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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

9 May 1980

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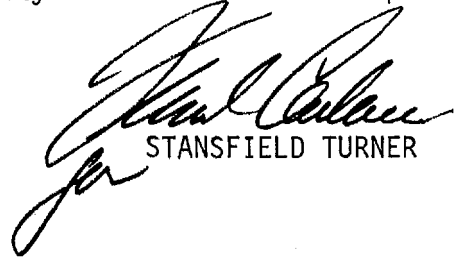
ALERT MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM FOR: The National Security Council

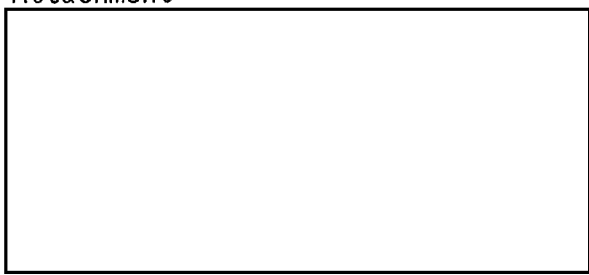
SUBJECT : Growing Unrest in South Korea and Prospects
for Takeover by Military Strongman Chon Doo Hwan

1. Current reporting indicates that the level of antigovernment activities by South Korean students, supported by opposition political leaders and workers, is coming to a head. Student activists and sympathizers have enumerated a series of demands and set a deadline of 14 May for government action, failing which they threaten demonstrations in the streets. ROK authorities are reportedly devising a series of steps to forestall a confrontation, with the use of force the last resort. It appears doubtful, however, that the activists will respond to government pleas for moderation. The outcome of clashes by students and troops, if they occur, will depend on the response of several key actors, and certainly on the state of mind and the role played by military strongman Chon Doo Hwan.

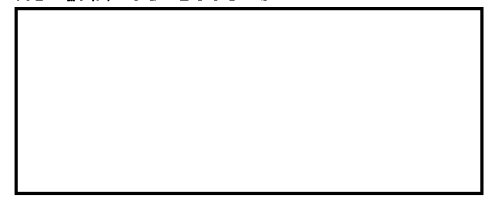
2. While what we have observed of North Korean reactions to developments in the South since the Park assassination does not yet suggest an intention to exploit the situation militarily, I continue to be concerned about the adequacy of warning on Korea. In this light, the current South Korean unrest, which brings with it the possibility of a military takeover, is yet another in a series of recent events that could undermine stability in the South and tempt Pyongyang to attack.


STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment



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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

9 May 1980

ALERT MEMORANDUM*

GROWING UNREST IN SOUTH KOREA AND PROSPECTS FOR TAKEOVER BY MILITARY STRONGMAN CHON DOO HWAN

A serious confrontation between ROK authorities and South Korean students is taking shape. While only a portion of the university student enrollment is involved, activists appear determined to test the permissiveness of the authorities and have put forward a series of political demands deemed unacceptable by ROK authorities, including the lifting of martial law by 14 May and the dismissal of top government leaders. Students in many parts of the country are planning to take to the streets and stage marches if their deadline is not met.

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These developments have caused great concern among ROK officials, particularly since they are occurring at a time of labor unrest. Officials are particularly alarmed about the possibility that student and labor demonstrators will join forces in the streets. President Choi is reported to be considering a variety of measures to deal with these threats but probably lacks the will and ability to act decisively. The ROK Army Chief of Staff placed the infantry regiments of five divisions, the Special Warfare Command, and the Capital Security Command on standby alert. They are to be prepared to move into Seoul to support Martial Law Command efforts to control student demonstrators. On 6-7 May, two special forces brigades moved into the Seoul area, joining four others garrisoned there.

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[Redacted]

*The Alert Memorandum is an interagency publication issued by the Director of Central Intelligence on behalf of the Intelligence Community. Its purpose is to ensure that senior policymakers are aware of impending potential developments that may have serious implications for US interests. It is not a prediction that these developments will occur. This memorandum has been coordinated at the working level with CIA, DIA, NSA, and State/INR.

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The outcome of clashes between students and troops would depend upon the reactions of opposition figures, the business community, and the general public. Opposition political leaders already have expressed support for some student demands and have called for a special National Assembly session later this month to discuss the situation. Sympathy for the students among other elements, however, is limited. The majority of South Koreans probably hope that actions which might lead to instability, to a military dictatorship, and to a loss of foreign--and especially US--confidence can be avoided. It is possible, therefore, that the authorities would be able to suppress student activism without causing the confrontation to spread to other sectors of society. It is also possible, however, that such clashes--especially if they involved loss of civilian life--might bring workers and opposition political leaders into the confrontation and rupture the process of political reconstruction under way since President Park's assassination. [REDACTED]

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The attitude and role of military strongman Lt. Gen. Chon Doo Hwan with respect to these developments probably will be decisive. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

All of the actors in this situation will, however, be very mindful of US Government attitudes. Student and opposition party leaders will be looking to the United States to restrain and inhibit crackdowns by the ROK Government and the military. Chon himself will want to avoid as much as possible provoking US reactions that could undermine his position or the US/ROK security relationship. Nevertheless, if Chon believes that the United States is out to get him and that his power within the ROK military is eroding as a result, he may be prepared to discount US attitudes in the interest of taking full control of the government. [REDACTED]

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North Korea does not currently appear to be taking any military steps in response to the deteriorating political situation in the South. However, the events of 26 October and 12 December 1979 caught the North by surprise. That is not true of the present situation. As we pointed out in SNIE 42/14.2-79, 20 December 1979, and in an Alert Memorandum, 8 February 1980, the emergence of widespread civil disorder in the South would prompt Pyongyang to consider forceful reunification of the peninsula. If Washington were seen to be preoccupied with the situation in South Asia and domestic issues, Pyongyang would probably be further emboldened by a conclusion that the US capacity to resolve the situation in the South or to defend South Korea was seriously weakened. [REDACTED]

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