America's "Friend" in Korea

Donald Kirk

Seoul: The methods of torture employed in the headquarters of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency or the rival National Security Command may be among the most varied, if not original, in Asia. There is, for instance, what is known as "putting a man on an airplane"—tying the victim by his hands and feet, dangling him by a rope from a propeller-like blade attached to the ceiling, and setting the contraption to spinning wildly. Then there is the "Genghis Khan treatment"—the trick of placing the accused over a fire or stove until he screams out his confession. "Or sometimes they lock the man in a glass room, with the floor, ceilings, and walls made of glass, and turn on bright electric lights from all sides," says a young informant. "The man goes crazy from the light."

The catalogue of torture techniques, as gradually, secretively disclosed after what may have been the most intensive terror campaign ever conducted here, goes on and on, routinely ranging from long stretches in solitary confinement to beating and electric shocks. "They put bamboo slivers under the nails," says my informant. "They put a wet leather jacket on a man and let it shrink on him as it dries. They kept one of my friends from sleeping for a week. Four men watched him all the time and took turns beating him with their guns whenever he dozed. By the time he was released, he was almost crazy." The masters of the art of torture, it is widely believed, are aging men trained in their recondite skills while serving in the Japanese Imperial Army during the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. The same explanation is frequently advanced for the trend in Korea from democratic rule to quasi-militarist repression. The prime exponent of the Japanese militarist philosophy here, after all, is Park Chung Hee, a graduate of the Japanese Imperial Military Academy, a first lieutenant in the Japanese army before the end of the war—and, since staging a coup d'état on May 16, 1961, the ruler of the country.

What manner of man is Park? And how, besides authorizing the use of torture, does he perpetuate himself in power? Considering the United States commitment to Korea, in terms of manpower, lives, and funds since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Americans might reasonably demand answers to these questions. And the topic of Park's background, his "credentials," as it were, seems all the more relevant in view of the pattern of worsening dictatorship—certainly not the ideal for which the United States joined the conflict that set him on the path to national leadership.

The youngest son of a poor farmer, Park has never cultivated the aura of a popular politician or crowd-pleasing speaker. Perhaps in part because of his rude beginnings, he seems as self-conscious and stilted in his public appearances as he does in the actual content of his speeches and statements. "He has no personal gestures, no characteristic attitude like the President of the United States," says a Korean who has seen him at academic commencements and other formal affairs. "He always has in mind the idea of authority. When he talks to an inferior, he seems very hard—as if he is afraid, if he smiles or shakes hands, he could lose his face, his dignity." Compounding this sense is Park's small physical stature—a phenomenon that necessitates extra cushions at public events, raised platforms behind bullet-proof podiums, and the like. His efforts to overcome the humiliation of his size and of his family background both accentuate and help explain his passion for unquestioned power, absolute authority, unswerving loyalty.

These aims, rather than any anti-Communist politi-

DONALD KIRK holds an Edward R. Murrow Fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is on leave from the *Chicago Tribune*, which he served as Far East correspondent before returning to the U.S. last fall.

cal ideology, have dominated Park's career. The best evidence for this is the agility with which he has switched allegiances and alliances as the moment dictates. While Korean Christians, an influential, educated minority in a largely Buddhist society, often risked life and freedom in resisting the Japanese, Park acquired the professional soldier's habit of following orders without question. Then, in the limbo period between World War II and the Korean conflict, the young officer, now a graduate of the Korean Military Academy and a captain in the fledgling Korean Army, is said to have been involved briefly in a Communist guerrilla revolt in which one of his brothers was killed. Having saved himself from execution by cooperating with his interrogators, he seized upon the opportunities for promotion offered by wartime expansion of the army. By 1953 Park was a brigadier general in the artillery and off to the U.S. army artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for the "advanced course" in his field. Despite Park's efficiency in wiping out all trace of his former association with Communist rebels, Korean sources insist these early contacts, plus his training by the Japanese, account to some extent for his present toughness in dealing with dissent.

"He knows Koreans dislike both the Japanese and the Communists," says a student, offering one common, if vastly oversimplified, explanation for Park's ideological peregrinations. "Therefore he is the worst person to lead us, and he tries to show his anti-communism to cover up his career." Possibly more to the point, in the view of other critics of the regime, Park's flirtation with communism deepened his faith in force rather than Western-style democracy as the most effective approach to governing his country, always menaced by North Korean divisions just above the 38th parallel which divides the two Koreas. "He saw communism as a means to an end like anvthing else," says a foreign analyst. "He probably admired the sense of discipline of the Communists." Park by now is so powerful that he stands alone as a sacrosanct figure above more vulnerable underlings. "You can say a lot of things about the government here," a Western press official reminds a correspondent, "but you can't attack the President. There's a great feeling of *lèse majesté* around here."

The comment also serves as a reminder of one of the main reasons for Park's "success" not only in keeping himself in office but also, in the years before the "energy crisis" and the tripling of crude oil prices, in guiding the Korean economy to an average increase of 9 per cent per year in gross national product, now projected at more than $12 billion for 1974 at current dollar values. Although American diplomats seem distinctly uneasy about some of Park's excesses, they publicly cite America's "obligation" to defend Korea as reason to keep 38,000 American troops permanently posted here at an annual cost of more than $700 million and to continue pumping more than $150 million a year into the "buildup" of the Park military machine, now equipped with everything from M-16 rifles to a squadron of F-4 "phantoms." The former American ambassador, Philip Habib, shortly before leaving Seoul on August 19 to become assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, told American peace corps volunteers in a private question-and-answer session that America's underlying purpose in Korea was to "maintain the stability" of the Korean peninsula—and that any interference in South Korean "internal politics" might have an unsettling effect.

It is indicative of the dictatorial sensitivity of President Park toward "interference" by anyone, whether foreign or Korean, that he was perhaps most infuriated by student slogans denouncing him as a "tyrant" and "leader of tyrants." Yet such language does seem to apply to him as he leads his government through a period of political unease, acutely sensitive as he is to any seeming slight or sign of disrespect. "If he issues an order, even his best friends cannot say a word because he gets very angry at them," says one indirect report from the Blue House, the presidential mansion where Park lives, surrounded by soldiers and dark-suited security men, a high fence and a broad expanse of lawn, and where he also spends most of his working hours. "He wants all his orders executed in a minute," says my informant, requesting the usual anonymity expected of anyone seriously criticizing the ruling establishment. "So we sometimes say he governs by 'direction policy' because he directs almost by intuition or some kind of ideas which no one else understands. Sometimes we even see the ministries struggling to carry out two opposite orders from the President. One man follows one order, another man follows the other one —and he dismisses both of them." It is the traditional response of insecure, divide-and-rule national leaders, anxious to play factions and rivals against each other in order to preserve their own position, but in the final analysis the use of force is the technique that Park understands the best.

"The highest number of prisoners in Japanese jails in Korea during the colonial period was about 10,000," says a pamphlet published by an underground opposition organization. "The present Seoul government has locked up an estimated 100,000 political prisoners. People have vanished into jail for years, all contact with the outside world forbidden. Others have simply disappeared without trials or prison sentences; neither family nor friends could ever learn what happened." The severity of a recent series of trials by a military tribunal can only be interpreted as "a function of the severity of the man himself," says a foreign diplomatic source, summarizing the long investigations of all of those believed to have inspired or supported short-lived demonstrations against the government in November, 1973, and

Father Antonio Shin, a Roman Catholic priest, is carried away by riot police as over a thousand Catholic priests and laity clashed with police in Seoul during a demonstration demanding the release of Bishop Daniel Tji Hak Soun and other political prisoners. (*Religious News Service*)

again, still more briefly, in April, 1974. "He's a tough guy. He meant to say, 'I'm serious about this—if you plot against me, you go on trial.' The only thing the Koreans seem to respect is force or terror—that's his philosophy."

The official figures for investigations in 1974, if they do not bear out Park's thesis about Korean respect for terror, at least verify his own trust in that method. Since last January his aides have admittedly authorized the arrest of 1,043 persons suspected of sponsoring or participating in demonstrations and plots against his rule. The major investigating agencies, the Korean CIA, the National Security Command, the police and the army, eventually turned some 300 of them over to the military tribunal after inflicting varying degrees of torture on most of those subjected to interrogation of any kind. So far the government has formally announced the conviction and sentencing of over 170, including a highly respected Roman Catholic bishop, a revolutionary poet, a former president, and a Presbyterian minister.

Nor are political dissidents necessarily treated more harshly than members of Park's own 600,000-man military apparatus, superficially united behind him but always rumored as the source of the most substantive opposition to his rule. Mindful of his own record of revolt while in the army, Park combines his sense of divide-and-rule with his propensity for intimidation in all dealings with senior officers who might appear remotely inclined to emulate his example. "Some military men have been tortured on his orders," reports another informant. "He fears military power grows too big, so he always takes measures beforehand, before they grow too strong." It was his anxiety about getting upstaged, either directly by a coup or indirectly by gradual usurpation of his powers, that led him to dismiss the silver-haired, scheming Lee Hu-rak as head of the CIA last

fall. "It was obvious Lee was more of a threat than could be tolerated," the informant explains. "There was a power struggle between the heads of the CIA, the National Security Command, and the Seoul capital garrison command, and eventually all three of them were removed. It was Park's way of asserting control over all of them."

It was a sign of this overall skill in isolating as well as frightening his civilian critics when he decided on August 23 to do away with the broad dictatorial powers of a couple of "emergency" decrees, under which he had conducted the year's purge of dissidents, at a time when he might have been expected to intensify rather than deescalate his campaign. His wife of twenty-four years had been fatally wounded on August 15 by a pistol fired by a young Korean resident of Japan as her husband delivered his usual anti-Communist harangue on the twenty-ninth anniversary of Korean "liberation" from Japanese rule. (Park resumed his speech after she was carried offstage—a feat of self-control widely ascribed to his inner Japanese-inculcated discipline rather than to any lack of feeling.) Though it might appear harsh to say so, the death of Mrs. Park provided the richest opportunity the President had ever had for ordering a barrage of propaganda against both North Korea and Japan, galvanizing his people in a torrent of national mourning—and implying that he might have to exact still greater retribution from his critics. By unexpectedly rescinding the dread decrees eight days later, he could emerge as a merciful man of forgiveness, a benevolent father of his country. There was only one small qualification to this act of seeming munificence: the assumption, more than implicit in the statement accompanying the lifting of decrees, that naturally there would be no *real* opposition now that everyone could see how bad the Communists really were.

"Through the August 15 tragedy," said Park, "our people have seen, anew, the true nature of the North Korean puppets and their evil schemes." Thus, he reasoned, "I believe the people have come to realize that internal stability is most important of all. I believe national unity has been strengthened through this tragedy." As a matter of fact, whatever his critics may think about "internal stability," the killing of Mrs. Park by a bullet intended for her husband may have had just the unifying effect that Park would have liked to have achieved by his own record as president. The specter of more than a million persons jamming the sidewalks and streets for a glimpse of the funeral cortege leaving the ornate gate in front of the stern, stone-walled capitol, constructed by a Japanese colonial governor in 1936, was moving proof of Park's prestige, if not his popularity.

Then, in answer to those who might have thought that student demonstrators and protesters at prayer meetings significantly represented the people's will, advocates of the Park philosophy could note that as many as a million Koreans had been turning out the week of the assassination for nothing more controversial than the Campus Crusade for Christ, led by one William Bright, a middle-aged American evangelist, on a broad 3,000-foot runway from which planes once took off for bombing missions during the Korean War. When asked if he thought there was democratic freedom in Korea, Bright set reporters straight. "There's more freedom of religion here than anywhere else in the world," he said. "The government put people in jail for their political actions, not for their religion. They were breaking the law."

So there. And yet the impression remains that any such display, whether for the funeral of his wife or for a religious crusade, reflects Park's ability at manipulating and channeling popular emotions more than public support for his policies. It is, in short, another tribute to his finesse at divide-and-rule that he could reduce his once quite strong opposition to the secondary, almost degrading, status of whiners and complainers seemingly divorced from the sentiments of the average Korea. The best-known victim of this tactic—more devastating in the long run than sheer terrorism—has been Kim Dae Jung, a former national assemblyman who gave Park one of the worst scares of his political career by winning 46 per cent of the votes in the 1971 presidential election after freely criticizing Park's policies. Such a demonstration of vote-getting ability might have been forgivable if Kim had accepted the role of "defeated opposition leader"—the sort of "opposition" that American diplomats like to see in countries supported by American aid so they can foster the myth before Congress of upholding democratic values and freedoms. Kim might have been more effective, in fact, if he had stayed where he was and worked to strengthen his New Democratic Party, but he chose instead to carry his crusade abroad, notably to the United States and Japan, after Park in 1972 promulgated a constitution that gave him sweeping powers—and provided for his election to a new six-year term by a 2,359-man "national conference for unification" handpicked by himself and his agents.

"Under his revised constitution, the national assembly is merely a democratic showcase," said Kim in a typical speech, this one delivered at the University of Washington in Seattle in April, 1973, and distributed by his own publicity machine in Washington to editors and scholars throughout the world. "Your aid and military assistance were intended to benefit the people and the national defense," said Kim. "President Park used this military aid to enhance his militaristic totalitarianism and this money to reinforce his CIA-dominated government. . . . I ask that you remedy this situation." Heady talk—just the kind to turn him into a popular figure at Ameri-

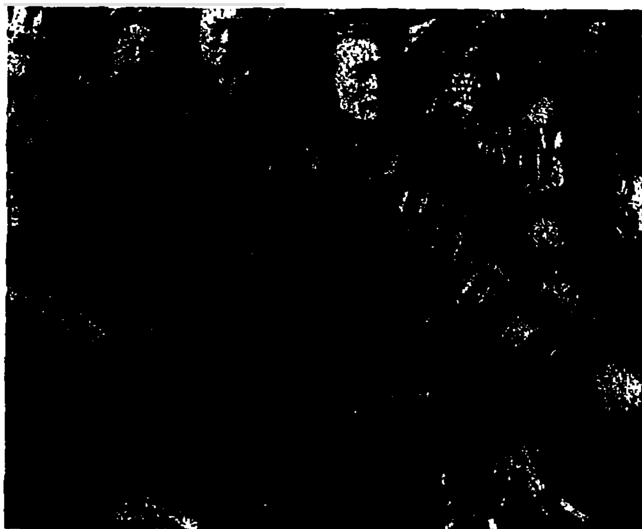
can intellectual seminars and discussion groups. Enough to have won the sympathy of Harvard faculty members, who offered Kim—like Park a farmer's son, too poor ever to have gone to college—a fellowship for a year's study. Much too strong, though, for President Park, who evidently decided the only way to eliminate this menace to Korean foreign policy, to the standing of the Korean government in Washington and other major capitals, was to get Kim back to Korea. Thus, on August 8, 1973, in the midst of a speaking tour in Japan, Kim was kidnapped from the twenty-second floor of Tokyo's Grand Palace Hotel, a luxury lodging near the grounds of the Imperial Palace. "They put wet handkerchiefs on my nose, they beat me, they taped my mouth," says Kim, describing the whole event over a long lunch in his closely watched home here. "They drove me to Osaka, they carried me onto a motorboat and tightly bound my arms and legs. They said they were going to throw me into the sea." A Roman Catholic, Kim "prayed to Jesus Christ to save me."

The saga of the kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung forms one of the most bizarre episodes in modern East Asian politics and diplomacy—and it even revived the image of Kim internationally at a time when he was becoming a bit of a bore. "I heard some big sound like a bombing, and I saw some flashing light, though my eyes were covered," Kim tells me excitedly, eager to run through the wild yarn as he has done on innumerable occasions. "One of the sailors cried 'airplane,' and the ship began going very fast. Several hours later some of the sailors offered me water and food. Two days later the ship arrived in South Korea." The next day, a man whom Kim had never seen before told him that an organization called the "Young Men's Group for Saving Society" was responsible for his abduction. "We have returned you to Korea because of your antinational activities," Kim quotes the man as having said. Kim replied that he had been crusading against the Park government, not against his country. "It's the same thing," the man retorted—but he also led Kim to a point near his house, released him, and telephoned radio stations and newspaper offices informing editors of Kim's homecoming. The news created a sensation in Japan, where flustered foreign ministry officials treated the event as an infringement on Japanese sovereignty. There was no question the plot had been engineered by the Korean CIA. In the ensuing uproar a second secretary of the Korean embassy in Tokyo returned to Korea and resigned, in that order. The prime minister of Korea, a onetime colonel who often carries out pro forma duties on Park's behalf, even journeyed to Japan to apologize for what had happened—without admitting any official complicity.

For all the embarrassment, however, Park achieved his purpose beautifully. Kim Dae Jung, still suffering from nervous and muscular problems afflicting his lower back and hips as a result of an automobile accident that happened mysteriously at the peak of his 1971 campaign, can receive foreign correspondents but not domestic reporters in his home. He is afraid to go out because he knows that Korean CIA operatives will follow him wherever he goes. A permanent CIA guard occupies the top floor of a building overlooking his own barbed-wire compound, and a couple of security men in sports shirts and sneakers sit on the corners at either end of the alley running by his house.

Kim again is suffering from the same kind of overexposure that undermined his prestige while he was inveighing against the government abroad. He has told his story so often—and he has reiterated his views to so many foreign interviewers—that nobody much is listening any more. In his own party a new set of leaders, clearly beholden to Park, has emerged to form the sort of harmless "opposition" that Park needs to cloak his regime in democratic guise. Indeed, one of the stalwarts of the party delivered a brief eulogy at Mrs. Park's funeral, assuring her in death that "we will fully support your husband as you did and care for your children." For Kim the assassination of Mrs. Park only compounded his own misery. The killer was not only acting on behalf of the North Koreans, says the Seoul prosecutor, but he also had attended a dozen or so Kim Dae Jung rallies in Japan—a "confession" that Kim pleads could not be true, since he gave only two or three lectures in Japan before the kidnapping.

Yet Kim, like the Korean opposition in general, is not necessarily dead politically. A golden-fringed pennant showing him addressing a mass rally during the 1971 campaign reminds a visitor of his onetime popularity. The pennant, hanging above the coffee table in his living room, lists his "role in the '70's"—including such



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vague promises as "realization of mass participatory democracy" and "strengthening of the democratic system for all democratic people." The owner of a fleet of coastal vessels before his entry into politics in the 1950's, Kim also displays a wall plaque presented him by the Korean first division, a certificate proclaiming him an "honorary citizen of Memphis," and a large photograph of himself and his wife with Mrs. Richard Nixon in Washington. At heart a conventional politician, he protests his goals as willingly today as he ever did at the height of his glory. "My people never have allowed any kind of suppression continuously," he says, citing Korea's ancient history of revolt and revolution. "My people will restore our democracy in the near future." Empty though such declarations may appear, they clearly are not empty enough to satisfy Park. The government on the morning of the assassination of Mrs. Park "suspended investigation" of the kidnapping of Kim, but, in an Orwellian reversal, is bringing him to trial on trumped-up charges stemming from his political campaigns. The basic allegation is that Kim's election accusations against Park were "false"—including one rather prescient jibe that Park, if he won, would set up a "generalissimo regime."

Although Kim might some day reemerge as a serious political contender, more genuinely "revolutionary" figures than he will probably have to keep up the level of protest. There is somehow a feeling among students at Korean National University, a focal point for any change, that Kim, by sitting at home granting interviews to foreigners, has "sold out," or at least has opted out of their cause. "He is no longer our leader," says a young student, still hopeful of a resumption of anti-Park activities. "We think he has failed us."

The most important campus organization, the National Federation of Democratic Youth Students, lost virtually all power in the roundup and trial of its principal figures and backers, but one student tells me that young people in the army at the time of the arrests are now forming the nucleus of a new protest movement. "They are returning to the universities and will try something this fall," the student predicts. "The CIA does not know them because they were not previously implicated or involved." At the same time, the sense of outrage among Christians—and particularly the country's 800,000 Catholics—seems too deep for Park to contain by mere terrorism. For several nights before the killing of Mrs. Park worshipers gathered in the stately red-brick Myon Dong Cathedral, on a rise overlooking one of downtown Seoul's most crowded shopping districts, and prayed to God to bless their struggle for liberty. They had a legitimate hero—Bishop Daniel Tji, sentenced to fifteen years in jail by the tribunal after writing a celebrated "declaration of conscience" in which he admitted providing funds "in support of the oppressed Christian-minded students," but said he was "falsely accused by forged documentation of instigating a revolt."

The death of Mrs. Park, however, temporarily stripped the religious movement of its fervor. The Catholic cardinal, Stephen Kim, venerated for his messages of protest and criticism, dutifully participated in the funeral service for Mrs. Park, and spoke with feeling for the self-effacing, traditionally Confucianist woman who had dedicated her career to such good works as orphanages and Girl Scouts while bringing up her two daughters as Catholics so they could get good Catholic educations. "May God bring fruit from the seed of peace sown by her," said the Cardinal, who officiated at the funeral with a Protestant minister and a Buddhist monk. "May God help us to live by trusting each other and building a new country." There was a faint whiff of criticism inherent in the call for "a new country," but the net effect of the prayer was to contribute to the overwhelming impact of the occasion. It would not be at all surprising if Park did not seek to enhance his image still more, both at home and abroad, by granting "amnesty" or reducing the sentences of some of those convicted by the military tribunal.

"There had been indications for a couple of weeks before the assassination that he was starting to realize that his policies weren't going to be tolerated by Korea's friends abroad," says a foreign resident here, noting that both the French and Belgian ambassadors attended one of the services at Myon Dong Cathedral after Biship Tji's trial. "Foreign missions were expressing strong concern." American diplomats, although they did not attend the service, have advised Korean officials of the cosmetic advantages of softening their attitudes—if only to placate Congressional critics anxious under any circumstances to pare down foreign aid programs. Thus, a show of leniency, contrasting with the spirit of terror that permeated all political discussion here before Mrs. Park's death, would be highly appropriate.

Lest anyone expect Park to condone opposition for more than his own propaganda purposes, however, the wording of his statement accompanying the issuance of the emergency decrees last January should still be regarded as operative. "The government will deal resolutely with any challenge to the legitimacy of popular mandate," said the presidential statement. "It will also move ahead to consolidate the basis for national unity by forestalling the harmful disruption of national consensus." For the benefit of those who may not have gotten the message, there is no question here that Park would impose similar or stiffer measures if necessary to insure that "consensus"—meaning daily reaffirmation of his own supremacy over his people.