The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus
In-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 12, Issue 8, No. 1, February 24, 2014.

Distorting Democracy: Politics by Public Security in Contemporary South Korea[1] [UPDATE] 民主主義を歪める当代の韓国公安政治

Jamie Doucette and Se-Woong Koo

Update February 24, 2014.

Since our article appeared, there have been several developments that demand the reader's attention. The scale of electoral interference was found to have been more extensive than we originally reported. Last December, prosecutors investigating the case disclosed that the National Intelligence Service (NIS) had produced over a period of two years leading up to the election some 1900 online posts and approximately 22 million Tweets with political or election-related content—roughly 30% of all election-related content that was generated on Twitter. This was circulated by agents of the NIS's psychological warfare team and hired contractors.

The trial of former NIS chief Won Sei-hoon, who stands accused of overseeing the spread of messages favorable to the ruling Saenuri Party, is due to begin in the near future. On the other hand, on February 6 Kim Yong-pan, the former Seoul Metropolitan Police chief, was acquitted on the charge of ordering a cover-up of the NIS's criminal activities after the court deemed the evidence insufficient to establish his guilt, ignoring the testimony of a key whistleblower in its entirety. The conduct of the trial and its verdict were condemned by members of the legal group MINBYUN (Lawyers for a Democratic Society) which criticized the police for limiting the scope of their initial analysis into NIS tweets and failing to fully investigate the online activity of NIS agent Kim Ha-young, the woman discovered on the eve of the presidential election to be spreading pro-Saenuri tweets and social media posts from her studio apartment.

On February 17 the United Progressive Party (UPP)'s left-nationalist lawmaker Lee Seok-ki was found guilty of sedition, plotting an armed rebellion, and National Security Law (NSL) violation based on a transcript from meetings held by Lee and his associates. He and his lawyers have vowed to appeal the verdict. The evidence against Lee, especially the transcript originally circulated by the NIS, was called into question in the course of the legal proceeding, as several original recordings on which the transcript was based proved missing and the transcript itself appeared to substitute extremist language in place of more neutral words. The court, however, largely accepted the case as presented by the NIS and prosecutors. Lee's conviction on the charge of NSL violation was deemed especially troubling by progressive commentators as it relied heavily on the fact that Lee and his associates had sung "revolutionary" songs from North Korea.

Besieged by numerous popular protests and the growing scope of the scandal, President Park Geun-hye reluctantly consented to a bipartisan special committee in the National Assembly for discussing possible NIS reform. The Saenuri Party and the main opposition Democratic Party came to a tentative agreement on December 31 that the NIS would report to the National Assembly's intelligence committee, bringing the agency for the first time under the control of a democratically elected body. Although the NIS's power to surveil other state agencies, political parties, civilian institutions and individuals was partly curtailed and any political involvement explicitly criminalized, its psychological warfare division, at the center of the electoral scandal, was left intact.

The politics by public security that began under former president Lee Myung-bak and intensified under the current president as discussed in detail here took a turn for the worse late last fall. In addition to the crackdowns on the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers' Union (KTU) and the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU), the Park administration began an attempt to privatize the country's high-speed railway system, the KTX. When public opinion on the KTX privatization turned negative, the police searched the homes of the Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU) leaders, who were at the forefront of combined strike action and anti-privatization protests, accusing them of violating the NSL by forming an organization within the railway corporation that "plotted to expand *chongbuk* forces" and spread pro-North propaganda. Late last December the police also raided the headquarters of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KTCU), the umbrella organization for Korean labor unions, in the name of arresting the KRWU leaders, but without a proper warrant. In the process the police caused extensive damage to the Kyunghyang Shimmun building, home to the KCTU office as well as one of the country's main liberal newspapers, in a move that has been much criticized as a heavy-handed, illegal crackdown on press freedom.

Perhaps because of public backlash against the punitive approach of the Park administration, the government was forced to negotiate with the KRWU, which called off the strike after the government declared that it would not pursue privatization. Nonetheless, the KRWU is still being sued by the Korea Railroad Corporation (KORAIL) for damage claims amounting to 4.7 million USD for waging the strike.

The conservative anti-communist rhetoric of *chongbuk* documented in the article continues to proliferate. Growing criticism of the state of politics from the religious sector, particularly the administration's stance on NIS reform and trenchant pursuit of labor activists, has provoked conservative ire. When leaders of the KRWU took refuge in the main temple of the country's largest Buddhist order, Chogyejong, its monks were called *chongbuk* activists (slavish followers of North Korea) in the conservative media. A demand for President Park's resignation by the Chŏnju dioceses of the Korean Catholic Church last November was met by this comment from Saenuri Party floor leader Hwang Woo-yeah, who had served as a judge under the Chun Doo-hwan dictatorship: "We must be cautious and pay careful attention to allegations that efforts to reject the results of the presidential election really picked up after North Korea recently issued orders for an anti-government campaign in the South." However, with falling support after the president's first year in office, moderate conservatives have suggested that Park return to her original and since-discarded program of 'economic democratization' instead of continuing along the antagonistic path her administration has pursued since last spring.

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Introduction

Although a full year has not elapsed since the election of South Korea's President Park Geun-hye, there are already troubling signs that her term as President is going to be a difficult period for both the health of Korean democracy and for liberal and progressive political forces. In the months since she was elected, significant evidence of political and electoral interference by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) and other state agencies has come to light, leading to an expanding series of political scandals, most notably the indictment of former NIS director Won Sei-hoon.

Won Sei-hoon

A sitting lawmaker, Lee Seok-ki, has been arrested on suspicion of sedition and plotting a rebellion, as well as charges of violating Korea's National Security Law (NSL). Citing this arrest, the Ministry of Justice has recently moved to disband the United Progressive Party (UPP), of which Lee is a member, charging that the party's 'progressive democracy' platform is based on "the so-called founding ideology of North Korea".

Lee Seok-ki shouts as security agents detain him

This sequence of events has been accompanied by a broader shift in political discourse. For the purpose of discrediting its opponents, the broader South Korean right has returned to its cavalier use of the chimerical label *chongbuk chwap'a*: a term commonly translated as 'pro-North leftists,' encompassing not only suspected proxies of North Korea but anyone seen as deferential to the wishes of the North. The term 'chong' means to obey or follow, with connotations of being slavish, while 'buk' means North. *Chwap'a* stands for 'left faction,' or leftist. The way in which *chongbuk* has been coupled with *chwap'a* as a compound term in contemporary conservative discourse attempts to erase the distinction between what were originally two very different concepts, such that in the current political climate the left become synonymous with *chongbuk*, and vice versa. This terminology has been used to discredit groups from across the liberal-left opposition, including not only the UPP, but also Democratic Party politicians associated with the liberal administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. These politicians have faced vilification by the right as *chongbuk* for assuming a conciliatory stance towards North Korea, and for seeking to reform the state apparatus designed by former military governments to contain dissent.

In this essay, we argue that this rhetorical shift has been accompanied by an expansion of what South Korean intellectuals term 'politics by public security,' a phrase used to describe the use of public security as a ground for stifling dissent and criticism. What is unique about the present moment is not simply the evocation of a threat to national security but the extent to which state agencies have been actively involved in this process, whether it be in the form of direct electoral interference, the leaking of confidential state documents, or the initiation of probes into prominent critics of the government from across the liberal-progressive opposition. In what follows, we examine the recent sequence of events from NIS electoral interference to the more recent move to disband the United Progressive Party in order to better understand distorting effects to Korean democracy brought about by this recent rhetorical shift and its intricate relation to 'politics by public security.'

Insinuating Pro-North Politics

This shift in political tone was not widely anticipated before the election. Though many intellectuals, including the National Association of Professors for Democracy (2012), warned that the election of Park could lead to a restoration of political forces associated with past dictatorships and a comprehensive rollback of rights in South Korean society, Park's presidential campaign began on a benign note. She started the election season off by visiting key sites for previous democracy movements and even met with the families of activists who had protested the regime of her father, Park Chung-hee; the most contentious of these visits was her foiled attempt to lay flowers in front of a memorial statue of labour martyr Chun Tae-il. More importantly, Park staked her presidential campaign on the idea of 'economic democratisation' (*kyŏngje minjuhwa*) and appointed the generally affable economic reformer Kim Jong-in as chairman of her 'National Happiness Committee'. Kim was the architect of Article 119, item 2—the famous "economic democracy clause"—of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea that accords a strong role to the state in ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and preventing abuse of economic power by dominant players: Kim's inclusion of this clause in the constitution after the June 29 Declaration of 1987 (which granted significant concessions to the Democracy Movement) had earned him the ire of the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI). While Kim was uncertain about the conservative party's loyalty to the cause of economic democracy, his participation in the campaign meant that in contrast to the last presidential election in 2007, differences between the liberal and conservative camps on economic issues were surprisingly small, with both sides promising to regulate the avarice of Korea's large conglomerates, the chaebol, and invest in social welfare. In short, Park ran on a more progressive platform than past conservative candidates; she even pledged to create a universal old-age pension and to significantly expand day care. But things swiftly changed after her ascendance to the presidency.

The civil tone of debate on economic democratisation notwithstanding, perhaps because of a need to more strongly distinguish the conservative party from the liberal opposition, Cold War rhetoric eventually crept into the conservatives' campaign discourse. The initial target was the UPP's candidate Lee Jung-hee, who directly confronted Park in the televised debates, declaring that "The Saenuri Party and Park Geun-hye are the roots of [pro-Japanese] collaboration and dictatorship and do not have the right to sing the national anthem" (Hankyoreh 05 Dec 2012). Lee in turn was painted as a North Korean sympathizer for her activist past and her vocal attacks on the right, in addition to what was seen as her hesitance to directly criticize North Korea. The insinuation of pro-North politics was not isolated to attacks on Lee Jung-hee. As early as two months before election day, Park's campaign struck at the Democratic Party (DP) candidate and main contender, Moon Jae-in, with similar rhetoric. Chung Moon-hun, a lawmaker from the ruling Saenuri party with close ties to then-president Lee Myung-bak, began to spread a claim that former president Roh Moo-hyun, for whom Moon had served as chief of staff, had agreed to abandon the *de facto* western maritime boundary between the two Koreas known as the Northern Limit Line (NLL) during his summit meeting with the North's leader in 2007. Kim Moo-sung, another Saenuri lawmaker and the chief manager of the ruling party's campaign, cited a key excerpt from the summit transcript almost verbatim during the campaigning period to reenergise Chung's accusation, signalling that both he and Chung had somehow illegally accessed the summit transcript, which, under the law, was considered a classified and sealed state document.[2]

While such attacks against the liberal-left were scathing, the most alarming aspect of last year's presidential campaign was the expansive use of popular internet forums and social networking sites by state organs, chiefly the NIS, to create and circulate messages intended to discredit key opposition figures as pro-North leftists. At the time of writing, prosecutors have disclosed over 1.2 million Twitter messages and approximately 1900 online posts with political or election-related content produced or circulated

by agents of the NIS's psychological warfare team; the investigation also uncovered posts by private sector supporters hired by the NIS but these have not, as yet, been included in the indictment.[3] It was this direct interference that was most alarming to many observers as it represented a clear violation of the Public Official Election Act (Articles 9 and 85). At its most juvenile, the NIS appears to have concocted rather poetic sobriquets for the three most prominent presidential candidates: "Park Geun-hye has a friendly smile, Moon Jae-in has startled rabbit eyes, and Ahn Cheol-soo has an icky snake face" (Hankyoreh 21 Oct 2013, np). Most other messages were more ideologically informed and substantive, calling Moon a 'traitor eager to give the NLL away to North Korea,' and accusing him of scheming to 'establish an inter-Korean federation and achieve a red reunification' (ibid, np).

The NIS's psychological warfare had the potential to seriously damage the Park camp. One week before the election, the DP went public with its discovery that the NIS was manipulating public opinion, but the party was only able to implicate one agent, Kim Ah-young, who was caught carrying out her duties inside a studio rental in Seoul. DP staff and reporters surrounded the apartment until the police and staff from the National Election Commission arrived; however, after a quick, controversial investigation, the Seoul Metropolitan Police announced that they had been unable to discover any wrongdoing, effectively exonerating the NIS of any electoral interference, and dealing a blow to Moon Jae-In, who just hours before had accused the NIS agent of doing just that in a televised presidential debate. Furthermore, Moon and his supporters were blamed for forcibly confining an innocent woman who happened to be an NIS employee. It was only later, after Park was inaugurated, that Kim was indeed revealed to have engaged in tweeting and blogging in support of Park under direct orders of her superiors at the NIS.

This revelation of the NIS involvement, and the ensuing indictment of former NIS Chief Won Sei-hoon in June on charges of breaking the national election law, which was then followed by a further indictment on bribery in July, sparked a series of protests and candlelight vigils demanding a thorough investigation throughout the summer and into the fall. The popular call for a new, independent inquiry into the intelligence agency's activities during the election campaign grew stronger following reports by two liberal media outlets—The *Hankyoreh* and the Korea Center for Investigative Journalism—that soldiers and employees of the Ministry of National Defense's Cyberwarfare Command had similarly worked to assist Park's campaign. A National Assembly audit also revealed that the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs had been engaged in activities that promoted Park in positive terms and denounced the opposition as *chongbuk*, or pro-North leftists. The ministry had additionally organized a training program for opinion leaders in the months prior to the election, using a curriculum that argued "economic development during the authoritarian military governments of Park Chung-hee (the current president's father) and Chun Doo-Hwan was the structural condition necessary for sustainable democracy" (Hankyoreh 14 Oct 2013, np); furthermore, The *Hankyoreh* reported that one such program in the country's second-largest city of Pusan included a video titled *The Truth of the Chongbuk Faction* claiming that the democratisation movement against the dictatorship during Park Chung-hee's Yushin regime had been carried out on the orders of North Korea (ibid, np).

Politics by Public Security

The insinuation of pro-North politics aims to delegitimise the democratic movement by claiming that it sought guidance from North Korea, negating the movement's attempts to expand equality and liberty in South Korea and work towards engagement with North Korea. The use of anti-communist rhetoric is nothing new in South Korean politics; South Korean conservatives have long utilized their own 'paranoid style' (Hofstadler 1964) for political leverage against their opponents. What is most distressing for liberal and progressive politicians and social movements is not the use of this rhetoric *per se*, but the degree to which state institutions have participated in such politics by directly intervening in South Korean elections and defending their actions as justified acts of psychological warfare against, in Won Sei-hoon's words, "leftist followers of North Korea [who] are trying to regain power through being in contact with North Korea" (Associated Press 14 June 2013; cf. New York Times, 14 June 2013).

The actions of the NIS and other state agencies evoke uncomfortable memories of past authoritarian governments that the Korean democracy movement sought to overcome and in many ways confirm the fears surrounding Park's election that were expressed in the pre-election statement by the National Association of Professors for Democracy (NAPD):

There is a vivid historical record of past military regimes in Asia seeking ways of justifying their oppressive rule by exaggerating security threats, expanding the military and militarism, equating domestic dissident views as national threats, and employing illegal methods of exercising violence against citizens, only to monopolize power, wealth and media into a few hands. The result was the devastation of the safety and basic livelihood of the common people. This record makes us look at the come-back of oligarchic forces in South Korea through nostalgia towards the late South Korean dictator as an ominous sign for the future of democracy in South Korea as well as elsewhere. (NAPD 2012)

The electoral interference cases involving the NIS and other state agencies, however, were not the only signs of a return of what many Korean intellectuals call 'politics by public security.'

The growing number of scandals roughly coincided with a reversal of Park's main campaign pledge to institute so-called "economic democratisation" by curtailing the power of the dominant conglomerates and expanding social welfare. After introducing some very mild corporate governance reforms and backtracking on key campaign pledges to establish a universal old-age pension system, Park declared that her economic democratisation drive was complete. Sometime after this announcement, though perhaps not related to it, there was a flurry of sensationalized efforts to implicate liberal-left political forces in pro-North politics as part of the wider discourse of public security. In a move seen as an attempt to deflect attention from its own wrongdoings and highlight what it viewed as *chongbuk* tendencies in liberal and progressive politicians, on June 25 the NIS leaked an excerpt from the 2007 inter-Korean summit meeting—the same excerpt cited by the ruling party's chief campaign manager last year—reiterating the pre-election charge by Saenuri that the late President Roh Moo-hyun had been prepared to renegotiate South Korea's NLL with North Korea and to cede South Korean territory to the North. The leak strongly hinted that the NIS and the ruling party might have collaborated on President Park's election campaign by illegally sharing state secrets, prompting further outcry.

Then, on August 28, the NIS revealed that it was investigating UPP lawmaker Lee Seok-ki and his associates on charges of sedition and plotting an armed rebellion to sabotage the South Korean government in the event of war on the divided Korean Peninsula, as well as charges of violating the NSL. On September 4, a large majority of National Assembly lawmakers voted to strip Lee's legislative immunity, although several liberal and progressive lawmakers expressed concern about NIS behaviour which included leaking surveillance transcripts from meetings of Lee's alleged *chongbuk* group within the UPP. Speaking to this so-called 'Revolutionary Organization' (RO), Lee allegedly made comments about the need to prepare to fight against American imperialism and by extension the South Korean government, if a war broke out between the two Koreas.[4] According to the full transcript published exclusively by *Hankook ilbo*, others in attendance outlined strategies to attack transportation, energy, communication, and other key state infrastructures (Hankook ilbo, 2 Sep 2013, A10-11; 3 Sep 2013, A10-11).[5] The publication did much to quell public outrage at the government and the NIS; in the immediate aftermath of Lee's arrest, President Park's approval rating recorded an all-time high of 64% according to Gallop Korea, roughly corresponding to the percentage of respondents expressing belief in Lee's guilt (61%).[6]

There have been other efforts to derail the NIS electoral interference investigation. Chae Dong-wook, the prosecutor general who indicted Won Sei-hoon, was accused on the front page of the conservative daily *Chosun ilbo* of having fathered an illegitimate son

(Chosun ilbo, 6 Sep 2013, A1), and allegations surfaced that the Blue House (the Office of the Korean President) and the NIS had conducted an unprecedented private audit on a sitting prosecutor general to gather intelligence against him. Chae subsequently resigned from his position. Next to go was Yun Sŏk-yeol, the lead investigator in charge of the NIS case, ostensibly for arresting NIS agents without first informing his superiors. In spite of these intrigues and the increasing scope of the scandal, or perhaps because of them, President Park almost entirely abstained from commenting on the NIS case throughout the summer and early autumn, leaving it to her advisors to defend the NIS. It was not until October 31 that Park spoke definitively, endorsing the ongoing investigation into the case. Despite her endorsement, however, it was reported widely in the media that Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn and the new NIS Director Nam Jae-joon had sought to obstruct the investigation into the NIS. Minister Hwang had allegedly pressured Prosecutor General Chae not to pursue the election fraud charges, and Director Nam took exception with the lead investigator Yun for arresting and interrogating the NIS agents, who were released promptly following Yun's dismissal from the investigating team.

The Perfect Scapegoat?

To many in South Korea and abroad, it appears that the NIS is employing different strategies to avoid scrutiny of its own suspected illegal activities, but above all, taking advantage of the antics of Lee and his associates, for he is perhaps the perfect scapegoat for the resurgent public security politics. Lee champions a strand of left-nationalism popular in the 1980s but in decline since. After the Kwangju Massacre of 1980, many South Korean activists came to express conviction that the United States valued anti-communism more than democracy and human rights in South Korea (Park 2007 182-83). Some intellectuals came to insist that Korea was a colonial society and that a revolution against American imperialism was necessary. In pursuit of 'national liberation' (NL), some with this tendency embraced Kim Il-sung's ideology of *chuch'e* (self-reliance). The most prominent of these thinkers was Kim Young-hwan who visited North Korea and met Kim Il-sung in 1991. While these so-called NL activists participated in the unification movement in the late 1980s and 90s, their ideological positions underwent a number of transformations following the transition to electoral democracy in 1987. The collapse of the Soviet Union, Clinton's Agreed Framework with North Korea, as well as greater access to information on North Korea led to gradual dissolution of pro-North tendencies. Like many former Popular Front leftists who became Cold War anti-communists in the United States, some former *chuch'e* proponents such as Kim Young-hwan had a change of heart and became prominent conservative intellectuals associated with Korea's new-right movement (Park 2007, 186-190).

While some left-nationalist and pro-unification groups continued to embrace a critique of American foreign policy towards South Korea, it is rare to find activists espousing *chuch'e* or a pro-North line today, despite renewed attempts by conservatives to paint a gamut of pro-democracy and reunification forces with the *chongbuk* label (cf. Doucette 2013). In following the Lee Seok-ki case, many on the left were fazed by the antiquated language and ideas expressed in the transcripts. For instance, social theorist Yi Jin-kyŏng, a long time critic of the NL faction, stated that the transcripts from Lee's alleged RO meeting resemble language locked in the antagonistic US-NK relation of the 1950s (Ku, Lee and Lee 2013, np; cf. Bae 2009). If Lee and his associates did indeed make the remarks contained in the transcript provided by the NIS, they appear to belong to a very small minority within the South Korean left. Yi Jin-kyŏng commented that even before the recent crisis, most participants in the progressive movement considered Lee's position anachronistic and have long distanced themselves from Lee's faction (Ku, Lee and Lee 2013, np). Lee's political views, ascent within the UPP, and controversial appointment to the National Assembly as a proportional representative through a contentious internal party procedure were all reasons behind the departure of liberal and progressive figures from UPP ranks.[7]

While other progressive thinkers share Yi's sense that Lee Seok-ki's views are outmoded and far from the position of the liberal-left, they argue that the case could do considerable damage to progressive political organizations. Regardless of the fact that Lee Seok-ki's faction is marginal at best, they contend, his case is being used to undermine the liberal-left and distract the public from the wider issues of the NIS scandal and the need for continued democratic reform within South Korean society (see Hankyoreh 02 Sep 2013). By charging Lee and other UPP members with such sensational crimes, the NIS has effectively turned the tide of public opinion in its favour, because Lee's alleged fantasies of what to do in the event of a war between the Koreas makes him an ideal object to counter the liberal-left's demand for an independent investigation into the electoral interference and substantial reform of the NIS itself. The Lee Seok-ki case also has the potential to undermine attempts at broader democratic reform within South Korean society in as much as it provides fuel for politics by public security. Conservatives have singled out Lee's political successes as proof that pro-North leftism is alive and well in South Korea, infecting the whole of the UPP and the South Korean liberal-left. In the process, they have ignored the fact that Lee's strident left-nationalist convictions, a remnant of the former national liberation (NL) ideology, are a poor illustration of the broader South Korean liberal-left.

Contesting Democratisation

What is taking place in South Korea is part of a broader attempt since 2008 at erasing the gains made by the country's liberal administrations and democracy movement. While the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments were by no means progressive in terms of their main economic and foreign policies (which included expansive labour market deregulation, multiple free trade agreements, and participation in the Iraq war), both Kim and Roh did seek engagement and detente with North Korea through the Sunshine Policy (cf. Choi, 2005). They also sought to reform the coercive apparatus of the Korean state: establishing the National Human Rights Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; promoting women's rights through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family; and attempting to reform the NIS and other disciplinary institutions.[8] Prominent activists, intellectuals and public figures from the democracy movements of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s participated in this process and many of them held key positions in the administrations of both Presidents Kim and Roh.

Under President Lee Myung-bak, these new institutions were restructured, disbanded, or largely subordinated to the administration. In general, Lee's tenure was also animated by the continuation of anti-communist rhetoric and undermining of Korean democratisation. The role of new-right intellectuals in the revision of history textbooks, the defunding of civic groups that participated in the "Candlelight Protest" against Lee's policies in the first months of his administration, as well as the actions of conservative civic groups such as the Korea Parent Federation, Korea Agent Orange Veterans' Association, and the Alliance for Patriotism against liberal-left opposition groups are noteworthy examples of the politics of the era.

What is interesting about the current moment, however, is the extent of intervention by disciplinary institutions in national political life. These include independent initiatives of various ministries as well as efforts coordinated at a more central level to strengthen conservative power and obstruct the work of liberals and progressives. It is also noteworthy that these institutions took to social media to generate support for the conservative candidate and to slander the opposition. While governments often surveil social media to monitor opposition activities, the NIS electoral interference case may be one of the first examples of widespread use of social media by state agencies to influence an electoral outcome.

Furthemore, the charges against Lee Seok-ki and his associates—NSL violation, sedition, and plotting an armed rebellion—evoke uncomfortable memories of the exaggerated national security threats during the Cold War era. While political activists from South Korea's student, labour and grassroots movements have often been targeted under the NSL, even under the liberal governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, charges of this severity have been unheard of since the end of the military dictatorship in 1987. The only exception was when former dictators Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo were belatedly prosecuted and convicted in 1995 for

mutiny and treason. The resurrection of charges synonymous with the bygone era brings to mind previous travesties like the trial of political dissident and later president and Nobel Peace Laureate Kim Dae-jung in 1980, and the fabricated People's Revolutionary Party case of the mid-1970s, which led to the arrest without warrant of over one thousand dissidents and ended in the swift execution of eight innocent people who were posthumously exonerated in the late 2000s. In both of these cases the NIS, then called the Korea Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), played a central role, as it does today in the investigation and prosecution of Lee Seok-ki.

Based on Lee's arrest and indictment, the ruling Saenuri party has sponsored a bill to revise the *Democratisation Movement Activists' Honor-Restoration and Compensation Act*, a law to exonerate and compensate former pro-democracy activists who were imprisoned, tortured, and prosecuted under authoritarian governments from the 1960s to the 1980s. The proposed amendment would allow the prime minister to ask for a review of compensation decisions and retrieve awarded funds, if the recipient was found unworthy. This attempt to undermine the existing law cites Lee Seok-ki's place on the list of candidates for exoneration and compensation, as well as previous honours conferred through the law on his alleged accomplices in the RO, as evidence that the entire South Korean democracy movement and its associated political parties must be re-examined. For instance, major conservative daily *Donga ilbo*, the first to break the story connecting Lee to the now-contentious law, made the point of saying that former opposition presidential candidate Moon Jae-in, too, had been involved in the committee charged with vetting democracy activists, in an effort to cast doubt not only on the UPP itself but also the main opposition DP and the history of South Korean democratisation (Donga ilbo, 7 Sep 2013, np).

Finally, the government plan to disband the UPP before the courts make their final decision in the Lee Seok-ki case is seen by most politicians on the liberal-left as a serious breach of due process. They claim that the government has sought to make Lee's alleged RO synonymous with the UPP and the liberal-left as a whole, and, by association, also tar the main opposition DP as a *chongbuk* organization that secretly embraces Lee's rhetoric. The *Hankyoreh* reports that the Ministry of Justice identified parts of the UPP's "progressive democracy" platform as unconstitutional and "identical to the arguments coming from Pyongyang," such as "overcoming foreign domination and dissolving South Korea's dependence on the alliance with the US" (Hankyoreh 6 Nov 2013; Ministry of Justice 2013). This government claim, as well as the prosecutors' apparent deletion of several original recordings on which the crucial transcripts are based, have raised concerns that the Ministry of Justice is overstating the threat in order to suppress criticism of the NIS. Moreover, while the ministry cited improprieties in the UPP primary as part of its concerns, these improprieties are being addressed by the court. In short, there is no legal ground for dissolving a political party, least of all prior to court decision; such an event has not occurred since the era of authoritarian governments.[9]

Conclusion

This is a dangerous moment for South Korean democratisation. Politics by public security, a residual product of early anti-communist national security states, is experiencing a curious afterlife. There are other examples of politics by public security that cannot be explored in greater depth here but also deserve brief mention: the illegal surveillance of civilians by the Defense Security Command (a branch of the Korean army) and the Prime Minister's Office under the Lee Myung-bak administration; and President Park's recent appointment of Kim Ki-choon, a figure closely linked to the dictatorship of her father, General Park Chung-hee, as her new chief of staff. Park's administration is aggressively seeking to deregister one of the country's largest labour unions, the 60,000 member Korean Teacher's and Educational Workers' Union (KTU), on the ground that it retained a handful of fired or dismissed workers as members. The KTU has been at the forefront of contesting recent revision of Korean textbooks to paint the Park Chung-hee dictatorship in a favourable light and has traditionally been an active and at times militant labour union, making it a prominent thorn in the side of conservative forces. The most recent target of state action is the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU), whose server was taken over by prosecutors for twenty-two hours because its web forum hosted a message by an external organization favouring the opposition during the presidential campaign. The union claims that prosecutors confiscated materials far exceeding the parameters of the case, including meeting minutes and the list of site users dating back more than two years.

These recent events pale in comparison to the magnitude of the aforementioned scandals, but they, too, reveal a negative trajectory for political forces seeking to finally lay to rest the remnants of the Cold War and the dictatorships of the past. Yet the bold manoeuvres by the NIS and its backers in the ruling party to slander the gamut of liberal and progressive forces through the insinuation of pro-North politics underscore just how much outdated state institutions and conservative ideologues feel threatened by the legacy of democratisation. On the upside, the NIS has given the public ample reasons to fight its intrusion into the political sphere, invigorating a new sequence of popular democratic activism. The opposition and progressive civic groups are calling on President Park to draw a clear line between her own administration and her father's by appointing an independent special prosecutor to investigate the NIS and restructuring this state agency created to maintain security at the expense of civil liberties and democratic rights.[10]

But NIS reform is just one piece of a wider puzzle. Substantive progress in democratisation must ultimately include all of the following: egalitarian reform in pursuit of economic democratisation as articulated in the constitution of the Republic of Korea; reform of what remains of the coercive Cold War apparatus, both its institutional vestiges such as the NIS and its legal expression that is the NSL, which are used to repress political dissent by people who hold strong beliefs; and perhaps most importantly, doing away with the cultural politics of the Cold War that attempts to paint every political perspective left of the conservative security state as an example of *chongbuk* politics.

Jamie Doucette is Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Manchester. Se-Woong Koo is Rice Family Foundation Visiting Fellow and Lecturer at the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, Yale University. Along with several other scholars, they helped initiate the Concerned scholars statement on National Intelligence Service interference in South Korea Democracy and signature campaign in early September, 2013. The statement was signed by over 200 international scholars and presented at a press conference at the Korea Democracy Foundation in Seoul on October 22.

Recommended Citation: Jamie Doucette and Se-Woong Koo, "Distorting Democracy: Politics by Public Security in Contemporary South Korea," The Asia-Pacific Journal, *Vol. 12, Issue No. 8, No. 1, February 24, 2014.*

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Notes

[1] The authors thank Mark Selden and Jae-Jung Suh for comments and suggestions on drafts of this article. As usual, all errors are the authors' own.

[2] After the election, an investigation in search of the original transcript from the National Archives would come up empty handed, and the Ministry of National Defense would confirm that former President Roh had given no indication of wishing to abandon the NLL in talks with the North.

[3] At the time of writing, prosecutors are also considering additional, criminal charges against 22 members of the NIS psychological warfare team. It seems certain that there will continue to be further repercussions from the NIS case.

[4] The English acronym "RO" as the shorthand for this group's alleged Korean name, Mujang Inmin Hyŏngmyŏng Kigu (Armed People's Revolutionary Organization), reportedly appeared in the NIS arrest warrant for Lee and other members of the UPP. It was mentioned in the press first by TV Chosun on August 28 and subsequently picked up by other outlets. It is, however, still unclear if Lee and those accused of being in the group used the name themselves (TV Chosun, 28 Aug 2013).

[5] While there are concerns about the accuracy of the transcripts in circulation, the Seoul District Court refused to issue an injunction requested by the UPP against the newspaper, saying that "it is difficult to deem the content of the transcripts to be different from actual statements made by the attendees in consideration of the interim reports by investigating prosecutors and the UPP's own press conferences" (Journalists' Association of Korea, 10 Oct 2013, np).

[6] Among those who favorably assessed Park's performance, the biggest reason (22%) for supporting her was her "policy towards North Korea" (Gallop Korea 2013).

[7] The recent crisis has only amplified this process; for example, the Progressive Justice Party, made up of several former key UPP politicians who exited the party after the controversy involving electoral irregularities in selecting proportional representation candidates including Lee, was decisive in voting to strip his immunity in the National Assembly, partly out of open disdain for him but also to set itself apart itself from Lee's ideology and the increasingly cornered UPP. The main opposition DP similarly voted for Lee's arrest in recognizing his growing public notoriety as a liability it could ill afford.

[8] For more detail, see the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* (Vol. 42, Issue 4 2010) on Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (cf. Kim DC 2010).

[9] In the first criminal trial which came to an end in October 2013, 45 UPP members were found not guilty on the charge of

'obstructing official business' for their alleged involvement in manipulating the proxy voting process. The prosecutors have appealed the ruling and the date of the second trial has yet to be announced at the time of writing.

[10] So far this effort has been labelled by the right as another example of *chongbuk* politics. For example, in a recent meeting of the supreme council of the ruling Saenuri Party, party leader Hwang Woo-yea (who served as a judge under the Chun Doo-hwan dictatorship), argued in response to demands for Park's resignation by the Chŏnju diocese of the Catholic Priests for Justice that: "We must be cautious and pay careful attention to allegations that efforts to reject the results of the presidential election really picked up after North Korea recently issued orders for an anti-government campaign in the South" (Hankyoreh 26 November 2013).