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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

SOUTH KOREA: In Transition

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The military and civilian leaders who have run South Korea since President Park's assassination a month ago are paving the way for an orderly transfer of power to a new interim government in December. The transition to a permanent successor government in a year or two will be more difficult as demands for liberalization are weighed against the determination of the government to maintain order. The government's plans for change have the support of the people and the opposition New Democratic Party. Militant dissidents are not satisfied, however, and their confrontational tactics could cause a clampdown that would threaten the liberalization process.

[Redacted]

Acting President Choe Kyu-ha and the Martial Law Command have moved rapidly to restore a sense of normality and to ease tension. They have lifted nearly all the restrictions on public activity imposed after the assassination, promised to revise the unpopular Yushin Constitution, and begun to release political prisoners. Moreover, the government has arranged for the election of Choe as an interim successor and the installation of a new cabinet in mid-December.

[Redacted]

The New Democratic Party is likely to continue working with the government as long as it has a voice in liberalization programs and reforms move ahead at a satisfactory pace.

[Redacted]

The progovernment Democratic Republican Party will bring a somewhat different kind of pressure to bear on the reform process. The party and Kim Chong-pil, the former Prime Minister who has just resumed the party

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presidency, are preparing for a presidential bid in 1980 or 1981.

[redacted] The Democratic Republicans may push the interim government to speed up liberalization.

The Government's Dilemma

In undertaking political reform, the government sees itself caught in a difficult position.

[redacted] On the other hand, there is little doubt that the government would sacrifice reform if dissident activity threatened to disrupt domestic stability.

[redacted] In revising the constitution, therefore, the government will not compromise on the issue of retaining a strong executive, even if he is chosen by direct popular elections.

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Outlook

Whether the activities of [redacted] dissidents prove disruptive will depend on decisions taken by the government in the near term, as well as on the willingness of the dissidents to moderate their demands. The interim government has so far set a good example by bending when necessary and by reestablishing channels of communication with varied political and social interest groups. It has benefited in those early weeks from a popular desire to heal old wounds, but this grace period could end when Choe becomes interim president. [redacted]

If at that point the government fails to set a timetable for reform and to work with the National Assembly in maintaining the momentum of change, the limited appeal of the dissidents could broaden into potentially serious protest activity. A wave of dissidence could result in a showdown between those in the interim leadership determined to maintain order at any cost and those committed to the process of liberalization. [redacted]

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