

Media portrait unfair to South Korea

Watching TV this week, it's easy to view South Korea as a nasty military dictatorship whose long-suffering people are now rioting in the streets for democracy. Only torture, violence and U.S. backing keep the rightist military junta in power.

Can a Korean Saint Cory Aquino be far away? Such is the picture now being painted by the liberal media, led by that scourge of right-wing regimes, the CBC. Our media just love black and white morality plays. They are so much easier to explain and make reporters tingle with righteous emotion. In the case of Korea, however, things are just not as simple or clear-cut as the lib-left wants us to believe.

South Korea does have a no-nonsense civilian/military dictatorship. It also looks very much like President Chun Doo Hwan's plans to step down and be replaced by former general Roh Tae Woo means that the present ruling group will try to perpetuate itself in power.

With good reason, the opposition is crying foul and demanding direct elections instead of the electoral college system favored by Chun. True democracy this is not. But neither is it the kind of autocracy found in communist nations like neighboring North Korea or the CBC's beloved China.

The very fact that South Koreans have been rioting shows that the government is exercising a good deal of restraint. These are not peaceful protests. This is extremely violent, ugly street warfare staged by radical student groups. So far, police have used only tear gas and baton charges to quell what at times seems open insurrection. No doubt, the very tough South Korean army is itching to shut down the riots. If it does, bullets and bayonets will replace tear gas. A military coup would likely follow.



Eric MARGOLIS

Many of the rioters' grievances are justified. South Korea must move to establish a fair electoral system that gives the opposition a chance to win. But note that the bulk of the rioters are militant Marxists and leftist extremists who want to see a Communist or Maoist dictatorship imposed on South Korea, not democracy.

Behind some of them are agents of North Korea who have been busy for years trying to use radical groups to undermine the South.

Christian groups are also playing an inflammatory and sinister role in the current cycle of unrest. Catholic and Protestant groups in South Korea have been heavily infiltrated by communist organizers. This follows the pattern established in Latin America where church groups, under the guise of "liberation theology," have become a major staging base for communist subversion.

Left-wing clerics and their followers are now at the forefront of opposition to the government. Part of their motivation comes from ideological zeal and part from the ambition to impose pink Christianity on a nation where Confucians are still a majority.

Watching all this, only 30 miles north of riot-torn Seoul, lies much of communist North Korea's million-

man army. There is absolutely no doubt that North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung would take advantage of serious disorder in the south by launching an invasion — provided he thought he could have two things: A quick victory and at least tacit approval from the USSR and perhaps China.

Kim, let us recall, has vowed to "liberate" South Korea. He has made North Korea, with only 17 million people, into one of the world's most militarized and repressive nations.

Even more ominous, North Korea maintains 80,000 crack commando troops on full operational alert. Fleets of coastal craft and light aircraft are ready to insert this formidable force into South Korea, either to kick off an invasion or to profit from internal unrest.

South Koreans are now rightly looking over their shoulders with growing worry. The government must deal with its rioting students and angry middle class without dropping its guard against the North.

If things do get out of control in Korea, the world could well be faced with frightful danger. The two Koreas, the USSR, U.S. and China would be in direct military confrontation. Avoiding this means keeping the lid on South Korea while reining in Kim Il-Sung and his commandos. It also means steadily nudging the South Korean government to a fairer system without creating revolution. It also means pushing South Korea's squabbling opposition to get serious about democratic politics and compromise.

Building democracy in South Korea (and, dear CBC, why not the North too?) would be nice. Keeping the world's most dangerous and volatile hot spot from exploding must, however, take priority.