

1984

United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in the Third World

Kim Dae Jung

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/
journal_of_international_and_comparative_law](https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/journal_of_international_and_comparative_law)

 Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jung, Kim Dae (1984) "United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in the Third World," *NYLS Journal of International and Comparative Law*: Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/journal_of_international_and_comparative_law/vol5/iss2/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@NYLS. It has been accepted for inclusion in NYLS Journal of International and Comparative Law by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@NYLS.

NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE LAW

Volume 5

Numbers 2&3

1984

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE THIRD WORLD

*KIM DAE JUNG**

I feel deeply honored to be here tonight at New York Law School, an institution rich in heritage, which has produced many distinguished jurists such as the late Supreme Court Justice John Harlan. The name of your one-time faculty member, Woodrow Wilson, is very dear to the Korean people because his principle of self-government inspired the independence movement in Korea in 1919. It is also gratifying to hear that New York Law School is one of the major law schools where subjects related to the international law of human rights are actively taught and studied.

I. REPEATED FOREIGN POLICY SETBACKS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Today, the United States is more isolated internationally than it has ever been. Since World War II, the United States has lost as friends nearly twenty-five of its former allies, including China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iran, Syria, Ethiopia, Libya, Nicaragua and Cuba. It appears that its losses on the international front will continue to mount. This disturbing prospect has been dramatically underscored by a recent United Nations vote which overwhelmingly condemned the United States invasion of Grenada. At the time of the Korean airliner incident, the United States failed to get a resounding condemnation of the Soviet action in the United Nations, even though the Soviet act may be considered a much greater violation of human rights than the

* This is the text of an address delivered at New York Law School on November 9, 1983, by the South Korean dissident who recently returned to his home country.

Grenadian invasion by the United States. These two cases clearly demonstrate the decline of American influence and prestige in the international community. We remember when the United Nations was created, the United States could count on the support of about 80% of its member countries.

From my personal standpoint, recent developments in Korea and the Philippines provide the most damning evidence that the United States is rapidly losing ground in world politics. The Philippines used to be the only American colony—a colony which the Americans proudly claimed to have liberated and democratized. In spite of its contribution to the independence and democratization of the Philippines in the early part of the century, anti-American movements are gaining in intensity in the Philippines today. For example, senator Ninoy Aquino, a friend of mine, was saved from the death sentence by United States intervention. Further, the United States was his temporary home in exile for three years. Nonetheless, the Filipino people hold the United States largely responsible for his assassination.

As for Korea, the United States has maintained a close relationship with my country for over 100 years. Christianity first came to Korea from America; the United States liberated Korea from Japanese colonialism in 1945; it came to the rescue of the Korean people during the Korean War and it supported the April 19, 1960 student revolution which ushered in a brief period of democratic rule for the only time in the history of the Republic of Korea. Since the advent of the Chun Doo Hwan regime, however, the friendly feelings towards the United States which have accumulated for over a century have dissipated and been replaced by anti-American sentiment. Although such emotions are not pervasive throughout the entire nation, a recent national survey revealed that 70% of Korean youth harbor anti-American feelings. In addition, American cultural centers have been set on fire or bombed on four separate occasions; on at least two different college campuses the United States flag has been burned; and anti-American chants now reverberate on college campuses in Korea. Of course, I do not condone violence, but I understand why these acts were carried out. These were not pro-communist acts nor anti-American. Rather, they were an expression against United States policy toward Korea.

The deterioration of United States relations with Korea and the Philippines—two of its friendliest allies in the past—indicates that there is something fundamentally wrong with United States foreign policy. When I watched a recent television poll demonstrating overwhelming United States public support for the Grenadian invasion, I finally figured out the fundamental problem that has taken American policy down the road of repeated setbacks. In contrast to the great

United States domestic support for the invasion, in the United Nations the United States could muster the approval of only nine tiny countries for its actions while more than 100 nations condemned it as a violation of international law and morality. Moreover, none of the western democracies supported the United States. This is the clearest illustration of the problem that confronts American foreign policy.

In domestic affairs, the American people insist on the application of conscience, justice and majority rule. I was deeply moved when Martin Luther King's birthday was designated as a national holiday because it clearly showed that Americans, including an overwhelming majority of white Americans, stood for the lofty principles of human rights and morality. On the other hand, in matters of foreign policy which relate to the Third World, the American people are either negligent or largely ignorant. The only time that they seem to be concerned or interested is when foreign policy problems are related to anti-communism or anti-Soviet issues. Furthermore, they seem to be supportive of a dictatorship if it is considered useful for anti-Soviet or anti-communist purposes. The majority of Third World people have felt betrayed by such a double standard on the part of the United States and its people who have supported corrupt minority leaders in the Third World. Thus, Third World people have given up their struggle against communism or have even gone over to the communist camp. I believe that this is the main reason for the increasing international isolation of the United States. In other words, it is the lack of concern that the American people have for Third World people that accounts for the loss of friends for America in the Third World.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SOUTH KOREA

As I stated earlier, the United States had contributed to the modernization, liberation and democratization of Korea until 1960. From the mid-60's, however, the United States began to disappoint the South Korean people with its support for the Park Chung Hee dictatorship. It is from this time that the United States used the pretext of security as the rationale for ignoring popular aspirations for democracy. The United States supported the 1969 amendment allowing Park to run for a third term and the Yushin Dictatorial System which was put in place in 1972. The most extreme and blunt expression of United States support for dictatorial rule was when General Chun Doo Hwan was allowed to violate the military chain of command, massacre Kwangju citizens and suppress popular democratic aspirations following the assassination of Park Chung Hee. Chun pulled one division from the demilitarized zone without proper authorization—this was done to carry out his military coup. He arrested his superior, the army

chief of staff, and he purged the army of a great number of generals who advocated the political neutrality of the military and the restoration of democracy. The United States acquiesced to and even helped General Chun's massacre of people in Kwangju. These slain patriots had advocated American-style democracy.

The United States has supported such military dictatorships claiming that failure to do so would pose a security danger. During the Korean War security was a most critical issue and even then we enjoyed freedom of speech, popular election of the president, local autonomy and the independence of the legislative and judicial branches. These freedoms greatly encouraged our people to expel the North Korean invaders and the Chinese army of one million. Now, we are in peacetime and we have lost all of these democratic freedoms which we enjoyed in wartime. This clearly proves that real security requires having something to secure. How can the United States, then, justify repression using the excuse of security?

Some American leaders in concert with the South Korean Government have argued that democratic development will have to yield to the imperatives of economic growth. This is an untenable assertion considering that today, with an annual per capita income of over \$1,800, we enjoy none of the democratic freedoms that we had during the Korean War when per capita income hovered around a meager sixty dollars. A recent national survey revealed that 80% of the South Korean people desire democratic development even if it would mean slowing down economic growth.

Mr. Reagan's visit to Korea may be a turning point in Korean-American relations. President Reagan may either prop up the dictator, thus contributing to further instability in South Korea, or publicly proclaim his support for a democratic Korea—a Korea with a free press and fair elections. The way to genuine security is clear. In other words, Mr. Reagan may attempt to maintain a short-lived and fragile Korean-American alliance by promoting the security of a dictatorship or help build a permanent bastion of freedom in South Korea—a bastion which will draw its strength from popular commitment to, and defense of, democratic principles. A democratic government can force North Korea into a dialogue, and thereby lead to peaceful coexistence, exchange and reunification—all ultimate goals of our people.

III. THE NEED TO RETURN TO THE FOUNDING SPIRIT OF AMERICA

According to the famous historian Arnold Toynbee, although the United States adopted the democratic system from Great Britain, it was the United States that first put into practice the principle of majority rule. It was not until the end of the 19th century that the princi-

ple of majority rule became a reality in Great Britain, but it had been put into practice almost 100 years earlier in America. America was, at the time, considered a great experiment and it was viewed as having made a monumental contribution to the political history of western democracies. It is this daring spirit and insight of America which the world came to envy and respect. For example, the Italians and even the ethnocentric French followed the American example and adopted majority rule. Toynbee further pointed out that until World War I, the United States was usually consistent in its defense and application of the majority rule principle in domestic and international affairs. All this changed with the emergence of communist Soviet Russia following World War I, when the United States had to prove to the world that its support of majority rule was genuine and more sincere than that of the Soviets. However, the United States unfortunately began to side with minority dictators under the pretext of anti-communism. This was the beginning of international tragedy not only for America, but also for all those in the world who yearned for freedom. Professor Toynbee concluded his analysis by emphasizing that the only way for the United States to overcome the communist threat was to return to the pre-World War I days when it advocated the universal application of majority rule.

I believe that Professor Toynbee was right on the mark. If the United States is to triumph over communism, it will have to be able to enlist the support of the Third World's people. To win their support, in turn, the United States has to convince them that it stands on their side by advocating the principle of majority rule.

By supporting minority dictators instead, the United States has unwittingly aided the expansion of Soviet communism. For example, in Vietnam, the leading communist nations, China and the Soviet Union, supported the communists, but the United States, the leading democracy, failed to support democratic believers. The United States supported military dictators instead, who destroyed the Vietnamese people with American money and weapons. Because of such mistakes on the part of the United States, the Soviets could make great gains.

The United States should adopt the following measures to promote majority rule and democracy in the Third World, and ultimately to preserve universal freedom and justice in the face of the communist threat. First, the United States should openly renounce its policy of supporting dictatorships and advocate a respect for the will of the majority in the Third World. Second, to respect majority rule in Third World countries does not mean to interfere in internal politics or to impose a particular ideology or political system. It only means to press for freedom of the press and free elections which are core elements to

guarantee the realization of majority rule. All sovereign nations in the world have the obligation of providing their people with these fundamental rights because they have all adopted the principle of the people's sovereignty in their constitutions. Therefore, the United States should work to make this a universal practice through open and quiet diplomacy. This is the only way to win the hearts of the Third World's people. Third, the United States imposed economic sanctions on the Polish Government for its destruction of the Solidarity movement. Why should it not take similar or appropriate measures to punish *any* government that denies their people freedom of the press and free elections? On the other hand, governments that honor or restore these democratic rights should be rewarded with economic or moral support from the United States.

When President Carter declared that human rights was the heart of United States foreign policy, we loudly applauded and welcomed that declaration as the reincarnation of the founding spirit of America. Since its proclamation, however, in spite of episodic efforts to promote human rights here and there, the United States disappointed the world public by pursuing erroneous policies of supporting the Shah in Iran and Chun Doo Hwan's military coup in South Korea. I believe the Carter human rights policy failed not so much because of the inconsistency or indecisiveness of the Carter administration, but rather because of the American public, which did not take human rights to heart.

Western democracies also failed to give sufficient support to President Carter's human rights policy. The Carter foreign policy that embraced human rights as its core represented not only the founding ideal of the United States but also the desire of the world's oppressed people. We cannot let this policy fail because of insensitivity or ignorance. I implore the American public—especially those of you in this room whose mission it is to uphold and protect law and human rights—to make this policy effective. This is how to make the United States great once again in the minds of the world's people. This is the only way for the United States to help the Third World's people to be hopeful about their future and to gain their full support in a United States drive to overcome the communist threat. The principle of majority rule embodies the founding revolutionary spirit of the United States. Therefore, America should always side with the majority to achieve success in foreign policy.