization initiative has paved the way for several hundred blacklisted university professors, journalists, writers, and social and religious leaders to emerge from professional limbo. Some, we believe, have been hardened and, even radicalized by their experiences, and as well-known members in their fields are likely to give radical dissent greater authority.
- The return to campus this fall of many formerly banned student activists, as well as the possible reinstatement of hundreds of blacklisted workers and illegal unionists, also increases the likelihood of intense outbursts of discontent. [redacted]

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36. Dubbed *yawei*, or “out-outs,” by the Koreans, blacklisted professionals and activists are the core of an emerging dissident counterculture. Barred professors have continued to publish through small-scale printers and in dissident publications. Their writings, and translations of foreign works, provide a counterpoint to the government’s official interpretation of modern Korean history, noting the key role of leftists in the independence struggle, exploring perceived inequities in US–South Korean relations, and highlighting the way in which successive authoritarian governments have manipulated the issue of relations with the North for domestic purposes. Ironically, many dissident intellectuals are US-educated, and their degrees from US institutions help give their revisionist views particular authority. [redacted]

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37. [redacted] banned texts are widely read in informal study circles. For many students who have few electives, the proscribed literature provides virtually their only exposure to analysis of contemporary historical, political,

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### The Kwangju Generation

The political and social views of this generation of South Korean university students reflect experiences that are dramatically different from those of their parents. [redacted]

Today's typical 20-year-old student was born after South Korea's economy had already taken off. He reached middle-school age during the period of political discontent that marked the last years of President Park Chung Hee's rule; as a young teenager, he witnessed President Chun's seizure of power; and during high school he was exposed almost daily to new anti-Chun stories and contemptuous jokes about the President's family—especially the First Lady:

- For this generation, the primary political event—analogue to the Vietnam experience for US college students of the 1960s—is the suppression of anti-Chun rioters in Kwangju in May 1980 (thus, the “Kwangju generation”). Korea's liberation from Japan, the Korean war, and the Student Revolution in 1960, all of which have shaped the attitudes of older Koreans, pale by comparison.
- The “Kwangju generation” came of age politically under unpopular military-spawned governments relying on repressive laws, censorship, and a pervasive, frequently brutal, internal security network to maintain control.
- Today's students have no memory of the carnage, dislocation, and uncertainty of the Korean war. They are also largely ignorant of the bitter ideological divisions and violent infighting among Koreans during the colonial period and postlibera-

tion years. Those who grew up poor saw their situation, not as the universal condition, but juxtaposed to prosperity and even luxury in which they did not share.

- Finally, all young Koreans have been exposed to nationalistic “boosterism,” which gives little recognition to the US contribution to South Korea's postwar reconstruction and economic takeoff. [redacted]

The “Kwangju generation” has experienced enormous social change and flux:

- More than half of this generation had migrated from village to city by the time they were 20, according to demographers. The dislocation has limited their ties to adults other than parents and strengthened the impact of the school peer group on their attitudes. For many who have migrated by themselves for schooling and employment, there is little day-to-day adult guidance. [redacted]

Student anxieties and alienation are exacerbated by the fiercely competitive college entrance system. Most university students have passed through a grueling three years of virtually nonstop cramming for the entrance examinations. Many have spent another one to two years at private academies after coming up short on their first attempts. According to South Korean educators, many—perhaps most—university students have little interest in their field of study, having selected it chiefly to increase their chances of getting into a prestige school. [redacted]

and economic issues. In addition, campus newspapers—which have been less tightly censored than the commercial press—have carried opinion pieces that reflect such analysis. [redacted]

38. Even those university professors who have stopped short of flaunting their antigovernment views occasionally stand up for the radical dissenters. At many schools they have thwarted government efforts to use academic sanctions against student dissidents. Earlier this year, scores of academics also signed statements opposing police torture. In the weeks preceding the June demonstrations, more than 1,400 academics had identified themselves with dissidents' demands that President Chun rescind his 13 April announcement that suspended negotiations over constitutional reform. [redacted]

39. The dissident community has roots beyond the campuses as well. Small print shops, theater and art groups, and churches provide a loose network:

- Printing shops and bookstores, run by former student activists, reprint and distribute banned

texts and print newsletters and leaflets. These often detail protest activities, arrests, and trial proceedings censored from the regular press. During 1986 and early 1987, numerous small publishers were arrested for printing allegedly seditious literature.

- The government has sought to suppress art that expresses dissident views. Police last year shut down one major exhibit focusing on the “masses' struggle.” Small drama and dance groups produce thinly veiled critical dramas or satirical masked dances—a traditional folk art with strong antiestablishment overtones that dissidents have adopted as a symbol of the *minjung* (the “masses”) spirit.
- Dissident clergy lead congregations that bring antigovernment elements together. [redacted] in industrial districts some congregations consist largely of young activist

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workers, permitting ministers, laity, and foreign missionaries associated with the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) to continue their labor organizing despite being banned from worksites by the government.

dissent will abate even if the government continues apace on its new reform-oriented political tack:

40. The government has had difficulty producing a solid estimate of the dissident community's strength. Most obviously, membership in dissident groups frequently overlaps.

- The government's capitulation to major political and economic demands in the face of protests and strikes since June has set a precedent for "people power" tactics that some dissident elements will find irresistible. Key interest groups, including students and workers, have no political party to call their own, and may see public protests as the most effective means of influencing the political agenda.

some 100 registered social and religious organizations, which are alleged to have nearly 35,000 members, as threats to stability. The tally lists some youth groups, but it does not include the full array of radical "underground" campus groups or the formal political opposition.

41. Moreover, it is hard to assess the impact of dissidents on popular attitudes and emotions. In our view, even the size of an organization is not necessarily a good indicator of the dissidents' appeal. Many, perhaps even a majority, among South Korea's 1 million university and college students—nearly half concentrated in the Seoul region—together with the large numbers of recent graduates and high school upperclassmen, are influenced by counterculture values and perspectives. Indeed we suspect that, through churches, contact with students, and other channels, most of the urban population is regularly exposed to news and ideas from dissident circles.

- There is no convincing evidence that government-sponsored political indoctrination courses or pledges of good behavior by protesters and their parents have much effect on students who are arrested. The most effective deterrent has come from parents who have warned their children against ruining their own and their families' future, or being tortured by the security services—sanctions that may appear less of a threat now that the government is clearly trying to cultivate a new image.

- Harsh government treatment also has alienated entire families, with younger brothers and sisters following students into dissident activities. Parents increasingly have been drawn into the fold as they seek help for their children's legal defense from human rights and legal aid committees, and emotional support from various groups. With more freedom to speak out, pressure to release dissidents still in jail—and to compensate the victims of past human rights violations—could gain momentum.

**More Violence Ahead?**

42. It is difficult to predict the level and scale of protest activity this fall. Occasional reports or rumors that radicals are arming themselves with explosives or firearms have not proved accurate.

- 44. Student radicals are likely to press the political opposition to demand more and greater concessions from the government. It is not clear how much support the radicals can mobilize among other students, workers, and farmers. Demands for a constituent assembly to draft a "mass democracy" constitution, a socialist restructuring of the economy, and the withdrawal of US troops from Korea will probably cost support among the broader public.

Nonetheless, the events of June and July underscore the possibility that violence by radicals—for example, on the fringe of basically nonviolent demonstrations—could occur, even with a heavy police presence in the vicinity. We see only a limited possibility, however, that radical protest actions this fall will escalate to insurrection.

- 45. We believe that dissident zealots, including radical students, are potentially capable of setting the spark to a generally volatile political situation, but are not yet in a position to create their own opportunities. The relaxation of controls on many dissident activities under the government's new democratization program does not appear to have led to closer cooperation

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We are not optimistic, however, that radical

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among radicals and other dissident groups. Generational as well as ideological differences separate young radicals from older dissident leaders. While the latter may respect the students' sincerity and the "purity" of their protests, we doubt they are prepared to subordinate themselves or their agenda to student leadership. Moreover, the trend toward increasingly extreme radical ideology over the past several years argues against the likelihood that disparate radical groups will soon coalesce around an ideology and concrete political agenda that would appeal to large numbers of more moderate dissident elements or workers. [redacted]

46. If negotiations on constitutional and electoral reform run into snags, however—especially if the government is held chiefly responsible—violent protest could win public sympathy. Under these circumstances, we can envision large numbers of mainstream students and others joining the radicals in the streets. [redacted]

47. For the organized political opposition, the prospects of capitalizing on such demonstrations to push demands for reform would be tempting. [redacted]

48. Nonetheless, Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and other politicians almost certainly would think long and hard before actively allying with student radicals or openly encouraging their actions. Both Kims almost certainly recognize the pitfalls of any formal "alliance." Most obviously, the government could use evidence of such direct ties to avowedly leftist radicals as grounds for moving against the opposition party and its leaders. [redacted]

49. We also assume that the two Kims know the limits of their control and recognize that the radicals would prove difficult, if not impossible, to direct. [redacted]

[redacted] neither the radicals nor most students have great regard for either Kim. The absence during the June demonstrations of visible support for the Kims or the opposition party appear to support this judgment. Hardcore radicals have criticized the political opposition as bourgeois reformers

and even political opportunists, and a direct solicitation of radical support could bring more criticism or incur political debts the radicals would be quick to call due in the event of an opposition victory. [redacted]

50. Chun's successor is virtually certain to face radical challenge from the beginning of his term—either as an attack on the legitimacy of a DJP victory, or as agitation for drastic reforms by an opposition winner. Even if the election results are accepted by South Koreans on both sides, radical dissidents could make it difficult to keep reforms on course. The result, in the worst case, could test even a liberal new leader, who would need to address whether to shelve reform in favor of the time-tested controls of his predecessors. [redacted]

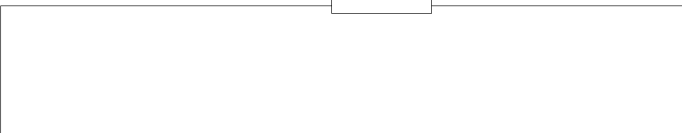
**Implications for the United States**

51. Despite the prospect that radical dissent will continue to grow, the United States does not appear likely to become the immediate target for systematic terrorist attack. Grumbling about US "meddling" in South Korean internal affairs persists, but independent journalists and opinion leaders have reacted positively to recent US support for democratic reforms. Their influence could well lead radicals to conclude they have little to gain from greater verbal attacks on the United States:

- In view of the upsurge of attacks on US facilities in recent years, we cannot downplay the significance of threats against US officials and American citizens. [redacted]

[redacted] But other evidence, including public opinion polls, leads us to conclude that only an extreme minority would approve of such tactics. In short, we do not believe committed and well-organized groups that can carry out a terrorist course of action now exist or are preparing to emerge. [redacted]


52. Even so, there are other threats. Specifically, we believe the radicalization of dissent creates an atmosphere in which disgruntled or disturbed individuals may be more likely than in the past to carry out a solo attack on US persons or property. And, given P'yongyang's interest and access to South Korea via agent infiltration, we would not rule out the possibility of North Korean terrorism against Americans disguised as the work of local dissidents.<sup>2</sup> [redacted]




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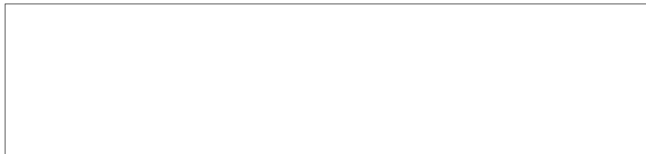


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53. We believe that anti-US sentiment is too deeply ingrained in the ideology of most extreme radicals for their attitudes—or their interest in pillorying the United States—to change fundamentally. Indeed, the cheers that greeted the lowering of the US and Japanese flags during the mammoth rally in Seoul on 9 July suggest radicals can easily tap anti-US emotions even when public opinion toward US actions is favorable. 

54. Over the longer term, the consequences of radical dissent could become increasingly significant for US interests. Themes raised by radicals—US economic “imperialism,” racism, the use of South Korea as a “nuclear platform,” and others—will remain part of South Korea’s intellectual mainstream well into the 1990s. The US–South Korean military alliance, which is the cornerstone of the broader relationship, will be a major focus of radical protest and anti-US sentiment. It is unlikely that radical ideology will make deep inroads within the next few years in the perception of the large majority of South Koreans that the military alliance and the US troop presence is vital to their own national security.<sup>3</sup> Even well-informed South Koreans have a poor understanding of how the combined command structure operates, much less of the institutional history and political-military rationale behind the current arrangements. The radicals could complicate the management of US–ROK relations by stirring up public sentiment on such nationalist issues as the creation of a nuclear free zone on the Korean peninsula and the presence and role of the US military contingent in Korea—for example, the large US military contingent in Seoul and dominance of the combined command structure. 

55. Some of the factors that contribute to radicalism in South Korea, such as the youth bulge—a source of demographic pressures and socioeconomic competition that fosters youthful discontent—will wane in the early 1990s. But others that are the result of economic development, such as the creation of a large industrial work force that has only begun to assert its economic and political interests, are certain to grow. Like other newly important constituencies—students and white-collar office workers, for example—factory workers, have no national political party to call their own. How these groups organize themselves and bring pressure to



bear through the political process are major unknowns for South Korea’s development over the next decade.



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56. Under these circumstances, measuring changes in the popular outlook is difficult at best, but we believe radical notions have helped redefine basic perceptions of the US relationship, particularly for many younger Koreans. Several radical perspectives are helping to shape the public’s views:

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- A freer press and media coverage of local conferences and roundtable discussions on US–South Korean relations reflect an increasing preoccupation with conflicts and inequities in the relationship that need to be redressed in Korea’s favor.
- Research topics by university professors and graduate students, as evidenced by articles in university social science journals, suggest a heightened interest in “surplus value,” the influence of multinational corporations, and other topics closely associated with anticapitalist dependency theory.
- In the past year there has been a flurry of publications touching on the negative side of the United States’ four-decade involvement in South Korea—for example, *Culture of Death*, a critique of US commercialism. Mainstream South Korean academics have also reappraised US–South Korean political and economic relations.



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57. In itself, the emergence of revisionist viewpoints comes as no surprise, given the widely noted rise in nationalistic and even xenophobic sentiments in South Korea. Nonetheless, we believe the trend is worrisome: it works to polarize the political atmosphere and impedes dialogue and compromise between the government and the opposition, which could help ameliorate the impact of radical influence. In the current debate, proponents of a more balanced viewpoint also run the risk of being painted as antinationalist. Indeed, even the government has frequently found it convenient to let anti-US sentiments draw fire from itself.



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58. Experience also suggests that the current generation of South Korean adolescents and young adults will carry many of their basic perceptions toward domestic and international political and economic structures into adulthood. If so, far more than in their parents’ generation, their roles in business and government, as well as the decisions they make on issues


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involving the United States, are likely to be shaped by political, social, and philosophical perspectives that have been colored by radicalized indigenous Korean thought. We foresee no easy solution to tensions that

will arise between the practical need for South Koreans to internationalize politically and economically and the nationalistic impulse to create a more purely "Korean" society. 

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