

A Little More Dictatorship: Balancing Anti-Communism and Human Rights in South Korea

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Mershon Center, Room 120
1501 Neil Avenue

Registration required: mershoncenter.osu.edu/eventcalendar/eventdetail/495/-/sarah-snyder.html

Abstract: In this talk, Sarah Snyder will explore the extent to which American concerns about human rights violations in South Korea influenced U.S. policy toward that country. Not unusually for the era and the region, the United States relied on authoritarian leaders to preserve stability in South Korea. Despite congressional pressure that increased steadily into 1970s, successive administrations did not press their ally to improve its human rights practices. U.S. officials intervened only in extreme instances, such as in March 1963 when Park Chung Hee announced an extension of military rule for two more years and in August 1973 when they believed Kim Dae Jung, a dissident South Korean politician who had been kidnapped in Tokyo, would be murdered. Within the United States, there was minimal nongovernmental attention to human rights members of Congress and lower-level diplomats. Throughout the years, the United States remained largely reticent about human rights abuses in South Korea, content with a politically stable, anti-communist ally and distracted by more pressing problems such as the war in Vietnam. Top U.S. Leaders only directed their attention at Park's repression when the instability it produced seemed to threaten U.S. interests in the region. Debates over U.S.-South Korean relations also highlight how salient Cold War concerns remained throughout the long 1960s even as the United States ostensibly sought détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with the Chinese.

Bio: Dr. Sarah Snyder is assistant professor of U.S. foreign relations at the School of International Service at American University. She specializes in the history of the Cold War, human rights activism, and U.S. human rights policy. Her book, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge University Press), analyzes the development of a transnational network devoted to human rights advocacy and its contributions at the end of the Cold War. The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations awarded it the 2012 Myrna F. Bernath Book Award for the best book written by a woman in the field in the previous two years. She previously served as lecturer at University College London, a Cassius Marcellus Clay Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of History at Yale University, the Pierre Keller Post-Doctoral Fellow in Transatlantic Relations at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies also at Yale, and as a professorial lecturer at Georgetown University.

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