

By Yukinori Ishikawa

THE U.S. IS SUCH AN AGGRESSIVE DEFENDER of "democracy" in Nicaragua that it makes no bones about interfering with Managua's internal affairs. Yet in South Korea, where the clergy fast and students hurl stones in protest against an authoritarian government, the U.S. remains indifferent to the popular demands for democratization.

The latest round of Korea's postwar history of upheavals—the split-up of the peninsula and three coups d'état since 1960—has once again thrown the country into turmoil.

SOUTH KOREA

And Ronald Reagan—like his predecessors—is standing on the sidelines, in effect giving tacit approval to strongman President Chun Doo Hwan.

The Reagan White House embarrasses Americans—and angers many South Koreans—when it patronizes this authoritarian government, which considers the Olympic Games more important than the country's democratization. On April 13 Chun took to the airwaves to plead with his 41 million compatriots for "understanding and cooperation" toward his "momentous decision" to suspend the attempt at constitutional reform until after the Seoul Olympics in September 1988.

Chun's political ambition, according to pundits, is to become South Korea's first president to peacefully hand over leadership to a successor. Given that, the question is how to select the next leader. "Having determined that it has become impossible to amend the constitution during my tenure," he declared in a televised speech, "I hereby announce that in accordance with the existing constitution, I will turn the reins of government over to my successor on Feb. 24, 1988, when my term of office expires."

Opposition forces have reacted to Chun's decision with indignation, charging that it will enable him to handpick an heir. Last year a wave of anti-government demonstrations by students, church and labor organizations forced the former general who seized power in a 1980 coup to promise reluctantly that the country's next leader would be chosen democratically.

Under current law South Koreans vote for 5,600 electors who, in turn, choose the president. But restrictions on the election process take advantage of South Korea's social structure to maintain the status quo. Electoral delegates must be recommended as "men of virtue" by at least 100 voters. In a Confucian society this means those in power—landlords, industrialists and other local magnates allied with the government.

Chun blamed the non-conciliatory opposition, which has advocated direct presidential elections, for blocking the path to constitutional reform. In the year-long debate the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) insisted on a cabinet system headed by a prime minister chosen by legislators. He said: "The opposition has not only adamantly rejected [the DJP proposal for a British-style cabinet system] but has also made the prospects for any constitutional reform by consensus extremely dim by getting itself involved in severe intraparty chaos and infighting."

The largest single opposition party, the



President Chun Doo Hwan considers the upcoming Olympic Games more important than the country's democratization.

Chun dodges reform, blames the opposition

New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP), which at one point held 103 of the 276 seats in the National Assembly, recently broke up over the electoral question. South Korea's best-known dissidents, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam (they are not related), walked out of the NKDP in early April along with 73 of the party's 90 National Assembly members to create a new party called the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP). The constitutional debate took a new turn late last year when NKDP's chief Lee Min Woo, a veteran parliamentarian who initially served as a figurehead for the two Kims, disagreed with them on the electoral issue.

The Kims joined forces and gave the party's titular leadership to Lee two years ago. They argue that Chun's successor should be chosen directly by the people, a system that would give the opposition its best chance of taking over. Last December, however, Lee hinted that the NKDP might support the government's cabinet system if "the government and ruling party take measures for the nation's democratization, such as the release of political prisoners."

The Kims quickly began scheming to remove Lee from the party's presidency. That fanned the flame, and the party feud reached a critical stage in March when an NKDP legislator who had launched bitter personal attacks on the two Kims invaded the party headquarters with a group of thugs. The brawl—which included punching and throwing ashtrays—gave the Kims and their followers a pretext to part company with Lee's NKDP.

In a bid to gain a hold on the unstable political situation, Chun's ruling party rebuked the Kims' breakaway as undemocratic, as a "plot to wipe out our efforts to reach agreement on a revision of the constitution." Yet many South Koreans believe the opposition was egged on, and doubt that Chun made a serious attempt at political reform in the first place. "The fact that the government gave up the constitutional reform effort even without dialogue with the new party shows that it had no intention to revise the constitution from the start," fumed Lee Ki Taek, a former NKDP vice president.

Political observers believe that Chun's new offensive is aimed ultimately at removing the Kims from the country's political arena.

With Kim Dae Jung under house arrest, the future of the new party is anything but rosy. Soon after the NKDP split, outspoken opposition lawmaker Yoo Sung Hwan was sentenced to one year in prison for violating the National Security Law. In his address before the National Assembly last fall he called into question the government's anti-communist policy and argued that the unification of the divided land should be on the agenda.

The court ruled that Yoo, now a member of the new breakaway party, broke the law by distributing the text of his speech to the press before he actually addressed the National Assembly.

In his Easter message Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou Hwan lamented: "The people's dream for constitutional reform, which was expected to open a new brighter era, has been miserably shattered under the intrigue of deceit and partisan interest." The Roman Catholic prelate, whose political clout spills over to non-Catholic South Koreans, warned that Chun's "agonizing decision" will leave the community "soaked with tear gas once again." True, within days after the April 13 announcement a total of 13,000 students from more than 20 colleges across the country took to the streets in protest, and there were scattered clashes between demonstrators and police.

Political observers believe that Chun's new offensive is aimed ultimately at removing the Kims from the country's political arena. Before the TV camera Chun discarded them as has-beens: "We cannot entrust the future of our nation to persons who are tinged with thoughts of old eras. Political parties must urgently strive to accept and nurture a new generation of untainted and competent politicians who will be capable of leading the country in this transitional period."

Heir apparent: Roh Tae Woo, chairman of the ruling DJP, is the man most frequently mentioned as the country's next leader. The former general, who was instrumental in providing backup troops when Chun staged his military takeover in December 1979, is expected to be nominated DJP president—and a presidential candidate—in a party convention next month. Then in December electoral college delegates will likely pick him as Chun's successor.

The U.S. government, which acknowledged that the question of constitutional revision is a South Korean internal affair, is not sending signals of disapproval to the Chun regime. U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, in a visit to Seoul a year ago, expressed support for Chun: "Orderly change is the name of the game. Democracy is moving along pretty fast in Korea. The country is making the transition to democratic rule under impressive circumstances." Apparently, despite some privately expressed discomfort at Chun's hardline policy among U.S. officials in Washington, the U.S. position remains unchanged.

Many South Koreans, offended by Shultz's ludicrous and insensitive remarks, have understandably turned their backs on the U.S. Anti-American sentiment has been taking root most notably among students, who charge that the U.S. supports Chun's authoritarian government for its own military and economic gains. The U.S. maintains about 40,000 troops in South Korea, one of the strategic areas where the U.S. is said to have a nuclear shield against the Soviet Union. Similarly, South Korea as a cheap-labor production center has been built into the U.S.-designed global economic system—and hence is subject to exploitation by U.S. multinationals. The U.S. commitment to democracy appears to be a pretext to throw its weight around.

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By Bill Girdner

BUENOS AIRES

THE GREAT PUBLIC COURTROOM IN THE federal courthouse here seems like a church, with stained glass windows, a lofty ceiling and pews. Standing in the empty and quiet court, prosecutor Luis Morena Ocampo recalls a day in the same room in 1985 during the trial of one of the generals who led Argentina down the path of military terror.

It was on that day that Morena summed up the sometimes sobbing testimony of 833 witnesses against former military President Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla. Following the summation thundering applause came from those packed into the court.

As the chief judge gavelled for silence and finally ordered the hall cleared, they continued to applaud. For 10 minutes it lasted, even as they filed out.

It has been well over a year since Videla and four others were convicted in connection with the deaths, detention and torture of thousands of Argentines. (Videla was sentenced to life imprisonment.) But the applause still rings in Morena's ears.

"Beautiful," he says, "a beautiful moment."

This now-silent chamber, with all the power and hope that it contains, has more to do with a short-lived military rebellion last month—and with the jubilant demonstrations when it was abandoned—than anything else in Argentina. It is in this courtroom and others in Argentina that military officers have been, and will continue to be, tried for torturing and killing civilians during the 1976-83 period known as "the repression."

Under the military governments in those years 9,000 people "disappeared." Clandestine torture chambers were set up in hospitals and schools. Argentines were arrested, raped, tortured and killed based on the merest suspicion that they had anti-government views.

Putting former military leaders on trial represents a chance for Argentina to abandon a turbulent history punctuated by military generals marching on the presidential palace and taking power. And it is through the lessons learned in these trials that many of those committed to a civilian government here hope the Argentine people will refuse to support a military takeover in the future.

Guns, votes and trials: As the rebellion demonstrated, those hopes and thoughts are fragile.

On Easter Sunday, Argentine President Raul Alfonsín entered an army base where rebel military officers were barricaded in opposition to a new wave of prosecutions of military officers for human rights abuses. Alfonsín won a clear victory. The rebels gave up with some concessions from the government, and the leader of the rebellion was cashiered.

But last week Alfonsín seemed to cave in to the pressure of a recent series of such rebellions. He asked the Argentine congress to adopt legislation that could abort prosecutions for most of the more than 220 officers charged. Alfonsín's apparent concession on the prosecutions reflects the fragility of civilian governments in Latin America, despite the "Spring of Democracy" that has arrived to much of the continent.

"There are a lot of governments in Latin America where democracy is paper-thin, and the military elite exercises most of the power and can act with impunity, where democratic governments are more of a show," says Arvid Neier, co-chair of the international human rights group Americas Watch.



Argentine President Alfonsín (center, with mustache) wants to end most prosecutions of military officers for their part in "the repression."

ARGENTINA

Old and new leaders face different kinds of trials

Neier and other human rights experts say that prosecutions for human rights abuse such as those in Argentina are critical in strengthening and ensuring the survival of democratic governments.

Human rights abuses that could subject military officers to prosecution have been alleged in the nations of Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Uruguay, neighboring Argentina, is currently debating repeal of an amnesty for military officers who held power prior to the current civilian government. Citizens have circulated petitions calling for prosecutions and the matter is expected to come to a national vote later this year.

It's not yet clear how Alfonsín's proposal to end most of the prosecutions will fare in the Argentine congress. It is clear that such a move would have a strong impact on the future of both the region and the country.

Ghosts: The trials put on the public record the government terror that happened in secrecy and in cold blood. Almost any conversation about the military government now raises images of the disappeared, like ghosts. Those ghosts stir in a government-published book, thick as a college dictionary, that lists in small computer print the names of disappeared. They are in the portraits carried on banners at political demonstrations and in the accounts of deadly purges.

And they shine in the suddenly red and wet eyes of Emilio Mignone.

"My daughter disappeared on the 14th of May, 1976," he says. "We don't know anything about her. It's more awful, very painful, not knowing what happened to her. Imagining her torture, imagining her disappearance."

The director of the Center for Legal and Social Studies, the strongest human rights group here, Mignone describes squads of soldiers and police who proceeded systematically from door to door with lists. "They took rank-and-file leaders in factories, schools, universities, among intellectuals, the Catholic Church, in the slums—like my daughter," he says. "She worked as an emergency relief worker in the slums. For this act, she was detained."

"When the military is down," says Mignone "you must keep them down. If they become more powerful, it will not be possible."

Mignone and others say that in order to prevent the military from regaining its old power to intervene in Argentine politics—and in order to show clearly that such conduct is wrong—the prosecutions are necessary.

"In Argentina," adds prosecutor Morena, "society sees that all must follow the law, including the powerful—that we are all subject to the law. In the past, people believed the law applied only to the weak and not to the powerful."

Party politics: That theme has been until now a traditional tenet of Alfonsín's Radical Civic Union. The Radical party is compared by Argentines and Western diplomats to a Social Democratic party in Europe. It is top-

President Alfonsín has apparently caved in to military pressure. He's now calling on the Argentine congress to pass legislation ending most future military prosecutions.

heavy with lawyers and doctors. And in addition to respect for the Argentine constitution, its driving principles have been respect for civil liberties, clean government and fair elections.

Opposing the Radicals is the Justice party that dwells on the memory and policies of late President Juan Peron. Peron is compared by Americans here to the late Louisiana governor, Huey Long. The "Justicialistas" carry forth the same brand of populism, gathering in disparate social and political subgroups.

But beneath that surface of democracy flows a powerful current of fascism, according to many Argentine and U.S. observers here.

"The Peronists are fascists, plain and simple," says Miguel Ekmekdjian, a constitutional law professor and adviser to the Argentine congress. He says a bulwark of the Peronist alliance is the CGT, a huge union

confederation that, in his opinion, has often been the first line of support for military takeovers in the past.

But others defend the Peronists as a home-grown party with some similarities to the U.S. Democratic Party, representing workers as well as intellectuals without imitating the priorities of a European party. And some Peronists have already come out strongly against Alfonsín's call to curtail prosecutions.

Darkness and light: Further underlying Argentina's political future is what Argentines themselves say is a dark national soul, preoccupied with death and violence and dominated by a profound skepticism. Says Ekmekdjian, "We have this sense of death, of the past, this tragic sense of life that says if you don't think like me, then I want to eliminate you."

The future of their nation, many Argentines say, lies in developing a greater tolerance for opposing viewpoints, in rejecting the demagoguery that vaulted past leaders into power and in rejecting the quick military fix for political or economic trouble.

Many in Argentina hope the trials of army and naval officers will serve as a political motor that pulls their nation away from military governments and toward peaceful democratic politics.

A new wave of charges, filed to beat a February deadline, have received front-page treatment from the wide range of newspapers here. Previous trials of military officers received daily press coverage and nightly news shows broadcast long segments of testimony.

Undersecretary for Human Rights Eduardo Robossi says a central purpose of the trials is to reveal the truth of what had happened after such a long period of secrecy and lies from the military government—and thereby to discredit military governments in general. It is for that purpose, for example, that the trials were conducted through oral examination and argument. A special law was passed to change the antiquated Spanish system that relied solely on written argument and evidence.

"No inhabitant has been able to avoid seeing the problem," says Robossi.

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