

Probe of S. Korea Payments

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Continuing revelations of South Korean efforts to influence U.S. members of Congress and executive branch officials through cash, gifts and campaign contributions are placing new strain on already troubled political relations between the two countries.

If the revelations are capped by indictments and trials—as many expect—the result is likely to be a crisis of confidence affecting one of the world's most dangerous trouble spots.

Senior American diplomats believe there is little they can do at this stage about the Justice Department investigation or newspaper revelations of corrupt relations between well heeled Koreans and well placed Americans. They make no secret of their apprehension, however, that U.S. alliances and the world strategic balance could be gravely affected by the outcome.

More so than any other place in the world, the interests of the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Japan converge at the Korean peninsula which juts out like a sore thumb from the mainland of Asia.

Backed by 42,000 American troops, U.S. jet warplanes and atomic weap-

ons, and by the economic interest of nearby Japan, heavily armed South Korea stares across the 38th parallel at heavily armed North Korea, which is backed by close alliance with its neighbors and sponsors, China and the Soviet Union.

After the collapse of Indochina and the U.S. withdrawal from Thailand, South Korea remains the last U.S. military foothold on the Asian mainland. And with massive historical and tangible investments at stake and the memories of 33,000 U.S. war dead in the 1950-53 Korean conflict, the U.S. has reacted fiercely to any hint of military challenge.

Then-Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, backed by President Ford and other high officials, responded to rumbles of trouble in May, 1975, by saying that the U.S. would consider using atomic weapons in case of a North Korean ground attack.

When two U.S. Army officers were killed in August this year by North Korean troops in a "demilitarized zone" incident, the U.S. deployed a naval task force from the Pacific, F-4 jet fighters from Okinawa, B-52s from Guam and F-111 warplanes from Idaho in a show of force with nuclear implications.

Less stark or dramatic as a military threat but as important in the long run has been the long, slow, steady deterioration of the once-close political ties between the United States and South Korea.

This has been brought about by the increasingly repressive rule of South Korean President Park Chung Hee and the growing reaction to that on the part of the U.S. press, church groups, Congress and the public at large.

As the history of the Vietnam war demonstrates, it is no longer sufficient for an expensive foreign military commitment to have the backing of the White House, Pentagon and State Department. Without the support of Congress and the public, any U.S. alliance is in peril, and without the acquiescence of Congress and the public such foreign policy commitments are not viable.

In Washington today, nearly every major embassy employs officers assigned to practice their diplomacy on Capitol Hill rather than at the State Department. Many embassies employ public relations experts or paid consultants to polish their nation's image—and powder the blemishes—for

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presentation to the U.S. press and public.

The realization of the growing role of Congress and the public—and the perception that South Korea's position with these groups was steadily eroding—may well have been the motivating factor behind the South Korean campaign now being investigated.

From the Korean point of view, influence-buying follows the lines of familiar practice over many years by Americans and Japanese seeking influence in Seoul. Last year Gulf Oil Chairman Bob Dorsey testified to paying (secretly) \$4 million in 1966 and 1970 to the political party of Korean President Park.

According to Justice Department sources, at least 22 present or former congressmen are under investigation for receiving money or gifts from South Korean agents, including Washington-based businessman Tongsun Park.

The Justice Department obtained an unprecedented U.S. grand jury subpoena of the banking records of the South Korean Embassy but then withdrew it—evidently after Korean

agreement to supply bank data voluntarily.

The Washington Post reported—and the State Department confirmed—that a senior confidant of President Park attempted to give \$10,000 in cash to a Nixon White House aide in May, 1974. The money was returned.

Sources told The Post that Tongsun Park has distributed between \$500,000 and \$1 million annually to congressmen and other U.S. officials. Park, who arrived in London yesterday, denied "most strongly" that he had engaged in any questionable activities for the Korean government. "I am a private citizen and I am my own agent. Whatever I have done is purely in my own interest," he said.

Park told UPI at London airport that after completing business in London he will return to Washington. "I will offer further cooperation with the Justice Department," he said.

Even before all this emerged, South Korea was in political trouble here. In a show of displeasure, Congress in 1975 cut military sales credits for Seoul, which could be restored only on the certification by President Ford that human rights conditions are improving. (Ford never so acted.)

An attempt to continue the limit on the same issue was defeated in the House last June, 241 to 159, after a major fight. In April, 119 members of both Houses signed a letter to Ford expressing concern about U. S. support for Park's repressive rule. Last week 153 members of Congress signed a letter to Park himself, protesting the sentencing of prominent dissidents to prison terms.

In the presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter charged that South Korea "openly violates human rights." Ford revealed in a televised debate that he personally had told Park that "the United States does not condone the kind of repressive measures he has taken."

Carter has called for the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from South Korea over a period of four to five years, and immediate withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons there.

Senior officials in the Ford administration say that they would consider reductions in the U.S. troop strength in Korea from 42,000 to perhaps 20,000 or so, but that withdrawal of all troops could be dangerous. These officials see nothing to be gained from withdrawing the nuclear warheads.