

**May 22, 1980**

**Action Memorandum from Richard Holbrooke and  
Anthony Lake to the US Secretary of State, 'PRC  
Meeting on Korea'**

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**Summary:**

Richard Holbrooke and Anthony Lake brief the US Secretary of State on the upcoming policy review committee meeting on the ongoing unrest in South Korea.

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## ACTION MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Secretary

FROM: EA - Richard Holbrooke RH  
S/P - Anthony LakePRC Meeting on KoreaObjectives

State Dept. review completed

You are scheduled to chair a PRC meeting on Korea at 4:00 p. m. May 22. You should use this meeting to define basic U. S. objectives and strategy for dealing with the fast-breaking and deteriorating situation in Korea. You should seek to achieve a consensus in support of the following general aims:

1. Maintenance of security on the Korean Peninsula and strategic stability in Northeast Asia.

2. Restoration of order by the Korean authorities with minimum use of force and without laying the seeds for wider disorders later.

3. Preservation of a carefully calibrated posture of disapproval, public and private, of the military crackdown in Korea, while avoiding statements which imply that we are encouraging opposition to the government at a time of growing disorder.

4. Assuming order is reestablished, build relationships with the new power holders, while seeking to move them back toward the political arrangements President Choi had promised.

Structure of the Meeting

I. Intelligence Briefing. We suggest that you begin the meeting by asking General Jones and Admiral Turner to provide a brief rundown on the current situation. Dave Jones will be prepared to address the military situation, the North Korean threat, and the security

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implications of redeploying regular ROK units to riot control activities. Stan Turner is ready to address broader aspects of the political situation.

It will be important to examine several key intelligence questions:

-- What are the intentions of the military leadership, especially Chon Doo Hwan? How secure is Chon's position in the military?

-- What is the likelihood that the military can restore order swiftly? That disorders will spread from Kwangju to Seoul and other cities? (The disorders in the southwestern city of Kwangju--Kim Dae Chung's home area--pose major questions about near-term stability. Some reports suggest these demonstrations may spread to Seoul.

-- In the event disorders spread, how many troops could the ROK withdraw from CFC control without seriously degrading its defenses?

-- What are the possible North Korean reactions?

II. Issues. Following a discussion of these questions, you should turn to the basic policy issues we face. You should emphasize that the immediate issues relate to the establishment of order and the avoidance of a progressive disintegration of authority in Korea. Assuming order is restored, we must determine our stance toward the military power holders, and decide how hard (and with what leverage) to press them toward constitutional reform and elections.

The potential for an escalating cycle of action and reaction, which we long feared and sought to avoid, has begun. We have two immediate problems: preventing escalation of violence and avoiding an erosion of the ROK defense posture which could invite North Korean efforts to exploit the situation. We suggest you direct the discussion to these operational issues:

1. What Should We Say in Public?

At this juncture, we recommend a relatively low-key public posture by the USG, standing by our statement of Sunday but avoiding additional comments which can be seized upon by either side in Korea to inflame the situation. However, once order and stability are restored, HA believes we may wish to consider more specific public expressions of our concern.

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2. Should We Take Additional Steps to Increase Our Military Readiness?

General Wickham has already taken some steps to increase readiness of U. S. forces against possible North Korean aggression and to monitor the readiness of ROK forces. We suggest you request the JCS and CIA to increase our combined military readiness with ROK forces and to monitor North Korean movements.

3. Should We Authorize Release of Additional Korean Units From the Combined Command?

In addition to five Special Forces Brigades in the Seoul area which are not attached to the Combined Forces Command (CFC), the Koreans have now twice requested release of CFC committed units for domestic use.1/ General Wickham has released the units as requested. If further force diversions are requested by the Koreans, we believe Ambassador Gleysteen and General Wickham should emphasize these concerns: a) forces now being assigned to riot control duties are not trained for that purpose (unlike the special forces brigades and police) and could act in a manner which escalates the confrontation; b) clashes pitting the army against civilians could either result in bloody incidents alienating the military from the Korea people or invite insubordination among draftees with a resulting erosion of discipline and command and control; and c) continuing release of units from the CFC could weaken South Korean defenses against the North.

1/ Diversions thus far have included the following:

Two regiments of the Marine Brigade, for duty in Taegu and Pusan	Normally in reserve at SE port of Pohang.
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Two regiments of the 30th Division to control riots in Kwangju	Ready reserve forces in Seoul area.
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Stand-by authority has already been requested and given for use of units from the 7th and 20th Division. While these area not "front-line" units, they are in immediate reserve in the invasion corridors north of Seoul.

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4. What Should We Do About Visits and Symbolic Actions?

Ambassador Gleysteen has recommended that the visits to Korea next week of EXIM Chairman John Moore and OPIC President Llewellyn be cancelled. Mr. Llewellyn has already decided to cancel on the basis of the Ambassador's recommendation. Mr. Moore is reluctant to do so, but we believe that the PRC should request Mr. Moore to defer his travel to Korea until the situation is stabilized. In general, however, it would be unwise to contemplate punitive actions which will cut at the civilian side of the Korean government, undercut our commercial interests, and possibly provoke nationalist reactions without achieving significant results with the military leadership. We also recommend cancelling the Korea-U. S. Planning Talks scheduled for the third week of June here in Washington. These discussions, initiated for the first time with Korea last year, are handled by the Department's Policy Planning Staff. We believe it is most appropriate not to proceed with such talks at this time, since they will be viewed in Seoul as a prestigious reaffirmation of business as usual.

We should proceed with our efforts to resolve the problems of Japanese rice sales to Korea and the long-delayed reallocation of the Soviet fisheries quota in our Pacific economic zone. Similarly, Department officials plan to proceed to participate in the annual IBRD review of Korean aid the development in Paris the first week of June. We will attempt to keep U. S. participation low key.<sup>2/</sup>

We do not recommend recalling Ambassador Gleysteen from Seoul at this time. We need him more on the ground than back here. We also do not feel the time is ripe for a special emissary, although individuals such as former U. S. Commander in Korea General Vessey can reinforce our policy through discussions here with key Koreans.

5. What Should our Basic Mid-Term Policy Posture Be?

The PRC Discussion Memorandum runs down the current situation and identifies broad policy options for defining our posture toward the Korean authorities.

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2/ The present situation may require us by law to abstain or disapprove any votes in the IFIs on loans to Korea at this time.

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We and Ambassador Gleysteen believe that the most realistic objective is that outlined in Option III: A Limited Accommodation with the Military Power-Holders -- accepting their dominance at present, while continuing to lobby for political moderation and seeking to nudge them gradually in the direction of constitutional reform and elections.

6. In the Longer-Term, What Should our Position be on Dealing with the General and Encouraging Human Rights? Despite the difficulties involved, we recommend that the U. S. Mission in Seoul be authorized to resume when appropriate efforts to influence those in power in Seoul to move toward a process which will be credible to the Korean people and provide a basis for stability and progress.

It may be several months before full political development can resume, but intermediate range goals could include:

- Limiting and reducing the impact of martial law.
- Setting a date for ending martial law.
- Setting a date for constitutional referendum.
- Reopening the National Assembly and completing work on the constitution.
- Restoring the powers of the civilian government.
- Pointing out the problems created by the recent arrests, and working towards release of the new political prisoners.

While we must work with the established leadership to maintain essential security cooperation, we can scarcely resume "business as usual" under present circumstances.

This suggests a cooler posture, avoiding lectures and allowing the Korean military to discover for themselves the consequences of their recent actions. We should avoid punitive measures, but now is not the time to move ahead on new cooperative ventures. For example, no move should be made at this time to reschedule the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) between Defense Ministers. We would certainly not want to touch the core of our military relationship -- i. e., commitment, troop deployments, com-

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command arrangements. Depending on how the situation evolves, however, we may want to slow the pace of cooperation of our security relationship (e. g. missile technology and aircraft coproduction) in ways that do not appreciably affect joint U. S.-Korean military capabilities. A review by State and Defense of these and other aspects of the security relationship is needed before deciding specifics.

Drafted by:

EA/K:RRich *M*

EA:MArmacost *M*

Cleared by:

PM:DO'Donahue *M*

HA:SCohen *M*

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