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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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SOUTH KOREA

A force of some 3,600 army troops and marines led by Maj. Gen. Pak Chong-hui, deputy commander of South Korea's Second Army, seized Seoul on 16 May and deposed the government of Prime Minister Chang Myon. Pak's group professes friendship for the United States and a desire to eliminate official corruption and strengthen the national economy, after which it will purportedly return the government to civilian authority.

Pak, a former officer in the Japanese Army, joined the South Korean Army in 1946. Two years later he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for Communist activities, but he was recalled to service at the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. He is not known to have re-established his former Communist contacts.

The revolutionary junta has declared martial law and named a temporary all-military cabinet. All major population centers are believed quiet, and the city of Taegu reportedly has been returned to civilian authority. In Seoul, leftist newspapermen reportedly have been arrested and all suspected Communists ordered taken into custody.

Lt. Gen Yi Han-lim, commanding general of the First Army, which is deployed along the Demilitarized Zone facing North Korea, is holding his men in position and has declared that he "and all his officers and men support the military revolution." []

Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Chang To-yong has accepted the chairmanship of Pak's Military Revolutionary Committee.

Chang said he did so with the understanding that there would be no mass punishment or violence against individuals, that a new cabinet would be formed composed of the best men available, and that troops would be withdrawn from the capital city "at the earliest opportunity." He noted that the committee agreed to the last condition provided troops remained until the position of the United States toward the coup was clear.

Following the takeover, Prime Minister Chang failed to rally any support for his administration. On 18 May he announced the resignation of his government over Seoul radio. This action has provided a cloak of legality for the coup and opened the way for transitional measures within a constitutional framework.

With the cooperation of President Yun Po-sun, Lt. Gen. Chang appears to be working for a transfer of power to a nonparty government composed of civilians and some military officers. There is some indication that Pak Chong-hui might agree to such an arrangement.

Initial Communist propaganda reaction reflected a lack of first-hand information on the coup--North Korea, for example, announced the event some six hours after it had taken place and then was forced to rely on Seoul press statements as news sources. Subsequently, however, Pyongyang denounced the coup leaders as "flagrantly reactionary" in a statement expressing hope that things may yet develop to the Communists' advantage. While hailing Chang Myon's downfall, the statement depicted South Korean troops as "deceived and misled" and urged them to take "internal problems firmly in their hands." Moscow and Peiping also have labeled the coup group reactionary. []