The U.S. in Korea: What Price Security?

Donald L. Ranard

With the possible exception of Chile no other country in 1976 received as much critical American public and press attention as did Korea. Almost to the exclusion of other issues, the criticism has been directed to the denial of human rights. Press stories, editorials, letters to the editor, Congressional hearings and legislative restrictions, TV documentaries, church newsletters—all have deplored the erosion of civil liberties in South Korea. And as the criticisms mounted, more and more voices, including those from among the ranks of Korea’s traditional friends, began calling for a reduction of United States military and economic support to this country, the rebirth of whose independence was gained at a tremendous cost in American blood and treasure.

A premise long held by American foreign policy makers has been that stability on the Korean peninsula is vital to peace in Asia, and especially for the security of Japan. Accordingly, the major United States policy objective has been the avoidance of war on the peninsula. This has not been an idle utopian quest: Conflict between North and South could escalate to nuclear war between the supporters of both governments of a divided Korea. To achieve its objective the United States maintains some 42,000 troops in South Korea, has provided over the years some $13 billion in economic and military assistance (approximately $1 billion of military assistance was provided in the period 1970-75 toward the modernization of the Korean military), is pledged to provide some $485 million in credits for military sales in 1976-77, and spends countless hours in the U.N. and world capitals in diplomatic representation on behalf of the South.

Without this support, according to Washington and Seoul spokesmen, Korea’s sovereignty would be in jeopardy. They reason that if the U.S. were visibly and markedly to reduce its support—of force levels or military assistance or backing in the U.N. or even by publicly condemning South Korea’s internal policies—that a hostile Kim II Sung would be tempted to unify the peninsula by force.

But can a South Korean Government oblivious to American values and sensibilities concerning human rights continue to be assured of and receive these manifestations of American support? We can only begin to answer this question by relating Korea’s record of human rights to reaction in the United States. For if the premise is indeed logical that American support is vital to Korea’s survival, then the issue of human rights becomes part of the larger perspective of Korea’s governance.

In mid-1974 the Department of State recognized publicly that since 1972 the trend in Korea has been toward one-man rule. “Institutional means of dissent have been rendered powerless and efforts to express opposition have been suppressed through a series of severe emergency decrees,” is the way it was expressed to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In fact, the march had begun earlier. The seizure by force of government on May 16, 1961, by then Major-General Park Chung Hee was the first step in a long line of illegality that today knows no limits.

In the spring of 1971, some ten years after General Park’s coup, Korea faced a decisive election. A vigorous challenger, Kim Dae-Jung, had succeeded in unifying his opposition, the New Democratic Party, and against great odds and the almost unlimited powers of a ruthless government was making headway in his appeal to the electorate. Unlike any other campaigner in Korea’s short experience with representative institutions, Kim was raising issues of substance: the status of the Korean CIA (KCIA), the size and role of the military, unification and international security guarantees, Park’s authoritarian rule, academic freedom. That Park Chung Hee was worried by his challenger is best evidenced by his last-minute promise to the public that 1971 would be his last election.

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With all-out support of the government apparatus Park was reelected—narrowly as Korean elections go; what had been a trend toward undemocratic rule now became an avalanche of disregard for the rule of law. Indeed, the record since is replete with egregious illustrations almost defying comparison outside the Communist world.

Taken at his word, Park was now a “lame duck” president, certainly a new phenomenon in Korea’s politics. And as politicians within his ruling party began to maneuver for the inside track for succession and power, as the university campus also reacted, and as an uncertain public learned of Kissinger’s talks in Peking, Park reacted sharply. He declared a state of emergency in December, 1971, and pushed through the first of what was to become a long line of emergency actions aimed at consolidating presidential power. But the more grievous, the more serious damage to constitutionalism was still to come.

In mid-October, 1972, the ax fell: Park declared martial law, suspended the Constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, closed the universities, and put the press under censorship. Following in gooose-step order by the year’s end was a series of political moves that, in retrospect, are surprising perhaps only in the time that had elapsed since the coup of 1961:

- A thoroughgoing overhaul of the constitution to make all arms of government subordinate to an authoritarian head. Nowhere is this more clearly revealed than in Article 53, which boldly states that in times of national calamity or crisis (largely undefined) “the President shall have power to take necessary emergency measures in the whole range of the State affairs, including internal affairs, foreign affairs, national defense, economic, financial and judicial affairs.” (The approval of the National Assembly was not required, nor was this presidential power subject to judicial interpretation.)
- Provision for the indirect election of the president through secret ballot and without debate for a period of six years (with no constitutional limit on tenure) by a National Conference for Unification, a new constitutional organ. (In theory this body was to become “a representative body for national consensus on matters concerning national unification and will also be charged with other important functions.” It is amply clear, however, that it was intended simply as a rationale for constitutional change, and as a controlled vehicle for effecting Park’s continuation as President.)
- A national referendum that ratified the new constitution. (Government claimed that 91.9 per cent of the electorate voted and 91.5 per cent approved. It should be noted, however, that martial law was still in effect, the press was censored, no public discussion was allowed, and, accordingly, the extent to which these figures are representative of the popular will is open to considerable question.)

President Park then stood unchallenged for reelection, which was followed almost automatically by the National Conference.

As rationale, Park once again pointed to the need for national unity in the face of great challenges to the nation—internally the ever present factional strife, externally the threat from the North. Park further justified his grab for power by bluntly exploiting his alleged uncertainty on the international horizon: the opening of diplomatic communication between the U.S. and China, and the winding down of the war in Vietnam. To the Nixon Administration and the State Department, which had less than a day’s notification of martial law, the inclusion of Vietnam and China in Park’s posturing was a political embarrassment. Both issues were being touted by the White House as great diplomatic achievements, and it sought with some success to have Park exclude them from his public announcements.

In mid-1973 one event alone demonstrated Park’s determination to silence opposition voices, no matter how far removed from Korea. Kim Dae-Jung, who had opposed the President in 1971, had been out of the country since October, 1972; in August, 1973, he was kidnapped by the KCIA while visiting Tokyo, and five days later was surfaced in Seoul by a fictitious association of patriots, a “National Salvation Society,” whose involvement in the affairs has never been made clear. What is obvious, however, is that the enormous problems involved in removing Kim from the heart of the world’s most crowded city, sheltering and then smuggling him past police from Tokyo to Osaka, slipping by the typically tight control of Japanese immigration, plus chartering a launch to return Kim to Korea, could have been overcome only by a government organization that had the contacts and experience for such cloak-and-dagger work and was prepared to underwrite the plan financially. Many still suspect that the plot against Kim initially involved assassination but was fortunately thwarted by public outcry against his kidnaping in both the U.S. and Japan.

To date no one has been prosecuted for the crime. The affair remains a blot on Japanese justice and continues to fuel suspicion of links between the KCIA and the Japanese police, as well as between Park’s politicians and the then Tanaka government. For the past three years Kim has remained under virtual house arrest in Seoul, his uneasy status interrupted only by further harassment and persecution. Today it is Kim Dae-Jung who finds himself convicted on specious charges while his kidnappers, known to the Japanese authorities, are still at large.

The Kim Dae-Jung affair was a signal, not read accurately at first but increasingly clear as time passed, that the South Korean Government was capable of criminal acts, including violence and terrorism, to achieve its end. But opposition was not yet intimidated, and as 1973 came to an end courageous voices were petitioning with surprising success for a return to constitutional government. Again government responded with a massive show of strength. By early 1974 Emergency Measures No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4 had been promulgated prohibiting any type of criticism against the so-called “Yushin Constitution” (in effect ending one of the most basic human rights, i.e., the right to petition government), and rigidly controlling the activities of a student organization known as the National Democratic Youth and Student Federation (NDYSF) that the government claimed was a North Korean tool involved in a
The plan to overthrow the government. So heavy-handed was government action that, taken literally, Emergency Measure No. 4 made possible the death penalty for students who cut classes or examinations. Violators were subject to courts-martial.

The rush of events following the emergency decree of 1974 and those of 1975 almost defy clear recounting. Were they not the happenings in a country the U.S. bled for in an attempt to establish a showcase of democracy below the 39th parallel, they might better have been ascribed to the pages of English satire. In summary, the Christian leadership, both Catholic and Protestant, was arrested or charged, not once but several times, as were Korea's only living ex-president, the ex-head of its opposition party, its leading poet, and the editor of the most prestigious literary magazine. Charges were piled on charges: Poet Kim Chi Ha was convicted, sentenced to death, commuted, released, rearrested, sentenced to life imprisonment. Emergency Measure No. 4 was rescinded in early 1975 only to be reinstated in a different text as Emergency Measure No. 9 of May, 1975. Defense lawyers for the accused were arrested: ex-President Yun Po-sun was convicted of charges of plotting to overthrow the government by passing the grand sum of $2,000 to a student religious group; and Kim Dae-Jung, tried because of election irregularities in 1967 and 1971 (he had dared to call Park Chung Hee a 'generalissimo'), was convicted, sentenced, released on appeal, placed under constant surveillance, and finally rearrested in the so-called March 1, 1976, plot against the government!

The fabricated case against the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) goes back to the early days of the military government. In 1964 some forty-seven Koreans were charged with subversion; thirty-four were released because of insufficient evidence; and the remaining thirteen were then charged under the National Security Law prohibiting antistate activities. The trial of the thirteen defendants became a travesty, the forerunner of a state-directed justice that was to become characteristic of court procedure against political prisoners under Park's government. By the time the case had wound down three of the public prosecutors had resigned, refusing to prosecute a case they had concluded was fabricated; eleven of the defendants were acquitted, only to be confronted under appeal with new
charges; and finally, seven were found guilty and six received suspended sentences.

In early 1974 the files of the PRP were once more dusted off, and twenty-two members were charged with conspiracy. Again the PRP was the link to the North, required this time to prove that the NDYSF was planning to overthrow Park’s government and set up a Communist regime in the South.

The case wound its way through Korean legal procedures for almost a year, by which time it was in the Supreme Court for final judgment. On April 8, 1975, the Court upheld eight death sentences, and all but two of the lesser convictions. The following day, ignoring existing avenues of appeal for retrial or clemency, the government summarily hanged the eight.

Fortuitously, at that time a mission representing Amnesty International was in Seoul conducting an on-scene investigation into allegations regarding the administration of justice under the Yushin Constitution. Aroused by the attention given the PRP, Amnesty conducted a special examination of the case. Its report contains the following conclusions:

- All of the crucial elements in the case against the alleged members of the PRP were confessed to under torture; these confessions did not represent the truth.
- The evidence presented, even without cross-examination, falls far short of proof that the defendants were involved in the alleged conspiracy.
- Pretrial and court procedure contained some fifteen examples of gross irregularities (i.e., no defense witnesses allowed, calling of prosecution witness in absence of defense lawyers, no cross-examination of prosecution witnesses).
- The case was fabricated to arouse feelings with respect to the North-South issue, and further to provoke prejudice against academic, church, and other demands for liberalization.

For their activities on behalf of the PRP defendants and families two American missionaries were expelled: Methodist missionary George Ogle, after fifteen years’ residence, and Maryknoll priest James Sinnott, after fourteen.

Not matching the PRP case in brutality but demonstrating as ruthlessly the government’s determination to eradicate civil dissent was an incident on March 1, 1976. On this day a group of prominent political and religious leaders gathered in Seoul’s Myungdong Catholic Cathedral, where twelve signed and issued a “Patriotic Declaration of Democracy,” which sought the restoration of democracy in Korea. Demanding an end to the repressive emergency measures, restoration of basic human rights, and an independent legislature and judiciary, the statement also placed the nation’s trouble squarely on the President: It called on him to step aside. Immediately, the arrests began, and within short order, for what the Washington Post’s foreign correspondent John Saar termed a “moderate, even vapid declaration for a return to democratic government,” some eighteen dissidents—distinguished largely for their prominence in the Korean cause against the Japanese occupation, communism, and for democracy—were in the dock, charged with having agitated for a popular uprising against the government in violation of Article No. 9.

Four months later, on August 28, Yun Po-sun, the president who had stood to the side to avoid bloodshed during Park’s coup, Kim Dae-Jung, who had run against Park in 1971, and Ham Suk-hon, seventy-five, an almost legendary Quaker who had been involved in nonviolent resistance since first opposing the Japanese a half century ago, had been sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment. Sentenced to five years were Chung Il-Hyung, seventy-two, and his wife Yi Tae-Yung, Korea’s first woman lawyer. Others sentenced included five Catholic priests and four Protestant pastors.

There are few bilateral relationships that are more on the American conscience than that between the United States and Korea. This sensitivity goes back a long time; in fact, the first treaty Korea signed with a Western power was with the United States in 1882. From that period through the end of World War II the U.S. attempted to steer a careful course of noninvolvement in Korea’s entangling relations with China, Russia, and Japan. This desire to remain aloof had guided American policy during Korea’s difficult days under Japanese occupation; it was probably not until 1943 in Cairo that a more forthright U.S. position endorsing a free and independent Korea became policy.

Yet, notwithstanding its earlier cautions, the United States did become deeply involved. Certainly in the Korean War and ever since it has remained Korea’s patron and benefactor—politically, economically, and above all militarily. Without such U.S. support the sovereignty and viability of the South would have been in question. Some 35,000 American men died in conflict on the peninsula between 1950 and 1953, and the costs of that war are still a charge to the American taxpayer. Whatever may have been some of the strategic objectives that led the U.S. to the defense of South Korea in 1950, American idealism and America’s desire to maintain in the South a free and democratic government cannot be minimized. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson said in 1950: “U.S. aid, both military and economic, to the Republic of Korea has been predicated upon the existence and growth of democratic institutions within the Republic.”

It is against this background of a great investment in Korea—in blood, treasure, and idealism—that the American reaction to Korea’s tragic internal developments must be examined. By no means the least of all contributions, indeed the first in origin, was that of the American churches, both Protestant and Catholic, whose missionaries brought Western culture—English language and thought, schools and universities, orphanages and hospitals—to both halves of the peninsula. Today, just as during the Japanese occupation, it is the Christian population that is in the forefront of the movement to restore constitutional guarantees.

With the above in mind, how has the American press and the legislative and executive branches reacted to Korea’s move to one-man rule?

No major American newspaper maintains an office in

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Seoul; by and large coverage is maintained from Tokyo, where several large American newspapers are represented as are the major newspaper wire services. Yet residence in Tokyo, with its large and vocal Korean population, as well as hyperactive Japanese focus on the peninsula, serves to stimulate press attention. In this situation American reporting has been crisis-oriented (as against daily coverage), directed to priority news events such as the declaration of martial law, Kim Dae-Jung’s kidnapping, and the March 1 incident and its aftermath. Yet even here Korean events are frequently forced to take a back seat to equally calamitous Japanese events, e.g., the Lockheed scandal.

Nonetheless, even a casual survey of the American press over the past two years leads to the conclusion that Korea has figured increasingly in the American news. In general this attention is directed to the political-military scene, with lesser emphasis on economic news. On the political side a continuing theme over the past two years has been the erosion of democratic institutions and the growth of authoritarianism. Most frequently, this in turn is linked to security issues, including the threat from the North and the U.S. military presence or assistance.

Of the American newspapers covering the Korean scene, the two most active and influential are the Washington Post and the New York Times, both of which have kept open a window from Korea to the West. A sampling of reportage from Seoul by these two newspapers tends to indicate that regular reporting has been generally heavy and has been uniformly critical. Captions of news stories will suffice to summarize the nature of their criticism. Thus, for example, in connection with the Samil incident, the Washington Post’s John Saar cabled: “South Korea Arrests Foe of President” (March 8); “South Korean Opposition in Crisis” (March 10); “Seoul Is Seething Under Tight Control” (March 14); and “Defendants’ Wives Call S. Korean Trial ‘Hollow Formality’” (March 28).

Subsequently, at approximately the date of the court’s decision, Saar was back in Seoul, and he wrote: “Abusing the Law in Korea” (August 1); “S. Korean Trial: Christians Put Park Dictatorship in Dock” (August 9); and “Stiff Prison Sentences a Blow to S. Korean Opposition” (August 29).

The New York Times reporting has been similarly oriented, its captions equally pejorative. The following are a few examples: “Leading Seoul Dissidents Ask Resignation of President Park” (March 21); “The High Price of Stability in Korea” (March 21); “U.S. Said to Make a Few Gains in Seoul in Efforts to Ease Repressive Policies” (June 11); and “Seoul Sentences Expected to Intimidate Park’s Foes” (August 29).

The reporting of news from Seoul, with its emphasis on the relationship of the deprivation of human rights to the U.S. involvement, has provided grist for American editorial comments, and American editorialists have done their homework. During the past eleven months some five editorials on Korea have appeared in the Washington Post, and I am aware of four in the New York Times during the period March-August this year.

Three of the Post editorials bore down heavily when joining Korean internal affairs and American support. Thus on December 20, 1975, the Post stated that “the Park regime apparently does not understand that cases like those of the two incarcerated Kims are steadily eroding support in this country for the American commitment to South Korea.... But the real peril for the present government in South Korea, and for the American position there, is a slowly growing distaste in this country that will eventually undermine both of them.” On March 19, in as hardhitting a commentary as the Post has yet published, it compared Park to Kim II Sung, derided the Ford Administration’s “permissive tolerance of Korean police rule,” and recommended that if the Administration could not set Park straight, “then Congress which controls the funds that keep him afloat, should do so on its own.” Again addressing itself to the impact of Park’s repression on military assistance prospects and the U.S. strategic position in the Pacific, the Post on May 25 called on Park to keep the internal life of his country within a range of values Americans can support. “As long as he does not, the prospect will remain that the United States will not adequately hold up its end, either.”

The New York Times editorials on Korea have focused on this same theme. On June 2 the Times called on Congress to deny increased military credits to Korea (as had the Washington Post). Noting the Administration’s fear that this would send a signal to North Korea, the New York Times reasoned that, to the contrary, it “might be more appropriate to send a signal to President Park that the United States, while faithful to its responsibilities, is increasingly intolerant of his progressive destruction of democratic civil liberties in South Korea, a nation that many thousands of Americans died to save.” But in no American editorial of recent date I have reviewed was the interrelationship of security to human rights more clearly stated than in the Times’s commentary (August 24) on the brutal murder of two American Army officers in the August 18 DMZ incident. With “Korean Achilles’ Heel” as the caption, which itself hammers home the view the Times wound up its castigation thus: “Its repressive acts—signs of weakness and not of strength—make the Park government a potential liability as a United States ally and the Achilles’ heel of American military power in East Asia as was the case with similar unpopular regimes in Southeast Asia.”

As American news reporting concentrated on Seoul, repercussions were being felt in Washington, frequently around Capitol Hill. Increasingly since mid-1973 the activities in the U.S. of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency were catching the public eye and being reflected in the press. Also reported were the dealings of so-called influence peddler Park Tong Sun, the entertaining done by Congressional clerk Suzi Park Thompson, and the travels and other affairs of various Congressmen considered members of the Korea lobby. Included in the allegations were charges that Korean Government representatives had offered campaign contributions to candidates in American elections, and that money, trips, honorary degrees, and other favors had been provided Congressmen in return for Congressional action favor-
able to Park Chung Hee’s cause. Indicating that certain of these charges were being taken seriously was the revelation in September that a federal grand jury was sitting in Washington to probe the allegations.

References to alleged connections between the Unification Church and the KCIA were also having an airing in the Washington and New York press. Figuring largely in these charges was a Colonel Pak Bo Hi, a former military attaché at the Korean Embassy in Washington, who had since served as an executive of Radio Free Asia, the Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation, and more recently as the Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s translator. The considerable financial involvement of the Unification Church, as well as certain of Korea’s other friends, in the newly chartered Diplomat National Bank of Washington was also catching more than passing attention.

While the American public was digesting this news, there was some stirring in Congressional chambers. Directed at times toward the reduction of U.S. force levels (as in the unsuccessful Solarz-Fraser amendment to the 1976 military assistance bill) or toward budgetary limitations on military assistance (as in the similarly unsuccessful Fraser amendment to the same bill), the issue was inevitably the status of human rights in Korea. Protagonists for both sides found opportunity to voice their views in the Congressional debate that raged around the International Security Assistance Act of 1976. Although those who advocated legislative action in favor of troop cuts or fiscal cutbacks were voted down, the cost to Korea’s supporters was high.

On April 2, following the March 1 Declaration, some 119 members of both Houses signed a letter to President Ford condemning President Park’s rule and expressing concern about America’s supportive role in the Republic of Korea. “Under present circumstances it is increasingly difficult for us to justify military support for South Korea to our constituents,” their letter concluded. Similar views continued to be heard in both Houses, causing the Administration for the first time to give special mention to the issue of human rights in its prepared statements requesting security assistance.

Providing evidence that concern over the relationship of the United States to a repressive government has gone beyond the moral issue of human rights per se is the April 8 testimony of Congressman Donald Fraser before the Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Addressing the possibility of conflict on the peninsula, Fraser speculated about U.S. public response to the almost automatic engagement of American forces. Assuming neither China nor the Soviet Union were involved, he said, “It is unlikely that the American public would favor another Vietnam-type commitment by the U.S. forces.” In his view the repressive nature of the Park regime would preclude American support. Somewhat similar concerns were expressed by Congressman David Obey. Challenging the report of the House Committee on Appropriations, which he viewed as defending South Korea’s repressive policies, Obey drew this conclusion: “As they become more and more detached from their own people, repressive regimes tend to create destabilizing situations which can eventually be detrimental to U.S. strategic interests.”

On June 2 the House voted on foreign aid, and one of the principal issues was military aid to Korea. Earlier, the House International Relations Committee had approved an amendment by Congressman Fraser to limit military aid over a two-year period to $290 million in credits as against the $485.5 million the Administration had requested. Turning about, the full House voted 241-159 to reject the amendment. Although Korea’s supporters chose to regard this as a setback for those who would use the human rights issue as a condition to aid, it is significant that the Fraser position had picked up considerable strength in the House, reaching beyond those who two months earlier had signed the letter to the President.

In essence, the final 1976-77 bill is the best reflection of the Congressional attitude. Section 502b expresses the general concern of Congress regarding deprivation of human rights; it represents a milestone in legislative efforts to put the United States Government squarely behind the endorsement of human rights in foreign policy. In order that this general concern register where Congress apparently believes it should, Korea was twice singled out in the bill: in Section 411, which requires the President to report annually over the next five years on the status of modernization of the Korean military and on prospects for U.S. troop reduction; and Section 412, which specifically requested that the President, within sixty days after enactment, communicate to the Korean Government in forceful terms the concern of Congress over the erosion of human rights in Korea.

No summary of Congress’s impact on repression in Korea would be complete without reference to the hearings of the Subcommittee on International Organization of the House Committee on International Relations. In 1975, under the chairmanship of Donald Fraser of Minnesota, this committee met on three separate occasions, heard some thirteen witnesses, and sifted through countless documents, letters, and expert opinion concerning the status of human rights in Korea. Again, in 1976, the Committee met on five occasions, this time mainly to examine allegations about the harassment of Koreans in the United States by the KCIA and the reported connections between the KCIA and the Unification Church. In the parade of repressive regimes Korea led the way — both in Congressional concern and in Congressional appropriations.

That challenges to the supportive role of the U.S. in Korea no longer could be ignored seems evident in the Administration’s change in public relations strategy, which began sometime in mid-1974. Prior to that time the typical Kissinger line had been that the U.S. was “not happy” (not “unhappy,” however) over internal Korean developments but that security considerations were overriding. This was rarely volunteered, forthcoming only in response to direct questions.
In mid-1974 and again in mid-1975, largely motivated by the hearings on Korea of the House Subcommittee on International Organization, the Department of State began to find it more appropriate to elaborate. No longer was the Department evading questions; rather, it was admitting to the deprivation of human rights in Korea, even enumerating the circumstances, and only then did it go on to the security rationale.

This formula was followed on several occasions during 1975-76—before the House Subcommittee hearing in June, 1975, and by Secretary Kissinger before several audiences across the United States, frequently with specific reference to Korea. Addressing the Japan Society in New York on June 18, 1975, the Secretary said, with specific application to Korea: "And there is no question that popular will and social justice are in the last analysis the essential underpinning of resistance to subversion and external challenge. But our support and assistance will be available where it has been promised." A year later, in Seattle, on July 22, the same phrasing was repeated: "And we will continue to remind the South Korean Government that responsiveness to the popular will and social justice are essential if subversion and external challenge are to be resisted. But we will not forget that our alliance with South Korea is designed to meet an external threat which affects our own security, and that of Japan as well." (This same formulation appears in President Ford's Pacific Doctrine delivered in Honolulu in December, 1975.)

What seems clear from even a limited review of public statements by State Department officials is that the Department has had to explain and defend its record on human rights, usually with respect to Korea. I am aware of at least eleven public statements by senior State Department officials (frequently Secretary Kissinger) elaborating on human rights during 1975-76; five have done so in the context of U.S. policy toward Korea. This same need to explain has been apparent at the White House level. During the same period, the President spoke publicly of moral values and foreign policy on some three occasions beginning with August, 1975, when in Helsinki; of these, two were in relationship to Korea, perhaps most concretely (but inadequately) in the Carter-Ford debate on October 6, 1976.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the image of Korea in the U.S. is now under serious challenge. The portrayal of a loyal ally, industrious, steadfast, and representative of an age-old culture that places great value on art and literature, still manages to come through. But what also is being painted in stronger colors is ruthlessness, grossly undemocratic behavior, corruption both at home and abroad, violence and torture. Korea no longer is seen mainly in terms of its remarkable recovery from war and destruction and as resolute foe of communism. More often than not it is pictured in the company of totalitarian and dictatorial regimes—Chile, Argentina, Iran, the Philippines—and frequently as the worst offender of the lot.

This developing consensus, at least as viewed by the press and increasingly by the Congress, bodes poorly for American-Korean relations. When this is related to the United States experience in Vietnam, the Administration may have difficulty supporting a concept of Korea as a linchpin of the U.S. security role in the Pacific. Indeed, what begins to emerge from the editorials and from the Congressional debates is a belief that the basic issue no longer is the question of force levels in Korea or the size of military assistance, but rather the U.S. commitment (as represented by the Military Defense Treaty of 1954) to a country that has nothing in common with traditional American values.

There is reason to believe that this perception of the problem is also acknowledged by Washington. To a far greater extent than ever before it is being called on to defend its policy toward Korea. With increasing frequency the rationale offered is that our commitment exists basically because of Japan, as though to suggest that what really goes on in Korea is not the issue.

To be sure, the interrelationship between human rights and national security is complex; moreover, trends in American thinking may not yet be discernible. Admittedly, the opposition in Korea continues to advocate a continued American presence and support, which further obstructs the development of options. But what is going on in Korea is clearly having a tremendous impact on American thinking, and whether the Administration can sustain support in spite of Korea's record on human rights is more and more open to question. In this context we could have the making of tragic failure: both U.S. and Korean governments stressing security interrelationships but following courses with respect to human rights that will not in the long run maintain the American public support necessary for the commitment.