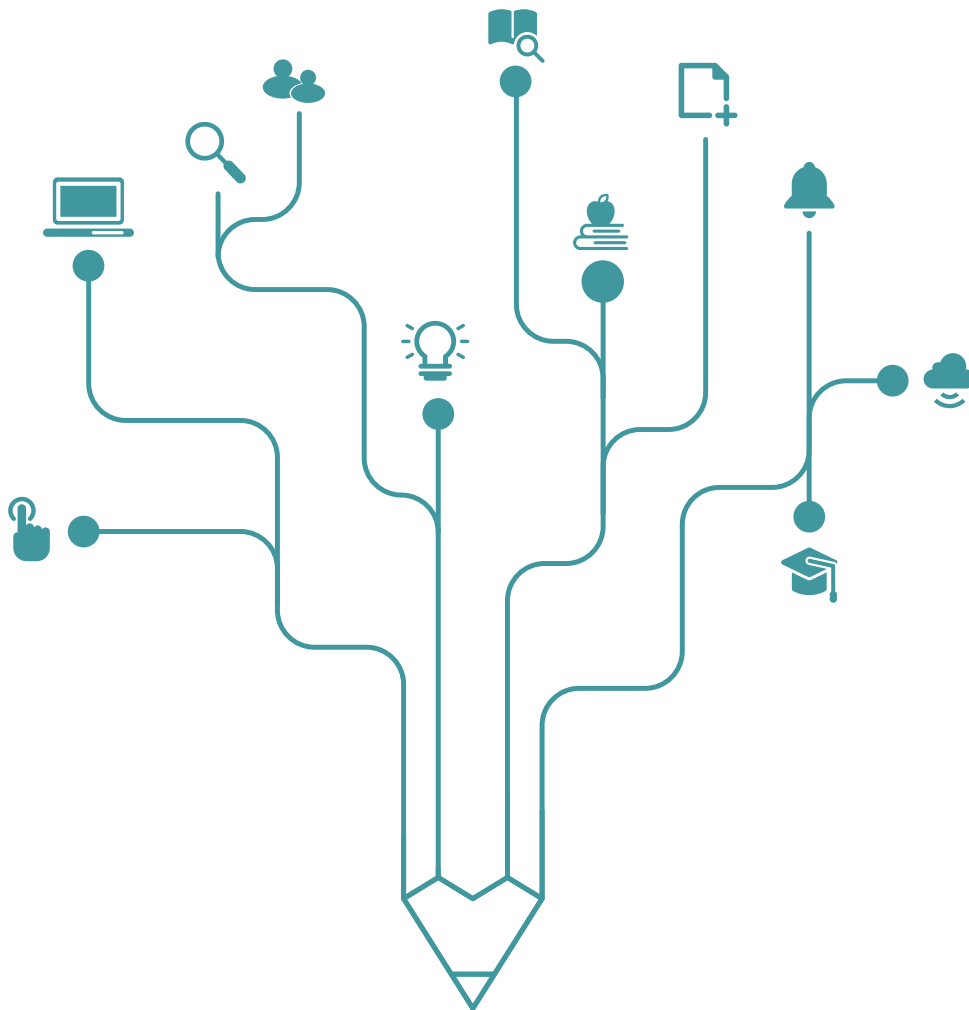


External Threats and Democratization from Military Rule: Burma 1988 and South Korea 1987

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Abstract: What effect does the international security environment have on democratization? This paper argues that for militaries in power, sustained external threats facilitate democratization by credibly assuring the armed forces of continued influence after leaving office. It tests implications of this argument for 1) the opposition's demands to the military during political crises over democratization, 2) the degree of the regime's flexibility towards the opposition, 3) the level of violence during crises over democracy, and 4) the outcome of the crises. Utilizing a comparative case study of ruling militaries in Burma and South Korea, it finds strong support for each of the implications.

Democracy Summer?

In Burma during August of 1988, mass demonstrations calling for democratization led to the resignation of General Ne Win, the head of the military regime in power. Free elections seemed imminent during what is still referred to as the "democracy summer." However, when two successive leaders after Ne Win failed to quell the unrest, the military reasserted control and brutally repressed the democratic movement. Thousands died during the process.¹ More than thirty years later, Burma has yet to fully democratize.

About a year earlier in June of 1987, a military regime led by Chun Doo Hwan in South Korea had also faced nation-wide demonstrations calling for democracy. In contrast to the Burmese case, however, Chun and his anointed successor Roh Tae Woo oversaw a largely peaceful transition to democratic rule despite it appearing almost certain at the time that accepting democratization would lead to a loss of power for the military.² South Korea has since consolidated democratic rule.

¹ Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 210.; Ferrara, "Why Regimes Create Disorder: Hobbes's Dilemma during a Rangoon Summer," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003. p. 314.

² Han, "South Korea: Politics in Transition," in *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), ed. Diamond, Linz, and Lipset.; Cotton, "Understanding the State in South Korea: Bureaucratic Authoritarian or State Autonomy Theory?"

Why do some military regimes democratize while others do not? What effect, if any, does the international security environment have on the likelihood of democratization? This paper takes a “second image reversed” approach to advance a theory of how the international security environment influences democratization from military rule.³ It argues sustained external threats facilitate democratic transitions when the armed forces are in power by credibly assuring the military that its interest will be protected after leaving office. This is an effect unique to military dictatorships among different forms of authoritarian rule. The presence of North Korea, in other words, made it easier for the generals in Seoul to return to the barracks compared to those in Burma, which did not face a similar outside threat.

In presenting evidence for the theory of credible assurance, this paper utilizes the method of difference in a comparative case study of military regimes in Burma and South Korea. Cases are selected to maximize similarities between them while seeking to isolate the international security environment as the cause for the different outcomes. Tests of the hypothesized mechanisms of the theory will also be a plausibility probe for the theory beyond the cases analyzed in this paper.

After detailing the logic of the theory, the paper details its implications for 1) the regime’s degree of flexibility during transition negotiations, 2) the position of key opposition leaders during the process, 3) the level of violence during the transition, and 4) the ultimate outcome of the crises. Testing the implications against the historical record, it shows that the process of South Korea peacefully democratizing and Burma not being able to do so are consistent with the expectations from the theory. Lastly, it also discusses how recent developments in Burma further support the logic of credible assurance.

By presenting a theory that specifies how external conflicts facilitate democratization and providing empirical support from multiple tests of the theory, this paper offers an explanation for why some military regimes democratize while others do not. While ample empirical support exists for the claim that military rule is more likely to democratize than other forms of autocracy, these studies focus on traits that can account for the military’s fragility in power relative to other forms of autocratic rule.⁴ Such works, therefore, cannot account for variation *within* military rule

Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 24, 1992.; Kim, *Korean Democracy in Transition - A Rational Blueprint for Developing Societies* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky).

³ Gourevitch, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1978.

⁴ Geddes, “What do we know about democratization after 20 years?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2, 1999.; Singh, *The Strategic Logic of Military Coups* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.); Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:

regarding democratization. It follows that prior works on democratization from military rule have limited utility in accounting for why the military regimes of Burma (1962-88) and South Korea (1961-87) parted ways regarding democratization in the late 1980s despite the high degree of similarities between these two regimes.⁵ Because military regimes make up the plurality of post-1945 dictatorships, a theory accounting for democratic transitions from military rule can also contribute to the broader literature on democratization.

The argument also contributes to the growing literature on the relevance of international factors in civil-military relations. Prior scholarship has primarily focused on the relationship between militaries out of power and the civilian leadership.⁶ This paper expands the scope of inquiry to examine what external threats mean for militaries in power for their relations with domestic opposition forces.

The implications of the argument are not solely academic. Proponents of the democratic peace have long argued that democracies behave differently toward each other compared to dictatorships in ways that matter for the national interest. Foreign policy decisions often hinge upon expectations about the future of the target country, and a better understanding of the consequences of regime breakdown will be of interest for policymakers. The key finding that credible assurances

Prentice-Hall, 1977).; Svobik, "Contracting on Violence: The Moral Hazard in Authoritarian Repression and Military Intervention in Politics," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 57, No. 5, 2013.; Lai and Slater, "Institutions of the Offensive: Domestic Sources of Dispute Initiation in Authoritarian Regimes, 1950-1992," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2006.; Debs, "Living by the Sword and Dying by the Sword? Leadership Transition in and out of Dictatorships," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No.1, 2016.

⁵ According to contagion theories of social change, this divergence is more of an anomaly since the example of South Korean democratization (as well as the Philippines) succeeding should have been a model for the Burmese in 1988, making their success more likely.

⁶ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).; Arbatli and Arbatli, "External threats and political survival: Can dispute involvement deter coup attempts?" *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Apr. 2016.; Andreski, "On the Peaceful Disposition of Military Dictatorships," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, No. 3, Vol. 3, 1980.; Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military - The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999).; Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 2002).; Staniland, "Explaining Civil-Military Relations in Complex Political Environments: India and Pakistan in Comparative Perspective," *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008.; McMahon and Slantchev, "The Guardianship Dilemma: Regime Security through and from the Armed Forces," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 109, No. 2, 2015.

of influence out of power facilitate transitions to democracy also has implications for policy toward military regimes that remain in power as in Egypt or Burma, as well as those that exert influence as part of the ruling coalition as in Algeria or Rwanda.

Theory and Hypotheses

Several theories have sought to account for why military regimes are more likely to democratize than other types of autocracies. To do so, these theories focus on traits that military regimes share that distinguish them from other dictatorships. Such traits, however, ill-suited to explain why some military regimes democratize while others do not.

For example, the “preference for unity” argument points to the military’s prioritization of organizational cohesion as an explanation for its tendency to democratize. Leaders of the armed forces prize a professional military unified under a single chain of command.⁷ Factions within are essentially involved in a “game of coordination,” preferring to act together - whether taking power, returning to the barracks, or remaining in power or in the barracks- over any scenario in which they are divided.⁸ Therefore when facing a crisis, despite controlling the means of coercion, factions within a military government prefer giving up power (in unison) rather than a split within its ranks over remaining in power.⁹ As a result, on average military regimes tend to last a shorter time in power compared to other forms of authoritarianism.¹⁰ This fragility, in turn, means they are more likely to democratize.

Alternatively, the “strength in power” argument sees the military’s bargaining power as driving the higher propensity for democratization. The military’s possession of the means of violence gives military regimes the leverage to dictate the terms of their exit from power.¹¹ Better terms of exit, in turn, makes it easier for them to hand over control of government.

⁷ Janowitz, *Military institutions and Coercion in Developing Nations* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977).; Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

⁸ Singh, *The Strategic Logic of Military Coups* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

⁹ This prioritization of unity on the part of military regimes represents a departure from the assumption that political actors in power seek to maintain it above all else.

¹⁰ Escriba-Folch, “Accountable for What? Regime type, Performance, and the Fate of Outgoing Dictators, 1946-2004, *Democratization*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013.; Geddes, Wright and Frantz, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Nordlinger, *op. cit.*; Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.2, No.2, 1991.; Geddes, *op. cit.* 12

A third view argues the opposite: control over *solely* the means of violence means that military regimes lack the means to coopt, elicit cooperation from, and organize support for the regime.¹² This “over-reliance on force” view contends that the military’s refusal or inability to utilize institutions such as parties or legislatures to organize support for the regime and neutralize threats to it is the reason why military rule is more prone to democratize. Authoritarian rule cannot maintain power solely based on the threat of force, and thus exclusive dependence on it is a source of frailty, not strength.

Lastly, the “weakness out of power” view asserts that *less* bargaining leverage on the part of the military out of power facilitates democratization under military rule. Militaries control the means of violence and thus pose a threat when brute force is the primary determinant of power. Because democracies rely less on violence as a means to determine who governs,¹³ democratization reduces the potential threat militaries pose to the new ruler. As a result, military dictators can expect a safer post-tenure fate under democratic rule and therefore are more likely to democratize. Democratization resolves the problem of the military not being able to credibly signal that it won’t wield violence to regain power. Thus military rule is more prone to democratize (but not more likely to transition to another autocracy).

The military’s preference for unity, control over the means of violence, over-reliance on force, and non-threatening character under democratic rule do not vary. Therefore, while they may explain why military regimes are more likely to democratize compared to other forms of dictatorships, they cannot explain why some military regimes democratize and others do not.

Credible Assurance and its Implications

This paper argues strength out of power - rather than strength while in power, weakness out of power, or sole dependence on force - makes it easier for the military to hand over control to democratizers. A key obstacle to democratization is the possibility of persecution for autocratic regime insiders and their supporters after a turnover of power. Promises to refrain from post-transition oppression are not *ex ante* credible for those in power, since the incoming regime *ex post* may have sufficient incentives to crack down on the outgoing regime and its supporters. Knowing this, incumbent dictators can wield violence against the opposition in order to maintain power. Democratization can be delayed. Thousands can die in the process.

For military regimes, post-exit fates have added significance. Harming the interests and professionalism of the armed forces not only endangers the livelihood of soldiers, it also poses a

¹² Lai and Slater, *op. cit.*

¹³ Debs, *op. cit.*

threat to the military's goal of protecting the nation. However, sustained threats from abroad credibly assure officers in power of continuing influence and status out of office. This credibility stems from 1) the military's monopoly over the means to provide security and 2) the need from all parties - including the incoming regime - for security from external threats. With the presence of serious foreign threats, all parties, including the incoming regime, have a shared interest in maintaining a strong national defense. Exclusive control over the means of defending the country is usually held by the armed forces. Therefore, the threat of conflict operates as a credible commitment device, ensuring the preservation of military influence, resources, and autonomy even after leaving power.

Military leaders are thus able to project within harsh security environments that the armed forces will not face significant harm out of power. The assurance of post-exit status, in turn, makes it more likely that military regimes democratize when facing a crisis of rule. Since different countries and regimes face varying levels of external threat, the security environment can provide an explanation for why some military regimes democratize while others do not.

The theory of credible assurance also leads to three additional expectations for how the security environment influences interactions between the military and the opposition during crises over democracy. First, democratizers facing a serious and continuing threat from abroad should be more moderate during the bargaining process over the terms of democratization. The dependence of the opposition on the armed services - with their monopoly on the means to provide national defense - constrains democratic leaders from demanding too much from the military regarding how to turn over power and the conditions put on their removal from power. The presence of an outside threat disciplines democrats against unchecked retribution against the military for past injustices. The high priority that the public puts on protecting the country and the possibility that they will punish leaders for policies detrimental to national security at the ballot box gives democratizers an electoral incentive to moderate their demands as well.

Second, the military should be more accommodating in negotiations over the terms of their exit when the country is vulnerable to an outside threat. The possibility of external conflict assures the military, as the only organization that can defend the nation, that its core interests will be protected even when out of power. At the extreme, with complete certainty in the continuing presence of an existential outside threat, the military can cede total control over the terms of transition to the opposition once it decides to return to the barracks for it is guaranteed a critical post-transition role. Generals cannot afford to be as compromising in negotiations over the terms of exit when there are no serious outside threats. The much higher uncertainty over their fates after leaving power denies them the flexibility to do so.

Lastly, with more moderate demands from democratizers and higher degree of flexibility in the negotiating position of the military in negotiations over democratization, the crisis is more likely to be resolved non-violently in countries facing dangerous foreign enemies. With less to lose from letting go of power and confident that its interests will be protected, the military has less incentives to use force to remain in office while risking a split within the military and a deterioration of domestic order. In a benign security environment, in contrast, democratizers depend less on the military for national security and have lower incentives to moderate their demands. Uncertain that its core interests will be protected after leaving power, the military has more reason to use force in an attempt to stay in government. Violence becomes more likely.

Burma and South Korea: The Similarities

Military regimes in Burma (1962-88) and South Korea (1961-87) provide an ideal setting for testing the implications of the theory of credible assurance. The two cases differ on the key outcome of democratization as well as the key explanatory variable: the security environment. Burma does not face an outside threat whereas South Korea borders North Korea. The two cases, at the same time, share many political and historical features between them, facilitating the use of the “most-similar systems design.” Since the commonalities between the two cases cannot account for varying outcomes, this restricts the factors that can explain divergences in outcomes to those factors that the cases differ on.

The similarities in the trajectory and timing of key political developments in Burma and South Korea since the early 20th century are striking. The two East Asian countries experienced decades of colonial rule during the first half of the 20th century - South Korea under the Japanese and Burma under British as well as Japanese rule. Both were liberated in the aftermath of World War II and became independent states in 1948.

With independence, figures that had been active in the anti-colonial movement - U Nu in Burma and Syngman Rhee in South Korea - emerged as the first leaders of the two newly liberated states. Both the Republic of Korea and the Union of Burma underwent substantial instability in the immediate years following independence. Common challenges included managing the post-colonial transition, strengthening weak state institutions, fostering economic growth, and countering communist insurgencies in the countryside.¹⁴

¹⁴ McCune, “Divided Korea I” in *Korea today* (Routledge, 2019).; Topich and Leitich, “Burma under Colonial Rule” in *The history of Myanmar* (ABC-CLIO, 2013).; Hong, “Historical Setting: The Division of Korea, the Korean War, and the Evolution of Syngman Rhee’s Anti-Communist Policy” in *State Security and Regime Security: President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea 1953-60* (Springer, 1999).;

Both countries were initially democratic - Rhee and U Nu both came to power via free and fair elections. Rhee was elected President via a vote at the Constituent National Assembly in 1948 weeks before the Republic of Korea was officially established on August 15th. U Nu was elected to parliament in 1947, a year before formal Burmese independence. He then became the first prime minister of independent Burma after Aung San, the independence movement leader in line to become prime minister, was assassinated 6 months before the founding of the country.¹⁵

Democratic rule, however, did not endure in either country. Rhee turned authoritarian in power, repressing regime opponents, using violence to intimidate political rivals, and manipulating electoral rules (while also changing the constitution) to extend his time in office. He also engaged in wide-spread corruption to win elections, leading to mass protests and ultimately his downfall in 1960.¹⁶ U Nu ceded power to the military in 1958 amidst increasing domestic turmoil. At the time, his office announced that it was a “voluntary” delegation of authority to a caretaker government. U Nu later revealed, however, that the military top brass had coerced him into giving up power by threatening a coup.

Democratic rule briefly returned to both countries in 1960. In South Korea, mass protests against rigged elections in April of 1960 forced Rhee to step down. Free elections followed and a democratic government under Prime Minister Chang Myon was formed. In the same year, after two years of military rule, U Nu returned to power when his party won a landslide victory in the general elections. The military transferred power back to the civilian, democratically elected government.¹⁷

Both U Nu and Chang Myon, however, were ousted by military coups within two years. General Park Chung-Hee led the procession of tanks in May of 1961, ending the year of democracy brought about by the popular movement that toppled Syngman Rhee. General Ne Win followed with his coup in Rangoon less than a year later in March of 1962.

In contrast to the period of political volatility before the coups, military rule proved resilient, lasting 27 years in the two capitals. Ne Win remained in office until his resignation in 1988, one of the longest uninterrupted reigns of a military dictator in modern history.¹⁸ In South Korea, the

¹⁵ Aung San is also father of the current leader of Burma Aung San Suu Gyi.

¹⁶ Hong, “The Domestic Use of State Security and the Collapse of the Rhee Regime, December 1958–April 1960” In *State Security and Regime Security* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

¹⁷ Kipgen, "Political Change in Burma: Transition from Democracy to Military Dictatorship (1948-62)." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46, No.20. 2011.

¹⁸ Devi, "Myanmar under the military rule 1962-1988." *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 5. 2014.

military regime survived the assassination of Park by his intelligence chief in 1979, with General Chun Doo-Hwan taking over after his death. He remained in office until democratization in 1987.

The crises that lead to the downfall of the two military regimes developed in comparable ways. The death of students triggered a crisis of rule and popular calls for democracy in both countries in the late 1980s. In South Korea, government security service agents and the police tortured to death a university student in January of 1987. His death and the subsequent attempt at a cover-up sparked mass protests across the country. In Burma, university students in Rangoon got into an altercation that was not politically motivated in March of 1988. When protests ensued against the violent police response to the incident, police officers shot and killed one of the protesting university students. Demonstrations quickly spread to other campuses.

Within months of the deaths of the students, both countries were facing mass protests calling for an end to dictatorial rule. At the height of their political crises,¹⁹ both regimes made concessions to the opposition. Chun and Ne Win handed power to others. Their successors - Roh in South Korea and Maung Maung in Burma - initiated political negotiations for a transition to democratic rule.²⁰ It seemed that democracy was well within reach in both countries during the summer weeks of 1987 and 1988. This period is still frequently referred to as the "Democracy Summer" in Burma. In South Korea, the year 1987 remains synonymous with democratization.²¹

Moreover, it appeared almost certain at the time in Burma and South Korea that accepting the protestors' demands for democratization would lead to a loss of power for the military. Elections results following the unrest provide support for the minority status of the military. In South Korea, over 95 percent of voters later in the same year ratified a constitutional amendment for direct presidential elections. The leaders of the democratic movement would gain about 55 %

¹⁹ In Burma, the demonstrations reached their peak on August 8th, 1988, drawing not just students but citizens from all walks of life. The date is why the mobilization is often referred to as the 8888 movement. Later in August, Aung San Suu Gyi, daughter of the independence hero Aung San, emerged to address half a million people in Rangoon. In Seoul, the mobilization on the 10th of June in 1987 drew as much as a million.

²⁰ Maung Maung was the second leader after Ne Win. Sein Lwin followed Ne Win into office and implemented a harsher crackdown on demonstrators in an attempt to bring the crisis to an end. He lasted 17 days as the leader of the ruling party before resigning

²¹ A movie released in 2017, on the 30th anniversary of South Korean democratization, about the chain of events leading to the military regime's acceptance of democratization is simply titled "1987."; Han, "South Korea in 1987: The politics of democratization." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 1. 1988.; Devi, "Myanmar under the military rule 1962-1988." *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 5. 2014.

of the vote in the first direct elections for president later the same year.²² In the elections of 1990 in Burma (which the regime later disregarded), the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 89 percent of the seats in the general election. The average vote share NLD candidates received at the district level was 59 percent.²³

South Korea and Burma: The Divergence

Burma and South Korea exhibit striking similarities in terms of their colonial experience, timing of key political developments since independence, the nature of the dictatorships that took power in the early 1960s, the onset of the crisis of military rule in the late 1980s, and how the two regimes initially responded to the crises. At the same time, the outcome of the crisis precipitated by the mass movements for democracy in Seoul and Rangoon could not have been more different.

South Korean Path to Democratization

As the crisis in South Korea intensified in June of 1987, the regime contemplated martial law but ultimately decided against the use of force. On June 29th, Roh Tae Woo,²⁴ the regime's successor in line to take over when Chun Doo Hwan's term was up in 1988, announced to the nation that he supported direct presidential elections. Roh's "June 29th declaration" also proposed that a committee with all major political parties participating be formed to draft changes to the constitution, including an amendment for direct presidential elections. The amendments would then be put up for a public referendum and if approved, direct presidential elections would be held soon afterwards. The regime would hand power to the winner.²⁵

Roh's announcement signaled the regime's acceptance of democratization and Chun's *de facto* removal from power. Roh would run as the DJP's candidate in the presidential elections. Chun publicly accepted Roh's proposals for democratization a day later. Crucially, the military

²² As detailed below, however, this vote was split among two candidates.

²³ The level of support for the NLD would remain remarkably stable over the years. In 2015, elections were held as part of the liberalization process. In the first general election since 1990 in which the NLD fully participated, the NLD won about 86 percent of the seats with about 57 percent of the vote at the district level (Union Election Commission 2015).

²⁴ Like Chun, Roh was also a former army general. The two had been classmates at the Korea Military Academy. Roh had supported Chun during his ascent to the presidency following Park Chung Hee's assassination in 1979 and joined Chun in the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) after retiring from the army.

acceded to the plans. It did not object to the process for constitutional change nor direct presidential elections. The committee to work on constitutional revisions was soon formed and a consensus draft soon emerged. The new constitution, including a provision for direct presidential elections, was approved by plebiscite in October of 1987 with 78.2% of eligible voters participating and 93.1% of voters favoring the constitutional changes.²⁶

Two months later, direct elections were held for the presidency. Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, the two faces of the democratic movement, did not unify their candidacies despite widespread calls to do so and ran on separate tickets.²⁷ The split proved to be decisive as, under South Korea's first-past-the-post presidential electoral system, Roh won with a plurality of about 37 percent of the popular vote. Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung jointly received well over the majority of the votes, respectively receiving 28 and 27 percent support.²⁸ The candidate of the ruling party under military rule, as a result, was sworn into office as the first president of a newly democratic South Korea.²⁹

Although the loss was a setback for supporters of the movement against military rule, South Korea was well on the path to becoming a stable and vibrant democracy. Elections for the National Assembly, South Korea's legislative branch, were held five months after the presidential elections. The vote resulted in opposition parties winning a majority, giving them their first experience with checking government power under democratic rule.³⁰ Kim Young Sam would be elected President in 1992 after joining the ruling party. Kim Dae-Jung, who remained in the opposition, would succeed him five years later in the first alternation of power via the ballot box, further consolidating democracy.

Continuing Military Rule in Burma

²⁶ Diamond and Shin, "Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea," in *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea* (Hoover Institution Press, 2000), eds. Diamond, Shin, pp.6.; Saxer, "Democratic transition and institutional crafting: the South Korean case." *Democratization*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003.

²⁷ Kim Dae Jung left the opposition party he had been a member of with Kim Young Sam to form a new party (the Peace Democratic Party) that would support his candidacy.

²⁸ Kim, "A Theory of government-driven democratization: the case of Korea." *World Affs.* Vol. 156, No. 3, 1993.

²⁹ For the argument that the military regime foresaw the possibility of a division within the democratic campaign and actively worked to incite it, refer to (Kim 1992).

³⁰ The ruling DJP received the most seats, but fell well short of a majority with 125 of 299 seats in the National Assembly. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam's party won, respectively, 70 and 59 seats.

While in South Korea the regime exercised restraint in the face of mass demonstrations, the democratic movement in Burma was met early on by the police's lethal use of force. As demonstrations for multi-party democracy gathered momentum across the nation in Burma, Ne Win ramped up violence against demonstrators. Only when casualties mounted into the hundreds with no signs of the unrest subsiding did Ne Win relent and step down. When Chun stepped down in South Korea a year earlier, in contrast, one protestor had died during the democracy protests.

The military also did not withdraw from politics following Ne Win's resignation. Sein Lwin, another army figure known as the "Butcher of Rangoon" for his role in the violent suppression of the protests, took over as the head of the government and ruling party (Burma Socialist Programme Party: BSPP). This further exacerbated political tensions across the country. Sein Lwin ordered soldiers to shoot at protestors during the August 8th mobilizations after assuming the presidency and resigned amidst the uproar over the resulting casualties after 17 days in office.

Sein Lwin's ouster raised hopes that the brutal suppression of the protests would end. Maung Maung, one of the few civilians within the high ranks of the ruling party, took over as the head of the BSPP and attempted to negotiate a resolution to the crisis with opposition leaders during August and September of 1988. The BSPP at first proposed a referendum on changing the constitution for the country's turn to democracy. When the protestors called for free, multi-party elections without a referendum, Maung Maung offered to bypass the referendum and have the current government oversee elections with the appointment of an electoral commission. The negotiations broke down, however, when the protestors insisted on the installation of a new interim government as a precondition to multi-party elections. With the demonstrators not being able to offer anything short of the military leaving power immediately and elections being held under a transitional government, an agreement over a plan for democratization never emerged between the regime and protestors.

Meanwhile looting began to spread amidst continuing protests and instability and with no political resolution to the crisis in sight after three leadership changes, the military reasserted control. General Saw Maung, the head of a new political organization called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), ordered the crackdown. The SLORC declared martial law and forcefully broke up protests across the country. Several thousands more died during September of 1988 (Steinberg 1990, Ferrara 2003). The outcome of the "democratic summer" of 1988 in Burma was thus the loss of thousands of lives and the advent of another form of military rule led by a different group of generals.

The military initially promised a quick transition to democracy and general elections were held in 1990. Democratic activists formed the National League for Democracy (NLD) to contest elections. When results showed that the NLD had won nearly 90 percent of the seats, however, the military backed away from its commitment. The military remains in power to this day.

Despite the numerous parallels in their modern histories, the nature of authoritarian rule, and how the crisis of military rule developed in the two countries developed in 1987 and 1988, South Korea underwent a negotiated, non-violent transition to democracy. Burma experienced a vastly different outcome. Indiscriminate and repeated violence against protests calling for democracy led to thousands of civilian deaths. Hopes for democracy were crushed. By the early 1990s, it was clear that the two countries were now on vastly different political paths.

South Korea and Burma: The Security Environment

The stark contrast between South Korea's continuing conflicts with North Korea and the absence of any interstate conflict for Burma, this paper argues, can help explain the diverging fate of the two countries after the late 1980s. The international security environment is particularly important in the context of military rule, for it plays a particularly important role in the decision-making of the officers in government. Not only is the military's goal of defending the country directly tied to a country's foreign relations, the level of resources and influence for the armed forces is impacted by it as well. Since the degree of threat a country faces matters for both the military's goals as well as its material interests, higher levels of threat from abroad are likely to alter the military's behavior.

South Korea's Security Environment

Ever since June of 1950, when North Korean military forces moved south of the 38th parallel and initiated the Korean War, South Korea has faced an existential external threat. The invasion nearly succeeded in bringing the entire Korean peninsula under communist rule. The Korean People's Army (KPA) forced South Korean forces to retreat behind a narrow perimeter around the southeastern port city of Pusan. Only the reinforcement of the South's position by arriving UN forces had stemmed the attacks. A counteroffensive soon forced the North Koreans into a retreat north of the 38th parallel.³¹

However, when US forces marched into North Korean provinces bordering China and the USSR, during the winter of 1950, Beijing intervened militarily, sending hundreds of thousands of troops into North Korea. The retreat by the US and South Koreans did not end until the Chinese and North Koreans had retaken Seoul. A counteroffensive by UN forces again brought the main battle lines North of Seoul. The front stabilized afterwards around the 38th parallel and an armistice was signed in July of 1953 halted hostilities.³²

The Korean War continues to play a critical role in South Korea's security environment. Not only did hundreds of thousands of Koreans die, South Korea nearly experienced total defeat - only

³¹ Paul M. Edwards, *The Korean War* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006)

³² William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War* (Princeton University Press, 2013)

with outside intervention had the country been saved. Moreover, because an armistice ended the fighting between the two sides and has yet to be replaced with a peace treaty, the Koreans remain technically at war. This led to a keen awareness of the possibility of another conflict and its potentially disastrous consequences.³³

Enmity has continued to mark relations between Seoul and Pyongyang in the decades since the fighting ended. The solidifying of the Cold War in the 1950s across the globe kept tensions high on the Korean peninsula. The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China not only militarily supported North Korea's attempt at reunifying the peninsula by force during the Korean War, they also refused to recognize Seoul afterwards, adhering to the position that the DPRK was the sole legitimate government of the Korean people. The US and other western governments reciprocated, not recognizing Pyongyang.³⁴

Temporary periods of stability and relaxation of tensions did not resolve the underlying political issues between the two Koreas. North Korea has only once gone more than two years without a conflict, provocation, or explicit threat that involved military force throughout the post-Korean War period.³⁵

In 1987, as the democratic movement was gathering momentum in South Korea, there were no signs of a lessening threat from North Korea. In 1983, perhaps marking the low point since the end of the Korean War in South Korea-USSR relations, Korean Airlines Flight 007 had been shot down by Soviet military aircraft, killing all 269 passengers on board, mostly South Korean nationals. While Mikhail Gorbachev had come to power in the USSR in 1985, that year Moscow actually expanded military cooperation with North Korea (Khil, 1990.; Lho 1989).³⁶

Crucial to the logic of credible assurance is the effect that serious, sustained threats from abroad have on the military's perceptions of its role in society, both present and future. In 1987, the history of enmity in South Korea's relations with North Korea and the geopolitics of the region gave the South Korean military no reason to think that the country's reliance on it for security, and therefore its position and influence, was at risk.

³³ Roland Bleiker, Hoang YJ, "Remembering and Forgetting the Korean War" in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), ed. Bell D.

³⁴ USSR normalized relations with South Korea in 1989, and Beijing did so in 1992.

³⁵ Joonbum Bae, "Impossible Allies? When History and Security Collide: South Korea—Japan Relations in Context." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 6, 2021. p.1144-1164.

³⁶ Young Whan Khil, "South Korea in 1989: Slow progress toward democratization." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1990. p. 67-73.; Kyongsoo Lho, "Seoul-Moscow relations: Looking to the 1990s." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No. 12, 1989. p.1153-1166.

Burma's security environment

Burma's international context since liberation has differed markedly from that of South Korea. The relatively benign security environment that Burma enjoyed was partly the result of geography. It did not border any of the powers emerging from World War II nor was it an area of strategic interest to them. It was therefore largely able to avoid being at the front lines of the Cold War as the two Koreas had been.

Prior Burmese subjugation at the hands of colonial powers also led to its leaders avoiding entanglements with the great power politics of the post-war era. Much of present day Burma had been annexed by Britain in the late 19th century. A failed attempt to enlist Japan's help to gain independence was followed by Japanese occupation in 1942. Although granted nominal independence by Tokyo a year later, it came at the cost of Burma declaring war on the US and Britain (Cady 1976, p 166). It was only with Japanese defeat that the Burmese were able to negotiate independence from the British.

Independent Burma's first leader U Nu sought to avoid being drawn into competition among regional powers by declaring "positive neutrality" and non-alignment as key principles of foreign policy. Not facing an existential foreign threat, Burma did not need to ally with an outside power as South Korea did with Washington and North Korea with Beijing. The Korean War being fought along Cold War lines between North Korea, the USSR, and Communist China against South Korea and the US-led UN forces solidified the thinking among the Burmese leadership that not becoming enmeshed in a military alliance was in the Burmese national interest (Haacke 2006, p 17).

Due to its choice to minimize relations with the outside world, Burma didn't conclude alliances with any of the major powers. It also eschewed affiliation to regional and bilateral institutions. It did not join ASEAN when it was established in 1967. It was careful not to accept aid from other countries, including the US, preferring self-sufficiency in its economic development. Thus, while Burma has not benefitted from more cooperation with other nations, it has also been able to maintain a relatively benign security environment, without any major wars or international crisis since independence.

China was a partial exception to the non-threatening nature of Burma's foreign relations. Support by Communist China for the armed insurgency carried out by the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) and Chinese efforts to export the Cultural Revolution were sources of friction between Rangoon and Beijing in the 1960s (Holmes 1972). Even with Chinese support, however, the insurgencies were more of a nuisance in the eyes of the Burmese regime, never posing a serious threat to the government. China also understood that, in terms of its strategic interests, Ne Win was not pro-American and thus far from the worst leader that Burma could have (Fan and Krause 2017).

By 1978, when the Chinese government withdrew support for the BCP it ceased to be a factor in bilateral relations (Kudo 2012).

Crucial for the military's decision on whether to wield violence against the opposition is what their future looks like out of power. Sustained external threats can be one source of a guarantee that the armed forces will not face persecution from those that have taken over state power once they return to the barracks. In the lead-up to the mass demonstrations for democracy in the late 1980s, Burma and its military did not face any serious external threats from abroad.

Credible Assurance: the Implications

The logic of credible assurance leads to three testable implications for how the contrasting security environments resulted in South Korea democratizing and Burma not being able to do so. If the military is more secure of its status after leaving power because of external threats in South Korea but not in Burma, 1) the degree of flexibility shown by military regime during the crisis negotiations, 2) the position of key opposition leaders toward the military, and 3) the level of violence during the transition should differ in the two cases.

Military Regime Flexibility

Military regimes facing sustained external threat can be more flexible regarding the terms of a democratic transition. With credible guarantees of post-exit status, the military can be more accommodating on the terms of its exit. The military's monopoly over the means of providing security and the shared interest that everyone - including the democracy leaders - have in strong national defense is behind the military's confidence that their status will not be harmed out of power. Reliance on the military for protection from outside threats limits the harm a democratic regime can inflict on the military and its ability to defend the country. Therefore, the military can afford to exhibit more flexibility in negotiations with the democratizers.

At the extreme, with near-certainty about the presence of a continuing external threat, a military regime need not bargain for favorable terms of an exit. Completely assured of the armed forces' status in society regardless of who or what type of democratic coalition enters the halls of power, the military can hand a *carte blanche* to democratizers as they return to the barracks. Delegating decisions regarding its fate to the democratizers is possible because the military understands that, as the only organization that can provide for national defense, the resources needed to protect the country cannot be taken away even after it gives up control of government.

Conversely, without the assurances that sustained threats to national security afford for the future status and resources of the armed forces, the military is more likely to be rigid and uncompromising during political crises over democracy. Absent credible guarantees of what comes

after leaving the presidential office, it is difficult for the military to be accommodating with the terms of the transition. With no confidence their interests will be protected after giving up power, being flexible in the negotiations opens the way to a potentially dire fate after the transition.

Even if leaders of the democratization movement pledged protection for the military these promises are not credible. Military leaders know that once the democratizers take power, they may have incentives to repress the military and eliminate the threat that it poses to them. They will also face constant pressure to persecute the military for actions during authoritarian rule. As a result, it is difficult for the military to cede control to democratizers.

The military will tend toward accommodation during crisis negotiations for democracy in the presence of sustained external threats. Confident that leaving power poses no existential danger to its status and influence, it is more likely to yield on key terms of the transition, perhaps even without conditions. Without the guarantee that foreign threats provide for the military out of power, in contrast, militaries are more likely to be uncompromising in negotiations with the democratizers. Negotiations will tend toward deadlock, with a standoff between the regime and democratizers often exacerbating tensions as time goes by without a breakthrough.

The negotiations in South Korea and Burma over the terms of the transition to democracy align with these expectations. In Seoul, the concessions that Roh Tae Woo's offered to the democratizers in the June 29th declaration are consistent with the logic of credible assurance. First, the declaration made clear to the public that the goal of the constitutional revision was the "peaceful transfer of power." The regime made the critical concession of committing to a negotiated and nonviolent transition to democracy. In contrast to the Burmese army, which repeatedly threatened and used force during the crisis of 1988, the military regime in South Korea explicitly committed to peacefully leaving office.

In the same speech, Roh also explicitly stated that revisions to the Constitution would be pursued "in agreement" between "governing and opposition parties," including those calling for democracy. Not only did the regime commit to a peaceful transfer of power without delay, it also vowed to do it via negotiations and agreement with the opposition. The commitment to transfer power peacefully and on terms set in agreement with the opposition effectively meant a delegation of the terms of democratization. The military was committing to a transfer of power and a return to the barracks, regardless of the outcome of the negotiations over constitutional revisions and elections.³⁷

³⁷ Bedeski, Robert. *The transformation of south Korea: Reform and reconstitution in the Sixth Republic under Roh Tae Woo, 1987-1992*. Routledge, 2002, p.37.; Jonsson, G. (2014). *Consolidation of democracy in South Korea?*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, p.14.

Was there opposition to this plan within the regime from the armed forces? After all, the regime had conceded any leverage that the regime had by promising a peaceful transition via agreement with the democratic opposition by a set date. The Defense Security Command, the intelligence branch of the military and one of the most powerful organizations within the armed forces at the time, internally debated how to respond to the democracy protests before either Roh or Chun had made a decision. It advocated for, however, a return to the barracks for the military. With key organizations in the military recommending the regime accept democratization, the rest of the process proceeded smoothly. The referendum and the presidential elections were held on schedule and the new government took office in February 1988 as Roh had announced the previous year.

In Burma, conversely, negotiations were characterized by the military's extreme reluctance to delegate any control over a potential transition. As the crisis deepened throughout 1988, the military regime took several measures in order to bring an end to the crisis. Ne Win, in power at the onset of the crisis, resigned on the 23rd of July. However, by this time the demonstrations had swelled and were demanding democracy. Ne Win's successor Sein Lwin attempted to beat back the tide of protests with force but failed and also stepped down after less than three weeks in office on the 12th of August.

Maung Maung followed Sein Lwin into office and attempted talks with the protestors. Maung proposed to the protestors what the military regime in Korea had offered a year earlier: a referendum on constitutional revisions for the "multi-party democracy" the protestors were demanding. When this proposal was rejected and protestors called for immediate elections, Maung offered another set of concessions. Constitutional revisions through a referendum could be bypassed, the regime conveyed, and the current government would appoint an independent electoral commission to manage elections "within three months." Although some dissidents deemed such a proposal worthy of consideration, the opposition ultimately didn't accept the current government staying in place while elections were held. Protestors again called for an interim government to replace Maung. The new government, they stipulated, needed to oversee elections and a transition to democracy.

The demands of the protestors were tantamount to the military stepping down without any measure of protection for its position or interests. Ceding power to the demonstrators would remove any say in deciding the terms of the transition. In essence, the military would have to delegate their fate to the democratizers. Negotiations hit an impasse when the armed forces refused to accept such conditions.

The deadlock in Burma resulting from the military's unwillingness to delegate their fate to the opposition and the uncompromising position by the democratizers is consistent with the theory

of credible assurance. The democratizers rely less on the military for the joint interest of national defense when there is no serious external threat and thus are less likely to be accommodating to the preferences of the military. Without a looming foreign threat, the public is also less likely to harbor concerns about a weakened or marginalized military, removing any future electoral concerns the democratizers might have about seeking retribution from the military.

The democratic opposition continued to organize daily demonstrations into September of 1988. With demonstrations continuing amidst looting and the regime's offer of elections within 3 months showing no signs of restoring order, the military stepped in. Martial law was declared and Maung was forced out. The armed forces entered the cities and broke up demonstrations, killing thousands in the process. Within days the "democracy summer" drew to a bloody close.

Although the military promised that elections would be held soon after it restored order, it soon backed away from this pledge. In June of 1989, the military announced the martial law regime would remain in place after the elections scheduled for May 1990 until the elected parliament agreed to a constitution and a government was formed based on that constitution. It later disregarded the election results when the democratizers, now organized under the National League for Democracy, won an overwhelming majority.

Facing a crisis of rule, the military regime in South Korea declared ahead of negotiations with the opposition that a peaceful transfer of power would take place, via agreement with the opposition, and committed itself to a firm date for the transition. Once the military made these concessions, the negotiations as well as the transition itself proceeded smoothly as both sides swiftly came to an agreement and later abided by their commitments.

In Burma, in contrast, the military found it difficult to accept protestors' demands absent assurances of its position in society after leaving power. The military refused to cede control over the transition in negotiations with the protestors nor did it commit to a timeframe for ceding power. This made a deadlock nearly inevitable. In the end, only one side could prevail. The side that possessed the means of violence did.

Democratic Opposition Demands

The theory of credible assurance also has implications for how key opposition figures position themselves vis-a-vis the military during the transition process. In the face of outside threats, democratizers depend on the military for maintaining a robust national defense and the absence of other organizations that can provide security limits democratic leaders from harming the interests of the military once it is out of power.

The military in societies facing serious external threats also have more leverage vis-à-vis the democratizers even when out of power because the public is mindful of the military's primary role in defending the country. Democratizers in such societies thus have double the incentives to protect the military. Not only are the armed forces the guarantors of the nation's security, the public also is not comfortable with measures that threaten the ability of the military to defend the nation. Thus, while they seek to drive the military out of power, leaders of democratic movements are also intent on assuring the public that democratization will not come at the expense of national security.

Without serious threats from abroad, in contrast, democratizers will be unlikely to temper or moderate their goals during crisis negotiations. With less need to rely on the military for national defense, the democratic movement is less likely to be accommodating to the military's needs regarding its influence and status. The public will also be less concerned about the status of the military, and hence there are no future electoral incentives for democratic leaders to become a moderate in negotiations with the military. Due to the brutal practices of many military regimes during their reign, there may be pressure to do the opposite: demand justice for the victims of military oppression and call for retribution against the military. This further threatens the military.

The position of Kim Dae-Jung, one of the most influential political leaders of the democratic movement in South Korea, is informative. His views carried extra weight for both his personal history and base of support gave him ample reason to seek retribution against the military. During his political advocacy for democracy, the military dictatorship had tortured him, sentenced him to death, and forced him into exile.³⁸

Moreover, Kim's core base of support in the Southwest of the country had been the site of the bloodiest episode of violence by the military regime. In May of 1980, Chun Doo Hwan ordered a crackdown on demonstrations against his rule in Gwangju just as he was consolidating power after the assassination of his predecessor, Park Chung-Hee. Hundreds, and by some estimates thousands, of citizens were killed. An investigation into the massacre and justice for the victims and their families had been a key issue for the democratic movement ever since.

Despite in many ways embodying the brutality of the military dictatorship, Kim Dae Jung repeatedly made clear during the 1987 presidential campaign that he would not seek to punish the military and its leaders. Emphasizing his strong support for national security, Kim stressed that his

³⁸ Errington, Wayne. "Kim Dae-Jung and the Consolidation of Democracy in South Korea." In *Paper presentedo en Australasian Political Studies Association Conference. University of Adelaide*, pp. 1-29. 2004.

election to the presidency would not threaten the status of the armed forces. When asked his position on legal measures against the perpetrators of violence against protestors in Gwangju during the presidential campaign, for example, he went on the record as saying that while he fully supported getting to the truth of the incident and compensation for the victims and their families, he would not seek retribution or legal prosecution against those responsible for the deaths. One of the reasons that he gave for not seeking such measures was to “prevent future political turmoil (Yonhap News, 1987).” Kim was keenly aware of the destabilizing consequences of attempting to harm the military.

It is also telling that Kim Young-Sam, his rival within the democratic movement and the other main opposition candidate for the presidency during the 1987 campaign, attempted to capitalize on the public concern of the relatively progressive Kim Dae Jung. Positioned to the right of Kim Dae-Jung, he would frequently claim that Kim Dae-Jung’s supporters would vote for him, while his more moderate supporters would not do so for Kim Dae-Jung. A key reason Kim Young Sam’s support would not transfer over due to the perception that Kim Dae-Jung was too pro-North and sought “radical change” regarding relations with the US and security policy.

Both Kim Dae-Jung’s pledges to not pursue persecution of the military and Kim Young Sam’s assertions of Kim Dae Jung’s “radical” policy platform reflect public unease at changes that can jeopardize national security. Even when transitioning away from military rule, the leaders of the democratic movement were directly constrained by the electorate’s aversion to policies that endanger the military and thereby national security. This provides added assurances to the military that its interests will be secure even after leaving power.

In contrast to South Korea, where opposition politicians competed to convince the public that the armed forces and national security would not be harmed under their rule, democratic opposition leaders did not face pressures to accommodate the needs and preferences of the military in Burma because of the absence of a foreign threat. Hence, prominent democrats in Burma did not moderate their demands against the military. Former Burmese army brigadier general Aung Gyi provides the counterexample to Kim Dae-Jung. He had risen to prominence as a regime insider who had voiced opposition to Ne Win and joined the protests. As a former general in the Burmese army, his open letter criticizing Ne Win had drawn much support in 1988. Along with Suu Gyi, U Nu, and Tin Oo (another former general) he later became one of the faces of the democratic movement.

When Aung Gyi urged protestors at the height of the demonstrations, however, to “not even to think hostile thoughts against the military,” the reception that he received, according to one account, was that “the crowd turned away in disgust and disappointment.” There was no sense of common interests with the military among the protestors nor a shared understanding of the need to limit harm to the military. Moderate elements within the Burmese opposition leadership that were

conciliatory or accommodating toward the military were being marginalized by the public (Maung 1999).

Aung Gyi later ran in the 1990 elections after forming a separate party. It fielded candidates in over half of the 492 constituencies across Burma won one seat while the NLD swept over 80 percent of the electoral districts (Tonkin 2007). There are likely many reasons why Aung Gyi's party failed to win any seats. However, from the military's point of view, the poor showing of moderates like Aung Gyi heightened doubts about whether the new democratic leaders would protect the interests of the military after the transition. The NLD spokesman U Kyi Maung, immediately after the landslide victory, referred in an interview to "how many Germans stood trial at Nuremberg" when speaking about post-transition plans. This only solidified the perception that there would be no secure future out of power after democratization for the military (AsiaWeek 2007).

The most radical of the main presidential candidates in South Korea's 1987 election was keen on convincing the public that he was in favor of preserving a strong military. His political rival within the democratic movement, aware of the public's sense of vulnerability vis-a-vis North Korea during a period of rapid change, sought to take advantage of his perceived animosity toward the military. In Burma, the cold reaction to a democratic leader's calls for protecting the military, the dismal election results for his party, and the eagerness of some democratic leaders to punish the military, far from assuring the military that it had a secure future out of power, made it see the "writing on the wall (Tonkin 2007)."

The positions of the Aung Gyi and Kim Dae-Jung on the military, as well as the public's response to them, indicate that in South Korea there was broad acceptance even among democratizers about the need to keep the military a viable force. The shared interests of everyone in maintaining a robust defense against North Korea moderated the public's position on the military, as well those of democratic leaders that relied on their support. This was not the case in Burma. Its benign security environment lowered the dependence of democratizers on the military and therefore removed any constraints on reprisals against the military.

Violence

During a crisis, threats to the military's status, resources, the freedom of its leaders and even their lives after a transfer of power provide powerful incentives for military rulers to refuse an agreement with the opposition. Facing large, impassioned crowds calling for democracy and the ouster of the military, the regime's options are limited to either giving way to the protestors with no guarantees of its status out of office or using force to quell the unrest. As in Burma, they at times choose the latter, resulting in mass casualties.

Conversely, with the presence of the North Korean threat calling for a well-resourced and capable military to defend against it, a return to the barracks for the armed forces in South Korea offered prospects that were much better than in Burma. The external threat not only provides for a safer return to the barracks but also incentivizes minimizing the social unrest and instability that the society is subject to. Thus the foreign threat can act as a credible commitment device, ensuring that the

With the military regime more accommodating in South Korea and opposition leaders moderating their demands regarding the military's future out of power, South Korea's crisis over democracy was more likely to reach an agreement and do so without violence.

In contrast, absent a foreign threat, Burmese military leaders could not relinquish control over the terms of transition huge risks to their personal fate as well as the future viability of the armed forces. Without the risk of a war, democratizers relied less on the military and were more demanding during crisis negotiations over the terms of the transition. This made the military's use of violence more likely.

The paths that the crises over democracy took in the two countries are consistent with these expectations. In Seoul, as late as mid-April in 1987, the regime felt confident enough for Chun Doo Hwan to announce that ongoing discussions in the National Assembly on constitutional revisions for democratization would be put on hold, reversing a pledge he had made during the last election. Transfer of power, he declared, would take place undemocratically according to the current Constitution in the interest of "a peaceful transfer of power" and "the Seoul Olympics" due to take place in 1988. The regime, in effect, publicly declared that it would extend its time in power with this announcement.³⁹

It was only when the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice revealed on May 20th that the government had hidden and distorted facts about the student's torture that democratization became a national issue. Anger at the government cover-up of the student's death amidst Chun's refusal to allow the legislature to debate constitutional change led to growing opposition to the regime. Within this context, the National Movement for a Democratic Constitution (NMDC) was formed, bringing together reformists within the legislature together with civic and social movements into a

³⁹ Adesnik, A. David, and Sunhyuk Kim. "If at first you don't succeed: the puzzle of South Korea's democratic transition." *Centre on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law Working Paper Series* (2008).; Bedeski, Robert. *The transformation of south Korea: Reform and reconstitution in the Sixth Republic under Roh Tae Woo, 1987-1992*. Routledge, 2002, p.46.

national umbrella organization calling for democracy (Fowler, 1999). Founded on the 27th of May, it immediately began organizing for a national demonstration for democracy on the 10th of June.

Just before the founding of the NMDC, the government made its first significant attempt to placate the opposition and avert a political crisis. Noh Sin-Young, the sitting Prime Minister that Chun had originally picked to succeed him, took responsibility for the death of the tortured student and resigned from office on the 26th of May. This measure, coming immediately after the Catholic Priests' announcement and just before the formation of the NMDC, however, did little to mitigate increasing discontent at the regime.

Demonstrations by students, religious organizations, social/civic movements, and office workers began to take place across the country in early June. The crisis heightened when on the 9th of June, a university student at a protest was hit by a tear gas canister fired by police attempting to break up a demonstration. He remained in critical condition as the national mobilization next day by the NMDC took place.⁴⁰ The first of several meetings on a response to the crisis among the military leadership took place after this rally.

In Burma, in contrast, crisis in 1988 unfolded over months. Discontent began to build in March of 1988, when a college student in Rangoon were killed by police in altercations at a teashop that initially were not directly related to the regime or democracy (Lintner 1994, 275). However, the death at the hands of the police led to rioting and further demonstrations spreading across Rangoon. During a protest on the 16th, more demonstrators were killed by riot police. Moreover, 41 protestors put in a police vehicle to be taken to jail suffocated to death inside. As protests began to spread across campuses in Rangoon, Ne Win's regime in Burma responded by closing down universities.

Once students returned to campus in June, however, protests against the regime picked up again. By the 16th of June, demonstrations once more had spread across Rangoon. Five days later, the military opened fire on the crowds. Dozens of civilians as well as riot police died (Fink 2001, 53). Universities were shut down for the second time in the year. A curfew was imposed on all of Rangoon (Steinberg 1990, 27). The shuttering of universities and the curfew would again fail to pacify the unrest, however.

On the 7th of July, in a conciliatory move, Ne Win announced that all arrested students would be released and that the ruling party would hold an extraordinary session to discuss measures to end the turmoil. The curfew was lifted on the 9th of July. However, rioting spread to the provinces. Amidst no signs of the unrest subsiding despite the announcement of these measures, Ne Win

⁴⁰ The student eventually died on the 5th of July.

announced at the party meeting on the 23rd that he and several of his closest associates in the government and party would resign. He also suggested a referendum on multi-party elections and constitutional revisions.

The resignations failed to mollify the masses. General Sein Lwin, head of the riot police and widely seen as complicit in the hardline response of the government to date, was chosen as Ne Win's successor. Almost immediately, further mobilization followed. Despite martial law being imposed in Rangoon on August 3rd, protests continued to spread. By the end of the month, rallies had taken place in 250 cities across the country. August 8th was the largest mobilization of people, drawing 1 million in Rangoon and half a million in Mandalay. Soldiers again opened fire on demonstrators, killing hundreds in Rangoon alone (Fink 2001, 55). On August 12th, Sein Lwin resigned.

Maung Maung replaced Sein Lwin as the head of the ruling party and state and offered additional political concessions to the opposition. He suggested a referendum for constitutional revision could be bypassed in favor of elections if agreement on an independent electoral commission could be reached. The protestors, mistrustful of the government continued to demand an interim government be established first. The protestors and regime were unable to reach an agreement on the path toward a transition to democratic rule. Meanwhile, many public services were suspended. Looting began to spread.

Military intervention on September 18th forcefully drew the crisis to a close. Maung Maung was removed from office. Three leadership changes, as well as multiple rounds of repression against protestors took place during the crisis. The regime - unwilling to cede power to an interim government without guarantees of the military's status out of power - attempted varying levels of coercion and offered political concessions before deciding on full-blown repression of the protests. This prolonged the crisis.

Seoul 1987 and Burma 2011

In 1988 the Burmese military killed thousands to make sure that they did not relinquish control over government to the democratizers. Therefore, the terms that would have led to the Burmese military in 1988 peacefully returning to the barracks are unknown. However, subsequent developments in Burma since 2011 offer some leverage on the question of what it would have taken for the military in Burma to have democratized in 1988. This is because more than twenty years after the brutal crackdown on the democratic movement, the Burmese military made tentative moves toward leaving power. It approved a new constitution, overseen general elections which the opposition won, and partially ceded power to the National League for Democracy.

By all accounts, the series of incremental moves toward liberalization and the limited transfer of powers to the opposition in Burma was not forced upon the military. The National League for Democracy, the main opposition political party, did not pose a threat to the regime. There were no major social mobilizations preceding the decision to liberalize. The most recent protests of note (led by monks in 2008) had been quelled years prior to the liberalization process. The civil conflicts in the countryside were largely dormant and several rebel ethnic groups had signed cease-fire agreements with the central government. No salient domestic threat had forced the military to transfer power to the opposition.

It is also hard to argue that a significant deterioration in the security environment between 1988 and 2011 facilitated the military's withdrawal from power. The military regime under the leadership of Thein Sein, who became President in 2011 and began the liberalization process, sought to improve relations with the outside world. Burma under his leadership shifted moved away from isolationism to embracing deeper economic and political relations with its neighbors. It chaired the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) group in 2014 and established regular contacts with the US government.

That there was no significant domestic threat to the military's position means whatever conditions the military imposed to protect its status as it left power are likely to be less demanding than the ones that the military would have required in 1988, when there was a serious threat from protestors and opposition politicians to the military's place and role in society. Departing from a position of relative strength, the military is likely to require less in terms of guarantees of its post-exit status than if they were being forced out from a position of relative weakness. Therefore, Burma in 2011 offers a rough guide to what the military required to return to the barracks in 1988.

What were the conditions that the military needed for the limited transfer of power? The military's ceding of authority since 2011 were preceded by institutional measures that constrained the incoming government's policy autonomy and preserved the military's status and influence. In the absence of a sustained external threat that assure resources and influence for the military, the Burmese junta incorporated in the new 2008 Constitution several protective measures for the military. Chief Justice Aung Toe, who was chairman of the drafting commission for this Constitution, forthrightly stated that "in drafting the constitution, the Commission adhered strictly to the six objectives, including giving the Tatmadaw (the military) the leading political role in the future state (Reuters 2008)."⁴¹

⁴¹ Basic Principles section of the Burmese Constitution of 2008, It states that "The Unions consistent objectives are : (a) non-disintegration of the Union; (b) non-disintegration of National solidarity; (c) perpetuation of sovereignty; (d) flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system; (e)

On the executive side, the constitution barred politicians with a foreign spouse or children from running for president. This stipulation disqualified prominent opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose husband and children were British citizens, from that position and is widely believed to have been targeted at her. The constitution also reserves control over the defense, home affairs, and border control ministries for the military, granting the armed forces control over all government agencies in charge of external and domestic security. One of the two vice-presidents is also designated by the military.

Under the new Constitution, the military not only controls the key ministries overseeing everyday security affairs, it secured a guaranteed majority in the powerful 11-member National Defence and Security Council (Myanmar Times, 2019) Membership in this body, charged with key functions in defense and security under the 2008 constitution, includes the president, the two vice-presidents, the two parliamentary speakers, the military commander-in-chief and his deputy, and the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, home affairs and border affairs. The military retains the power to appoint a vice-president and the defence, home, and border affairs ministers. Thus, even if civilians are elected to the two parliamentary speaker positions, they can have at most 5 members in this 11 member body.

In the legislative branch, 25% of the parliamentary seats are appointed by the military. Changing the constitution requires 75% of parliament to approve it, giving the military de facto veto power over any initiatives to change the institutional protections for the armed forces in the constitution. The constitution also disallows prosecution against the military for actions during its time in power (Barany 2015, Williams 2011).

The Burmese military began to cede power only after prohibiting the most prominent opposition politician from running for the presidency, securing control over the domestic and external security agencies, and guaranteeing majority in the key decision-making body for foreign and security affairs via the 2008 constitution. Through its 25 percent representation in the legislative branch, the military also secured an institutional veto over changes to the constitution.

The contrast between how the Burmese began relinquishing power post-2011 and how the South Korean military returned to the barracks in 1987 is stark. Compared to the Burmese military in 2011, which faced no real domestic threats to its rule, the South Korean military regime withdrew from power facing mass protests for democracy in 1987. Hence, it was in a weaker position relative

enhancing the eternal principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality in the Union and; (f) enabling the Defence Services to be able to participate in the National political leadership role of the State.”

to the democratizers. The protestors, after all, had mobilized enough support to force the military's acceptance of democratization.

The Korean military regime had ample time before leaving power to implement measures to protect its interests under democratic rule. The ruling party also had the majority in the National Assembly (South Korea's legislative body) necessary to enact measures for a better post-exit status unencumbered. After committing to direct presidential elections and a peaceful transfer of power in 1987, outgoing military leaders had 6 months until presidential elections during which they controlled the presidency and were the majority party in the National Assembly.

During this time, however, the military regime did not attempt to pass any laws or implement institutional measures to ensure its interests after leaving power utilizing its majority in the legislature. As in Burma in 2008 before the liberalization process, a new constitution was approved in South Korea prior to democratization in 1987. However, as outlined above, the military did not seek to control or influence the constitutional revision process. The revisions were not dictated by the outgoing military, but rather proceeded by consensus, with all the main political parties participating and backing the key amendment for direct presidential elections.

The democratic opposition was able to secure the crucial concession of direct presidential elections from the regime without guaranteeing anything in return for the military. Reflecting the degree of confidence that the military had about its position in society, it is not clear that the military sought *any* protective measures, either in the constitution, through separate legislation via its majority in the legislature, or through executive orders while in government.

In contrast to Burmese army targeting Suu Gyi with a constitutional article that forbid those with foreign spouses or kids from running for president, Roh's June 29th declaration released Kim Dae-Jung from prison, freeing him to join the opposition movement (Kim 2011). The new constitution did not reserve any ministerial posts for the military. No seats were allotted for the military in the National Assembly. No positions in the national security decision-making apparatus was guaranteed for it. There were no judicial measures to protect the military from prosecution.

It is hard to find evidence of the Korean military attempting to guard itself against threats to its influence and status after leaving power. Facing an existential security threat from North Korea and aware that the democratizers would have to depend on the armed forces for national defense, the military found no need to bargain for formal measures or pacts to protect its interests as the country was democratizing. Such confidence in their future was proven largely right as democratization did not bring significant losses for the resources or the autonomy of the South Korean armed forces. In contrast, the virtual veto that the military still enjoys in Burma against any measures that can harm its status reflects the uneasiness the armed forces feels about whether its

position in Burmese society can be preserved. As recent developments have shown, even such measures were not enough to prevent the military from retaking power.

Alternative Explanations

There are several rival explanations that could account for the divergence in the response of the military regimes in Rangoon and Seoul to mass protests in the late 1980s. First, the military as an organization could have been stronger in South Korea. If the history of conflict and tension on the Korean peninsula had created a larger, more cohesive, and professional army that had more leverage over democratizers, the military could have had less to fear from democratization than the Burmese armed forces.

However, the Burmese army was far from weak. The Burmese army grew into a powerful force in domestic politics because insurgencies in several regions of Burma had plagued the nation from immediately after independence. Studies have argued that countering such insurgencies was critical to the development of a professional, well-resourced armed forces absent a serious external threat (Callahan 2003). This undercuts the argument that it was differences in the capabilities of the military that was behind South Korea taking the path to democracy and Burma not doing so.⁴²

Another potential explanation is the economy. Influential works have argued that the degree of economic development as well as recent economic performance influences the stability of authoritarian rule and the propensity for democratization. South Korea in the late 1980s was more economically developed and growing at a faster rate than Burma was. However, it is not clear what higher levels of development and better annual economic performance imply for the military's hold on power. On the one hand, scholars have argued economic development and modernization lead to democratization (Lipset 1959). In contrast, others have also shown that high levels of economic growth (and higher absolute levels of development) mean that authoritarian rule is less likely to fall (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000).

⁴² Domestic threats - specifically in the form of domestic insurgencies - arguably have the opposite effect that external threats have on military rule. External security threats assure the military of continued influence after leaving power. This assurance stems from the military having a monopoly on the means of national defense, and the shared interests among the military and those taking over power in a robust defense capability. Internal security threats, conversely, exacerbate the uncertainty regarding the military's post-exit fate. An insurgency by definition means the nation is divided into warring parties with the military battling the insurgents. Therefore ceding power amidst an insurgency means the military would be giving up on the fight, or worse, handing power to those directly to insurgents or those allied to them.

Moreover, Burma in 2011 was not too different from Burma in 1988 in terms of its level of development due to crippling economic sanctions and misguided policy that were implemented by the military regime after the crackdown on democracy protestors. So the economy, by itself, is insufficient to explain why Burma did not democratize in 1988 while it has taken steps toward doing so in 2011. At a minimum, the effect of the economy is not a sufficient explanation for why South Korea and Burma went down divergent paths in the late 1980s.

From an institutional approach, the existence of a legislature and opposition parties within the National Assembly in Korea and the absence of such institutions in Burma could have been behind the contrast in outcomes regarding democratization. The Assembly provided a platform for democratic leaders to become national figures: Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, the two leaders of the democratic movement in South Korea, had both been legislators. Opposition parties also became important vehicles for social change. The party the two Kims jointly led was a crucial part of the coalition pushing for democracy. Although Burma had an assembly, it was exclusively run by the ruling party and had no autonomy from the regime. The lack of a national political organization pushing for democracy in 1988 may have played a role in Burma not being able to democratize.

However, researchers have found that legislatures and political parties can also stabilize autocratic rule by providing 1) a fora for negotiations with the opposition, 2) information on the preferences of the wider public, and 2) the means to coopt the opposition (Malesky, Przeworski and Ghandi, Ghandi). Opposition parties, moreover, remained active in Korea even after the coup of 1961 throughout rule by the military. Viewed in this light, the puzzle is why the legislature and opposition parties ceased to act as a vehicle for coopting the opposition into the ruling coalition in 1987. In sum, not only is there no consensus on the effect of legislatures and parties on autocratic rule, the argument that they were crucial to democratization cannot account for why South Korea's legislature and political parties were not enough to bring about democratization prior to 1987.

Moreover, if allowing political parties and legislatures can spur democratization, why would military regimes allow them? The case of Burma seems to suggest that military regimes can and do choose to disempower them once they pose a threat. The democratic opposition in Burma formed the National League for Democracy after the crackdown of 1988. The NLD then won an overwhelming victory the elections of 1989. Rather than leading to democratization in Burma, however, this had the opposite effect. The military soon annulled the election as well as the NLD, driving thousands of activists abroad or underground. An opposition political party, even one with the majority support of the public and an overwhelming victory in elections, did not contribute to democratization. Whether a opposition political party or legislature was present or not thus cannot explain why South Korea democratized and Burma did not in the late 1980s.

Lastly, South Korea's military alliance with the US has been identified as a reason why South Korea avoided the use of force by the military and was able to democratize in 1987. The US preferred that force not be used against peaceful protests and the South Korea's reliance on the US for its security, it is argued, facilitated democratization by constraining the military. Burma did not have such formal ties with another country and hence less limitations on what the military could do.

It has been documented that the US opposed the use of force against demonstrators during the critical moments of 1987, both privately to the regime as well as through public statements (Fowler 1999). However, US policy had been constant in urging military dictatorships in South Korea to gradually take steps toward democratization and opposing oppressive measures against the democratic opposition. Therefore, it is hard to see how a consistent position on the part of the US could have been the crucial causal factor in Korea democratizing in 1987.

At the same time, it is not clear that going against the stated preferences of the US carried significant costs for the military regime in South Korea. The last time there had been a crisis of military rule in South Korea, when Chun's predecessor Park Chung Hee was assassinated by his intelligence chief, the US had gradually muted its criticism of the military's clampdown on dissent, including the massacre of civilian protestors in Gwangju (Fowler 1999). Chun had experienced first-hand that even after being responsible for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of deaths, President Reagan had welcomed him as his first foreign guest to the White House after he had consolidated power in Seoul. US interests during the Cold War in East Asia had priority over liberalization in South Korea (Sohn 1989; Lee, McLaurin and Moon 1988). In light of this past, it is unclear that US statements in 1987 would have been decisive for Chun and his fellow generals.

Conclusion

The democratic movements against the military dictatorships in the 1980s continue to have relevance in Burma and South Korea. Leaders of the opposition movement that gained prominence amidst the protests for democracy remained key actors in the politics of the two countries during subsequent decades. In South Korea, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung were both later elected president, with the former winning the 1992 election and the latter followed him into office in 1997.

In Burma, Aung San Suu Gyi became a symbol of steadfast, courageous resilience in the face of oppression to the broader world. In 2015, she too became leader of her country. However, it was

nearly 20 years after a democratic leader (Kim Young Sam) became president in South Korea.⁴³ Her position as State Counsellor also came with many more constraints on her power than the two Kims had in South Korea. Lastly, her time in power was short-lived. Uncertainty remains in Burma about whether the liberalization process initiated by the military can continue. South Korea, in contrast, continues to consolidate democratic rule. The military's return to power is nearly unthinkable.

This chapter has argued that a key reason for the separate paths these politicians, their countries, and their peoples have taken since the summer of 1987 and 1988 is the contrasting international environment that the two nations and their armies faced. In response to mass protests for democracy Burma underwent a violent transition from one form of military rule to another with thousands of civilians dying. South Korea, in contrast, underwent a negotiated and relatively orderly transition to democratic rule with hardly any casualties. These outcomes align with the argument that North Korea's sustained external threat credibly assured the South Korean military of continued influence and status out of power. Confidence in a viable future for the armed forces, in turn, took away the incentive to crack down and made peaceful democratization more likely. The lack of such an external threat in Burma, in contrast, made assuring the Burmese military amidst the demonstrations difficult.

Using the method of difference in a comparative study of the Burmese and South Korean cases of military regimes, further implications of the theory were tested against the historical record. The level of violence during the transition, the degree of regime flexibility during negotiations, and the position of opposition leaders toward the military all provided support for the logic of credible assurance at work in South Korea and it being absent in Burma. The conditions under which Burma's military regime made tentative, and ultimately limited, moves toward liberalization post-2011 also aligned with the theory.

This explanation for why military regimes democratize suggests that it may not be ruling militaries *per se* that are particularly prone to democratize as the previous consensus states, but the security environment that facilitates their decisions to do so. The argument that the security environment can facilitate non-violent transitions to democracy runs counter to the conventional wisdom that the North Korean threat inhibited the democratization process in Korea. It also provides insight into why Burma's liberalization attempt took the limited form that it did.

⁴³ Because she was barred from becoming President of Burma because of the Constitution barring citizens with foreign spouses or children from taking up the pose, her party created the role of State Counsellor, which she assumed after leading the NLD to a landslide victory in the 2015 general elections.

The findings also have practical implications for the nascent moves toward democracy in Burma. Many have voiced frustration at the slow and limited pace of democratization in Burma. Some have voiced disappointment - often bordering on dismay - at the NLD leadership and Suu Gyi for not taking a more confrontational approach toward the military on a range of issues regarding human rights and reform. Many demand she and the NLD do more to push the military from its role in government.

However, absent a credible guarantee of continued status and influence for the military out of power, it is unlikely that attempts to coerce the military into policy concessions or a withdrawal from politics will succeed. In a worst case scenario, it could lead to the military's return to direct rule. Rather than confronting the military, consolidating democratic gains by utilizing newly empowered institutions such as the legislature while strengthening civil society and the free press in order to make a military reversion more costly seems to be the route the NLD leadership has taken.

The two cases this chapter focused were selected with the aim of minimizing, as much as possible, the differences between the two cases while isolating the impact of the factor they did differ on: the international security environment. While the dissimilarity in the security environment of Burma and South Korea is quite pronounced, however, it is unlikely to be the only significant factor that differed between the two cases. Other traits that the two cases did not share, both observable and unobservable, could also have impacted peaceful democratization in South Korea and violent transition to another form of military rule in Burma.

There is also a possibility that the posited relationship between the security environment and democratization may hold only in these two cases. One cannot ignore the possibility that the relationship between the security environment and non-violent democratization may not apply to other military regimes beyond South Korea and Burma from other periods and in other countries. Future research could subject the relationship to tests that include a larger number of cases in other regions and periods.