

**May 23, 1980**

**Memorandum from Donald Gregg for Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Mike Oksenberg's Note on Korea'**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Donald Gregg and Michel Oksenberg outline US policy toward Korea in light of the incident in Gwangju.

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Original Scan

OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

28

#8294

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

5/25/80

28

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May 23, 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI  
FROM: DONALD GREGG dg  
SUBJECT: MIKE OKSENBERG'S NOTE ON KOREA

Mike makes some good points in his memorandum;

- the idea of building Korea into the Geng Biao visit is clearly worthy of further consideration;
- I also agree that Congress needs to be kept abreast of Executive Branch thinking so that we can speak with one voice on Korea.

I don't think I agree that we have fallen behind events in Korea. Even though things have not gone as we hoped they would, I think our basic interpretation of events, including Park's assassination, have been basically on the mark. As to people working on the problem, I have been well impressed by the expertise available at State. In addition, Jack Vessey is involved--Dick Sneider is available, if necessary, and I assume Phil Habib is also. The latter two names have been raised with Ambassador Gleysteen, who feels strongly that, at least at this point, no Washington emissaries would serve any useful purpose.

cc: R. Sullivan  
M. Oksenberg

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Review on May 23, 1986

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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May 23, 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI  
FROM: MICHEL OKSENBERG *MO*  
SUBJECT: Korea (U)

*Zbig - somewhat  
OBE'd by yesterday's  
PRC. I wrote this right  
after staff meeting.*

On three occasions in the past few months, we have been behind the Korean curve:

-- Pak's assassination, which in retrospect was a more complicated, widespread event than the barroom brawl we first thought;

-- the movement of South Korean forces without our foreknowledge as part of maneuvering among a portion of the military in a power struggle;

-- the recent, severe popular uprising (more than Miami, to which Don Gregg compared it). (C)

The trend line, moreover, is not good: assassination; maneuvering for military coup purposes; regional rebellion. (U)

We could be witnessing a gradual but serious erosion or decay of the South Korean political system (it is too early to speak of an Iranian type collapse) at a time when:

-- our force posture is stretched thin;

-- Chinese short-term restraining influence on the North may have lessened in recent months; at least, Pyongyang gives some indication of disenchantment with Beijing;

-- Soviet willingness to play a restraining role on the North may be lessened, given the state of Soviet-American relations;

-- Seoul officials have not given clear indication in past months that they all act out of a rational concern for the national interest. (C)

If the government in the South does disintegrate, in my view it is unlikely that the North would forego the opportunity to intervene in South more actively. (C)

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-2-

In short, you face a possible disintegrating situation of major proportions, with high stakes. My sense at staff meeting is that you have not personally immersed yourself in this situation. I encourage you to do so:

- Make sure intelligence is what it can be.
- Ascertain our covert capabilities.
- Determine whether we have the most knowledgeable personnel working the problem (Dick Sneider? Phil Habib? Jack Vessey?).
- Make sure we build Korea appropriately into the Geng Biao trip; this will have to be done at the last moment.
- Determine availability in the event of a Korean contingency at any point over the next six months; while Iran-Afghanistan still consume us.
- Ensure Muskie and Brown keep the Hill well informed about our thinking on Korea. Glenn, Nunn, Javits, Wolff, and others have an enormous interest in and self-perceived expertise on Korea, and it is imperative that their support be sustained.
- Feel confident Gleysteen's counsel to officials in Seoul represents the right mix of suppression and democratic reform which an authoritarian regime under stress should adopt.
- Ensure we do not convey messages to Seoul that induce a sense of paralysis, neither suppression nor reform.
- Make sure Roger is fully involved in the Korea issue because of China's key role here. (C)
- Deploy forces to the region to convey our resolve to Pyongyang.

cc: Don Gregg

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